

Narrative Identity and Normative Frameworks

Towards an Ethics of Vulnerability

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1 Introduction

1.1 Philosophies of Personal Identity

Philosophers have many reasons to engage with personhood and personal identity. Conceptually this becomes apparent in the different terms used in the respective debates, which are populated by ‘human beings’, ‘selves’, ‘subjects’, ‘persons’, or ‘individuals’. These concepts are used interchangeably for the most part. For the present discussion and the goal to scrutinize personal identity, ‘person’ seems to be most suitable. When reconstructing arguments by Butler and other authors who capitalize on Foucault, I will join them using ‘subject’. A person’s identity is something a human being acquires over time. Some parts of a person’s identity are not under the control of the individual, such as the place of birth, or her parents. Others are by all means governable, such as the decision which career to pursue, which interpersonal relationships to maintain (and which not) etc. Some aspects of one’s identity can be told to others, some, such as traumatic experiences, sometimes cannot. Even other aspects do not seem to be suitable for sharing due to social conventions. Some even cannot be shared, because the person does not know them, but others might, such as the mother, a close friend, or the boss in a work environment. Many tend to believe that a person’s identity shows itself especially in behavioural traits, such as in the way she moves, talks, gestures, or what clothes she is wearing, which hobbies she

pursues, and which reasons she offers for actions taken previously. In a first approximation, all of these characteristics are addressed by ‘personal identity’.

There are other issues with person-related phenomena. For example, some philosophers prefer the term ‘personhood’ over ‘person’. They are interested in the criteria which decide what a person is, and what is not. Personhood is a concept which often is applied in the third-person-perspective, asking questions like ‘Is this a person or not?’ or ‘When will machines surpass our cognitive capacities?’ or ‘Has this chimpanzee (non-)human rights and therefore has to be released immediately?’. Personal identity, instead, is mainly bound to the first- and second-person-perspective. Questions like ‘Who am I?’, instead, aim for answers that define what character traits, what biographical facts, what personal experiences defines a person. Some philosophers engage what they call personal ontology, a field defined by the opening question ‘What am I?’. Olsen (Olsen 2007), for example, has reviewed these ontological debates and identified a variety of quite distinct answers to this question. The spectrum ranges from ‘We actually do not exist at all’, to ‘We are a collection of mental things’, to ‘We are spatial or temporal parts of animals’ to ‘material things’ or plainly ‘biological organisms’.

A further field of inquiry into issues of personal identity are questions of persistence and reidentification. How can we argue reasonably for a person’s persistence in the face of constant change? If a person a exists at time x , and a person b exists at time y , in which cases can we establish the identity of a and b ? Especially in the analytical tradition this question of the persistence of persons is perceived as an interesting subdivision of the metaphysical question of the persistence of entities in general, since persons change physically and psychologically over time, too. Starting point for many philosophers in this field is Locke’s definition of a person

as ‘a thinking intelligent being, that has reason and reflection, and can consider itself as itself, the same thinking thing, in different times and places’. This quote dominantly is interpreted in a psychological way, and one of the most prevailing strategies to explain the persistence of persons draw upon some version of psychological criteria of continuity.

These, admittedly meagre, pointers to the varieties of philosophical identity research may create the impression that it is possible to break down the complexities and intricacies of personal identity into an array of well-defined areas of research. This impression can be misleading, to say the least. There hardly can any doubt about the fact that analytical stringency is a necessary requirement to improve the understanding of any object of study, in general, and personal identity certainly is no exception to this rule. But from a critical distance one might be concerned that philosophers enact the tale of the blind men investigating the elephant, each a different part of its body. Unsurprisingly they come to quite different conclusions about the animal they have investigated. I certainly do not want to argue in favour of a bland holism as the framework for the philosophies of identity, but, as I will outline in the subsequent paragraphs, when personal identity is considered in the context of moral philosophy, the supposedly well-defined segmentation of philosophical discourses is in jeopardy to collapse. With that said, it is one of the requirements of this thesis to navigate the fine line between integrating relevant aspects of a wide spectrum of discourses but to implement the principle of parsimony. Still, rather than ontological or metaphysical issues it is set to explore the mutual dependence of the concept of personal identity and normative frameworks.

1.2 Research Question and Outline of Argumentation

This thesis will focus on narrative accounts of personal identity. Narrative, as many theorists claim, is meant to be particularly well suited for the exploration of matters of identity and ethics, especially because it supposedly integrates the developmental aspects of becoming a person, enables the individual of keeping track of her experiences, and references multiple contexts. So, to what extent is a narrative framework qualified for the philosophical investigation of personal identity? Surprisingly, and despite the fact that the turn to narrative took place over four decades ago, this questions still awaits a systematic treatment. Whereas there are many who argue in favour of narrative approaches to identity, basically because story-telling is pervasive in virtually each and every society, there is a significant blind spot in many theories of narrative identity, and that is inquiries into the capabilities and limitations of narrative as a theoretical approach, as a method and framework. In the relevant literature there is to be found a huge variety of definitions, but these definitions, at best, serve the explanatory intentions of the respective author, rather than deploying a structured discussion of the limitations of narrative approaches in general. This omission will be addressed in chapter three.

In addition to the philosophical topics linked to the concept of personal identity in a narrower sense, proponents of a narrative framework have worked on various other philosophical topics, such as: the formation of identity; the acquisition of the evaluative and normative frameworks by the individual or shared by a community; the anticipation, planing and evaluation of actions; keeping track of one's experiences; the critical self-reflexivity which enables the individual to question herself and established (normative) frameworks; being able to provide a coherent ac-

count of one's becoming, one's actions and intentions; the hermeneutical process of (self-)interpretation and the need for making sense; narrative accounting and making one's motives for eventually harmful actions transparent to others; the temporal dialectic of being and becoming; and lastly, the orientation of one's entire life toward the ultimate good. In summary, narrative seems to be crucial and almost without any alternative to integrate all of these aspects and to develop a theoretical account of a situated, enacted, and socially recognized identity.

Within the narrower boundaries of ethics and moral philosophy, for that matter, narrative and narrativity are understood to play a crucial role as well, albeit in quite opposing, and eventually contradicting ways. Theorists of virtue ethics, such as Alasdair MacIntyre (MacIntyre 2007), believe that having a unified and continuous life narrative is imperative for both, the orientation towards the ultimate good and secondly, to provide evidence and justification that any given action has been planned and executed in coherence with this orientation. A similar approach is taken by Paul Ricoeur, which will be discussed in depth in chapter 2. In a nutshell, these accounts argue that in order to live a good life, one has to have a narrative approach to life and identity, and one should be able, at least in principle, to give a narrative account of oneself. In contrast to this theoretical camp, in deontological accounts there also is a strong reference to narratives, but in a different perspective. The emphasis is put on normatively correct actions, and therefore the claim is that in order to act morally correct, one has to live ones life narratively.

Also, narratives and narrations are identified in and of themselves to be strongly evaluative, or 'sedimentations of normative orders' (Forst and Günther 2011). Combined with the anthropological assumption that the practice of story-telling has been, is at present, and always will be prevalent in almost each and every human population, narratives convey

norms and rules of behaviour. ‘The moral of the story’, hence, denotes an ethical advise about how to, or how not to behave in a certain situation. This might seem trivial, but it will be necessary to analyse exactly how stories represent and convey these ethical norms, how the audience is able to adopt them even without having been in a such a situation as in story, and how characters are formed.

In the face of this growing group of proponents of narrative accounts of personal identity, it is no surprise that the variety of criticisms is just as diverse. The criticisms range from outright rejection of narrative and narrativity *tout cours* (Strawson 2004; Sartwell 2000), to analyses of certain aspects of narrative, all of which are united in the opinion that in philosophy there is too little attention paid to the complexities and intricacies of the narrative framework. These analyses range from a comparison of the rich understanding of narrative in literature studies (Lamarque 2007), the questionable concept of the unity or coherence of narratives (Christman 2004), or that the narrative explanation of the self, subjectivity, and perception do not reach the explanatory level of phenomenological inquiries into these topics (Zahavi 2007), to name just a few. These various criticisms will be integrated in the course of this thesis where applicable. But the emphasis will be put on another position.

At the center of this thesis resides yet another criticism of narrativism which is both radical and constructive. In *Giving an Account of Onself* (Butler 2005), Judith Butler explores the structural and situational disorientations of the narrator, which limits the very possibility of narrating one’s life. These disorientations constitute a severe problem when it comes to moral accounting. In an interlocutory situation where responsibility and forgiveness are at stake, it is expected that the individual which is accounting for her actions delivers a narrative which make her intentions transparent. But what exactly is the problem with this ideal

and expectation of transparency? Butler differentiates at least five such problems, which she eventually calls ‘disorientations’, or ‘opacities’: the singularity of the narrator, which for her mainly arises from bodily exposure; the primary relations of a young child which have a lasting impact on its life but which cannot be narratively recovered; the historicity of personhood which cannot be fully known to the narrator; the norms that facilitate the very telling and which are not authored by the narrator, and which render the narrator substitutable. And lastly the ‘structure of address’, which consists in the intriguing ambivalence of the narrated account of oneself which, in the moment in which it establishes my account, immediately is given away to the addressee.

These hindrances, in Butler’s view, make it impossible to maintain a coherent and unified narrative of one’s own identity. They are not only disorientations about oneself, or about the normative setting one lives in, for that matter. They are at the same time disruptions of the act of accounting and taking responsibility for one’s actions. The failure to maintain coherence is first and foremost an ethical failure, since most moral philosophers render a coherent and stable identity as the most important requirement for assuming responsibility. On a very basic level, ethical deliberation has to establish the identity between the perpetrator and the one who is confronted with claims of compensation. But in Butler’s view, in many occasions this demand for self-identity constitutes a case of what she calls ‘ethical violence’, a term she borrows from Adorno and which denotes the oppressive situation which arises from norms that are not self-evident any more, but still are socially shared. Still, they remain and function as the conditions for being recognized and accepted as a member of society, and for accounting for one’s actions.

What sets Butler’s criticism apart from many other critics is the scope and purpose of her criticism. She does not want to answer the question

at all if a narrative approach to identity does or does not make sense. She accepts the fact that, on an everyday basis, narrative ordering of events and experiences is part of each human's life and a necessary means to survive as a relational being. But if the disorientations and opacities of self-identity are part of the structure of social accounting, and if the societal demand for coherence, stability, and self-transparency are inevitable, than the ways of how we fail also are essential of who we are. Therefore, the ethical failure itself could give way to a new approach to ethics, which draws upon humility and generosity at the same time. Since I and you have structurally the same difficulties with narrating ourselves, I cannot expect from you what I myself are not able to do. It is this predicament, i.e. the shared situation of one's own opacity to oneself, that figures as a central underpinning for sustaining ethical bonds with others. Which bonds she actually thinks of in this context will have to be discussed below. One, surely, is forgiveness. Forgiveness, for Butler, is the ethical answer to the structural and theoretical opacities of the self.

In order to assess Butler's account of the ethics of forgiveness and vulnerability it is necessary to reconstruct in detail what her understanding of human being, relational sociality and identity is. This will be the content of Chapter 1. Once this account is reconstructed, I will engage in a double movement of analysis and argumentation. In a first step, in Chapter 2 I will confront existing narrative accounts of personal identity and ethics with Butler's concept of opacity. Besides MacIntyre, Paul Ricoeur has devised the most comprehensive account of narrative identity in *Time and Narrative* and *Oneself as Another* (Ricoeur 1994), and therefore will be discussed in depth. The guiding questions for this part are: How do they theorize personal identity in terms of narrative? What is their understanding of narrative in its double nature as structure and practice? Why, in their view, is the narrative approach to personal iden-

tity most suitable for moral inquiry? To what extent have these authors considered the structural and situational hindrances of story-telling, and how does this influence their accounts of ethics and identity? Finally, all of these questions will be discussed against the backdrop of Riceurs's and MacIntyre's notions of relationality and responsibility.

It will turn out that, for a variety of reasons, the understanding of narrative itself as a concept and framework remains sub par in all of these accounts, and that is true for all the accounts discussed in this thesis, including Butler's. In reaction to that, I will review the most advanced narrative frameworks from neighbouring disciplines such as (linguistic) anthropology, social psychology, literary studies, and ethnography. Especially insightful are the works of Ellinor Ochs, Kenneth Gergen, Michael Bamberg, and Marie-Laure Ryan. This reconstruction will result in a systematic and multi-layered conception of narrative as structure and practice, resonating with some essential insights from speech act theory. The later is helpful since it allows for differentiating the various levels on which narrative accounting act upon the narrator and the audience. As it should be clear by now, my main interest is to explore the possible opacities of personal identity in general, and their impact and realisation in situations of failure of narrative accounting. To that end, a closer look at narrative as a theoretical framework and cultural practice will enable me to identify these opacities more precisely on various levels.

In the last chapter, I will merge the results of the analysis so far and discuss the plausibility of Butler's proposal for a new ethical approach, based on the facticity of narrative failures and a relational understanding of human existence. This synopsis will expose the argumentative weaknesses and simplifications in Butler's account in a manner that will also address shortcomings of the other ethical accounts discussed in this thesis. Taken together, these results will suffice to indicate the theoretical

work which has to be done to develop further Butler's ethical intuitions, especially regarding the ethics of vulnerability, and how to bring them to their full development.

2 Narrative Opacities and the Ethics of Vulnerability

In this chapter I will reconstruct and discuss Judith Butler's reflections on ethical concepts, her problems with narrative accounting, and her suggestion to redefine responsibility in terms of acknowledged opacity. This is a particular cautious way of addressing the moral corpus of her philosophy, and this caution seems to be mandatory for several reasons. To begin with, large parts of her work on gendered identities, performativity, corporeality, language, and on desire, clearly are themed in a genuinely political guise. This is to say that her philosophical inquiries actually did initiate a rich variety of political, feminist and anti-sexist discourses not only within the narrow borders of academia, but also in many feminist and queer movements. Methodologically, these ramifications are due to her consequent rejection and deconstruction of essentialist conceptions of (gendered) identity, or her critique of conceptual binaries such as 'male/female', 'gender/sex', or 'subject/object'. Also, her Foucaultian understanding of norms and critique point to the concrete transformation of existing *regimes of truths*, especially the heterosexual matrix. Hence it is no surprise that she explicitly resisted the *turn to ethics* within social theory since, in her view, this might equate to an 'escape from politics' (Butler 2000, p.15).

Besides the alleged depoliticising effect of the *turn to ethics*, it is the

violent implications of ethics itself which fuel Butler's sceptical distance towards it. Ethics, understood as a cluster or set of normative beliefs, often gives rise to what could be called righteous denunciations and even to the devaluation and dehumanization of entire populations in the name of morality itself. Both forms of violence point directly to the problematic connection between identity and ethics. Often, a shared system of ethical beliefs and practices establishes a sense of community and group cohesion, and, not the least, an individual's sense of identity. A person's identity, in this perspective, to a large extent is constituted by group affiliations. But there is an ethical downside to this group-related formation and stabilization of collective and personal identity. It is only possible at the cost of the exclusion of others, virtually all of them. This is a problem on many levels, e.g. the political, social, and cultural. From a philosophical point of view, this differentiation between group members and 'others' often is the basis and prerequisite for group-related violence, as, for example, Amartya Sen has impressively argued for (Sen 2007). It is this link between group ethics and differentiation from others that informs all sorts of relativistic arguments within moral philosophy.

Personal identity in this context also becomes relevant in another regard here. In the case of moral conflict and criticism, it rarely is merely a certain course of action or practice that resides at the foundation of that conflict. Often, the problematization of a given action is perceived by the addressee as a critique of her whole way of being, or her life-form. A critique of this sort often is perceived as a threat to one's identity, which then, in turn, has to be defended by all, and often violent means. Or to be more precise, violent means of self-defence, i.e. the defence of one's identity by means of violence, both the identity and the violence deployed get ethically justified by a supposed threat or harm. This, in Butler's view, is accompanied by a problematic reification and essential-

isation of this identity which is at odds with her account of performative identity and also is apparently inapt to consider non-violence in a fruitful way.

This conceptual framing of ethical violence is resonating with a formulation by Adorno. In one of his lectures on the problems of moral philosophy, he claims that ‘nothing is more degenerate than the kind of ethics or morality that survive in the shape of collective ideas [...] Once the state of human consciousness and the state of social forces of production have abandoned these collective ideas, these ideas acquire repressive and violent qualities.’ (Adorno 2001, p.17). Adorno, thus, links these violent aspects of ethics and identity with two lines of confrontation. When he speaks of the degenerate state of ethics at any one time, he points to the anachronicity of ethical beliefs and norms, which are violently upheld in the present, although they have lost the basis of their initial justification. Adorno, just as Butler, certainly never believed that there has been any such point in time and history when norms were not anachronistic in this sense. Rather, he implies that with regard to norms there are two different regimes of time at work, one that is the norm’s own time, with its own political, cultural, and theoretical conditions of emergence, and with its own strategy of justification. It is in this way that ethics becomes a *collective idea*, an idea which is emblematic of its own time of emergence. This time-regime eventually collides with a new set of conditions, which themselves bear another state of human consciousness. This encounter of two time-regimes is confrontational, not only from a philosophical viewpoint, but from an emancipatory one. The individual encounters outdated norms with outdated justifications, but these norms still demand compliance as it is the ethical idea of the society. The norm has degenerated into a habitual rule, a tradition, a folklore. Functionally, the norms still impose the time regime of its inception, and since

it is not apt for the present time regime, the norm has to be enforced violently. Adorno provides yet a second formulation of the violent character of ethical norms, which references the metaphysical tension between universalism and the particular and which initially gives rise to the philosophical inquiry into ethics as a discipline: '[T]he social problem of the divergence between the universal interest and the particular interest, the interests of particular individuals, is what goes to make up the problem of morality' (Adorno 2001, p.19). This formulation certainly is compatible with Foucault's critical exposition of the disciplinary operations of normalization which the individual is subjected to, and which are, at the same time, the conditions of subjectivation itself. But with regard to moral philosophy, there also is the task of substantiation of norms. Since moral norms demand compliance from individuals, traditions and habits do not suffice as justification. Just because a community has followed certain rules and norms all the while, this does not guard the individual from the possibly violent and harmful consequences from obedience to these norms. With regard to Butler's account, this opens the field for a discussion of the problematic, and eventually violent, tension between the singularity of a lived life and the very normative matrix in which and by which this life is lived. Both aspects, the anachronicity of existing norms, as well as the norms which constitute the space of possibilities of becoming a subject, are at the center of Butler's ethical account and will be discussed in depth below.

That said, it seems natural that, for Butler, the question which opens the field of critical moral inquiry is not the Kantian 'What should I do?', but rather a variation of it: 'Who can I become in such a world where the meanings and limits of the subject are set out in advance for me?' (Butler 2002, p.12). With this approach she charts the space of ethical inquiry not in terms of a theory of action. Any focus on singular actions does

not seem of particular interest to her. Instead, she speaks of *becoming a person*, which denotes not only the actions of an individual, but also the individual being acted upon by other and by norms alike. Moreover, in her opinion ethics is meant to inquire into the conditions of acting and the intelligibility of actions, both of which have severe impact on the space of possible identities which one person can acquire, or the space of possible persons an individual can be over time.

In order to reconstruct Butler's ethical attempt of an answer to this question, it will be inevitable to look into various ambivalences within the topical field of ethics. As discussed above, one ambivalence occurs in the case of ethical violence, where norms cause violent relations among subjects and between norms and persons, although they are meant to govern a peaceful and non-violent cohabitation of subjects in societies. Ethical inquiry therefore should illuminate or even explain to what extent norms are, at the same time, claims to violence and non-violence. Also, norms seem to be ambivalent with regard to the subject itself. In Butler's understanding, norms constitute and structure the space of becoming a subject in a genealogical perspective, but also require to be appropriated by the subject. To that end, it will be necessary to reconstruct her concept of performative and relational identity. Thirdly, there is an ambivalence concerning the 'meanings and limitations' which supposedly are set out in advance. In what way do norms produce these meanings and limits, and how are they linked to ethics? If norms determine these meanings and limits, what are their violent ramifications, and how can they be overcome, at least philosophically? Lastly, there is an ethical ambivalence emerging from the theoretical concept of the subject itself. On the one hand, violence is a characteristic of a relation between one subject and another, implicating that subjects themselves are capable of being violent. On the other hand, this presupposes the

vulnerability of the subject. So how can norms be the cause for violence and the production of vulnerable subjects at the same time? And how should we think about the coexistence of violence and vulnerability?

I want to caution the reader against expecting clear answers to this set of ambivalent concepts. Neither will the reconstruction of Butler's ethics amount to a fully fledged moral philosophy with a well crafted argumentative foundation and a specific set of ethical instructions. Nonetheless, Butler's critical work on these ethical concepts such as 'recognition', 'norms', 'identity', and 'responsibility' will pave a way of conceptualizing ethics in a way that reflects upon the blind spots of existing ethical conceptualizations, regardless of their teleological or deontological orientation, and which connects a relational and performative concept of identity with a shared existential claim of human vulnerability in a non-violent perspective. As it will be shown below, this ethical approach relies upon a genuine notion of responsibility which rejects the prevalent demands for the subject's (self-)transparency and coherence and, instead, acknowledges the limitations and failures which these demands generate. Or to put it in other words, it acknowledges the limits of acknowledgment itself.

In order to reconstruct Butler's *ethics of vulnerability*¹ (Mills 2015, p.43), Sara Rushing coined the bulky phrase 'ethics of generosity, humility, and patience' (Rushing 2010, p.300). Butler herself considers an 'ethics of non-violence' in several occasions. These different emphases certainly underline the ambiguous and preliminary character of Butler's ethics, since different perspectives on it, all of which are fairly plausible, seem to bring about different conceptual priorities. I hope that my

¹There is a certain convention within philosophy to attribute catchy labels to theories in order to make them addressable more easily. I have chosen to highlight the aspect of vulnerability in Butler's account, but others have resorted to other emphases. Catherine Mills, for example, speaks of it as 'ethics of failure' in her informative reconstruction of Butler's ethics.

reasons for highlighting the aspect of vulnerability will become clear in the course of this chapter. A close contender has been ‘ethics of opacity’, since just as vulnerability, the subject’s limited or ‘opaque’ understanding of herself and the normative and practical contexts contribute to Butler’s concept of responsibility. That said, this chapter is not about the proper labelling of a theory, but about the theoretical claims about the relation of personal identity and normative frameworks. To this end, I will subsequently look at three major threads in Butler’s thinking. I will begin with what could be called her conception of a *corporeal ontology*. This deals with questions like ‘What is a subject?’, ‘What is a live?’, ‘What is a body?’, and also with ‘What counts as a full human being?’. In this section, her central concepts such as vulnerability and relationality will get scrutinized. In the second section of this chapter, I will consider her *social epistemology*. Epistemological considerations eventually are regarded as opposed to normative inquiries, but they assume a prominent role not only in Butler’s ethics of vulnerability, but also in the course of this thesis. It is her critique of narrative accounting, and especially the norms and demands which govern this social practice and also establish certain standards of self-knowledge and accounting, which will be discussed in depth in the subsequent chapters. Social epistemology, in this context, tackles the question ‘What can I know about myself/you?’, or with a slightly different focus, ‘What are the limitations of my knowledge about myself/you?’. Thirdly, Butler links her ethical considerations intrinsically with *social theory* and the *operation of critique*. As there are various structural and practical limitations to our knowledge about ourselves and the societal situations we live in, she thinks it is mandatory to incorporate methodologies from social sciences into ethical contemplation. And when it comes to the practical implementation of her ethics, the central task is to assume responsibility in a critical manner. Because

she thinks that subjects are formed by inherently violent norms, to assume responsibility means not to repeat the violence of one's formation. This is an advancement of Foucault's slogan that critique means 'not to be governed like that'. This style of critique has to suspend learned forms of (normative) judgement in order to open up the space for a different set of values. Accordingly, it will be necessary to revisit these topics before a condensed account of Butler's ethics of vulnerability will be presented at the end of this chapter. Before all of that, however, I will begin with the 'universal claim' of Butler's which states the new sense of ethics she tries to establish.

2.1 From Failure to Ethics

At the core of Butler's ethics of vulnerability resides the criticism of (ethical) violence. There are, of course, many forms and types of violence which affect human lives, and until this point, it remains obscure precisely what the quality of this violence is, which varieties exist and how they inform her ethical account. As a matter of fact, a comprehensive discussion of the concept of ethical violence will require some preparatory work and therefore will not be possible until the end of this chapter. One manifestation which is especially relevant in the context of ethics and identity is addressed in this quote: 'Suspending the demand for self-identity or, more particularly, for complete coherence seems [...] to counter a certain ethical violence, which demands that we manifest and maintain self-identity at all times and require that others do the same.' (Butler 2005, p.42). To what extent this assumption about self-identity over time and (narrative) coherence really is part of established ethical accounts will be scrutinized in the next chapter. For the time being, it will suffice to recognize that, in Butler's thinking, there is a categorical difference between the demand of self-transparency and coherence on the

one side, and her own demand, namely to suspend this demand itself in the context of ethics.

One reason for this difference is established on the grounds of expected success and failure. Seemingly, it is impossible, or at least very difficult, to establish and maintain this sort of coherence and transparency of one's own identity in the context of a lived life. In this sense, this demand asks for too much and consequently prepares the ground for failure. Butler seemingly envisions situations in which one is addressed and asked for giving an account of oneself for the purpose of negotiating forgiveness after harm has been done. It overwhelms the individual precisely in a situation where she seeks to find recognition or forgiveness. The reasons and conditions which forestall the success of establishing transparency and self-identity will be introduced below. Here I want to highlight the deduction of a new way of conceptualizing responsibility and forgiveness given the ethical failure which entails this demand eventually. So how can a 'new sense of ethics' emerge from ethical failure? Butler suggests that '...it would be spawned by a certain willingness to acknowledge the limits of acknowledgement itself. When we claim to know and to present ourselves, we will fail in some ways that are nevertheless essential to who we are. We cannot reasonably expect anything different from others in return. [...] This can, by the way, constitute a disposition of humility and generosity alike: I will need to be forgiven for what I cannot have fully known, and I will be under a similar obligation to offer forgiveness to others, who are also constituted in partial opacity to themselves.' (Butler 2005, p.42).

Several observations can be made here. With regard philosophical accounts of personal identity and subjectivation in general, this quote is slightly unsettling. Butler seems to state that no matter how advanced and sophisticated any given account of a person's identity might be, it

remains impossible for the individual to fully and comprehensibly know herself. It would be premature to conclude that engaging with the task of theorizing identity in principle would be futile in any circumstance since, for reasons yet to be elaborated, this endeavour would be doomed to fail. Rather, Butler makes two reservations about such accounts. Firstly, any account of personal identity which claims to have established the ideal way to theorize a human's identity in its entirety should be treated with caution. As I will discuss in the subsequent chapter, many narrativists vindicate some variant of the claim that a human's identity consists in, or amounts to, or is equal to her life-narrative. In doing so, they imply that, especially in comparison with other methodological approaches, only narrativist accounts of identity can grasp the full richness of human existence. Secondly, Butler also addresses the interlocutory situation in which an individual provides a (narrative) account of herself to another individual. In this situation, not each and every detail can be known and at hand. Moreover, the demand to make oneself and one's goals and motivations transparent in order to get recognized as a human being, and eventually be forgiven, can be used by the interlocutor to penetrate certain boundaries which are established by the state of not knowing, a use that in many cases can assume a violent form.

A second observation concerns the startling implication that, despite the circumstance that one's identity cannot be fully known, this very ignorance, in turn, is supposed to be an integral part of this identity. Here, it is important to notice the shift of reference which takes place within the quote. Although it seems that Butler speaks about the interlocutory situation of narrating oneself (and in a sense she does), she also refers to an ontological understanding of a person's identity. The failure to know and present oneself, in this sense, refers not only to the factual failure to present oneself properly when being addressed, but also to the on-

tological human condition of being disorientated about one's becoming and being. It is in this sense that failure can be viewed as 'essential to who we are'. This, however, does not implicate that Butler establishes some sort of metaphysical ground within her ethics which would link abstract ontological assumptions with a preconfigured notions of responsibility and forgiveness. Instead, she fashions her corporeal ontology in a strictly social manner. *Cum* Adorno, she is convinced that 'anything we call morality today merges into the question of the organization of the world.'(Adorno 2001, p.176), and that the ontological predicaments of human beings are inextricably connected and intermingled with this social domain, with its prevailing *schemes of intelligibility*, and with its normative outfit in general.

A third observation touches the question of the scope of these ethics. Here I use 'scope' rather than 'domain of applicability', since, at least for the time being, Butler seemingly establishes a critical matrix for questioning ethical theories about their capability of coping with the limits of (self-)knowledge and the violent and disorienting character of norms in general. Also, her ethical reflections clearly are a response to the massive devaluation and dehumanization of whole populations in the course of the preparation of waging war against these populations. The shaping of hostile identities by attribution of certain 'underdeveloped' characteristics to these people does not only justify violence and destruction by means of identitarian differences, but also disavows the possible exposure to violence and the precarity of each and every human being as a human being. It is in this sense that the equality of precariousness can be theorized as an ethical principle: 'The apprehension of precarity of others - their exposure to violence, their socially induced transience and dispensability - is, by implication, an apprehension of the precarity of any and all living beings, implying a principle of equal vulnerability that

governs all living beings.’(Butler 2010, p.xvi). Ultimately, this *principle of equal vulnerability* resides at the centre of Butler’s social ontology and provides the foundation of her moral philosophy.

2.2 Corporeality, Norms, and Relationality

In this section, I will trace how these ontological assumptions about corporeal vulnerability contribute to a concept of personal identity. Instead of asking ‘What is identity?’ or ‘What is a human?’ as in the previous part, the area of inquiry here, for Butler, is opened by a slightly different set of questions. She asks ‘What is a live?’, ‘What is a body?’, ‘How is identity performed?’, and ‘Who counts normatively as a full human being?’. In order to articulate answers to these questions, and thereby to substantiate this ontological dimension of her normative project, Butler inquires into a set of relational concepts which resonate with the existential vulnerability of a lived human’s life: ‘[I]f we are to make broader social and political claims about rights of protection and entitlements to persistence and flourishing, we will first have to be supported by a new bodily ontology, one that implies the rethinking of precariousness, vulnerability, injurability, interdependency, exposure, bodily persistence, desire, work and the claims of language and social belonging.’(Butler 2005, p.2).

There are three topics in this quote which need to be addressed. First of all, this set of concepts includes both, concepts which emphasise the relational aspects of a lived life as well as concepts which rather address dispositions of the individual body. Precariousness, interdependency, exposure, and desire, only exist and make sense in a social context, whereas persistence, vulnerability and injurability are dispositions of a living body. One of the pending questions here is to what extent does it make sense to think of this bodily ontology as a composite of individual and

intersubjective or relational features, or if all of them are relational in a genuine, meaningful way. With regard to a person's identity, this question has quite radical implications. Modern philosophical anthropology has operated on the strong assumption that the individual is ontologically prior to social relations. It is theorized as the atom which, in aggregation, constitutes cultural forms of cooperation and social institutions. It is obvious that Butler takes a critical, if not opposing stance towards individual atomism by highlighting relational concepts. Still, since she allows for dispositional concepts as part of her ontology, it could turn out that she maintains some of the assumptions which she claims to overcome. Secondly, the sheer group of concepts seems to pave the way for a concept of personal identity which is quite distinct from most of the theories of personal identity discussed in philosophy in general. As I will show in the next chapter, neither the body itself, nor its vulnerability constitutes the outset of philosophical reasoning nor the foundation of ethical obligations towards others. Thirdly, the reference of norms is remarkable. Obviously, Butler tries to establish the claim that from vulnerability, exposure, and interdependence claims about the persistence and flourishing of an individual arise, which constitute a strong moral stance due to its implied universality. Yet it remains to be seen how the transition of existential predicaments to normative claims is reasoned for.

Also, it still has to become more evident what relationality actually means in this context. Without having looked closer at the respective meaning of this concept in Butler's ethics yet, it is noticeable that it implies various types of relations. It seems natural, *prima facie*, to think of relations which exist between subjects, and I myself have talked about relationality in this intersubjective way. And it seems to be adequate to do so. It is subjects who can injure each other, who are exposed to each other, and who are existentially interdependent. Precarity is unequally

distributed among and within populations, a fact that is directly dependent on the social and normative situations within these groups. But the discussion will show that the relation to other subjects only contributes in part to this bodily ontology. Within the context of ethical considerations, two other domains of relations are equally important, namely the subject's relation to herself, and her relations to norms. The former is what commonly is denoted by reflexivity, i.e. the ability to make oneself, or at least parts of oneself, the object of ethical consideration, to put it in Foucaultian terms. Further, the relation of the subject to norms does not only mean the mere appropriation of certain ethical, socially prevalent beliefs, as many ethicists do. For Butler, the situation is far more intricate. Since it is norms which govern the formation of subjects, there is a necessary entanglement with norms right from the coming into being. Even reflexivity, often viewed as the crucial faculty to distance oneself from oneself and social pathologies as well, is merely one manifestation of a historically contingent regime of truth. In other words, norms govern how to be reflexive in the first place.

All three dimensions of relationality seem to be relevant, and certainly need to get fleshed out in the course of this reconstruction. Also, since all three dimensions of relationality seem to cover a vast area of a human life, such as becoming, acting, and reflecting, one could assume that relationality, at least in Butler's ethics, is the source of responsibility and, in this regard, the foundation for her ethics in total. This assumption, however, would miss the crucial point. Catherine Mills, for example, points out that relationality in itself is not the source of responsibility in Butler's ethics, but its 'venue'. Just as a concert hall is not the reason for concerts, but the venue for them, relationality constitutes the space for ethical conflict and responsibility².

²Butler herself considers relationality in many occasions, but she would not refer to it as the source of her claims about identity and ethics. For her, relationality is

So what does bodily ontology mean, and how is it related to the concept of human vulnerability? Butler hardly is motivated by metaphysical curiosity, but rather by the apparent hierarchy of what counts as a ‘full human life’. In the aftermath of the terrorist attacks in New York in 2001, especially regarding the practices and rituals of mourning about the lives lost in these attacks, it becomes obvious that there are substantial differences in these practices, and by implication also substantial differences in who counts as a live that can be lost and mourned. In other words, the lives which have been destroyed in the attacks on 9/11 are incomparably more mourned and grieved than any live which has been destroyed in the course of the *wars on terror* which ensued the attacks. For Butler, this shows that not all human lives are regarded as equal. It is this experience of devaluation, or even dehumanization, of human lives which establishes the political, social, and ethical background of her account of a bodily ontology. Also, it informs her analysis of the differential distribution of mournability.

There are certain assumptions about the body against which a bodily and relational ontology is positioned against. For many, the body is merely a biologically given fact which, regardless of the cultural and societal conditions and constitution. A body thus theorized appears to be untouched by cultural believes, norms and practices. As an evolved organism, for instance, the body’s functions and purpose would only make sense in accordance with the needs and pressures of evolutionary theory, completely independent of what culturally counts as living a life in a meaningful way. This perspective often is accompanied by individualistic presuppositions about a person’s identity. No matter how many roles an

itself just as ambivalent. ‘It won’t even do to say that I am promoting a relational view of the self over an autonomous one or trying to redescribe autonomy in terms of relationality. Despite my affinity for the term relationality, we may need other language to approach the issue that concerns us, a way of thinking about how we are not only constituted by our relations but also dispossessed by them as well’ (Butler 2004, p.24). It is this language of dispossession which is at stake here.

individual assumes in the course of her live, no matter how many transformations the body is subjected to, the body itself is seen as the site and authority to individuate and differentiate persons. Butler, instead, argues for a quite different concept of bodily existence, one that opposes both reductionist materialism and anthropological atomism.

‘The body is not a self-identical or merely factual materiality; it is a materiality that bears meaning, if nothing else, and the manner of this bearing is fundamentally dramatic. By dramatic I mean only that the body is not merely matter but a continual and incessant materializing of possibilities. One is not simply a body, but, in some very key sense, one does one’s body and, indeed, one does one’s body differently from one’s contemporaries and from one’s embodied predecessors and successors as well’ (Butler 1988, p.521). Several readings of this quote are possible here. The body as a materiality of meaning could still support the essential division of a text, or text-analogue, and its interpretation, as uphold in hermeneutics. The body, in this sense, could be regarded as a material entity which eludes understanding systematically and therefore is in dire need for interpretation and actual sense-making. But this is not what Butler envisions here. For her, interpretation itself is a social and cultural practice which, *qua* practice, is brought into being by norms, is individuated and structured by them, and which imposes these norms onto the body-as-text and the interpreter alike. Also, hermeneutics’ promises to reveal sense and meaning where both are merely sediments in the primary text. Butler disbelieves this hermeneutic commitment to interpretative progress and meaning. Norms, in her view, are the sources for opacities and disorientations, i.e. things which cannot be understood or known completely, and which renders the hermeneuticist endeavour to make sense out of one’s body and personal identity as futile.

The body itself is, then, is a ‘historical situation [...] and is a man-

ner of doing, dramatizing, and reproducing a historical situation' (Butler 1988, p.521). It is an integral feature of the body thus conceptualized that for the individual the historical situation itself will, more or less, remain obscure and opaque. The rules and norms which define the space of possible actions, and, in a performative framework, the possibilities of being a person, are not authored by the individual herself and therefore have to be reiterated without being fully known or comprehended. Also, the history and genealogy of the language which establish the medium in which actions and performances are made intelligible to others also remain obscure to the performer. Consequently, the body 'is not passively scripted with cultural codes, as if it were a lifeless recipient of wholly pre-existing cultural relations. But neither do embodied selves pre-exist the cultural conventions which essentially signify bodies' (ibid., p.526). *Doing one's body* as a historical situation, therefore, means that any given performance of identity is an (re-)enactment of pre-existing scripts and possibilities of being in the world. It is important to note that performance and reiteration do not concur with interpretation at all. Instead, these possibilities themselves are products of interpretations which are shared within a given culture in which the performance takes place: 'Actors are always already on the stage, within the terms of the performance. Just as a script may be enacted in various ways, and just as the play requires both text and interpretation, so the gendered body acts its part in a culturally restricted corporeal space and enacts interpretations within the confines of already existing directives' (ibid., p.526). Opacity arises from the obscure reasons and causes for why exactly the corporeal space is culturally restricted, and who authored these directives, and whose interpretations get enacted in any given situation.

To be exact, the previous paragraphs established Butler's ontology of the body, but not yet her corporeal ontology in the context of ethical

considerations. The conceptualization of the body as performed, and a person's identity as performed, is meant to oppose various binary oppositions which have dominated the discourses on these topics. In its anti-essentialist impetus, this account shows that a philosophy of personal identity can operate without the implication that besides its factual occurrences, there is some anthropological constant, some inalterable essence, or deeper truth about human beings. Just as the actor on stage, the stage itself, and the space of possible actions on this stage, finally, even the text and interpretation of the play performed, all exist prior to the actor's enactments. Conversely, the actor is not an acting essence, but an instantiation of pre-defined scripts in a space of possibilities, which eventually gets enacted. This does not imply that these scripts are especially persistent, or unalterable, since the applying norms are not deterministic in this strict sense. As we will see later, it is the very deviation from normative imperatives that make change and improvement possible in the first place. Secondly, 'the body' in Butler's philosophy is not mapped onto the biological, or physically given entity, which 'lives a life besides the person's identity' and which gets interpreted once the life-form has developed the cultural means for interpretation. Physics and biology are both what Foucault has called *regimes of truth*. And as such regimes, they merely add to the normative space of possible forms of existence for a body. In Butler's view, there is no need for the distinction, or dualism, of a first and second nature; there is only one heterogeneous normative space of possible ways of existence. The popular and common assumption that the body is unambiguously described and identified by the natural sciences hence is subverted, or, in this sense, *queered*. But how do vulnerability, injurability, and relationality come into play? How do these concepts intersect with corporeal ontology and ethics?

The vulnerability of a human being is easy to grasp in an infant. Long

before she grows up and matures into fully developed persons, the infant's survival necessarily depends on being taken care of by others. Only under this condition an infant can be expected to survive. One could object that this example may show the existential dependency of children, but that this precarious state will be overcome when the child becomes an adult person. Such persons are supposed to be capable to maintain themselves, and who probably can choose and decide with whom to build relationships. But is that plausible? According to which criteria would it be possible to determine the precise point of time when a dependent infant becomes independent in this sense? And would this demarcation really suspend what Butler repeatedly labels 'being given over to others'?

There is another regard in which being given over to others as a bodily constituted subject connects the individual to violence, and thereby establishes the ethical dimension of vulnerability not only for children, but for each human being. Even once one has gotten past the process of individualisation, the subject still is reliant on the interaction with others, and as a body, it is always exposed to the touch of others. These interactions with other human beings can result in a spectrum of possible outcomes, which range from loving and caring contacts through to bodily harm, torture, and even bodily destruction and murder. Whatever the result of such interaction will be, it is important to note that this primary vulnerability, which implies a primary helplessness as well, constitutes an existential social predicament which challenges every conception of personal identity that overstates the individual's autonomy and argues in favour of a fundamental mastery of life. I will return to this aspect, the aspect of an illusion of 'mastery by identity', in the discussion-section in the last chapter. The initial infant's dependency on primary social relations for survival is, in fact, not suspended by whatever it means to establish personality and becoming an adult person. Survival depends on

successful relations to others, and these relationships can be everything between abusive and loving. It is this spectrum of human relationships which converge into the concept of primary vulnerability.

The exposure to the touch of others is superimposed, or realized, in social relations with other human beings. To understand a person's identity as relational means it is relations which constitute a person's identity, and nothing else. This becomes obvious when one considers personal or emotional loss and its ramifications for identity. If a loved person dies, or a partner just parts ways, this loss will alter the way of how the person who suffers the loss will think about herself. Often, the direct experience of loss will result in an temporal insecurity about one's identity, because at the point of time in which the loss occurs, it remains opaque, or unknown, to what extent and how this loss will change the person's identity who suffers the loss. Loss, therefore, is one striking example for the relational vulnerability which becomes apparent once one has adopted this relational understanding of personal identity. This vulnerability cannot be 'willed away' (Butler 2004, p.XIV) without ceasing to be a human being. In conclusion, '[l]oss and vulnerability seem to follow from our being socially constituted bodies, attached to others, at risk of losing those attachments, exposed to others, at risk of violence by virtue of that exposure.' (ibid., p.20).

The perspective of the first person plural, the 'our', seems to implicate that Butler thinks of this disposition of vulnerability only from the perspective of the person who suffers loss and whose vulnerability is realised in a harmful way. This understanding would be flawed. Butler adopts the perspective of the 'we' because she wants to make ontological claims about every human being. This does not imply that she thinks of violent relations only in terms of exposure and passivity. In the context of ethics it is imperative, not only for Butler, to consider the other side

of the violent relation as well, namely that each relational human being can exert violence and aggression towards others. This is not only important because the plausibility of ethical accounts highly depends on their implementation of mutuality and reciprocity of ethical norms, or social relations, for that matter. In the narrower context of the reconstruction of the corporeal ontology, the aim here is to consider human relationality and vulnerability as the foundation for ethical reasoning, and especially to criticise existent accounts of what a human being actually is once they favour the individual, or her autonomy, over relations in an essentialist way. Vulnerability not only is an essential feature of each individual's existence, a mere disposition which one could harden oneself against, or maybe even dump completely. Vulnerability is a central aspect not only of one human being or another, but one which is constituted by the corporeality of human existence, or to be more precise, of each human being *qua* human being, and which shows itself in the very relations with others. It is in this sense that vulnerability is an ontological feature of human beings.

To a large extent this concept of corporeal vulnerability is coextensive with the concept of precariousness, although the latter puts emphasis on the social, rather than the corporeal dimension of human beings. 'Precariousness implies living socially, that is, the fact that one's life is always in some sense in the hands of the other. It implies exposure both to those we know and to those we do not know; a dependency on people we know, or barely know, or know not at all. Reciprocally, it implies being impinged upon by the exposure and dependency of others, most of whom remain anonymous. These are not necessarily relations of love or even of care, but constitute obligations toward others, most of whom we cannot name and do not know, and who may or may not bear traits of familiarity to an established sense of who "we" are.' (Butler 2010, p.30). It has

to be postponed exactly how particular obligations towards others arise from the mutual relation of being in the hands of others and being this hand, to stay in the picture. There is a categorical difference between precariousness and precarity, a conceptual difference that unfortunately is not rigorously sustained by Butler herself in her writings. Whereas precariousness denotes the risk to engage in violent relations with others, precarity addresses the politically fabricated economic and political conditions which keep people in a precarious condition. In this sense, precarity can be differentially distributed among populations. As a political being, Butler opposes those policies as well as the political strategies which corroborate precarity of any given sub-population. Precariousness, however, is an ontological attribute of being a human, or, the other way round, being a human being means to be existentially exposed to others and being at the risk of experiencing or violence.

As we have seen so far, Butler argues in favour of a corporeal and performative understanding of enacted identity. In the remainder of this section, it is vital to reveal how these ontological presuppositions are theoretically bound to a) Butler's relational conception of personal identity, b) the role of norms within this ontological framework, and c) the actual ethics of vulnerability. Not until then it will make sense to inquire into the epistemological considerations. As cited above, relationality in Butler's philosophy might best be viewed as the venue for ethics and responsibility, rather than its source or even foundation. Mills metaphor is meant to caution against the misunderstanding that relationality itself might be the source and rationale for corporal identity, for an ethics of vulnerability, and for a consequent shift in the meaning of responsibility itself. In this sense, the metaphor has been well chosen. Still, relationality assumes different positions in the theoretical architecture of Butler's philosophy. As it will turn out, relationality itself slightly shifts its meaning

in dependence of to what precisely an individual is related to. This does not undermine the cogency of the term ‘relationality’, but instead rather strengthens it.

The individual, accordingly, is deeply enmeshed in relations. As mentioned above, the most plausible, but *prima facie* also most trivial, set of relations are those relations which exist between human beings. Successful relations with others are viewed to be essential for survival right after birth, and remains to be in the later stages of adulthood. Also, from an ethical point of view, it is the relations with others, as well as the social and political conditions in which these relations are lived and evaluated, which are the essential topic of ethics itself. It may appear plausible to assume that Butler aims to contribute critically the concept of recognition, as it has been discussed over the last two decades. But relationality, from an ontological point of view, is meant to address ‘something fundamental about the social conditions of our formation’ (Butler 2004, p.22). It is part and parcel of her answer to the question ‘How have I become who I am?’ rather than to ‘How should we treat each other?’. Note that this genealogical perspective on subject formation is in itself merely a transitional stage for what Butler understands as the crucial ethical question, namely ‘Who can I be?’.

The space of possible ways of being a human being, thus, is opened and structured, but also limited and confined, by norms. These norms prepare a place within the ontological field of a subject. Butler clearly tries to enhance the Foucaultian understanding of the relationship between norms and becoming a subject. She concurs with Foucault’s concept of disciplinary normalization, according to which the formation of a subject is a norm-governed process on many levels. These levels include the normalization of postures and gestures, the acquisition of a certain sociolect, but also, how to think about oneself and others, and even how

to be reflective and critical. In the French texts of Foucault's, he prefers to speak of *normation* rather than of normalization. This is of import because normalization could be understood in two different ways. First, it could be understood descriptively, in the sense that subjects exist prior to the norm. According to this view, the norm would merely establish the normal distribution of possible behaviours, traits, or opinions. Normalization as the translation of the French *normation*, instead, puts the norms themselves in the primary position. Theorized in this way, norms assume a productive facet. This is completely different than just sorting existing subjects according to certain laws statistical distribution and deviation from average. Norms establish the space of intelligibility for becoming a normal subject. Part of these norms are ethical norms in a stricter sense, but there are many more. Only in the cognitive appropriation and practical reiteration of these norms one can become a subject. And it is through these norms, that the 'the illusion of an abiding [...] self' is generated. 'Such lives do not simply conform to moral precepts or norms in such a way that selves, considered preformed or ready-made, fit themselves into a mold that is set forth by the precept. On the contrary, the individual fashions herself in terms of the norm, comes to inhabit and incorporate the norm, but the norm is not in this sense external to the principle by which the self is formed.' (Butler 2002, p.197).

This concludes the reconstruction of this concept of corporeal ontology, which is the first out of three constitutive parts of Judith Butler's ethics of vulnerability. As it has become evident, this ontology is not to be confused with a metaphysical project, it is not meant to account for all entities as entities and as an answer to the formal ontological question of what there is. Rather, it is an ontology which is concentrated on philosophical issues of personal identity, such as its formation, its performance, and its relation to norms and ethics. This ontology is based upon a set of concepts

which semantically overlap each other quite substantially. Vulnerability, injurability, and precariousness, all three concepts try to delineate very basic ways of being linked, and related, to oneself, to others, and to norms.

The plausibility of this approach mainly lies in the ways in which corporeality resides at the core of this ontology. The body is not the ‘other’ of personal identity, a *first nature* which is more or less detached from the culturally acquired *second nature*. It is performed just as any other aspect of a person’s existence is performed. As a performance, similar to plays on a theatre stage, it is governed by norms and directives, it is an embodiment of an interpretation. Also, it is the corporeality of a human’s existence that implicates its own vulnerability and precariousness, and its dependence on others. It is because of these shared conditions that the apprehension of this common ground is possible. The core claims of the corporeal ontology constitute an attempt delineate crucial aspects of human existence which are apt to counter overly individualistic accounts of personal identity, and which frame the task of ethics to counter repression, violence, and normative force. This is an aim which structurally reappears in the next section on the fundamental limits of what we can know about us and the world, and how this opacity has crucial impacts for moral philosophy.

2.3 Varieties of Opacity

In the previous section on Butler’s corporeal ontology it has become evident that there is an inescapable enmeshment of norms and persons. The space of possible identities an individual may or may not acquire over the course of her lifetime is opened and structured by norms. Moreover, the corporeality of human beings matters in the context of moral philosophy because it establishes the principle of shared vulnerability and pre-

cariousness. This principle, in turn, gives testament to the fundamental relationality of human existence. Humans depend on successful relations with others right from their birth, and they maintain to be dependent in such a way for their entire lifespan. These relations are ethically relevant because the interactions with others can succeed or fail, they often are harmful and destructive. Human beings also have relations with norms themselves. This holds true, at least in a Foucaultian perspective, since norms prepare the space of possible identities for an individual, and they do so establishing a discursive regime of rules for behaviour, for intelligible actions, and for enacting a particular identity. The relevance of these relationships with norms is evident in the narrower sense of asking ‘How have I become who I am?’. But this relevance persists for the entire life, since identity, as shown above, is theorized as performative. The performance itself is governed by even more rules and norms. Lastly, the individual is in a relations with herself in many ways. Again, in a Foucaultian way, the subject considers and forms herself as the ‘object of her own moral practice’. All three domains of relations are connected to the complex liaison of personal identity and normative frameworks.

Nonetheless, the ontological and corporeal plain is not the only complex which constitutes the ethical dimension of human beings. Even if this corporeal ontology has established the manifold interrelations of subjects with norms, nothing is said yet about the impact this ubiquitous enmeshment with norms has on the individual. Vulnerability and relationality in and of themselves do not entail a specific ethical approach. The guiding question for this section, therefore, is to which extent it is possible for the subject to make the entanglement with norms explicit, i.e. transparent to herself and others. One of the goal of this section is to elaborate the various ‘opacities’ by which the individual gets disorientated, in Butler’s jargon. As I will discuss below, there are various

sources for this particular opacity, which all are identity-related. Now, what about Butler's resort to this term in the context of self-knowledge? Opacity can be read in two different ways. First, it is a vision-related characteristic of certain physical entities. A frosted window, for example, can be hard to see through, and many crystals also only let through a certain amount of light. Opaque, in this sense, can be virtually everything between 'transparent' and 'non-transparent'. Secondly, opaque often is used figuratively for everything that is difficult to understand or to explain. Both manners of use are accompanied by a rich group of semantically affine terms, such as 'hazy', 'murky', 'blurred', or 'cloudy'. So in which way is a person's identity 'opaque'? Certainly, this will be the central topic of the subsequent paragraphs, if not the entire thesis, but two remarks might be useful here. First, whereas 'cloudy' or 'hazy' denote momentary or transitional states, 'opacity' often is a permanent feature. This is congruent with Butler's assessment of crucial features of who a person is. Secondly, the opacities of personal identity are not only due to a situational uncertainty or any lack of knowledge, albeit both can be present in any given interlocutory situation. The opacities of identity might get cleared in certain details, but never all of them. Some aspects about how a person has come into being simply cannot be known. Therefore, these opacities constitute a very fundamental condition of what it means to exist as a human being³. At the same time, epistemic opacity always is partial. Although semantically opacity is the antonym of transparency, it does not make sense to speak of complete opacity when it comes to knowledge. Even if things are not known, there always has to be known something which can point to the unknown. But these are fairly general remarks. So as to reconstruct the theoretical and

³Hermeneuticists could easily agree here. Personal identity and its relation to norms and ethics are in dire need of interpretation. But for Butler, the resort to hermeneuticist interpretation will not dispel the existential situation of opacity. Each interpretation merely sets another mark in the fog.

argumentative structure of Butler's claim of opacity, I will again review the conceptual cluster she develops in order to substantiate the claim. This is quite similar to the proceeding of the last section. Just as it has been the case with vulnerability, injurability, and precariousness, Butler establishes a cluster of semantically adjacent concepts, which are meant to address the limitations of what can be known about personal identity and norms, and what not.

The manifold entanglement with norms is the source of a set of epistemic problems which result from the differences between the cognitive, practical, and social characteristics of human encounters, and the trajectories or modes of operation of norms. The tension between these two sides most considerably culminates in the concept of recognition. Of course, there has been put much scholarly effort and dispute into the concept of recognition, and it would certainly be far too extensive for the present purpose to provide a comprehensive reconstruction of these debates, and especially the definitional differences these debates have resulted in. For now, it will suffice to focus on Butler's 'post-Hegelian' conception of recognition as she discusses it in *Giving an Account of Oneself*.

What does 'post-Hegelian' mean? For Hegel, humans only gain self-consciousness through a process of mutual recognition. This claim reverberates with Butler's conviction that humans as corporeal entities are in need for successful relationship with others in order to survive and to develop a full personality. Also, the notion of mutuality implies that it is necessary to differentiate terminologically between the subject of recognition and its object. Mutuality can only be established if one subject recognizes another subject as, for example, an autonomous agent. In the context of this thesis, of course, the question is how the subject emerges and in which ways it relates to norms. Recognition as a social practice

is dependent on a set of norms which address who can be the subject of recognition, and what objects of recognition are acceptable. One has to be recognizable in order to receive recognition. Butler emphasises that although one subject wants to receive recognition for very personal features, or even for her singularity, the very norms of recognition exist prior to the encounter. This causes disorientation because the norms are not crafted for a certain individual, but rather for the subject of recognition. Instead of being recognized for what a person is, she has to become the subject of recognition, a role or position that is normatively defined. Consequently, the individual has to present herself as substitutable in the sense of the norm. Her recognition as a singularity depends on the norms of recognition, and these norms define who and what is recognizable, and who is not. ‘There is a language that frames the encounter, and embedded in that language is a set of norms concerning what will and will not constitute recognizability’ (Butler 2005, p.30). Whereas recognition denotes an act, a scene, or an encounter between subjects, recognizability prepares the individual for recognition: ‘If recognition characterizes an act or a practice or even a scene between subjects, then “recognizability” characterizes the more general conditions that prepare or shape a subject for recognition - the general terms, conventions, and norms “act” in their own way, crafting a living being into a recognizable subject, though not without errancy or, indeed, unanticipated results. These categories, conventions, and norms that prepare or establish a subject for recognition, that induce a subject of this kind, precede and make possible the act of recognition itself. In this sense, recognizability precedes recognition’ (Butler 2010, p.5). The tension between the subject and pre-existing norms, as well as the tension between individuality and recognizability is just one good example for the disorientating effects of norms. Butler’s conceptual reforging of recognition is post-Hegelian in the sense that the

subject's opacity to herself systematically occasions the possibility to confer recognition to others.

Before we can turn to the structural problems of narrative accounting in the context of responsibility and forgiveness, I will have to expose the limitations of (self-)knowledge which Butler addresses with the notions of opacity and disorientation. So in what precisely do the opacities and disorientations actually consist? What exactly are the limitations of knowing oneself?

As it has been presented in the last section, the opacity of the subject for herself and others is strongly linked to the relationality of personhood, i.e to other persons and to sets of norms. Within the totality of all relations an individual enters over the course of her lifetime, it is the primary and highly formative relations in early childhood which constitute the *primary opacity*: 'This postulation of a primary opacity to the self that follows from formative relations has a specific implication for an ethical bearing toward the other.' (Butler 2005, p.20). As it will turn out, the ethical bearing towards others does not exclusively stem from the opacity caused by these early relations. A sceptic could ask for further explanation precisely how this opacity is brought into being, and if this opacity really holds true for each and every person. Maybe there even are psycho-therapeutic practices such as hypnosis or regression that could lift the veil of time and oblivion. But these sceptical objections would miss the point which is at stake here. Even if the primary relations could be retrieved, this would change almost nothing about the predicament of not knowing exactly how one has become the person who one is. Full knowledge is not available in this regard. A second argumentative strategy could be launched against the sceptic from the reverse implication that even if one knows oneself as limited it still is knowing something about oneself, even if one's knowing is 'afflicted by the limitation that

one knows' (Butler 2005, p.46). That is to say that even if it was not for the primary relations which cause opacity, there are other genealogical processes which remain opaque.

But the limitations of knowing are not solely constituted by the primary opacity of early relations. There are several other hindrances which make narrative accounting of oneself in the context of negotiating issues of responsibility and compensation difficult. These hindrances are dubbed *disorientations*, and Butler identifies five such disorientations, only one of which is the primary opacity. Another of these had been introduced in the discussion of a corporeality, namely the *exposure* to others. 'There is (1) a non-narrativizable exposure that establishes my singularity, and there are (2) primary relations, irrecoverable, that form lasting and recurrent impressions in the history of my life, and so (3) a history that establishes my partial opacity to myself. Lastly, there are (4) norms that facilitate my telling about myself but that I do not author and that render me substitutable at the very moment that I seek to establish the history of my singularity. This last dispossession in language is intensified by the fact that I give an account of myself to someone, so that the narrative structure of my account is superseded by (5) the structure of address in which it takes place.' (ibid., p.39).

Obviously, these five limitations of knowledge about oneself are by no means limitations of epistemological accounts of how knowledge could be differentiated from opinion in general, or what a proper definition or criteria for knowledge could be found. Again, it is crucial to bring to mind that these limitations become ethically effective in the context of negotiating responsibility and forgiveness, which is, generally speaking, a situation of interlocution. As we will see in the next section, these limitations jeopardize the utility of narrative approaches to theorize responsibility. The disorientations and opacities which are the consequences of

the structural limitations of knowing oneself, largely affect the interlocutory situation in which responsibility is at issue. In order to draw nearer to the finalization of this reconstruction of Butler's ethics of vulnerability, I will now discuss the structural as well as the pragmatic problems of narrative accounting.

In addition to the bodily exposure to the touch of others and the primary relations, Butler expands the list of possible disorientations which impact the capability to narrate oneself. With (4) and (5) she puts emphasis on the disorientating effect of norms themselves. These are not ethical norms in a strict sense, but rather conventions how any account in a situation of ethical deliberations should be presented and told. Adorno's topic of the tension between universal and singular interests reoccurs here. There certainly are norms that govern the ways in which a narrative account should be brought forward, but they immediately render the teller's intention to narrate her singularity futile. Since norms are crafted in a way that govern cases rather than persons, the teller has to make herself substitutable to the norm. Telling the singularity of one's becoming consequently only can succeed if the singularity is traded for the account's intelligibility. The compliance with these norms transforms the individual's singularity into a sequence of narratable events, subverting the singularity itself. The 'structure of address' addresses the situationist character of the interlocutory episode in which at least to persons negotiate ethical demands. In this situation, there is a specific hierarchy between the two. The person asking for an account of problematic or harmful actions has the power to inquire endlessly. This is the pragmatic dimension of the ideal of the transparent 'I'. The asking person always may opt to continue asking, to inquire further, and to refuse to be satisfied with the degree of transparency of the motives which are meant to explain the person's actions. Although both refer to the interlocutory

situation of actually giving an account of one's actions, the difference between (4) and (5) consists in the distinct ways that the narrator is disoriented. Whereas (4) addresses the norms for giving an account that are shared by a collective, a *Sprachspiel* that everybody knows how to play, (5) exposes the differential distribution of power between the inquiring person and the one whose actions are under scrutiny.

2.4 Narrative Accounting

At the core of Butler's conversion of the notion of responsibility from the ethical ideal of the transparent 'I' towards the acknowledgement of limited self-knowledge and the existential disorientation of humans as relational beings, there resides a profound critique of narrative accounting. In order to assess the capabilities and incapacities of any narrative approach to ethical accounting, and to personal identity, for that matter, it is essential to carefully develop and denominate what narrative is, how narration and narrative relate to each other, and also how both figure in situations of ethical interlocations. Since it is the purpose of this chapter to reconstruct the ethics of vulnerability, the systematic analysis of narrative frameworks will have to be postponed until chapter three.

To clarify one point *ex ante*, Butler is far from rejecting narrative altogether. She states that 'no one can live in a radically non-narratable world or survive a radically non-narratable life.' (Butler 2005, p.59). There are several reasons for that. Given that humans are always in relations with each other, and supposedly even survival depends on this essential relationality, it is absolutely important that the individual's actions can be understood and recognized by fellow beings. Narrative accounting is one mode of establishing the intellegibility of actions. '[W]hen we do act and speak, we not only disclose ourselves but act on the schemes of intellegibility that govern who will be a speaking being, subjecting them to

rupture or revision, consolidating their norms, or contesting their hegemony.’ (Butler 2005, p.132). These schemes constitute what counts as an understandable action, and what does not. Or to put it another way, the schemes of intelligibility define and establish the pool of possible actions which are available to any given community, and narrative seems to play a crucial role when it comes to revise motives, consider intentions and consequences, and reconstruct socially prevalent norms. In everyday life, actions are often easy to locate within this pool. But in those cases which give way to ethical deliberation, the intentions, motives, consequences etc. of an action are problematic and therefore have to be thematized in a scene of address. In hermeneuticist terms, the action in question has to be interpreted by putting it in the context of the agent and her intentions. Making sense like that often takes the form of a narrative.

Butler concedes that survival depends on a narratable world. Still, she insists on the claim that there are certain aspects of human existence that are non-narratable, and among these it is the concept of the ‘transparent I’, i.e. the notion of a fully narratable identity of a person which disrupts the narrative accounting. In her opinion, it is this notion which escapes narrative integration, at least more so than events or actions, albeit possibly only in degree. This claim surely is quite counter-intuitive, so how can we make sense out of this claim? In order to make this palpable, it might be helpful to begin with the role of narrative in the context of moral allegations. In Butler, giving an account of oneself, in narrative terms or not, is preceded by an inquiry by another person. The I is addressed by another person and asked to give an account. In the context of the clarification of responsibility the interlocution is meant to figure out if the person addressed is the same person as the person who did harm to the inquirer. Only if this numerical identity between these two persons is established, claims for assuming responsibility, providing compensation,

and eventually achieving forgiveness become possible. This, of course, presupposes that the addressed self has a causal relation to the suffering of the inquirer. In order to establish this identity between addressee and harm-causing agent, the addressed person is expected to make herself, her intentions and motives, and also her normative convictions transparent. It is this expectation held by the inquirer that underpin the talk of the ‘transparent I’ as an ethical ideal.

But again, why is it a person’s identity, her self, that disrupts narrative accounting? This is how Butler envisions narrative accounting in response to an ethical allegation: ‘...as I make a sequence and link one event with another, offering motivations to illuminate the bridge, making patterns clear, identifying certain events or moments of recognition as pivotal, even marking certain recurring patterns as fundamental, I do not merely communicate something about my past, though that is doubtless part of what I do. I also enact the self I am trying to describe; the narrative “I” is reconstituted at every moment it is invoked in the narrative itself.’ (Butler 2005, p.60). One approach to understand this enactment of the self could be the temporality of accounting and performing. Whereas the scene of address always takes place after the harm has been done, and therefore the narrative accounting for intentions, motives, and the like takes place after the fact, the very practice of narrating oneself takes place in the actual present. Hence the ‘I’ assumes four different functions at different times. It is (1) assumed as a stable and comprehensible agent who might or might not have done harm; it is (2) presupposed as the narrator who responds to the ethical allegation and gives an account of oneself in narrative terms; and (3) the narrating ‘I’ acts upon herself and her audience in both senses (1) and (2) and therefore creates, alters, or modifies older versions of oneself; lastly (4), due to the uninterrupted relationality which influences the interlocutory situation of accounting,

the ‘I’ is acted upon by the audiences reversely, for instance through expectations, or the mutually accepted norms which govern the practice of narrative accounting itself. ‘I also enact the self I am trying to describe; the narrative “I” is reconstituted at every moment it is invoked in the narrative itself. That invocation is, paradoxically, a performative and non-narrative act, even as it functions as the fulcrum for narrative itself. I am, in other words, doing something with that “I” — elaborating and positioning it in relation to a real or imagined audience — which is something other than telling a story about it, even though “telling” remains part of what I do.’ (Butler 2005, p.66)

A second approach to this enactment of personal identity, which does not contradict the first one, but rather complements it, would focus on the normative dimension of narrative accounting. To this end, it is productive in a first step to analyse the practical domains of narrative accounting and the very position or space the norms define for the ‘I’ in these domains. Butler speaks of the ‘invocation of the self’ by narrative itself, and certainly this invocation is enabled and regulated by narrative norms. Unfortunately, Butler misses the opportunity to elaborate the multiple ways in which the self is invoked by narrative. Within the perspective of her account, it is plausible to discern two different positions of the self. Firstly, there is the self who compiles and arranges the events, and who offers motivations for past actions. This self equates to the author of the narrative account. In order to be the author of a narrative, one has to make oneself eligible to fill this functional position, and the eligibility, in turn, is defined by norms. In the narrower context of narrative accounting and the negotiation of responsibility, it seems almost trivial that that the author, narrator, and agent all coincide in exactly one person. Or to put it slightly different, author and narrator are supposedly identical with each other, and the purpose of the interlocution is

to establish the identity between these two and the agent of the harmful actions which initiated the accounting in the first place. Then again, there are many normative requirements to be met in order to be regarded as an author, or narrator. Secondly, there are norms which govern the invocation of the self as an effect of the narration itself, as Butler points out. But again, the plain assertion of this invocation does not explain properly how this invocation, and also the reconstitution, takes place. For instance, there is the 'I' which is established by the norms which are, explicitly or implicitly, addressed within the narrative itself. But this position often is contested by the expectations of the audience, which has its own set of normative beliefs about which identity is acceptable, or eligible, and which is not. Even if the reconstitution takes place as a combined effect of both normative realms, it remains obscure precisely how both have a disorientating effect on the individual. But progress in this regard will only be possible after the concept of narrative, and the practice of narrative accounting will be analysed systematically later on.

One narrative norm might serve as an example for how norms can put accounting into jeopardy, and how they restrict ethical deliberation. Whenever someone tells a story about their becoming the person they are, it is expected that the story they tell is sufficiently coherent. That means that the events, commentaries and links between events fit well together. That does not necessarily imply that there is no rupture or even discontinuities in that story. As a matter of fact, the interesting stories are those whose plot has unexpected twists and turns. But coherence as a narrative norm, i.e. a norm that governs the story-telling itself, has a severe impact on the selection of events, and how the events and actions of the characters in that story are chained together. In other words, a story that lacks a certain degree of coherence will not be regarded as plausible, or in the case of ethical deliberation, will be regarded as subverting the

intelligibility of actions and motives. From a critical point of view, the demand for coherence collides with the disorientations any given person finds herself in: '[N]arrative coherence may foreclose an ethical resource — namely, an acceptance of the limits of knowability in oneself and others. To hold a person accountable for his or her life in narrative form may even be to require a falsification of that life in order to satisfy the criterion of a certain kind of ethics, one that tends to break with relationality.' (Butler 2005, p.63). Again, it will have to be examined closely in the next chapter if the proponents of narrative identity, most of whom indeed argue in favour of narrative coherence, really are blind to the disorientating and violent undertones of this criterion of coherence.

When examining Butler's criticism of narrative accounting, it quickly becomes obvious that she is not interested at all to look closer at what narrative actually is. She restricts narrative to the interlocutory practice of narrative accounting. This limitation might be beneficial in order to focus more prominently on the various problems of narrative accounting in a scene of address. But there are some downsides to this. For instance, it would be helpful to trace the violent aspect of norms in more detail. To that end, the concept of norm is in need of an internal, semantic differentiation. But more importantly, a more sophisticated analysis of narrative not only as an interlocutory practice, but also as a fully fledged methodology would greatly contribute to improve the understanding of exactly how norms in various domains have detrimental effects on giving an account of oneself. This also could help to help the explanatory task to clarify the possibility of how norms could have less violent ramifications. This more thorough analysis has to be postponed to the next chapter.

2.5 Ethics, Critique, and Non-Violence

So far, the essential concepts of this ethics of vulnerability have been reconstructed, as well as Butler's scepticism about the practical prospects of making oneself transparent in any given situation of narrative accounting. The presupposed ethical ideal of the 'transparent I' is supposedly impossible to fulfil due to the various disorientations which arise from the fundamental corporeality and the existential relationality of human life. Further disorientations supposedly arise out of the inescapable enmeshment with norms and normative frameworks. Relationality and disorientations lead to a partial blindness about ourselves, and, at least for Butler, this predicament of partial blindness is supposed to be invariable, i.e. shared by all humans as humans. When narrating, the ethically the best one could do would be talking about these blind spots, but one could never narrate what cannot be seen. This predicament also constitutes the foundations for an account of ethics which might be capable to avoid the ethical violence which ensue from an unquestioned application of the ethical ideal of an 'transparent I', mainly by reframing responsibility and forgiveness in terms of opacity.

In the remainder of this chapter, I will attempt to carve out exactly what Butler's account of ethics consists in. We already have established that from an epistemic point of view, humans live in a hazy and foggy world. Corporeality and living in and by normative matrices structurally lead to permanent opacity. Ethics, therefore, '...requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us, when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance – to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere,

and so to vacate the self-sufficient “I” as a kind of possession. If we speak and try to give an account from this place, we will not be irresponsible, or, if we are, we will surely be forgiven.’ (Butler 2005, p.136). This is the very last sentence of *Giving an Account of Oneself*, and it condensates the shift of ethics from the ideal of transparency towards the recognition and offering of one’s own state of unknowingness. With regard to the role of personal identity within ethics she obviously endorses an account of ethics which features a vulnerable, disorientated and fluid concept of personal identity. *Vice versa*, any stabilized and fixed identity only can be uphold by violent means, with violent ramifications not only for the individual, but all individuals which are related to that fixed identity. This concept of personal identity starkly contradicts almost all major accounts of ethics, no matter if they are of teleological or deontological provenance. The ‘the self-sufficient I’ gets abandoned completely, for reasons of its violent implications. It is in this sense, that Butler argues in favour of ‘risking oneself’.

In the narrower context of ethical deliberation, the unknowingness implies that the subject is disorientated by its own becoming, especially by the norms which define and demarcate the position of it. For Adorno, this situation is the very *locus* where ethical violence unfolds, caused by the circumstance that for the subject, the norms are not self-evident any more. For Butler, this gap is the reason why ethical deliberation becomes necessary in the first place. Ethical deliberation, itself, cannot be merged with narrative accounting, or *vice versa*. Ethical deliberation, hence, is a reaction to the various predicaments which are addressed above. It exceeds narrative accounting since even the eventual failure of narrating oneself has to be part of it. In order to finalize the reconstruction of this account of ethics, then, we have to investigate how it is meant to avoid the violent consequences of personal identity and normative frame-

works. The venues by which Butler tries to establish the plausibility of this semantic shift with regard to personal identity and responsibility, are social theory and the liaison of ethics with critique. Lastly, it has to be stated more precisely in what sense Butler's ethics is non-violent, and what non-violence from an ethical perspective actually means.

How, then, is ethical deliberation as a normative practice connected with or even dependent on critique, and with the subject? And what does 'critique' exactly mean in this context? As it has been shown above, the nexus of becoming and being a subject on the one side, and norms and normative frameworks on the other side, does not lend itself well to be easily undone from one side or the other. Ethical deliberation 'is bound up with the operation of critique. And critique finds that it cannot go forward without a consideration of how the deliberating subject comes into being and how a deliberating subject might actually live or appropriate a set of norms. Not only does ethics find itself embroiled in the task of social theory, but social theory, if it is to yield non-violent results, must find a living place for this "I"' (Butler 2005, p.8). Butler's account is Foucaultian inasmuch she agrees with him that the very norms that define the space of possible ways of becoming and being a subject are not just imposed on one's existence, since the existence does not ontologically come into being prior to the norms, but instead, these norms provide 'the terms within which existence will or will not be possible' (Butler 2002, p.12).

To engage with critique means to question these norms in an interlocutory situation. This positions the critic immediately outside of the prevalent schemes of intelligibility, or at least puts her at risk of doing so. This, anyway, is a first meaning of critique in Butler, namely that the critic distances herself from what is regarded as given, as culturally and ethically shared convictions etc. The critique may aim in two directions.

First, the distance enables the critic to scrutinize the social context of any given practice that she problematizes. 'Social context' is as vague a term as it can get within the humanities, but with regard to the practices of critique and critical theories this vagueness at the same time demands and permits the critical inquiry of the object of interest, such as normative matrixes, shared beliefs, traditions that seem to be out of time. Secondly, philosophical critique also has to be directed at the critic herself. Although the widening of the critical horizon is essential, critique at once devaluates itself if the critic does not include herself in the critique, questioning to what extent she herself concurs practically or theoretically with what she wants to criticise. It could be argued that Butler's ethical account so far has mainly assumed the reflexive stance. But this self-related analysis would not be complete without the inclusion of the societal conditions which support the notions of a stable personal identity and the transparent I.

Both perspectives of critique, the contextual and the reflexive, would be arbitrary without justified goals or ends. Since critique in this sense is an argumentative strategy, its plausibility depends on how well it argues for the direction of change it proposes. Historically, this notion of critique, which had been crafted by thinkers of the enlightenment in reaction to the political abolishment of authorities, has been devoted to the goals of improved emancipation and self-determination. The autonomous self, which by means of its faculty of reason emancipates herself from self-imposed nonage, still is the ultimate goal of ethics in Western philosophy. In Butler, this argument assumes a particular shape. For her, living in a violent society, being brought up in it and having learned to exert violence on oneself and others, is the major impediment for living autonomously. It also denies the existential relationality which she grounds in an corporeal

ontology. But the question here has to be exactly how and to what extent critique integrates itself into the broader ethical account of Butler's.

There is a practical effect of critique which occurs in any given interlocutory situation. To question these norms is often perceived as and equated with questioning the whole person, her form of life, her 'Lebensentwurf'. We have already seen that the existential entanglement with these norms, or to put it slightly stronger, to live by and through the norms, causes various disorientations, which are, in fact, residua of unknowingness and unspeakability. When even a single problematic action is addressed by a critic, these opacities are traded for a stabilized, transparent and defensible version of personal identity. Psychological research has investigated this behaviour amply on the individual as well as on the collective level. But the point here is another one, namely how to cope ethically with these stabilized identities in the face of a normative corpus which is not of the making of the individual, but which allow these norms to be used as means of immunisation against critique, and as a justification of ethical violence. The critic thus aims for the exposure of how the ordering system of knowledge, norms and power works, but in a way that at the same time follows its breaking points which mark the system's historical emergence and finality.

Indeed, Butler suggests a certain direction for critique. If criticizing the norms means to risk one's identity, then instead of the reification and fortification of one's (personal or collective) identity, it is ethically mandatory to make oneself fluid, and to admit one's own opacity to oneself and others. To distance oneself from the ideal of a stable and transparent identity, and to present oneself as opaque to others, means to disrupt the reiteration of violent action patterns which have been learned in earlier years, and by doing so to make possible the transformation of the *status quo* for the better. It is important to note that Butler's notion

of critique has no privileged access to or insight into a more fundamental political or moral order. Her notion of critique rather suggests some tools and perspectives which might help to change human interaction from violent to less violent, which she considers essential for the emancipation of a society and their constitutive members.

As Butler deploys it, her notion of critique is particularly political. Rather than inquiring into the realm of possible actions an individual could resort to, perhaps in order to adapt more properly to the social conditions she finds herself in, Butler insists on the transformation of the societal conditions the individual lives in. Regarding the intersubjective architecture of her corporeal and relational ontology this hardly is a surprise. She stresses the constitutive force of the societal conditions even for actions: 'There are social contexts and conventions within which certain acts not only become possible but become conceivable as acts at all. The transformation of social relations becomes a matter, then, of transforming hegemonic social conditions rather than the individual acts that are spawned by those conditions. Indeed, one runs the risk of addressing the merely indirect, if not epiphenomenal, reflection of those conditions if one remains restricted to a politics of acts.' (Butler 1988, p.525). This seemingly implies that even the distinction between the individual person and the societal contexts is arbitrary to the extent that itself should be overcome eventually.

Butler tries to argue for the crucial role social theory and critique have to play in an ethical account that's aiming for the interruption of the automatisms of violence and the perpetuations of violent behaviour in human interactions. In order to achieve this, the critic has '...to isolate and identify the peculiar nexus of power and knowledge that gives rise to the field of intelligible things, but also to track the way in which that field meets its breaking point, the moments of its discontinuities, the sites

where it fails to constitute the intelligibility for which it stands.’ (Butler 2002, p.14). But this constitutes merely the first step of critique. Since for Butler and Foucault alike there is no action without a normative matrix which would endow intelligibility to it, the practice of critique also is part of the existing regime of truth. In order to subvert or transform this existing regime of truth the critic has to establish her own position at the margins of this regime. Moreover, she has to risk her own intelligibility and credibility in order to performatively enact the norms of critique in a slightly different way. Only in this way she is not as subjugated by the norms as before, and she already has engaged in a certain way of self-forming: ‘...if that self-forming is done in disobedience to the principles by which one is formed, then virtue becomes the practice by which the self forms itself in desubjugation, which is to say that it risks its deformation as a subject, occupying that ontologically insecure position which poses the question anew: who will be a subject here, and what will count as a life, a moment of ethical questioning which requires that we break the habits of judgement in favour of a riskier practice that seeks to yield artistry from constraint.’ (ibid., p.20). The concept of ‘social theory’ remains hollow and bleak, Butler seems to presuppose a general understanding what ”social theory” amounts to in various contexts.

2.6 The Claim of Non-Violence

Given that Butler’s argument for the intrinsically violent character of norms is strong, then there emerges a significant problem for ethics, or rather a family of problems. First of all, the virtual ubiquity of violence in norms, in individuals and in human relationships seems to render any account that opposes this violence as futile. Either non-violence is an ideal which starkly thwarts the violent aspects of factual life, a philosopher’s dream about an utopian vision of peaceful cohabitation. Or, given

that all norms are, at least in part, violent, non-violence is just another moral cypher for more violence. Both venues would cast the whole ethical approach into doubt, allowing only for nihilist, voluntarist, or cynical conclusions. Butler certainly is aware of this theoretical quandary, and it is in elaborating on the claim of non-violence where she presents a helpful condensation of her ethical convictions.

It has been amply developed that Butler thinks of the formation of a person's identity in Foucaultian terms. Norms play a part in each and every aspect of character formation. They constitute a normative matrix which, as a regime of truth, proliferate a fundamental distinction between what is right and what is wrong. This holds true for ethical deliberation in a narrower sense, but also expands into the non-verbal or enacted components of identity. How an individual speaks, or walks, or what clothing seems to be adequate, all of these aspects are governed by these norms. All of these norms are 'disciplinary' in the sense that they normalize deviant behaviour, they cut away or sanction deviant behaviour. Their violent character partly is founded in this normalization, partly in the opaque provenance of their conditions of emergence, and partly in the collision of time regimes, that of the norm itself, and that of the individual. So '...when one is formed in violence [...] and that formative action continues throughout one's life, an ethical quandary arises about how to live the violence of one's formative history, how to effect shifts and reversals in its iteration.' (Butler 2010, p.170). The ethical answer to this question, i.e. how to live one's formative history of violence, consists in non-violence. But what does this mean exactly? And how does this concept of non-violence correlate with Butler's new definition of responsibility?

It is obvious that non-violence cannot be a principle in the sense of a strong rule for virtually each and every situation an individual finds

herself in. First of all, non-violence as a norm among other norms would inherit or uphold the violence it exerts in various ways. One could think of various cases in which self-defence seems to be legit, even if it includes the deployment of violence; but more importantly, as a principle, it will suffer the same detachment in terms of temporal regime and the tension between its own universal applicability and the particular situation. Both would uphold the violent character of the norm, a feature which is especially problematic in the context of non-violence. Secondly, non-violence as a principle which demands compliance in each and every situation would hardly be advisable in many occasions. Instead of fashioning non-violence as a principle, Butler construes it as a 'claim'. The crucial question accordingly is 'Under which conditions are we responsive to such claim?' (Butler 2010, p.165). There is plenty to analyse about the conditions of responsiveness to such a claim, and its connection to responsibility. For one, the individual or group who responds to such a claim is crafted by violence and hence is disposed to a certain kind of violence towards others. In performing one's identity, and thereby iterating the commandments of the normative matrix, one is brought up in a way that makes it likely to exert violence towards others.

That said, it is now possible to lay open the core of this account of ethics. Precisely because one is normatively formed through violence, responsibility has to be framed as not to repeat that violence. This is the difference between 'being responsive' to the claim of non-violence and 'assuming responsibility' vis-à-vis the violence of one's own becoming. Although there is a common etymological root to both, responsiveness and responsibility, being responsive only asks for any response, whereas the concept of responsibility asks for a subclass of these responses, namely those which respond to this claim in a particular, maybe even non-violent way. In order to illustrate the possible ways of being responsive to his

claim, it is helpful to look at what psychoanalyst Melanie Klein has addressed with ‘moral sadism’. With this concept she aimed to theorize certain moralizations of aggressive behaviour. Without going into further, mainly Freudian detail here, at the core of moral sadism resides the justification of aggression and violence on the grounds of previously suffered harm. Because somebody has hurt me, I am morally justified to retaliate in violent ways⁴.

When taking responsibility for oneself is defined as ‘... to avow the limits of any self-understanding, and to establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject but as the predicament of the human community.’ (Butler 2005, p.83), the relational reference to the ‘human community’ is aimed to forestall the devaluation of others and its moralization, which in fact would constitute moral sadism. The specific moralization takes place when violence is seen as legitimate or even as virtuous. The previous experience of harm, or violence, which initializes moral sadism, also is an experience of the lack of control, of humiliation, and of subjugation. To respond to this experience in that way is not so much a philosophical operation of justifying violence, but on a psychological level, an operation ‘...to secure an impossible effect of mastery, inviolability, and impermeability through destructive means’ (Stonebridge and Phillips 1998, Butler p.178 in:). In this sense, violent acts are an attempt to relocate the capacity to be violated elsewhere, and it produces the impression that the subject who enacts violence is impermeable to violence herself. It should be clear by now that moral sadism is not the favoured

⁴Moral sadism thus defined has various impacts on personal identity as well. As it will be discussed in Chapter 4, the notion of a stabilized and rigid identity often serves a similar purpose of the fortification of the self. Once harm has been experienced, the need for a stabilized identity reflects the wish of the harmed person not to be harmed in that way again. The more rigid one’s own identity is perceived by others, the less likely is it that they would do harm to this identity. There is a lot of psychological research which substantiates this morally sadistic link between solid identities and the devaluation of others by means of that very identity. For the present interest it may suffice to point to this link.

response to violence, and certainly not the proper response to the claim of non-violence.

So again, if non-violence is neither a virtue, nor a position, nor a set of principles that are to be applied universally, what is it then? Butler offers two definitions, and I will present both here: Non-violence ‘...denotes the mired and conflicted position of a subject who is injured, rageful, disposed to violent retribution and nevertheless struggles against that action.’ (Butler 2010, p.172). The injured and rageful subject ‘...seeks to limit the injury that she or he causes, and can do so only through an active struggle with and against aggression.’ If this struggle is meant not to be decided in the sense of moral sadism, this ‘...necessitates a moral struggle with the idea of non-violence in the midst of an encounter with social violence as well as with one’s own aggression (where the social encounter and the ”one’s own” transitively affect one another)’. Framed in this way, this concept of non-violence acknowledges three fundamental tenets of Butler’s moral account. First, it thinks of individuals as impure. This means that due to the genealogical origins of subject in a regime of truth, there is a deeply ingrained tendency to act violently. This subverts a plethora of stratifications of human cultures and practices, in which some are regarded as civilized and non-violent, whereas others have remained on the stage of barbarism and display poor impulse control when it comes to violent behaviour. Secondly, this definition substantiates Butler’s claim that human relations and interactions never are completely willed by the individual. Certainly some relations are willed, but most encounters are outside the domain of control an individual might have in certain aspects of her life. That is to say that the claim of non-violence, since it is not answerable in principle, may occur in each and every social encounter, actualizing itself in these very situations. Thirdly, it incorporates the assumption that aggression is not an enclave of social life, only

to be encountered when one intendedly engages with it. The realm of social interaction, which is coextensive with the space of possible truths, possible actions, and possible intelligibilities, and which is generated by the normative matrixes, is itself, by virtue of the norm's innate violence, a domain where aggression and violence always are present. This counters the possible assumption that violence might only be one option among others.

It almost seems like violent retaliation is the default reaction to experienced aggression in social interactions. Since the individual has been forged as a subject or person by intrinsically violent norms, the discontinuation of iterating the learned violence is far from to be taken for granted. And as I have shown in this reconstruction, Butler indeed seemingly advances this thinking, displaying her resonances with Levinasian ethics⁵, who stated that violence always is a 'temptation' (Levinas 2012). Accordingly, it is no surprise that she argues in favour of the necessity for resistance to this violent temptation, a necessity which only can be satisfied by engaging in critical struggle with social practices. This struggle's ultimate goal might be conceptualized as the individual struggle of a person who tries really hard not to retaliate violently to harm. But it is her proclaimed emphasis to make clear that the parameters of that struggle permeate political situations, where retribution is made quickly and often accompanied with moral certitude. It is this juncture of violence and moralization that Butler explicitly wants to undo with her ethics of vulnerability (see for example (Butler 2010, p.172)).

From a more practical point of view, the possibility of any breakage between the violence that has been part of the subject's formation, or the violence she conducts herself on herself or others in social situa-

⁵In *Giving an Account of Oneself* Butler discusses the ethics of Levinas' in length. I have opted to not follow her in this direction, since Levinas has little to say about narrative accounting. Still, I will elaborate on Levinas in the last chapter when discussing vulnerability as a foundation for ethics

tions, is at the very center of this account. This claim presupposes a non-deterministic notion of (moral) norms. Although norms demand and determine compliance for certain actions, they rely on their iterated instantiation by agents. The norm's material content needs to be iterated by subjects in each situation which the norm claims compliance for. If a norm ceases to demand compliance, if the norm is no longer obligatory, the norm ceases to exist in practice. Here, the transformatory dimension of Butler's account shows itself. Since norms depend on iteration, and the individual subject may opt to not iterate the norm any more, i.e. to discontinue the violent imperatives of norms, and thereby shifting the prevalent configuration of the normative matrix in a non-violent direction.

The claim for non-violence thus conceptualized has to be further investigated. I will focus this investigation on three topics. The first topic aims at the functional interdependence of normative determinism and performative iteration; the second will bring into question the claim that norms are violent; and the third will look at the role of the subject itself in analysing and changing the violence of norms. Only after this groundwork it will be possible to finalize this chapter with a discussion of the semantic shift of the concept of responsibility itself. Seemingly, the idea if the iterability of norms is crucial to understand why norms do not act in a deterministic way, at least genealogical and ethical norms. For a norm to act deterministically would imply that the range of actions which are in the scope of the norm is defined minutely, precisely, and without any ambiguity. It would have to address each and every situation in which it demands compliance, and also prescribe in detail how to act. For many norms, this clearly is not the case, and it cannot be so in principle. In order to be applicable in many situation, a norm has to be a combination of a material prescription of what to do, and a formal abstraction from

the very situations at the same time. Both aspects of norms constitute the space of possible enactments of the norm, and it is both where the claim for non-violence has to be encountered. The material prescription of a norm, like ‘thou shalt not kill’, or ‘it is wrong to steal’, *prima facie* seem less ambiguous when it comes non-violent and iterated enactment. The acting subject may always opt to either follow or disregard the norm, in this sense the norm is either enacted or not. Far more problematic, but also more promising in the context of non-violence, is the formal abstraction. Here the subject has to inquire into the contextual details of the situation she finds herself in. It will depend on these contexts, albeit opaque in and of themselves, if there is an opening for enacting the norm in non-violent ways. Since contexts and situations are changing permanently, the iterated performance of the norm never will be identical with former performances. The non-identity of how norms are enacted via performative iteration solely shows that it is possible at all to alter norms in any direction. Here, we cannot substantiate the claim for non-violence, but demonstrate its possibility.

It was Adorno’s claim of ethical violence that norms need to be collectively enforced once the norm has ceased to be ‘self-evident’ and has turned into a collectively shared ideas. This, in Hegelian terms, is the conflict between customs and morality, *Sitten* and *Sittlichkeit*. At once it becomes clear that norms are not inherently violent, it is not one of their necessary constituents. When Adorno describes this transition from moral norms into customs in terms of degeneration, he does so because he knows about the violence which often is used to keep subjects iterating the customs. Such degenerated norms poison the social relationships, and the violent enforcement of norms becomes an end to itself. Butler elaborates on this claim by scrutinizing the violent aspects of the normative claim for self-identity. The manifestation and maintenance of self-identity

and coherent narratives, for her, is the main venue for debates about ethical violence. When social and moral recognition necessitates to comply with this demand, and by implication expecting the same from others, the very possibility to be recognized for inconsistencies in one's narrative, or for revealing one's opacities about oneself or external affairs, is precluded in principle. Moreover, again with recourse to Adorno, coherence and transparency are impossible to enact or to live, due to the conflicting temporalities of norms, but also because of the opacities which arise from the prevailing normative matrix. The normative discourse (which for Butler consists of both customs and morality) has a different temporality than the first-person-perspective of the subject. The relation and mutual impact of these two temporalities cannot be transparent for the individual, a circumstance which immediately undermines the claim to self-identity in the context of recognition: 'it follows that one can give and take recognition only on the condition that one becomes disoriented from oneself by something which is not oneself, that one undergoes a de-centering and "fails" to achieve self-identity' (Butler 2005, p.42).

If it holds true that norms can be enacted in a variety of fashions, a sub-class of which can be non-violent enactments, and if it also holds true that norms are not essentially violent, but acquire this feature as soon as their legitimacy becomes obfuscated, the question then is why subjects would aspire to act in a more non-violent manner at all. What are the motivations for not resorting to violence? In moral philosophy, and moral psychology as well, there traditionally are two stances on this question. The deontological approach would argue in favour of reciprocal duties and obligations towards others. Since every human being is furnished with the faculty of reason, and reason itself leads to the categorical imperative, human beings should respect the universal law and act accordingly. Without going into detail here, the motivation for acting

morally correct is to be found in the operation of generalization. It is reason that motivates subjects to live up to their potential as human beings and thus should act in accordance with the imperative. Also, the categorical imperative provides a consequentialist test when it demands the subject to check the maxims of her actions in terms of their aptitude as universal laws. Also, there is an operation of substitution at work in the Kantian imperative. In the formulations which demand to treat others always as ends and never as means to other ends, Kant asks the subject to constitute herself as a human being precisely by treating herself and others, and therefore humanity itself, as ends. Non-violent behaviour is mandatory exactly because the operation of substitution. The generalization of the maxims of one's own violent actions imply that others may legitimately use the same violence against oneself. This, admittedly, is a consequentialist reading of the categorical imperative, but for the present purpose, this seems to suffice to illustrate the point.

The second approach is the teleological account of virtue ethics. Here, the case for non-violence is not as obvious. At the core of this account is the presupposition that each subject has a primordial orientation towards the ultimate good. The idea of the ultimate good has many sources, one of which is the facticity of evaluative distinctions human beings make on a daily basis. As Charles Taylor has put it, each individual necessarily has to have a 'map of the moral world' in which she lives (see (Taylor 1989)). On this maps, like on any topological map used for navigating terrain, the relative peaks chart what is regarded as better, or of higher moral value. Also, this map has the function to provide orientation for the individual, so she can locate herself on this moral map. If it is possible, in each situation, to tell good from bad, this is possible only because of the idea of the ultimate good. Here, the operation of substitution is not necessary. Since the subject or individual is able to make strong evaluations

in each situation, intersubjective substitution and consequentialist considerations are not mandatory. The motivation to act less violent than before has to be derived from the quest for the ultimate good, which each individual is meant to engage in, in order to live a full life. This topic will be discussed in depth in the next chapter, but the point here is that in a teleological framework the very motivation for non-violent behaviour is strongly linked to the hermeneuticist primacy to making sense of life, and by doing so, living a life that can be viewed as fulfilled. This hermeneuticist motivation for ethical behaviour, for living a fulfilled life which is oriented towards the good unfortunately cannot, at this stage, inform on the issue of how to rethink responsibility in a way that Butler envisions. This discussion will take place in chapter 4.

So what is the theoretical relation of violence and ethics, or violence and responsibility? Butler disagrees with Nietzsche, for example, who understood ethics as a cultural practice as the result of the fear of physical punishment. Emblematically, ethical violence in her account is not so much a physical sanction but a confirmation, or even a testament of the inescapability of physical vulnerability. Often, certain notions of collective or personal identity are meant to eradicate this vulnerability, and as shown above, a direct reaction to suffered damage. But to be at each other's mercy, precisely because it is an inescapable condition of human life, constitutes the horizon in which humans can assume responsibility. 'Violence is neither a just punishment we suffer nor a just revenge for what we suffer. It delineates a physical vulnerability from which we cannot slip away, which we cannot finally resolve in the name of the subject, but which can provide a way to understand that none of us is fully bounded, utterly separate, but, rather, we are in our skins, given over, in each other's hands, at each other's mercy. This is a situation we do not choose. It forms the horizon of choice, and it grounds our responsibility.

In this sense, we are not responsible for it, but it creates the conditions under which we assume responsibility. We did not create it, and therefore it is what we must heed.’ (Butler 2005, p.101).

2.7 Rethinking Responsibility

In the remainder of this chapter, we finally are in the position to look at the conceptual transition of responsibility itself, namely from its association with the ideal of transparency towards an acknowledgement of one’s own limitations and opacities. It has become clear during the course of this reconstruction that the philosophical problem of responsibility only can emerge in a moral theory in which human existence substantially depends on successful relations with others. This immediately becomes obvious when one looks at the formational period of the individual’s life, a child only survives in a community of carers. In a purely individualistic world, the problem of responsibility would be non-existent since, in Butlerian terminology, this would mean to take oneself out of the ‘scene of address’, i.e. being addressed or addressing the other. Humans depend on social relations because of their corporeality and the needs which result from it. Again, these needs are only satisfiable in a social setting.

But relationality and precariousness, at the same time, model the individual vulnerable to harm. The relations to other humans are necessary for survival, but they constitute the situation in which the other can do harm, or hurt, or even kill, or in which the subject can harm, hurt, or even kill others. This is where the question of non-violence enters the discussion, but also where our understanding of what it means precisely to take responsibility actually means. What Butler is criticising is the ‘grandiose notion of the transparent “I”’, which is linked so intimately to the prevalent understanding of responsibility. When hurt has been done, and the subject is addressed by the aggrieved person, taking responsibility often

means to make one's motives, the context, etc. transparent, or at least comprehensible for the other. But as discussed above, there are various sources for a variety of opacities and limitations of self-knowledge that imperil the task of making oneself transparent. For example the primary relations of the infant to others is one source, but also the disorientations which arise of the opaque nature of norms themselves. In the end, the inescapability of opacities threatens the subject's capability of assuming responsibility for harmful actions. And since relations are crucial for survival, these opacities also threaten the subject's life: 'If I am not able to give an account of some of my actions, then I would rather die, because I cannot find myself as the author of these actions, and I cannot explain myself to those my actions may have hurt.' (Butler 2005, p.79).

At its core, the semantic shift consists in the redefinition of responsibility in terms of unknowingness. The sceptic reader could easily argue against the inclusion of opacity into the moral *Sprachspiel* of responsibility. 'Indeed, to take responsibility for oneself is to avow the limits of any self-understanding, and to establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject but as the predicament of the human community' (ibid., p.75). She would argue that especially when responsibility and forgiveness are at stake, then transparency is of great import. There is the risk that any perpetrator could reference her unknowingness about her own motives even if she was aware of these in the first place. By doing so, she would actively subvert the interlocutory episode of responsibility and stabilize her violent behaviour. Butler could reply that this objection is based on a confusion about these opacities. The opacities she argues for are not merely slips in the memory of the addressed person, but arise from the existential conditions which make a human life possible in the first place. '[E]thics requires us to risk ourselves precisely at moments of unknowingness, when what forms us diverges from what lies before us,

when our willingness to become undone in relation to others constitutes our chance of becoming human. To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance — to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me, but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient “I” as a kind of possession. If we speak and try to give an account from this place, we will not be irresponsible, or, if we are, we will surely be forgiven.’ (Butler 2005, p.136). Eventually, Butler links the honouring of the precarious life to a claim of love, and it surely would be interesting to trace her arguments in this field, since the conceptual array she established, especially opacity, the limitations of self-knowledge etc. are well suited for this kind of analysis. But for the present purpose, I will omit this part deliberately.

In conclusion to this chapter, I want to suggest the implication of this ethical account for the philosophical understanding of personal identity. This foreshadows the discussions of the next chapter in which various accounts of narrative identity and its link to responsibility will be reconstructed. As cited above, ethics requires ‘to risk oneself’, the goal is to ‘become undone in relations to others’ and ultimately having the chance of ‘becoming human’. It is important to note that Butler deploys the generic noun ‘human’ and not ‘identity’. Often, theories of identity seem to have the goal of theorizing the self-sufficient ‘I’ which is sufficiently persistent and identifiable in order to take responsibility and being accountable in social conditions. These types of accounts get turned upside down by Butler. Instead of locating the human condition in self-sufficiency, she invites us to do the opposite, namely to vacate any notion of a stable identity, especially when it comes to interpersonal and social relations. ‘To be undone by another is a primary necessity, an anguish, to be sure, but also a chance — to be addressed, claimed, bound to what is not me,

but also to be moved, to be prompted to act, to address myself elsewhere, and so to vacate the self-sufficient “I” as a kind of possession.’ (Butler 2005, p.136). The accounts of narrative identity of the next chapter will have to answer the question to what extent they allow for the vacating of the self-sufficient ‘I’, or how they conceptualize responsibility in a way that avoids the perpetuation of ethical violence.

3 Narrative Identity and Moral Norms

3.1 The Appeal of Narrative

In chapter 1, I have established the core tenets of Butler's ethics of vulnerability. She argues that the ideal of a coherent and transparent I, which supposedly regulates narrative accounting in ethical interlocations, can only lead to failure. This failure is primarily of ethical nature due to her assumption that any given account about oneself has to be partial, and therefore will be 'haunted' by that for which one cannot devise a definite story. But instead of marking this structural partial blindness about one's own becoming and acting as ethical failure, she proposes to regard this blindness as a shared human condition and, as such, as the foundation for giving recognition to others. Moreover, suspending the demand for narrative transparency, coherency, and overall, self-identity, counters ethical violence in an important way. To maintain one's self-identity and demanding to do so from others implies and upholds violent relationships. Instead, the rejection of violent traditions is a moral imperative, and Butler construes her ethics in an essentially non-violent way. With regard to a person's identity, this equates to liquefy one's own identity, especially where it participates in ethical violence.

This treatment of ethical violence, the instalment of the failure of nar-

rative accounting as the foundation for new conceptions of recognition and responsibility, is directly in opposition to most philosophical accounts of narrative identity and how they theorize its role in ethical deliberation. Over the last decades, the philosophical debates about the pros and cons of narrative approaches to identity and ethics have been structured to the effect that they often gravitated around the question to what extent a narrative framework could cope with the complexities of personal identities, cultural contexts, and moral systems. As will be demonstrated in the course of this chapter, the opposing camps in these debates gathered neatly around the question of how important narrative and story-telling actually is, in everyday life and from a philosophical perspective. In this sense, Butler's proposal is as provocative as fertile. Although she might reject most of the tenets of strict narrativists, she allows narrative to lay bare a human predicament which is essential to give and receive recognition, and to assume responsibility.

This particular interpretation of ethical failure, which also appears to be a failure of the narrative framework, sets her apart from the large group of critics of any narrative framework just as well. With the advent of the narrative turn in the late 1960s and its impact in many disciplines of the humanities, the emergence of critical stances, which aimed to repulse the importance of narrative especially for philosophical reasoning, can be no surprise.

After having solely focussed on the reconstruction of Butler's ethics of vulnerability in chapter 1, it is the purpose of this chapter to situate Butler's account within the broader field of narrative accounts of personal identity and normative frameworks. Whereas she develops her ethical account against certain core tenets of narrative theories, she omits to discuss any specific narrative account, nor does she reference any account in which the ideal of the transparent I is put forward. This clearly is

detrimental to the plausibility of her own theory, since it could turn out that she has not taken notice of some essential developments within the field of narrative identity and ethics, or that she tilts against narrative windmills, as it were.

The question, then, is which account of narrative identity I will use to contextualize and contrast Butler's account. The desired account should meet some requirements, i.e. it should be capable of answering a set of questions. First, concerning the narrative approach in a narrower sense, it should provide a concise yet comprehensive definition of narrative itself. Up to this point, and only based on the remarks of Butler's, it largely remains obscure what narrative actually is. As a practice, it certainly is norm-governed, but this does not say much. Narrative might also address the structure of stories, and the interlocutory scene etc. Only with a rich definition and understanding of narrative we will be able to assess Butler's problems with it, and if her account is promising. Second, it should make clear how personal identity depends on, or is constituted by and through narrative. As outlined above, Butler positions herself in a Foucauldian tradition of thought when it comes to becoming a subject. A theory of narrative identity should be compatible with this genealogical understanding. Third, what is the role of norms and rules in narrative accounts of identity? In which way are evaluations part of stories, and are there specific narrative versions of responsibility and recognition to be found? Only after a comprehensive account of narrative identity will be at hand, it will be possible to address the set of issues raised by Butler explicitly. Among these, the question of opacity figures prominently, but also what role embodiment and vulnerability may play in a narrative theory.

With this demanding set of requirements, some recent contributions on narrative identity can get ruled out immediately. This is due to specific

differences regarding the frameworks and particular the questions which philosophers have elaborated on. There are various ways to address these differences. Narrativists, according to Peter Goldie, hold one ore more views about the role of narrative in a person's life: 'Our lives are, in some sense, lived narratives of which we are the authors. Our lives are somehow only comprehensible through a narrative explanatory structure. Our lives bear close similarities to (or are even fundamentally the same as) the lives of characters in literature. Our having the right kind of narrative of our lives is, in some sense, integral to or constitutive of our being the persons that we are. Our very survival depends on our having such a narrative.' (Goldie 2012, p.1).

Not all philosophers subscribe to each and every claim of this list, whereas others would even add more claims to it, as it will be shown below. Goldie himself wants just to 'find the right place for narrative in our lives', and it is of no surprise that he position himself somewhere in-between the camp of the so called 'strong narrativists' and the group of critics, who deny the importance of narrative to various degrees. Conceptually, Goldie makes this intermediary position comprehensible by speaking of a 'narrative *sense* of oneself', rather than promoting the claim that persons, or selves, are constituted by and through narrative. He observes that this narrative sense of oneself has to be articulated from the first person perspective, that it enables self-reflexive questioning, that it can or cannot lead to the individual's identification with past actions, and that the narrative sense is essential to a non-presumptuous notion of coherence, that organizes one's experiences in terms of temporality and quality. This positioning has substantial conceptual ramifications regarding the definition of narrative itself, but also for the applicability of these accounts on the questions Butler has posed. Despite its elegance and plausibility, Goldie's account seems to be confined to an individu-

alistic reading of narrative, oddly neglecting the relational dimension of interlocution and being in the world.

Another narrative account of the self has been devised by Marya Schechtman. Her book *The Constitution of Selves* has been discussed widely, especially since she tackles the analytical approach to personhood, which, in reference to Hume, devotes itself to the question of psychological continuity and the identity-criteria for objects over time, of which persons merely constitute a sub-class. The reason why Schechtman turns to narrative is founded in this critical purpose. For her, personhood is not only about consciousness, but about the very ways persons organize their experiences. Individuals substantially constitute themselves as persons by coming to think of themselves as persistent objects who have, have had, and will have said experiences. Consequently, ‘... a person’s identity is constituted by the content of her self-narrative, and the traits, actions, and experiences included in it are, by virtue of that conclusion, hers.’ (Schechtman 1996, p.94). By expanding the notion of personhood by narrative organization of experiences in this way, the ultimate goal of the narrative self-constitution view is to capture the intuitive relation between personal identity and what Schechtman calls the ‘four features’. According to these, people are a) interested in their own survival and future, b) are moral agents who may assume responsibility, c) they display self-interested concern and d) enter into relations of compensation.

Narrative, in this view, is mainly an organizing principle for experiences. When questioned how this principle may come into existence, and according to which norms and criteria it selects and organizes experiences, Schechtman’s argumentation becomes slightly evasive. She complements her notion of narrative with two constraints, namely the articulation constraint and the reality constraint. The former allows for narratives that remain implicit or non-articulated, albeit they must not remain

completely ‘subterranean’. They should be possible to be articulated locally, this means ‘...that the narrator should be able to explain why he does what he does, believes what he believes, and feels what he feels.’ Here, it becomes obvious that Schechtman draws upon hermeneuticist accounts of narrative identity, which similarly underscore the reflexive value of narrative. Also, being able to articulate one’s narrative endows intelligibility to past actions and interpretations. To account for one’s actions and experiences precisely means to show to others how one is part of an intelligible life story with a ‘comprehensible and well-drawn subject as a protagonist’ (Schechtman 1996, p.115). Here, her subscription to what Butler has coined the ‘ideal of transparency’ becomes obvious.

The second restriction for life narratives is the so-called reality-constraint. There has to be a ‘[f]undamental agreement on the most basic features of reality [that] is required for the kinds of interactions that take place between persons to be possible’ (ibid., p.94). This is quite self-explanatory, but it gets more interesting when it comes to errors with regard to reality. For Schechtman, there are two kinds of errors. First, there are errors of fact. When a self-narrative contains clearly inaccurate views of the world, if it fails to appreciate obvious and observable facts, the narrative is flawed. It is remarkable that Schechtman introduces a constraint that is linked so intimately to the problematic notion of reality. On a common sense basis, of course it is clear to everybody what reality actually is. Gravity points downwards, rain wets streets etc. But she completely lacks the critical sense that is required to elevate this constraint above the level of common sense. Instead, she allows for factual errors as long as the narrative coheres with the ‘basic contours of reality’. Here it would have been helpful if she had discussed cases in which these basic contours are contested.

The second kind of errors are errors of interpretation. Schechtman

immediately admits that the demarcation between the two kinds of errors is far from precise, but maintains that errors of interpretation can lead to the complete devaluation of one's life-narrative. She presents a couple of examples from psychology, where persons fail to interpret their abilities, powers, or social status, but the whole point seems to fall flat since, from a hermeneutical perspective, the difficulty to make sense is the starting point of interpretation itself, so errors are needed in order to engage productively in the practice of interpretation.

Schechtman's narrative self-constitution view, more than Goldie's, puts emphasis on the social dimensions of personhood. 'The very concept of personhood involves a social dimension – to be a person is to be able to engage with others in particular ways.' (Schechtman 1996, p.113). This engagement with others means that sociality in general requires that persons can reidentify each other. With regard to the four features, it is easy to see that they all are linked to the social interaction of reidentification. But there is more to be found on the link between self-narratives and sociality, and it is here where Schechtman's account disqualifies as an account with which Butler's scepticism about narrative accounting could be improved. So what happens exactly when persons assess each other's narrative accounts? According to Schechtman, they share expectations about the intelligibility of narrations, and therefore look for the linearity of the story recounted. Any self-conception has to be sufficiently similar to traditional linear narratives of personhood, to what she calls 'standard narratives of mainstream culture' (ibid., p.102). This view can easily lead to a set of problems. If identity and the intelligibility of one's actions depend on a linear and coherent narrative, but also on traditions and world-views of a society, the accepted narratives might merely represent the world-view of a dominant group. Schechtman is at least aware of this problem, but the rationalizations she offers are far from

plausible. She admits that deviant life-narratives should be accounted for, but only if they are part of a family of mostly overlapping narrative forms and practices. Ontologically, alien narrative cultures may exist in any given society, but if narratives deviate substantially from the standard narratives of mainstream culture, the narratives cease to constitute an intelligible identity and therefore are detrimental in performing the four features. Besides that, Schechtman neglects the corporeal aspects of human existence, a circumstance that forestalls an in-depth discussion of relationality and corporeal precariousness. It is the lack of critical consciousness what makes it difficult to discuss Schechtman and Butler together.

Let's turn, then, to the so called strong narrativist theories, and let me outline why they appear to be suitable for the present purpose. One author who also has turned to the works of Paul Ricoeur is Kim Atkins. For her, a narrative approach to personal identity, ethics, and the complexities of being an agent is superior to psychological accounts of personhood in the tradition of Hume. The narrative approach, in her opinion, gains its superiority for many reasons. Especially if one is interested in the ethical implications of personhood, it is crucial to 'preserve the first-person-perspective' (Atkins 2004, p.341), which, with regard to the ethical or practical perspective, she considers essential. Narrative itself is, in reference to Aristotle, an imitation of acts and lives, and because of this imitating relationship is capable of the integration of such diverse entities such as characters, actors, motives, places, events, perspectives, and even different orders of time (Atkins 2008, p.4). Atkins notes that in this sense narrative 'shares with action a common semantic network' and links together the 'who?', 'what?', 'how?', 'why?', 'when?', and 'with whom?', of action. But this constitutes merely half of what is necessary to maintain the first-person-perspective. Narrating agents may give an-

swers to all of these aspects of a given action. But this semantic web itself has its basis in human embodiment, or respectively in the lived body.

Quite similar to Butler, Atkins wants to emphasise the relational aspects of human existence that arise from the condition of the lived body. Accordingly, the entanglement with others is not merely external, but over time, essentially internal. It is internal because human beings come into being literally through the bodies of others, and, just like Butler has pointed out, each human being's survival depends upon the most intimate human interactions. These interactions and relations will have a lasting impact on the individual's life. The question here is, if these early formative relations can be retrieved by any means, or if they necessarily will remain opaque. Different from Butler, Atkins has a rather non-critical assessment of these early relations. The early experiences with others set up psychological, affective, physical, agential, and moral structures, that tie human beings for their entire lives to those they depended on. It is because of that, that questions about who one is need to be addressed in the context of an interpersonal, cultural, and historical setting. Here, Atkins does not display the concerns of Butler's, who is sceptical about the retrievability of these early relations. We will have to postpone the discussion of this topic.

So how does a narrative framework establish the links between persons, their respective identity (or identities), and ethics in Atkins' account? Who a person is 'is the named subject of a practical and conceptual complex of first, second and third-person perspectives which structure and unify a life grasped as it is lived.' (Atkins 2004, p.347). This definition is rather bulky, but it is worth to be analysed further. The 'practical and conceptual complex' denotes a wide variety of characteristics and practices which can be attributed to the individual. Among these are the specific date and place of birth, particular physical traits, weaknesses and

abilities, but also the qualitative way how she acted and suffered. Also, Atkins includes successful or denied recognition and social status. Here, the need for a hermeneutical framework becomes apparent. If a person, and her identity, is constituted by such a variety of characteristics, and this constitution takes place by means of conceptualizations and interlocution, then this process of constitution can only be understood by means of perpetual interpretation. Or to put it in other words: Understanding a person requires the process of making sense of the richness of characteristics and practices of a person's life.

But there is a second aspect of this hermeneutic engagement, that will have to be discussed not only here, but which is a guiding thread throughout this whole thesis: The coherence or unity of a life as a necessary requirement for determining and understanding a person's identity. Atkins is explicit on this topic: 'Understanding who a person is, then, requires coherence and continuity in the psychological, physical, social, cultural and historical aspects of a person's life' (Atkins 2004, p.346). Now, this coherence supposedly is crucial on two planes. First, it has to be grasped and endorsed in the first-person-perspective, the individual has to understand herself as the subject of a certain live. But since relations with others are important for both survival and recognition, this coherence has to be graspable by others as well. This is where the second- and third-person-perspective become relevant.

Again, making sense of myself and others requires a narrative and reflexive engagement with oneself and others, and only narrative supposedly can provide the unity and coherence which are required to be intelligible. In this sense, narrative coherence is an essential aspect of the individual's answer to the question 'Who am I?', respectively 'Who are you?'. But it is also essential to the ethical dimension of living a live among others, or to the question 'Why have you done this?'. This

is a question for the reasons which may or may not have motivated an ethically problematic deed. For a reason to have normative weight, 'that reason must involve the mobilisation, coordination and direction of a whole network of perceptions, beliefs, thoughts and feelings; it must mobilise a semantic web of action.' (Atkins 2004, p.362). And, of course, it has to be a narrative identity through which it is possible to determine, or 'identify' the relationships, roles, and capacities that gives direction to a life. Atkins links this narrative account of personal identity to the concept of autonomy as it is present in the Kantian philosophy of Christine Korsgaard. But this topic has to be postponed to the last chapter.

As mentioned above, Atkins builds upon the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur's, and it is his account that will be discussed in depth hereafter. What is left to note is that Atkins considers narrative failure, i.e. the failure to establish coherence of one's life, as a threat to her strong claim for narrative identity. She obviously knows about the possibility of narrative failure when she differentiates physiological, psychological and social pathologies, all of which 'interfere with the afflicted person's when it comes to form an integrated and positive self-conception.' (ibid., p.347). Unfortunately, she merely mentions these pathologies and points out that there are well-known 'dangers of delusional mental states', but she neglects to integrate these critically and productively into her account of narrative identity. By doing so, she implicitly imposes a notion normality onto her own conception, since only the non-pathological individuals seem to be capable of establishing the morally mandatory coherence of life. I will return to this line of thought later on when I discuss the one particular criticism of narrative identity, namely the threat of the imposition of a generic form of life via narratives which is lived and maintained by dominant groups within a certain community.

3.2 Narrative, Agency, and Character

Atkins has referenced two features of Ricoeur's works on narrative identity that she not only considers crucial, but that she sees spelt out especially well in his works. First, there is the aspect of narrative coherence. As this concept is essential to link and understand questions of personal identity to normative issues such as responsibility, recognition, and autonomy, it will be vital to look closely at how exactly Ricoeur establishes the concept of narrative coherence and unity in his account, and what role it assumes in his ethical considerations. Secondly, she highlights the requirement of narrative unity. Supposedly, only narrative is capable of the unification of the three perspectives of the first-, second-, and third-person.

If Atkins is right in her evaluation of Ricoeur's account of narrative identity, especially about its capability to inform disputes in moral philosophy, will have to be discussed later on. Atkins herself positions herself in alignment with Christine Korsgaard's account of practical identity, which is tightly linked, or even emerges from the individual's reflective capacities found in Kant and therefore references mainly the first person and a person's will. But for now, we will engage with Ricoeur and his elaborate take on narrative identity. There are various approaches to this complex theory, but I consider it most suitable to begin with his definition of *narrative identity* head-on. 'The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her "experiences". Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.' (Ricoeur 1994, p.147).

In this quote, several crucial features of Ricoeur's narrative approach to

personal identity become apparent. The relation between a person and the character of a story, *prima facie* supposedly is one of understanding and interpretation. The rationale behind this assumption is that all knowledge of the self is interpretation, and this interpretation of the self finds narrative, among other signs and symbols, to be a privileged mediation. (Ricoeur 1991, p.188). This holds even more so since Ricoeur has engaged himself in depth with narratives in history, i.e. historiography, and fiction. Therefore, it is no surprise that he regards a live-story as ‘a fictive history or [...] an historical fiction’ (ibid., p.188). This allocation of identity-constructing narrative in close proximity to historiographical and fictive story-telling is typical for hermeneuticist perspectives on that subject. For example, it also structures Charles Taylor’s study on the *Sources of the Self*, and assumes a central role in Hayden White’s analysis of the value of narrative in the representation of reality. White concludes his analysis of various historiographical methodologies and their respective relationship with narrative with the observation that even the most objective and realistic methodological frameworks turn to narrative in their ‘...desire to have real events display the coherence, integrity, fullness, and closure of an image of life that is and can only be imaginary.’ (White 1980, p.24). Most hermeneuticist thinkers agree on the point that a person’s identity is a text-analogue in dire need of permanent interpretation. Narrative, understood as a formative heuristic which helps to organize experiences along a plot which endows the sequence of events and experiences with the (imaginary) features such as coherence and closure, seems to meet the human’s need for self-understanding and interlocution.

The definition, secondly, establishes an irritating link between a person and narrative identity. Exactly how the identity of a story ‘makes’ the identity of the character has to be analysed hereafter. Also, the du-

plication of the person as a character is far from intuitive. Certainly, it is common sense that the characters in stories are agents, therefore are the ones who do things, and who may or may not relate to each other. But unless the transition from person to character has been clarified, it remains questionable under which conditions it is viable to equate real-life-persons with characters in stories.

As a further signifier of his hermeneuticist stance, it is of crucial import for Ricoeur that the opening question about personal identity is and remains ‘who?’, instead of ‘what?’ or ‘why?’. There are four dimensions of selfhood in which the priority of the *who* has to hold, namely the linguistic, the practical, the narrative, and the ethical dimension. On the linguistic plane, one has to ask of *whom* does one speak in designating persons, as distinct from things. Who designates herself as the speaker in an interlocution? On the pragmatic plane, the respective question is *who* is the agent of action? In terms of narrative, this ascription of agency is extended to the broader concept of the acting and suffering individual. Here, the question is who (now understood as a character in a story) is suffering from what? Lastly, the ethical plane, which intricately is linked with the goal of living a good life with and for others in just institutions, has at its center questions like ‘Who is the subject of autonomy?’, which Ricoeur will answer in a way that is tightly bound up with solicitude for one’s neighbour and with justice for each individual. At this stage, it becomes apparent that in this particular account a philosophical theory of action assumes the role of a propaedeutic to the question of identity and its implications with ethics.

With regard to Ricoeur’s ethics, it is helpful to notice that he does not understand his work to culminate in any form of *narrative* ethics in the sense that a narrative approach to ethics would necessarily indicate a certain moral framework or theory. This not only differentiates his work on

narrative identity from philosophers like Taylor or MacIntyre, who explicitly advocate a teleological and therefore Aristotelian approach to ethics, i.e. value-ethics. Nonetheless Ricoeur indeed does argue in favour of the primacy of Aristotelian teleological ethics over Kantian deontic moral philosophy. But his core ethical formula reads that the ethical intention of humans is ‘aiming at the “good life” with and for others in just institutions’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.172) and seemingly aims to incorporate both ethical traditions and a Hegelian relationality and intersubjectivity into an inclusive hierarchy of evaluative principles. This issue will be discussed in the last chapter by reference to the arguments of Dieter Thomä, who has put forward an intriguing set of arguments against the usurpation of narrativity by the deontological or the teleological camp (Thomä 2007). This supposed equi-distance of narrativity from ethical theories also has its foundation in the mediating functions of narrative between interlocutory modes of description on the one side and the realm of norms on the other side. It is Ricoeur’s professed goal to investigate and clarify what he calls the ‘triad’ of *description - narrative - prescription*. To be more precisely, narrative theory, for him, finds its justification as the middle ground between the descriptive viewpoint on actions on the one side, and the prescriptive viewpoint on the other. In order to be that middle ground, narrative theory will have to be suitable to cope with, and possibly overcome, certain conceptual confusions about identity in ethics and moral philosophy. Moreover, narrative theory only can be the mediator between description and ethics if its practical field is greater than the semantics and pragmatics of action of the one hand, and that the actions recounted in a narration anticipate ethical considerations structurally, i.e. they are implied in the very structure of the act of narrating. But before we can delve into the ethical and moral implications, we have to

reconstruct Ricoeur's understanding of the problems of personal identity, and his rich concept of 'narrative theory'.

3.3 Two Problems with Identity

Ricoeur's philosophy of narrative identity takes its start with the analysis of the conceptual ambiguity of the notion of identity itself. With regard to the identity of a human being, there are two possible meanings of identity, namely identity as sameness, and identity as selfhood. The former he has labelled *idem*-identity and the later *ipse*-identity. It is Ricoeur's hypothesis that many of the problems with personal identity arise from the failure to distinguish these two semantic domains of identity. This conceptual obfuscation draws upon the fact that *idem*- and *ipse*-identity both relate to an entity's permanence over time. Let us look at how exactly permanence in time is topical here, and in what regards both versions of identity differ from each other.

Idem-identity defines identity as permanence over time in the sense of sameness. Sameness is a concept of relations and relations of relations. One way to understand sameness is as numerical identity. If an entity occurs at two different times it may be possible to reidentify the entity which occurred at t_1 with an entity that occurs at t_2 . This operation of reidentification is about oneness, and its antonym would be plurality. In addition to this quantitative reading of numerical identity, it is possible to conceptualize it in terms of quality. Here, the issue at hand is similarity. To establish identity along the lines of similarity means to identify entities with each other that are so similar that they could be substituted without semantic loss. This sense of identity has its opposite in difference. It is apparent that numerical identity only can be attested once it is possible to devise a criterion for this identity. To a certain degree, similitude can be established as a criterion for numerical identity, but this

would only transfer the need for a criterion into this semantic field. Both, the operations of reidentification and similitude become weaker as more time has passed since the first occurrence. Also, it remains obscure how exactly permanence over time is explained without positing any essence or substratum that could facilitate criteria for permanence over time. Thirdly, there is another criterion for numerical identity, and that is uninterrupted continuity. This, in turn, feeds into the second criterion of similitude, since it demands that in order to establish the uninterrupted continuity, one has to divide the temporal existence of an entity into a series of small changes that, in ordered pairs, do not break the relation of similitude. Again, Ricoeur maintains the categorical difference between ‘what?’ and ‘who?’. But for both it is true that this analysis of permanence in time as numerical identity establishes a central demand for any theory of narrative identity. ‘The entire problematic of personal identity will resolve around this search for a relational invariant, giving it the strong signification of permanence in time’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.118).

When it comes to selfhood, or *ipse*-identity, it is crucial to find a form of permanence in time that is an answer to the who-question. Ricoeur differentiates two models of permanence in time that are at hand from social interactions, two models that at the same time are descriptive and emblematic: *character* and *keeping one’s word*. In both models there is a presupposition of permanence in time that are said to belong to the person speaking. Importantly, there is a qualitative difference in these models of permanence. Whereas in the term ‘character’ there is an almost complete overlapping of *idem* and *ipse*, faithfulness marks an extreme gap between the permanence of the self and that of the same. This polarity ‘...suggests an intervention of narrative identity in the conceptual constitution of personal identity in the manner of a specific mediator between the pole of character, where *idem* and *ipse* tend to coincide, and

the pole of self-maintenance, where selfhood frees itself from sameness' (Ricoeur 1994, p.118). In other words, *idem*-identity is a sort of identity that never changes over time, whereas *ipse*-identity is a form of identity that endures change over time. So before we can reconstruct how narrative identity intervenes in the constitution of selfhood, and how it connects with ethics, we have to look at the underlying theory of action in Ricoeur's theoretical framework of narrative identity.

At the center of Ricoeur's theory of action resides the operation of ascription. As stated before, it is helpful to inquire into a theory of action precisely because it remains unclear up to this point how it can be conceived that persons and selves are characters in a story told. Or in other words, the transition from *What has happened?* to *Who has done it?* needs further elaboration. To begin with, even the question *What is he doing?* is rather difficult to answer. Alasdair MacIntyre uses the example of a man standing in the garden of his house, obviously wearing the proper attire for gardening. This observation of this behaviour can lead to very different answers to the question what this person is doing. It could be, that she aims to prepare the garden for the winter. But it could also be true that this person wants to use the gardening to work out, because someone might have told her that working out improves the general health. Or the person wants to please her partner etc. The logical space of possible answers to the question what is happening in that garden cannot be answered without shifting from the *What?* to the *Who?*. Although philosopher have attempted to establish an 'agentless' semantics of action, Ricoeur utilizes some observations of P.F. Strawson's to expose the importance of an agent. Strawson insisted on the relevance of a particular linguistic operation, namely 'attribution'. Following the question what differentiates persons and bodies in the context of actions, Strawson distinguishes three such attributions. Firstly, persons are what

he calls particulars, and an attribution of a predicate is made either in respect of bodies or persons, although the attribution of certain predicates to persons cannot be translated in terms of attribution to bodies. Secondly, it is possible to attribute physical and psychological predicates to persons. Thirdly, mental attributes, such as motives and intentions, 'are directly *attributable*' to oneself and someone else. Ricoeur condenses these three aspects into what he calls *ascription*, a term that he considers to designate the critical point of the transition from the domain of *What?*-questions to the domain of *Who?*-questions.

It would be premature to assume that because of the ontological and linguistic considerations of Strawson's or Ricoeur's, the concept of person and agent would have been established properly. In fact, the operation of ascription is one of the central points of this whole enterprise. Even if it is taken for granted that persons are particulars in Strawson's sense it is not clear exactly how the transition from *What has happened?* to *Who has done it?* takes place. Certainly, in order to identifying an action needs to start with a collection of observable behaviour and the movement of objects. All of these constituents can be assigned a place and a time. But for actions to be understood, it is necessary to identify the agent as well, by way of the operation of ascription. This means that we need to identify the agent, and her motives. Ricoeur observes that whereas getting hold of the agent often is quite easy, whereas the identification of her motives is an operation that is prone to interpretation, and therefore virtually interminable: 'On the one hand, searching for the author is a terminable investigation which stops with the designation of the agent, usually by citing his or her name: "Who did that? So and so." On the other hand, searching for the motives of an action is an interminable investigation, the chain of motivations losing itself in the unfathomable haze of internal and external influences...' (Ricoeur 1994, p.95).

It is precisely because of this unfathomable haze of internal and external influences that contributes strongly to the turn to narrative, since only narrative is supposed to enable to integrate all of the contextual aspects that are relevant to understand the motives of an agent. But what is topical here still is the question exactly how the identity of a person is meant to be constituted by a story in which she figures as a character, as quoted above. We have seen how a person is the entity to which mental states and motives can be attributed or ascribed. But this only introduces the concept of person into the philosophical theory of action. Additionally, the operation of ascription allows for the transition from the person to the agent of a given action. Still, it has yet to be clarified exactly how Ricoeur establishes the identification of ‘person’ and ‘character’. In order to reconstruct this transition, it is essential to look at Ricoeur’s theory of narrative and story-telling.

3.4 A Theory of Narrative

Up to this point, the theory and concept of narrative in Ricoeur’s philosophy has to satisfy manifold expectations. It is meant to constitute a person’s identity while integrating the two variants of identity, namely *ipse*- and *idem*-identity; it supposedly constitutes a heuristic framework to understand actions as sequences of events that are situated in meaningful contexts; and since there is no such thing as an ethically neutral narrative, it contains a plethora of evaluative distinctions on various levels, such as the ethical, the moral, and the interlocutory. Before it is possible to assess its capabilities against the background of all of these philosophical topics, it is now imperative to reconstruct Ricoeur’s theory of narrative to its full extent.

Ricoeur approaches the topic of narrative from pragmatics. Pragmatics, for him, is a transcendental perspective to the extent that it explores

the conditions that govern the use of language and especially the contextuality of this use. Of course, there are many, if not an infinite number of contexts that might matter here, but right now the focus is on those contexts that connect with the philosophical interests sketched out above. This also connects to the hermeneuticist framework of Ricoeur's inasmuch understanding language in general, and stories in particular, is a reflexive endeavour. It requires not only to trace links to the relevant contexts of an utterance, but also to reverse the perspective and take a look at the understanding person's own involvement with the various contexts. Pragmatics, therefore, is '...a theory of language as it is used in specific contexts of interlocution. This shift of approach should not, however, lead us to abandon the transcendental viewpoint: pragmatics is intended to undertake not an empirical description of acts of communication but an investigation into the conditions that govern language use in all those cases in which the reference attached to certain expressions cannot be determined without knowledge of the context of their use, in other words, the situation of interlocution.' (Ricoeur 1994, p.40).

In order to maintain this pragmatic perspective on language, Ricoeur heavily builds on the speech act theory as it has been devised by J.L. Austin and later on, John Searle. At the centre of the speech act theory is the linguistic utterance. But in difference to the 'sentence' as the central concept in analytical philosophy of language, the utterance is not merely a vehicle to communicate any propositional content. It puts emphasis on the intersubjective, or to be more precise, the interlocutory aspects of the situation in which the utterance occurs. Borrowing from information theory, speech act theory takes into view not only the vehicle of representation, but also the sender and receiver of the utterance. By doing so, it is possible to distinguish hierarchical levels in all statements or utterances. These levels are themselves regarded as acts. Austin differ-

entiate three such levels or acts, namely the locutionary, illocutionary, and perlocutionary acts. The locutionary act consists in the predicative operation itself. It is saying something about something, like 'There sits a black cat.' The illocutionary act consists in what the speaker does with saying something. This could be either merely stating something, or commanding another person to do something, or to give advice, or to promise something to somebody. The perlocutionary act refers to the consequences of the statement. When said to a quite superstitious person, the hint at the black cat sitting there might scare the addressee, or a cat-loving person might be delighted to be pointed to a cat nearby etc. The consequences also could be persuading, or enlightening, or inspiring and many others. By adopting the speech act theory it becomes apparent that using language is, of course, an action in and of itself but not only that. It is a compound or hierarchy of actions that takes place all at once.

Ricoeur adds the canonical list of speech acts the level of *interlocution* (eventually he speaks of *allocution*, but I consider interlocution to be the proper term here, since it puts more emphasis on the relational and intersubjective dimension of communication). On this level, the general expectation of mutual understanding is central. 'Facing the speaker in the first person is a listener in the second person to whom the former addresses himself or herself - this fact belongs to the situation of interlocution. So, there is not illocution without allocution and, by implication, without someone to whom the message is addressed. The utterance that is reflected in the sense of the statement is therefore straight away a bipolar phenomenon: it implies simultaneously an "I": that speaks and a "you" to whom the former addresses itself.' (Ricoeur 1994, p.43). As I said, mutual understanding is of import here, and this addendum fits neatly into the matrix of the other three levels. Commanding expects obedience, someone giving advice expects gratitude etc. For the discus-

sion of Butler's moral philosophy this is a valid point of connection, since it seems to correspond to her concept of relationality, but this will be discussed below.

It has to be noted here that the integration of speech act theory into a broader account of the narrative constitution of selfhood and identity might not be that substantial. In effect, this theory does not provide us in this respect with any more than the dialogic skeleton of highly diversified interpersonal exchanges. But even before the theory of narrative will have been presented here, this integration is a substantial step in the direction of relationality and sociality. As explained in the part on Schechtman and others, there seems to be an implicit individualism in narrative accounts of personal identity. For Schechtman, having a life-narrative mainly serves the purpose of keeping track of one's own experiences. It was demonstrated that based on this claim, it is not possible to discuss ethical violence at all, and neither the opacities about oneself that emerge from social interactions and norms. Here, interlocution, and narration, for that matter, not only constitutes the selfhood of the speaker and the identity of the agent, but they also place the 'I' and the agent in a social situation in which discourse necessarily is dialogue and communication with others. Or, as Ricoeur says '...every advance made in the direction of the selfhood of the speaker or the agent has as its counterpart a comparable advance in the otherness of the partner.' (Ricoeur 1994, p.44). The meaning of the otherness of the partner will be discussed in the section when I confront Butler with Ricoeur.

So what exactly means to tell a story to somebody? And what is narrative, narration, and so on¹? 'Telling a story is saying who did what

¹Although it is regarded as one of the strengths of Ricoeur's theory of narrative that it covers the structural constituents of narrative as well as the practice of story-telling *vis-a-vis* the other, his account pivots towards structure in total. The shortcomings with regard to the practice of story-telling, especially with regard to the normative aspects of it, will be discussed in the next chapter.

and how, by spreading out in time the connection between these various viewpoints.’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.146). We know already that the act of story-telling takes place in a social situation, it is not an individualistic monologue. Still, the individual is very important since she condenses a course of action into one more or less coherent narration. In doing so, she will have to integrate a substantially diverse set of entities, such as the ascription of agency to certain individuals, certain qualities and qualifications about the actions recounted, and establish a temporal matrix of events. We will discuss each of these topics separately, but here it is crucial to address the connection of these events. For Ricoeur, and many other narrativists, it is the connections between events, how they are ordered, and in what succession they occur within that story. It even is supposed to be the ‘...essential difference distinguishing the narrative model from every other model of connectedness’ (ibid., p.142). Alternative models of connectedness could be a causal one, in which the events are strictly ordered along the principle of causality, i.e. causes are always followed by results. A second alternative is the chronic, in which the events are listed in order of their chronological succession. The crucial difference to the status of events in a narration consists in the circumstance that in both models, the causal one and the chronic, it is impossible to distinguish between an event and its occurrence. The occurrence of the rain is the cause for the street being wet, and Jane Seymour appears on the list of the wives of Henry VIII after Anne Boleyn but before Anna von Kleve. In comparison to the narrative model, these models of connectedness are considerably parsimonious, the occurrence is identical with the event. Or in other words: There is a clear principle which governs which events are to include, and which are not. This is a stark difference to the narrative model.

In order to understand what makes the narrative model different from

all other models of connectedness we have to look at the status of events, or to be more precise, how a narrative event is defined: a ‘narrative event is defined by its relation to the very operation of configuration’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.142). So what is this operation of configuration? Telling a story surely is saying who did what when and how. But in order to gather all of these aspects in one story, it is necessary to impose a plot on the constitutive parts of the story, i.e. an ordered transformation from an initial state to a terminal state. Clearly, a plot covers the causal series of events as well as their temporal order. Sometimes, plot is understood as the selection of those events in a story that drive the story forward, an understanding that is close to a causal perspective to the extent that it only selects those events in a story that are necessary to approach the end of the story. Others put emphasis on the structure of the plot, such as tragedy or comedy. In general, there are two ways of understanding plot. The one regards plot as the story’s global structure. Hence, it is the aggregate of all events and actors. The second regards plot mainly as a sort of progressive structuration. With the reader in mind, in this case plot is defined as the connections between story events, consequences and motivations of the characters in that story.

The operation of configuration, which defines the narrative event, integrates all of these aspects. But what Ricoeur really is interested in is how the configuration is undertaken. This might not be answered in general, since there are quite different conventions for historiographic narratives, or for fictional narratives. Of course, here are those narratives important that constitute narrative identity. The operation of configuration is what Ricoeur addresses with the term ‘emplotment’. *Prima facie*, emplotment imposes an order on the elements of a situation or even a whole story. But this order is a fragile one. This is due to two poles that impact the configuration severely, the pole of concordance and the pole of discor-

dance. The demand of concordance is conceptualized in reference to the Aristotelian notion of the ‘arrangements of facts’. The events, situations, motivations, and intentions of the story have to answer the demand of concordance, they should be arranged in a way that drives forward the story, step by step from the beginning of the story to its end. The pole of discordance gives consideration to the fact that there are ruptures, unexpected turns of events, and contingencies within the course of the story. Ricoeur speaks of the ‘reversal of fortune’. Both poles are prevalent in each story. Imagine yourself becoming acquainted with somebody new on a train-trip. When you start to tell that person aspects of your life, both poles will have to be addressed. There is one aspect to your story, that covers your education and vocational training (especially in Germany, that is). This sequence of life-events maybe are easy to bring into a sequential order. But then there are also unexpected turns of events, maybe you wanted to become X, but by coincidence you ran into an old classmate and she invited you to work in a completely different area.

The poles of concordance and discordance stand in a dialectical relation with each other. Dialectical, in this context, does not merely denote a conflict of arguments, but an internal tension of organizing principles. We will see below, that for Ricoeur, this paradox assumes a crucial role when it comes to the transition from the plot to the character. At the core of this conflict resides the tension between necessity and contingency. This results in a feature of narrative emplotment that Ricoeur phrases discordant concordance. This notion aims to highlight the synthesis of the heterogeneous that is the aim of every narrative composition: ‘...between the manifold of events and the temporal unity of the story recounted; between the disparate components of the action — intentions, causes, and chance occurrences — and the sequence of the story; and finally, between pure succession and the unity of the temporal form, which, in extreme

cases, can disrupt chronology to the point of abolishing it.’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.141). At this point, Ricoeur is content to state that narrative can mediate between all of these aspects. Exactly how and why this integration or synthesis succeeds remains to be discussed. But first, some remarks on the relation of agency to contingency and necessity.

Telling a story means not only to say who did what, when, and why. It also means to produce an interlocutory episode in a way that conveys crucial aspects of the events recounted, especially in self-related narrations. First and foremost, that requires to select the relevant events. But when it comes to the aspect of discordant concordance, the mentioning of necessity and contingency is just as important. Ricoeur is justified to introduce discordant concordance. This can easily be made clear by imagining the same situation of a train-trip and the casual conversation with another person. If one’s past or becoming is topical, a lack of discordant concordance would seem to be off the mark. Given that the account would lack necessity completely, that is, that all the events are explained to be random or accidental, the interlocutor would have to assume that the narrator has no sense of agency in her life whatsoever. The opposite would be just as irritating. A narrative account of one’s becoming that is void of any contingencies would establish a character who either is completely in control of just each and every aspect of her life. Or the superhumanly level of control is just handed down to a supernatural entity. The dialectic of concordance and discordance hence corresponds to the theoretical intuitions and practical experiences with human agency. Some things can be intended and thus realized, whereas the chancy turn of events is part of every human endeavour. But this merely is a conventional observation that does not determine the validity of the concept *per se*. Especially the use of ‘dialectical’ is an indication that it might turn out to be a device to diminish the impact of opacities and disorientations

in the context of narration and narrative composition, or even to neglect them altogether.

Ricoeur's firm belief in narrative's capacity to mediate the heterogeneity of actions, events, temporalities and alike arises from a close reading of Aristotle's account of the *mythos* and its function as *mimēsis praxeōs*, i.e. the imitation of action. The question was what a tragedy like Oedipus Rex or an epic such as the Iliad are representing. He came to the conclusion that these texts are imitations of actions, and there is a high degree of plausibility to this conclusion. Ricoeur expanded this line of thought and the very concept of imitation, or mimesis. Against Aristotle, and Plato as well, Ricoeur freed the concept of mimesis from the context of art in a narrow sense, especially from the analysis of tragedy, which is the main part of Aristotle's work in poesis. By doing so, he is able to frame culture as a certain, historically contingent symbolic order, and mimesis becomes an arc of operations which he addresses with the three variants of mimesis, namely *mimesis*₁, *mimesis*₂, and *mimesis*₃.

*Mimesis*₁ is the operation of the prefiguration of the field of action. The field of human action is preconfigured in the sense that one has to have certain basic competencies in order to understand actions as actions. Among these one is the competency to understand the semantics of actions by means of a conceptual network. This means that there is a basic understanding of the structure and constituents of actions, and therefore one can ask questions of who, how, when, why, against or with whom etc. Additionally, there is the competency of using symbols and the competency in the temporal conventions that govern the syntagmatic order of narration. Narrations are *composita* and the temporal conventions are about the followability of a narrative. Overall, *mimesis*₁ is about how individuals are able to understand the sign system of their respective culture. In this sense, this first notion of mimesis covers the pre-narrative

level of understanding. '[T]he composition of the plot is grounded in a pre-understanding of the world of action, its meaningful structures, its symbolic resources, and its temporal character. These features are described rather than deduced. But in this sense nothing requires their listing to be a closed one' (Ricoeur 1984, p.141). Possibly, it is in this place where we can find a useful intersection between the works of Ricoeur's and Butler's. The pre-understanding Ricoeur speaks of has to be acquired by each and every individual, but we may assume with Butler that the genealogy of this acquisition of pre-narrative competencies might remain obscure, a circumstance that Butler, as argued above, brings into position against the principle of transparency in the context of moral deliberation, responsibility, and recognition.

Mimesis₂ instead is the configuration of the field of action. It is the pivotal notion of mimesis of the three discussed here, at least for Ricoeur, since it supposedly mediates between the other two. The configuration of the plot, as we have seen, figures as 'emplotment', because it is the dynamic character of these operations that Ricoeur wants to highlight. The mediating function of mimesis₂ is threefold. Firstly, the plot is a mediation between the individual events and incidents and the story taken as a whole. The events are turned into a narrative, and the narrative draws from the diversity of the events. Here, the difference between simple succession of events and configuration becomes clear. The configuration is the result of the operation of emplotment. Also, an event has to be more than just an occurrence, because in a story the event is meant to contribute to the intelligibility of the whole story. This is the main difference to events in a chronic, or in a causal series.

Furthermore, the emplotment brings together the highly heterogeneous factors such as agents, goals means, interactions, circumstances and unexpected results. This has been elaborated on above. And thirdly, the

plot is mediating in a third way, namely that of its temporal characteristics (Ricoeur 1984, see pp.64-68). This is a topic that Ricoeur adds to Aristotle's work on tragedy and plot, and he differentiates two temporal dimensions, one of which is chronological, whereas the other is not. The chronological dimension consists in the episodic dimension of narrative, i.e. that the story is made up of events that are brought into the order of succession. The second dimension is about the 'grasping together' of the story's incidents. This function of emplotment results in the unity of the story as a temporal whole. In *Time and Narrative*, Ricoeur identifies this paradoxical unification of the two dimensions of temporality as the poetic act itself. But this emphasis is removed from the theory of narrative in *Oneself as Another*. What remains is the conviction that the emplotment has to exert its unifying effects for the sake of the followability of the story. 'To understand the story is to understand how and why the successive episodes led to this conclusion, which, far from being foreseeable, must finally be acceptable, as congruent with the episodes brought together by the story.' (ibid., p.67).

When we think of emplotment, it is very much in the direction of mimesis₂ because it denotes the composition of the story in a narrower sense. Whereas mimesis₁ is about the conditions of the possibility of telling and understanding stories, Mimesis₃ too is about something beyond the very operation of composing a story from the heterogeneity of events and intentions. It '...marks the intersection of the world of the text and the world of the hearer or reader' (ibid., p.71). We will have to see if talking of two worlds, the one established by the story and the world wherein real action occurs really makes sense in the case of those stories that are supposed to constitute an individual's personal identity. Nonetheless, just as mimesis₁, mimesis₃ also will be quite useful for the purpose of discussing Ricoeur against Butler. By expanding the scope of

the notion of mimesis from the confinement of story-telling in a narrow sense on the conditions of understanding stories and the intersection of story-telling and real actions, it will be possible to question him about the obstructive aspects of both of these extra-narrative realms on the very possibility of telling a story about oneself. Seemingly, the demarcation of poetic, historic, and biographical stories as Ricoeur has established in *Time and Narrative* no longer can be maintained with regard to narrative identity. Still, the conceptual framework of mimesis is helpful to understand the complexities of story-telling.

Up until here, we have reconstructed what a narrative is, and especially how it differentiates itself from other collections of events. We have learned that narrative emplotment is an imitation of action in the sense of Aristotle. Ricoeur has widened the theoretical horizon of Aristotle to the effect that the paradoxical operations of emplotment and configuration are not merely imitations of actions, but also refers to the pre-configurative understanding of the symbolic structure of human experience as well as an understanding of the structure of actions. Also, the configuration of events is embedded in and entails the reconfiguration of the field of action, i.e. the impact and consequences not only of action itself but of actions recounted in a narrative have ramifications for and connections with real actions. This groundwork is necessary in order to understand the peculiarities of Ricoeur's account of narrative identity, and its moral and ethical implications. And in order to approach the central claim about the intricate relationship of narrative and personal identity, it is now important to look more closely at actions and the protagonists of these actions as the figure in narrative accounts of these actions.

The question is then to determine what how the discussion of personal identity is linked to narrative in the first place. To begin with, speaking

of the ‘operation of emplotment’, it is immediately clear that this implies a subject of emplotment, i.e. the individual who chooses the events and elements of the action recounted, and who tells it to somebody else. We already have seen that the ascription of agency is a crucial operation, and that it might be possible to identify the author of a given narrative, or the narrator of a narrative account as its protagonist. And Ricoeur does not leave much room for scepticism when he states that ‘...[t]he decisive step in the direction of a narrative conception of personal identity is taken when one passes from the action to the character.’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.143). The question hence is what, or to be more precise who, exactly the character is. The character is defined as ‘...the set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same.’ (ibid., p.148). Moreover, for him the character is the one who performs an action in a narrative. The central question is how the narrative category of character can contribute to the discussion of personal identity.

In a narrative that is neither fictional nor historiographical, in other words, a narrative that is about the actions, intentions and experiences of a living human being, there hardly can be action without a protagonist, or character. Now, the first step in the direction of the identification of the character of a narrative with the person who is telling the story consists in the assumption that the character is a set of distinctive marks which permit the reidentification of a human individual as being the same. These features can be described explicitly or arise from the prenarrative understanding of the audience. What is striking here is the observation that the character in a story, the individual will compound numerical identity and qualitative identity, an uninterrupted continuity and permanence in time. The sameness of the person is ‘designated emblematically’, which means the character of a story, more or less, designates the set of lasting

dispositions by which a person is recognized. Thus conceptualized, the character of a story compounds all of the crucial structural features of a story in and of itself. Also, both the stable pole of the character and the her variant pole need to be illustrated by a series of events, motives, intentions etc. Therefore, a character combines all of the heterogeneous features that have been discussed in the context of the emplotment of narratives. When Ricoeur states that ‘...[t]he thesis supported here will be that the identity of the character is comprehensible through the transfer to the character of the operation of emplotment, first applied to the action recounted; characters, we will say, are themselves plots.’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.143), it becomes apparent what the core of Ricoeur’s narrative account of personal identity is. Characters are themselves plots, ergo the three operations of configuration apply to them. Moreover, the subject of this configuration, the protagonist of the actions recounted, and the narrator can get identified with each other.

So far, we have gathered Ricoeur’s arguments with which he establishes the central role that narrative supposedly assumes with regard to the constitution of personal identity. This gathering has mainly focussed on the role that narrative plays with regard to the meaning of actions, and how to understand them. In fact, the ascription of agency and intentions to an individual, who also is the author of stories that recount these actions and who is the protagonist in these stories is essential to understand the slogan that characters are themselves plots. But this orientation toward actions falls short with regard to higher-order practical units such as practices. We now have to turn to these practical units because they open the field for several central aspects of Ricoeur’s account, especially concerning the unity life-narratives and the ethical implications of keeping track of one’s experiences by means of narrative.

So what exactly is a practice? A game is a practice, or a profession, or

an art, but there are innumerable more examples. A practice is a second-order unit which, other as an action, is not only intentional, but also ruled governed. Practices amongst each other and practices and actions have nesting relations. That is to say that their descriptions and definitions overlap with each other. A certain action may be executed in the context of a practice, and whole sets of practices can, in turn, be part of other practices. For example, setting one foot in front of the other are actions that accumulate in walking on a trail, whereas this 'walking on a trail' can be part of the practice called mountaineering, a recreational sport that, in turn, possibly is a part of the practice of 'going on vacation', that, again, maybe is part of a certain organisation of labour in a given community. Or think of vocations: driving a tractor engine is part of 'being a farmer'. Certainly, these are merely an introductory example of practices, and in order to trace how the reference to practices paves the way for the claim for the unity of a life and teleological ethics, we need to analyse it closely.

Ricoeur discusses three features of practices. Firstly, there is an intermingling of finality and causality in practices. This means that an agent is able to engage in certain actions, or start a chain of actions in order to partake in a certain practice. In this case, the linking principle consists in the ongoing assessment of the actions's outcomes by the agent, whereas the intended or unintended outcomes of certain actions would again start new causal series. Or to put it in other words, these chains of actions do display the systemic and causal segments of practices. Of course, what is lacking here is a kind of configuration that sets apart practices such as professions, arts, or games.

A second feature is the nesting relations between actions and practices. For example, holding office in the government denotes many other practices, such as giving a speech, or organizing majorities, or spinning

campaigns. Although it is not quite clear if the nesting relations of practices and actions, or practices and practices always are hierarchical, they are in most of the cases. This can be easily shown by reversing the posited hierarchy, or nesting relation. Giving a speech does not count as holding office, and neither does spinning a campaign. Clearly one has to look at the context of these respective actions in order to determine if any given action contributes to a practice or not.

The best way to approach practices conceptually, for Ricoeur, consists by means of the concept of constitutive rule. This term has been taken from game theory and has been imported into the theory of speech acts by Austin and Searle, and also helps to refine the theory of action. The central function of the constitutive rule in the context of actions is to give an action a meaning. The canonical example is the movement of a pawn on a chess board. The movements of the body parts of the player that lead to the movement of the piece of wood that occurs eight times on the board has no meaning at all. The function of the constitutive rule is to define these movements as a step in a chess game. ‘The rule, all by itself, gives the gesture its meaning’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.154). Ricoeur stresses the fact that constitutive rules are not moral rules. They simply rule over the meaning of particular gestures and movements, and merely determine what ‘counts as’ what. But they certainly lead the way to moral rules, and this is the reason we have to discuss this notion here. For example, there is a constitutive rule for what counts as ‘promising’, it defines which speech acts have this meaning, and which do not. But this rule, taken as such, has no moral signification, although it contains some sort of obligation. The moral rule, that one has to keep one’s promises, has a deontological status, i.e. it is linked to moral principles which also have to negotiated.

A final important feature of constitutive rules consist in the fact that

they underscore the interactive aspect of most practices. Due to the pragmatic (i.e. non-analytic) framework that Ricoeur deploys it is possible to integrate the intersubjective, and interlocutory aspect of human actions into the concept of practices. ‘Practices are based on actions in which an agent takes into account, as a matter of principle, the actions of others’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.155). This certainly is a welcomed extension of the analytical approach to the notion of action in which mostly an atomistic and highly individualistic view of action is conceptualized.

There is another aspect to practices which is made particularly clear in *After Virtue* by Alasdair MacIntyre. He ponders the same problems as Ricoeur, he is interested in the systematic relations between the constitution of a self and its identity, how a moral identity is acquired, and what role narrative plays in human existence. His arguments will be referred to in many ways in the remainder of this chapter, but what is of import here is that he adds the aspect of history to to the feature-list of practices that Ricoeur has outlined: ‘[P]ractices always have histories and at any given moment what a practice is depends on a mode of understanding it which has been transmitted often through many generations.’ (MacIntyre 2007, p.221). Again, this mode of understanding points inherently to the intersubjective and normative dimension of human acting. In this case, it is not so much about the consequences that arise from the very action itself. Rather, what a person is, to a large extent, depends on the historical trajectories of practices the individual is part of, and in this sense personal identity constitutes itself by the traditions that the individual is a bearer of. This also means that the standards of excellence, in any given practice, originate much further back than the solitary practitioner. Obviously, there is a conflict of temporalities at work in which the temporality of a tradition collides with the temporality of the individual.

This is precisely one of the sources for the opacities of the self about itself.

The expansion of the concept of action in terms of practices and even traditions is an integral part of the theory of narrative. The level of complexity the operation of configuration, as established by Ricoeur in the threefold concept of mimesis, is very similar to the degree of complexity that needs to be integrated into stories. There is a structural similarity to both. Also, practices have nesting relations with each other. This is a second similarity with narratives. In some cases and domains it is possible to determine these relations as hierarchical. This is possible in cases in which the global intention of a practice structures the succession of actions that are required to aspire to that intended goal. But in most cases, the nesting relations are in need of interpretation and evaluation. Hence, the agent which reflects on her actions and goals has to order the many practices and traditions she is part of. Moreover, practices and traditions as concepts are inherently intersubjective entities. An agent always has to take into account the consequences of her actions on others, and suffers the outcomes of other people's actions. This intersubjectivity is not necessarily ethically or morally relevant, but it opens the whole field of practices to ethical considerations. And this is what will be discussed next.

3.5 The Triade: Describe - Narrate - Prescribe

We already have seen that in order to tell a story about oneself it is necessary to select events, experiences, motivations, contexts, affects, and many more such ingredients. In Ricoeur's theory of narrative this process of selection, emplotment, plays a crucial role since the meaning of every single part of the narration arises from its position with respect to the others, which finally culminates in the meaning of the whole story.

The process of emplotment is inherently dialectical, because there are two conflicting principles of order, discordance and concordance. The one, concordance, covers the story-driving events, sometimes called the *fabula*, which contributes to the transition from the story's initial state to its conclusion. The other principle, discordance, is all about the ruptures, twists, and unexpected turns that the course of the story takes. The reason why Ricoeur chooses to address this conceptual tension as dialectical and not, for example, antagonistic or problematic is because he argues that it always is possible to integrate partial actions into one story, into one narrative. This claim is based on the argument that since we know what it means to complete an action, and narrative has a mimetic relation to actions, it always is possible to establish narrative closure. In this respect it does not matter if the principle of narrative composition is thought of as a top-down-concept or a bottom-up-concept: '...the practical field is not constituted from the ground up, starting from the simplest and moving to more elaborate constructions; rather it is formed in accordance with a twofold movement of ascending complexification starting from basic actions and from practices, and of descending specification starting from the vague and mobile horizon of ideals and projects in light of which a human life apprehends itself in its oneness' (Ricoeur 1994, p.158). The interplay of ascending complexification and descending specification will result in the oneness and unity of the human life, no matter how substantial the antagonistic or discordant portion of the lived experiences are.

The topos of unity is a recurrent subject in many theories of narrative, and especially within the hermeneuticist variety. But what exactly is this unity? Further inquiry is vital not only for a better understanding of the account of narrative identity as discussed here, but also to discuss Butler's criticism of the ideal of transparency and coherence in moral

accounting later on. Hence we will analyse the concept of narrative unity in three steps. First, we will reconstruct the concept as it is modelled in Ricoeur's philosophy, with eventual side glances at other authors who also deploy this concept, especially Alasdair MacIntyre. Especially interesting is how this unity is defined and practically achieved, but also what has to be left out of the real course of events for the sake of unity. Secondly, we will retrace how the concept of narrative unity figures as the central bridge from the narrative constitution of personal identity to a teleological notion of ethics and morality. Only by then, thirdly, it will be possible to look at the arguments that link narrative unity, ethics, and responsibility which is a prerequisite in order to compare the two different concepts of responsibility of Ricoeur's and Butler's.

So which status has narrative unity in Ricoeur's theory of narrative, and how does it contribute to the notion of personal identity? It turns out that first we have to ask what exactly gets unified? On the level of the any story told to somebody else, of course there is the unity of the story inasmuch it has a beginning, a middle section, and an end. It is one story, and unity here means oneness. This is a structural claim that might hold true over the whole range of types of stories, such as fictional, historiographic, and autobiographical stories. But what Ricoeur thinks of when he speaks of unity, is not this structural feature of the unity of the narrative, but rather the narrative unity of a life. But again, what is in need of unification, and why does unity matter that much? We already have seen that the events and experiences recounted in a person-related narrative often are part of wider practices, i.e. a compositum of actions and behaviours. This was the first widening of the concept of action that was necessary in terms of narrative. A third level is the life plan. With this concept Ricoeur aims to integrate an even wider area of practices, an area that he claims to be nothing but the 'global project of an existence'.

Life plans are vast practical units, such as the professional life, the family life, leisure time, or, as Charles Taylor would certainly add, the spiritual life. The shape of a life plan is malleable, it is mobile and open to change at any time.

To establish a life plan, or to change a life plan according to respective experiences, might they be linked to success or failure, to personal fulfilment or stark alienation of oneself, means to evaluate these plans according to certain ideals. This evaluation is the important point here. Just as we have seen in the case of actions and practices, it is the constitutive rule that confers meaning to them. And in parallel to this, it is the more or less distant ideals that confer meaning to any given life plan. The function of the constitutive rule on the level of actions and practices is the same as that of ideals on the level of life plans. But the aggregation of types of actions on the practical field does not stop here. The next step would be to assume that there is a life plan in singular. This life plan could take the shape of of a mere concatenation of the various life plans pursued by the individual. But this is not what MacIntyre has in mind with that concept, and neither does Ricoeur. The life plan of a whole life has to be oriented not towards changing ideals, but ultimately towards the ‘good’ life.

The narrative unity of a life as advocated in *After Virtue* by MacIntyre and adopted by Ricoeur, has to be fleshed out in more detail here, especially because it assumes a central role as a bridging concept as it links narrative practices and ethics. For MacIntyre, too, the unity of a life consists in the unity of a narrative embodied in a single life. The central practical question of teleological ethics, namely ‘What is the good for me?’ is ‘...to ask how I best might live out that unity and bring it to completion.’ (MacIntyre 2007, p.218). We have to look very closely at the concept of *the* good, which is the ultimate good, the *telos* of all

actions. But we have not established the concept of narrative unity fully yet. An essential feature of the narrative unity is that in MacIntyre, it is conceptualized as a quest for the good. This is a procedural fashioning of this concept, which is helpful to confront several objections that have been brought forward against it. For instance, some would demur that modernity itself, and certainly post-modernity has partitioned each human life in a variety of segments, each with their own norms, behaviours, and practices. Exemplarily, one could name Erving Goffman, who holds this view in *The Presentation of Self in Everyday Life*, but also Sartre or Dahrendorf. By resorting to the metaphor of a quest it is possible for MacIntyre make a strong point against the argument of scattered roles resulting in a scattered life: ‘Quests sometimes fail, are frustrated, abandoned or dissipated into distraction; and human lives may in all these ways also fail. But the only criteria for success or failure in a human life as a whole are the criteria of success and failure in a narrated or to-be-narrated quest.’ (MacIntyre 2007, p.219). The prospect of failure should be embraced, according to MacIntyre. Only by coping with harms, dangers, temptations and alike, it becomes possible to understand finally the goal of the quest. Life as a quest always is an education of the one engaged in it about the ends and goals of the whole quest. Moreover, MacIntyre reverses the perspective on what comes first, acting or narrating. He considers all human transactions to be enacted narratives, and except of the case of fiction ‘...stories are lived before they are told’ (ibid., p.212). We will return to MacIntyre once more when we will discuss the (co-)authorship of narratives and the ethical valence of narrative itself. Now, we will return to Ricoeur.

Ricoeur adopts the notion of the narrative unity of a lived life because it serves him to identify the agent of a narratively recounted action, or the agent in a set of practices, and the agent pursuing life plans pre-

cisely with the subject of ethics. ‘The idea of the narrative unity of a life therefore serves to assure us that the subject of ethics is none other than the one to whom the narrative assigns a narrative identity’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.158). Again, narrative imitates actions, here understood in a very broad way including practices and life plans. Because of pre-configuration or mimesis₁, we know that there has to be somebody acting. Because we are able to ascribe motives and intentions to the agent, and to look for the setting and contexts in which the action takes place, we can correlate the meaning of an action with the evaluation of (constitutive) rules on the part of the agent. And because meaning here is conceptualized from the perspective of hermeneutics, we know that actions are enacted narratives, since we need narratives in order to plan and enact actions. Agent, narrator, and the subject of ethics all fall into one entity, or are identified as the same entity. That said, the theoretical imperative of narrative unity becomes apparent. If the individual does not seek narrative unity, or does not engage on the quest for it, the whole concept of narrative identity would fall apart. The operation of identification would point to ever different identities, maybe linked to certain social roles, or periods of existence, or changing sets of ethical norms. This would render the whole theory of narrative identity completely sterile when it comes to its core tenets, namely that it is capable of establishing personal identity and account for moral accounting. The claim of the narrative unity will be the central starting point for discussing Butler’s criticism and Ricoeur’s theory of narrative identity. As I have reconstructed it thus far, it seems like the aspects of ethical violence and genealogical opacity about oneself are merely tasks or possibly obstacles in the quest of a lived life. They have to be overcome, and no matter how many there are, or which effects they have on the questing person, she has to hold on to the idea of unity.

What remains to be reconstructed now is the question exactly how

the unity of life narratives is theoretically associated with the ethics in *Oneself as Another*. Besides the great import of the narrative unity of a life, we already have hinted at two more theoretical pillars of this ethical account above. The one is the postulate that ‘narrative’ assumes the role of an important mediator or as the middle ground between description and prescription. Secondly, the core ethical intention of human beings as persons and narrative characters is that we are aiming at the good life with and for others, in just institutions (Ricoeur 1994, p.172). This intention is tripartite and we will have to look at each part separately, we will have to understand what aiming at a good life means, how it is feeds into a relational understanding of ethics, and lastly, what exactly is meant by just institutions.

For Ricoeur, narrative theory finds one of its major justifications in the mediating and intermediary position between description and ethical evaluation. He calls it the triad of describe, narrate, prescribe. Each moment of the triad, for him, implies a specific relation between the constitution of action and constitution of the self. We have learned that narrative mimics actions, it embodies structural similarities between the narrated plot and the action recounted. The character in the story can be attached to the narrator who recounts her actions. In this sense the story has to contain sufficient information that it is possible to answer both questions ‘What has happened?’ and ‘Who did it?’. The operation of ascription allows for the identification of motives and goals that prompted the action, or series of actions, as in practices or MacIntyrean settings. All of these questions cover the descriptive aspects of the action. But in order to interpret and understand the action recounted in a narration, the descriptive aspects are not enough, at least for Ricoeur, whose own hermeneuticist stance often is highlighted against the background of the analytical fashion to theorize actions, agents, and agency. Narrative

theory, however, anticipates and supports ethical questioning in various ways. So, how exactly does it do this?

One feature that positions narrative at the crossroads between the theory of action and moral theory and that makes the transition between them seemingly natural is that it enables the narrator as well as the audience to test certain ethical precepts. ‘Telling a story [...] is deploying an imaginary space for thought experiments in which moral judgment operates in a hypothetical mode.’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.170). That does not imply, as it seems, that all stories necessarily are fictitious. Rather, this statement refers to the interlocutory situation in which the speech act takes place between at least two individuals. Neither does it imply that moral judgment might not have detrimental effects, similarly to what Butler addresses with the notion of ethical violence. If it is plausible that events and experiences gain their meaning in a narrative from their relations with each other in a story, then the evaluation of the actions and motives in this story will be conducted not only by the narrator herself, but also by the audience. This is to say that since the intelligibility of any given action depends not only on the shared conventions and pre-configurations in the community of speakers and listeners, a narrative account will be fashioned towards the expectations of intelligibility. The operation of emplotment therefore will instantiate a hypothesis about the conditions and traditions of intelligibility. Or in other words: The narrator will tell her story in a way that she hopes will make her actions intelligible.

A second underpinning of the triad-claim is that, since narrative requires to widen the notion of action and the practical field in terms of practices and settings, and since telling a story it is an interlocutory and relational practice, it is not solely about the agent. It is just as much about the individuals that get acted upon. Something is done to

someone, and what happens on the receiving or suffering part is just as important than what the agent did and why. So, an essential part of the information conveyed by a narrative account is about who had to endure or suffer what. Ricoeur states that at this point ‘...the theory of action is extended from acting to suffering beings. This addition is so essential that it governs a large part of the reflections on power as it is exerted by someone on someone, as well as the reflections on violence as the destruction by someone else of a subject’s capacity to act’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.157). The aspect of power will be discussed below, since it is one of the essential topics of Butler’s. But what is relevant here is that the widening of the practical field in terms of relationality poses immediately the ethical question of who is affected by what. Especially these latter aspects establish the mediating function between description and prescription that only narrative is able to fulfil. These features of actions, such as the impact they have on others, the differential of acting and suffering, and the conventions of intelligibility could not get developed thematically without recourse to narrative, respectively the expanded concept of action that resulted from it.

Ricoeur obviously is not content to stop here. He provides a comprehensive ethical framework that can be condensed in the claim that persons aim at the good life, with and for others, in just institutions. The order of these three aspects does matter here, as it denotes the hierarchy that Ricoeur establishes. Quite similar to Adorno, he traces the common etymology of *ethos* and *mores*, and reserves the former for the practical aiming at an accomplished life in the sense of teleological ethics. To morality, instead, he assigns the deontic emphasis on autonomy, duty, and justice, clearly in a Kantian line of tradition. Morality aims at norms that are at the same time a claim to universality and an effect of constraint. The division of heritages, which shows itself in the opposition

of aim and norm, or Aristotle and Kant, constitutes a large part of the second half of studies in *Oneself as Another*. But in the context of this thesis, this opposition is not topical. The close reconstruction of Ricoeur's ethics serves the single purpose of preparing a discussion of his advanced account of narrative identity and normative frameworks with the one of Butler's.

The hierarchy consists in a sequence of assumptions, namely that (1) ethics actually does have the primacy over morality, (2) that there is the necessity for the ethical aim to pass through the 'sieve of the norm', and (3) that the legitimacy of recourse by the norm to the aim whenever the norm leads to impasses in practice. It is Ricoeur's position that morality may be a limited, although legitimate and indispensable actualization of the ethical aim, and in this sense ethics always accompanies morality. The integration of both lines of traditions, respectively the ethical aim and the moral obligation begins on the level of predicates. Applied to actions, this means that some actions are regarded as good, whereas others are predicated morally obligatory. On the level of self-designation, these predicates get transposed into self-esteem, which corresponds to the ethical aim, and self-respect with regard to the deontological moment. Accordingly, the hierarchy on the level of self-designation is tripartite as well, and Ricoeur states '...(1) that self-esteem is more fundamental than self-respect, (2) that self-respect is the aspect under which self-esteem appears in the domain of norms, and (3) that the aporias of duty create situations in which self-esteem appears not only as the source but as the recourse for respect, when no sure norm offers a guide for the exercise *hic et nunc* of respect. In this way, self-esteem and self-respect together will represent the most advanced stages of the growth of selfhood, which is at the same time its unfolding.' (Ricoeur 1994, p.171).

In order to comprehend these hierarchies and how exactly they may

or may not figure as the most advanced stages of the growth of selfhood, as Ricoeur, hardly modest, proclaims, we have to look closely at the concepts he introduces. So, what exactly is self-esteem, and how is it part of the plane of the ethical aim? It draws ‘...its initial meaning from the reflexive movement through which the evaluation of certain actions judged to be good are carried back to the author of these actions, this meaning remains abstract as long as it lacks the dialogic structure which is introduced by the reference to others. This dialogic structure, in its turn, remains incomplete outside of the reference to just’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.172). Self-esteem hence is the result of an interpretative engagement with one’s own actions and with orientation towards the good. The crucial step is taken when the agent of the interpreted action is identified with the interpreter. The ongoing assessment and interpretation of one’s own actions needs to be conducted with reference to a normative framework, and that is the good life. The guiding question is to what extent, if at all, the intentions, the actual acting, and the consequences for oneself and others are contributing to the realisation of the good itself. The more there is an alignment of these action-related aspects with the ethical aim of the good life, the stronger is the sense of self-esteem.

There is another meaning to the claim that self-esteem has a reference to others. Whereas the actual interpretation demands that one distances oneself from oneself and by doing so opens the space for critical assessment and reflection, the concept of acting and engaging in practices is itself established socially. To the extent that practices are cooperative entities whose constitutive rules are established socially, and self-esteem stems from the successful alignment towards the ethical aim, which also is established socially, there hardly is room for a solipsistic understanding of self-esteem. The orientation towards the good life maybe is a universal feature of human beings, at least in the eyes of Ricoeur and other teleo-

logical thinkers, but the content of the good life itself is for each of us nebulous. The very ideals and dreams of achievements with regard to which a life is held to be fulfilled or not vary not only from person to person, but from time to time within a single life. So even if self-interpretation becomes eventually self-esteem, it ‘...follows the fate of interpretation, [...] it provokes controversy, dispute, rivalry — in short, the conflict of interpretations — in the exercise of practical judgment’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.172). Therefore, self-esteem requires permanent self-interpretation, and hence is permanently dialogic in structure. Later on, we will see the requirements for self-esteem, and the detrimental consequences of violence on self-esteem in the context of Butler. But for now, we will turn to the second part of the normative formula, to the ‘with and for others’.

The reason for underscoring the non-solipsistic and dialogic character of self-esteem is to be found in the danger that self-interpretation is conducted in a way that ‘turns in upon itself’, or closes up, or excludes everything that is not within the narrow boundaries of the self, or her perspective. This emphasis on the essential sociality of self-esteem has been necessary because the ethical intention of aiming for the good life with and for others in just institutions constitutes a coherent practice of living. The social or intersubjective dimension of the ‘...with others...’ points to the dialectic of capacity and realization. The individual might incorporate both, but in order to achieve full realization, the integration of others and their participation in action is inevitable. Moreover, the reflexivity from which self-esteem stems remains abstract without the other, since it does not mark the difference between me and you. Accordingly, Ricoeur aligns the concept of solicitude to self-esteem on the level of the good life: ‘my thesis is that solicitude is not something added on to self-esteem from outside but that it unfolds the dialogic dimension

of self-esteem, which up to now has been passed over in silence' (Ricoeur 1994, p.180).

Solicitude, therefore, ensures that the ethical aim is not understood as an aim that can be achieved solitarily, or even solipsistically. It adds the dimension of the value of the other, whereby each person is *irreplaceable* in our affection and our esteem. This notion of solicitude is modelled after the concept of friendship. To self-esteem, which is the reflexive moment of the wish for a 'good life', solicitude adds the dimension of lack. It is friends that we need, and these friends are, just as one perceives oneself as well, others among others. It is precisely here where Atkins finds the theoretical basis for the integration of the first, second, and third person perspective. When a person addresses another person with 'you', that person understands 'I' for herself, and reversely, when the person is addressed in the second person, she feels that she is implicated in the first person.

It would be flawed to think of the friend merely as a role that another person assumes in my life. Certainly, it is possible to think of the interlocutors in a discourse as speaker and listener, or as sender and receiver. These are roles that are, in principle, reversible. Friendship, instead, adds the feature of nonsubstitutibility to the reciprocal relationship with others. Only under this assumption, namely that the other cannot be replaced by just another individual that happens to be functionally equivalent to the former, the other is taken into account as a person in the fullest sense. Certainly, nonsubstitutibility is assumed in discourse and interlocution as well. During interlocution itself, taken as the practice of language, the agent and the patient are caught up in relationships of exchange. But again, this is not a functional account of friendship, because in these relationships of exchange, the reversibility

of roles and the nonsubstitutability are joined together. The other is my friend precisely because she is in my affection and my esteem.

Above the ideas of reversibility and nonsubstitutability, Ricoeur places the concept of similitude. It supposedly is the result of the exchange between esteem that one holds for oneself, and the solicitude for the unique other: 'This exchange authorizes us to say that I cannot myself have self-esteem unless I esteem others as myself. "As myself" means that you too are capable of starting something in the world, of acting for a reason, of hierarchizing your priorities, of evaluation the ends of your actions, and, having done this, of holding yourself in esteem as I hold myself in esteem.' (Ricoeur 1994, p.193). Again, this would not be possible if the ethical aim could be achieved solitarily. On the contrary, it is the recognition of one's similitude with the other, and the insight that without the other the transition from capacity to realization of the ethical aim is practically impossible. It is important to emphasize the practical perspective, because, for example, ideally it might be regarded as possible. The feelings towards oneself and towards the other belong to what Ricoeur calls the 'phenomenology of reciprocity'. And it is here where the title of *Oneself as Another* achieves its full meaning: 'Becoming in this way fundamentally equivalent are the esteem of the *other as a oneself* and the esteem of *oneself as an other*' (ibid., p.193). This clearly resonates with Butler's remarks on substitutability and the import of the mutual acknowledgement of being enmeshed with opacities. But before we can start this discussion, we have to summarise the third part of the ethical intention, i.e. living in '...just institutions'.

The third part of the ethical intention continues to expand the perspectives of self-esteem and solicitude. Whereas self-esteem is associated with the first person perspective, and solicitude with the second person perspective, justice transcends both and is meant to be more than what

happens in face-to-face encounters. This third expansion of the ethical intention is necessary due to two presuppositions in Ricoeur's ethics so far. The first is that living well amounts to more than interpersonal relations. It extends to the life of institutions. But this expansion not about institutions per se, but about *just* institutions. Therefore one can assume that justice adds ethical features to the ethical intention that exceeds the ethical aim, self-esteem and solicitude. Essentially, it adds the requirement of equality, a requirement that is not already present in the former two. We will look at what institutions are, and how exactly justice is meant to ensure equality. Only after that we will be able to apply these results to the question if this third dimension of the ethical intention reorganizes the determination of the self, or person. One could expect that it is about the integration of the third-person perspective, but the details are more important than the structural symmetry of the ethical intention.

So what is an institution, and what is the difference between just institutions and those who are not? '[W]e are to understand here the structure of *living together* as this belongs to a historical community — people, nation, region, and so forth — a structure irreducible to interpersonal relations and yet bound up with these in a remarkable sense which the notion of distribution will permit us later to clarify. What fundamentally characterizes the idea of institution is the bond of common mores and not that of constraining rules' (Ricoeur 1994, p.194). This is a remarkably wide definition of institutions, it covers every way and style of living together, and also every level of organization. As this domain of institutions basically contains every organization of persons with more than two members, the import of issues of justice is just as wide. Justice is topical wherever there are common *mores*.

The primacy of living together over constraining rule is important for

Ricoeur's ethics. Following Hannah Arendt, he stresses the emphasis of *power in common* over constraints related to the judicial system and the political systems. As he has gone through the individual and interpersonal plane, there are specific differences on the societal plane. On the one hand, there is the aspect of the third other. In face-to-face interaction, it is ethically indicated to see oneself as the other, and *vice versa*. But on the societal plane, the third other is not present, but she is part of the plurality of society. In this sense, the '...plurality includes third parties who will never be faces' (Ricoeur 1994, p.195). Plurality also constitutes the ability to act in concert, and this is one way to define power, or at least, a certain style of power. In a more Hegelian view, it would be possible to begin with the ethical implications of power already on the intersubjective plane, since he discusses the dialogic and dyadic relations between master and slave. But here, the common mores get translated into wanting to live and acting together. And the question of how this co-habitation and co-operation can succeed without dominating the third other gets answered with the concept of justice. Justice can be understood in both Rawlsian versions of reparative justice or distributive justice, what matters to Ricoeur most is that both have the same ethical core, and that is equality. And the concept of equality is to life in institutions what solicitude is to interpersonal relations, and what self-esteem is with regard to one's relation with oneself.

Within philosophical discourses, there is a long tradition of dispute over which moral framework is to be preferred, teleological accounts in the tradition of Aristotle, or deontological accounts in the Kantian tradition. This dispute does not inform the present study since it does not speak directly to the usefulness of a narrative approach to personhood and its implications for ethical reasoning; neither is it relevant to clarify the concepts of ethical violence or genealogical opacities. It might suffice

to point out that while many of those engaged in this dispute feel compelled to take either side, or to solve the conflict by integrating the one as a supplement for the other. At the core of this conflict is the question if or how the morality of obligation, which stems from the categorical imperative, and the orientation towards the ultimate good can be brought into coherence. Ricoeur, of course, clearly stands in the teleological camp, but by means of the tripartite ethical aim or intention he vividly aims to integrate the Kantian obligation to follow the imperative into his ethical account. The style of morality of obligation can be characterized by ‘...the progressive strategy of placing at a distance, of purifying, of excluding, at the end of which the will that is good without qualification will equal the self-legislating will, in accordance with the supreme principle of autonomy.’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.207). According to the Kantian deduction of practical reason from the *Faktum der Vernunft*, self-esteem and the aim of the good life do not meet the requirements of universality of pure reason. Also, the ethical aim, as it is constituted partially as wanting to live with others, and to share a common ethos, is regarded as impure since it could be derived from *mores*, instead of autonomy, here understood as the ability of self-legislation and a free will. Only under the condition that autonomy substitutes the obedience to another, obedience has lost its character of submission and dependence. Or as Ricoeur summarizes it, ‘true obedience ... is autonomy’ (ibid., p.210). Ricoeur is not content with the Kantian formalism that regards the practical field of interpersonal interaction as matter, or plurality. He maintains the argument that the foundations of deontology lie in the desire to live well with other in just institutions, and has to take the back seat behind the ethical aim, which is teleological.

3.6 The Ethical Aim

For the discussions to come about the validity of Butler's claims, such as the opacity of the self for itself, and her proposal for new concept of responsibility based on the mutual acknowledgement of opacity, it will be beneficial to look at which concept of responsibility Ricoeur deploys in his ethical account of narrative identity, and if there is a theoretical opening in which the failure to give a narrative account of oneself can be discussed. Let us begin with the concept of responsibility. Ricoeur approaches the topical field of responsibility by a discussion of the two poles of identity, character and self-constancy. The phenomenon of character denotes the features and traits by which the person can be identified and re-identified. The second pole was the aspect of self-constancy. This is an ethical notion in a narrower sense because it denotes the demand that a person conducts herself in a way that other are able to count on this person. Because someone can count on me, I am accountable for my actions. This is where responsibility as a concept enters this theory: 'The term "responsibility" unites both meanings: "counting on" and "being accountable for"'. It unites them, adding to them the idea of a response to the question "Where are you?" asked by another who needs me. This response is the following: Here I am! a response that is a statement of self-constancy' (Ricoeur 1994, p.165).

This concept of responsibility clearly originates in the speech-pragmatist and interlocutory focus that Ricoeur establishes in his theory. And as a matter of fact, this connects quite well with what Butler has named the 'scenes of address'. With being asked to give an account of oneself, especially in situations when harm has been done, and forgiveness and compensation are at stake, it is expected to being able to give this account *ad hoc*. Ricoeur even points to the etymological root of responsibility in terms of being able to give a certain response. In his framework, the

crucial aspect of giving the response ‘Here I am’ is to reassure and instantiate the expectations of the other about the self-constancy of the person addressed. The other always can count on the fact that the character that has acted in a harmful way is self-constant in the sense that she can be addressed and asked about her motives. It is in this sense that ‘counting on’ and ‘being accountable for’ coincide.

But here the two accounts part their ways. Butler’s definition of responsibility is that ‘...to take responsibility for oneself is to avow the limits of any self-understanding, and to establish these limits not only as a condition for the subject but as the predicament of the human community.’ (Butler 2005, p.83). This definition seems to be at odds with the one provided by Ricoeur. He does not problematize the issue of the failure of ethical accounting, because he seems to equate it with the failure to maintain self-constancy. Or does he? As stated above, he adopts the Aristotelian phrase that narrative mimics action, but he extends the concept of action in terms of practices, settings and traditions. And as it surfaced in the context of narrative pre-configuration, his claim is that humans are in need of, but actually always do have a preliminary understanding of what an action is, and what is needed to understand the motives of an agent, its meanings, and the ethical implications that arise from that course of action. It seems that Butler would object on the level of *mimesis*₁. She would question that precisely in the situation of ethical address, it is quite uncertain what the ‘I’ in ‘Here I am’ actually denote. And on a more basic level, she would object that this pre-configurative knowledge is sufficiently rich enough to answer the ethical address. As elaborated above, one of the sources for opacity is the conflict of temporalities, especially the conflict between the temporality of the subject in opposition to the temporality of the norm. Due to the latter, it often is impossible to know exactly how has authored the norm in question.

Interestingly, here surfaces a weakness of Ricoeur's account. He mainly is concerned with the question of how a community is constituted, and that there exist common ethics that are essential to this process of community-constitution. He spends plenty of thought in order to demonstrate that narrative really assumes a mediating role between the domain of descriptions and those of prescriptions and ethical evaluation. Additionally, authorship is only of interest to him to the extent that it can be identified with the agency of a character in a story narrated. He even incorporates the theoretical framework of speech-acts because he wants to establish the practice of narrating in parallel to the actions that are told. But what he omits to do is to widen the circle of possible authors to those who have authored certain norms. Because of that, he almost is incapable to answer to Butler's criticism of self-transparency. He just cannot see the source for opacity here.

But he seems to agree with Butler that the question 'Who am I?' can be problematic, and severely so. When he discusses various limiting cases of the maintenance of selfhood in literary fiction, he does seem to give expression to certain intuitions that might point in a very similar direction than Butler's. He admits that the question 'Who am I?' can be even 'tormenting' (Ricoeur 1994, p.168). How does he arrive at this judgment? He follows the question how the problematic character of the *ipse* can be maintained on the narrative level. We know that his concept of character, defined as the sum of acquired dispositions and sedimentations, is fashioned in that way precisely to answer that problematic nature of ipse-identity. He can think of a person that is absolutely impossible to recognize '...by his or her lasting manner of thinking, feeling, acting, and so on...' (ibid., p.167). But he does not really believe that this can happen in the real world, since he continues that this is '...not demonstrable in practice, but it is at least thinkable in principle'. So, in

this thought-experiment, he continues, what is practicable ‘...lies perhaps in acknowledging that all the attempts at identification, which form the substance of those narratives of interpretive value [...] are doomed to failure.’ (Ricoeur 1994, p.167). It is unfortunate that he resorts to this stark contrast of demonstrability in practice. He sketches the picture of an all-or-nothing-identification, that is incapable to answer to Butler. Still, he underlines that he is not after ownership of selfhood. rather, he suggests that there is a ‘...dialectic of ownership and of dispossession, of care and of carefreeness, of self-affirmation and of self-effacement. Thus the imagined nothingness of the self becomes the existential “crisis” of the self.’ (ibid., p.168). It is unfortunate that he merely hints at these possibilities, instead of recognizing the crises of the self not only in limiting cases in literary fiction, but also as a predicament of the human community, as Butler coins it.

In summary, Atkins’ assessment might be true, Ricoeur indeed does develop a very sophisticated account of narrative identity. He does so by advancing the conceptual framework of Aristotle, and enriches it by the aspect of speech-acts, in itself merely a tool with which he expands the concept of action itself. He maintains Aristotle’s claim that mythos/narrative is in a mimetic relation with action. This allows him to establish a theory of narrative that is more extensive than most other accounts to be found in philosophical discourse. Of course, he sticks to the quite simple definition of narrative by stating that to tell a story means to narrate who did what when and why. But in addition to that, he truly augments narrative philosophy by his inquiries into the constitution of meaning in stories, and the intricacies of emplotment. Events and experiences recounted in stories achieve their meaning by their constellation with each other, what is important is the choice of events themselves, but also their overall array. Central to this part of his theory is that it is

possible to identify the character of a story with both the narrator and the person who actually has figured as the agent in the story told.

Central to the transition from the operation of emplotment to the ethical implications of this theory has been the concept of narrative unity. It is the vehicle that allows said identification, and for him, that leads to an ethical account that is mainly teleological in nature. It will be discussed later on that there are very few arguments that make the transition from a narrative account of personal identity to this teleological account appear as necessary or, at least, mandatory. But it reveals that it is his conviction that the personal, the intersubjective and the societal level have to be incorporated into this account. That, at least, resonates with Butler's insistence on critique. Unfortunately, it is not well suited to improve the clarity of Butler's claims substantially, which was the reason to turn to his work in the first place. There are various points of intersection between the two, but we will have to look at even more advanced accounts of narrative and how they constitute personal identity, and on which levels exactly norms may or may not make narrative accounting impossible. Only after that we will be able to approach an informed opinion on the core concept of Butler's, and that is ethical violence.

4 From Failure to Responsibility

In reconstructing Butler in chapter 1 it became apparent that her critique of narrative accounting operates with a vague concept of narrative. She mainly opposes narrative accounting, which she conceptualizes as being addressed by another human in order to provide a narrative account of oneself, one's motives, and explanations for a, in many cases harmful, course of actions. Instead of delving into the plethora of philosophical accounts of narrative identity and narrative accounting, she opted to concentrate her analysis mainly on the many disorientations and opacities that hinder the individual or subject to give an exhaustive narrative account of oneself. We remember, she differentiates five such disorientations, namely the non-narrativizable exposure to others that establishes the individuals singularity, the primary relations with others, that inherently are irrecoverable, a history of partial opacity to oneself, also the norms that facilitate the actual telling about oneself, but which are not authored by the narrator herself, and lastly, the structure of address, which denotes the permanent possibility to be asked to give an account. All five of these disorientations hinder to give a narrative account of oneself that fulfils the expectations of the interlocutor and therefore paves the way for compensation and, eventually, forgiveness.

In the light of these disorientations and opacities, Butler questions the prevalent concepts of personal identity. Many of those, she supposes, impose the ideal of a transparent 'I' onto everyone who has to answer

the request for giving an account of oneself. Again, she does not oppose narrativity as such. She admits that it is impossible to live a radically non-narratable life in a world that is so filled with stories. What she does oppose, then, is the presupposition that it is possible, at least in principle, to establish and maintain a transparent and stable identity that can cope with said expectations.

Instead, she demands the apprehension of the precarity of others, which means to recognize that the others also are, just as anybody else, exposed to violence and in this sense socially dispensable. Once this shared predicament of any and all living beings, which is the principle of equal vulnerability, has been established as the foundation for any philosophical account of ethics, it is mandatory to question conceptions of responsibility that rely on transparency and stability of personal identity. At this point, she argues in favour of the acknowledgement of the principle of equal vulnerability and a concept of responsibility that incorporates these insights.

She then continues to apply these insights to the question of what to do. Here, the concept of ethical violence, which she adopted from Adorno, gets utilized as a lens of critique. There are two versions of ethical violence in Adorno. The first defines ethical violence as the violence that is deployed in order to defend any system of norms, or 'collective ideas', whose justifications have vanished. This speaks to the temporality and authorship of norms. They need to be justified in a way that demand obedience from the agents without force, or, as Habermas has put it, only the unforceful force of the better argument is acceptable. The second definition framed the concept in terms of the metaphysical confrontation of universal interests and particular interests. If it is true that norms entail these varieties of violence, then it is imperative to inquire the possibilities how not to continue to reproduce these forms of violence. Hence, the

core of Butlers ethics of vulnerability consists not only in the demand to liquidify a person's identity, but also to engage with social theory and critique in order to cope with the disorientations and opacities. Only in this way it is possible to acknowledge the universal precarity of living beings, and to weaken the violent implications of a coherent and stable self. Her ethics is all about the disruption of normative trajectories of violence, and of the violence exerted by norms themselves.

These definitions of ethical violence as devised by Adorno leave much room for interpretation. But the crux of Butler's ethics of vulnerability is the claim that there are various sources of disorientation and opacity, which intrinsically are linked to narrative practices. The corporeal exposure to others that constitutes the individual's singularity is what is in conflict with the norms that facilitate narration and moral accounting. And given that narrative is regarded as a proper framework to organize one's experiences, as both Ricoeur and Schechtman would claim, there is a problem with the irretrievable experiences made in the early and formative times before the 'person' becomes consciousness. And exactly these claims, which directly are aimed at core tenets of narrative accounts of personal identity and moral reasoning, gave reason to the reconstruction of Ricoeur's comprehensive account of narrative and the constitution of identity.

And in fact, Ricoeur's work on narrative identity allows to reformulate the arguments of Butler in an advanced way. This is possible due to two features of his account. First, he develops his narrative account of identity and ethics strictly around the theory of action and practices. Narrative is in a mimetic relation with actions and practices, and because of that it is appropriate to recount actions and experiences in a narrative framework. Also, he refers to the speech act theory. This interlocutory dimension is missing in many competing accounts of narrative and identity, especially

in those who are in favour of what sometimes is called ‘minimal’ concepts of narrative. As shown above, Schechtman, for example, is content to claim that narrative is mainly a tool for the (re-)organization of experiences. As such, she is able to neglect the interlocutory dimension of telling a story to others in a specific situation. The speech-pragmatist contextualization of narration and narrative is especially suited to connect with Butler’s claim that the unknown authorship of the norms that facilitate the narration of an account of the self is one source of disorientation. So in principle, we could try to reformulate Butler’s claim in the language of speech-acts. And this would be an improvement in itself, since Butler omits to provide a more detailed account of how exactly the lack of knowledge about who authored a given narrative norm (which, in this context, is a norm that governs narrative accounting) actually stands in the way of knowing oneself.

According to the theory of speech acts, there are more channels of communication than one would expect. When we engage in a speech act, we do not only communicate some information. We also choose from a variety of possible forms of speech acts, and we also address the consequences in that speech act. Certainly, this four-level model of communication can be used to demonstrate that there are many expectations on the side of the recipient or listener when interlocution takes place. But in order to trace Butler’s claim about ethical violence in Ricoeur, we have to look into his arguments about norms, rules, and how ethics should cope with violent behaviour. After that we may return to the practice of telling stories, viewed as a speech act.

One problem with Ricoeur’s account consists what tasks he actually wants to achieve with certain concepts. Narrative, as we have discussed above, for him has to cope with the different temporalities of stories and persons. Also, the operation of configuration of emplotment is able to ne-

gotiate the two philosophical definitions of identity, namely *ipse*-identity and *idem*-identity. It achieves this goal precisely because via emplotment it is possible to conciliate the necessity of plot, i.e. the events that drive the story from its beginning to its end, with the many ruptures, or contingencies, that are part of the story, and in many cases, the most interesting part of the story. Emplotment establishes the unity and coherence of the story recounted, and this unity can be transferred to the level of a whole life. It is here where Ricoeur and Butler contradict each other directly. Whereas Ricoeur adopts the arguments by MacIntyre and claims that the narrative unity of a life is the ultimate requirement for a fulfilled life. Conversely, a life that cannot be brought into a unified condition never can be regarded as persistently oriented towards the good. Butler, instead, allocates here the most fundamental condition of human beings, namely the opacities and disorientations make it impossible to acquire unity for one's own life. Or in terms of the principle of the transparent 'I': Ricoeur knows that transparency is not always achievable when it comes to the twists and turns of a lived life. But he immediately has the proper remedy at hand, and that is the hermeneuticist conviction that more knowledge always is possible, if only would be more self-reflexive and would engage in even more interpretation. This, at least in the context of ethical violence, is a hermeneuticist fallacy.

In this regard, there is a remarkable gap in Ricoeur's philosophy. He assigns certain tasks to narrative, and he also provides a quite complex definition of what a narrative is, how it gets configured, and which role it plays with regard to ethics. Narrative unity of a life is the ethical aim translated into the sphere of interlocution. But outside of that, he is quite unaware of the many norms and rules that govern these practices. And it is precisely the degree of scepticism about the violent implications of norms in general that Butler puts to work in her philosophy, and that Ri-

coeur lacks completely. Obviously, he pursued two interests in *Oneself as Another*. Firstly, he wanted to demonstrate that the conceptualizations of personhood found in the works of analytical philosophers is deeply flawed and misguided when it comes to the concept of character, and when it comes to the ethical dimension of existence. This is what the first half of that book is all about. In the second half, he tries to defend his version of the ethical intention that all humans aim to live well, with and for others, in just institutions. As it has been shown in the previous chapter, the order of these concepts is what matters besides the material content of this ethics. The order establishes and confirms the insight that teleological ethics is superior to deontological varieties, that the content of what is good is superior to the Kantian formalism, and that in conclusion the ethical aim is more capable on all three planes, the individual, the intersubjective, and the societal. But again, these are two interests that determine the argumentative strategy of the whole book. And arguably he delivers a plausible account in that regard. But what he omits to do is to question some of the presuppositions that these two interests entail. And one of these presupposition is that norms are needed because of the violence in interpersonal or group settings. But the idea that norms themselves could be regarded as violent, and that violence often is used to keep an outdated (i.e. lacking rationalization) set of norms in place. In this sense, one might remember the argument of Williams' who claims with regard to identity that since stories can be about virtually everything, and one needs to pick the subset about identities of the narrators, one has to know what a person is before one engages with narrative. Ricoeur has failed to refute this argument. He seemingly had certain concepts at hand, and he used narrative to corroborate these claims.

A second weakness of Ricoeur's account is the dialectical heuristic that

he imposes on the antagonistic aspects of story-telling. He is right when he inquires into the two, often contradictory logics that unfold in stories. The one is the logic of the fabula that requires the story to contain those events that transform the initial state of affairs into the state of the conclusion. The second logic is the integration of unforeseeable events, that counter the logic of the fabula. The dialectical interpretation of Ricoeur's results in the conclusion that both logics can be integrated into one story. And in case that it might not be possible, the ideal of the unity of a human life is basically the ideal of engaging in quests every time these logics do not fit well. Again, by doing so he precisely covers up what Butler has unearthed in her book, and that is the observation that the coercion to establish unity and transparency is not only what makes it difficult to follow narrativist arguments, or to give a narrative account of oneself, but that that this ideal renders the prevalent concepts of responsibility dangerous and useless. For both claims we need to look deeper at what exactly happens in narrating oneself, and what the norms that facilitate narrative accounting actual are. The résumé regarding Ricoeur's contribution has to be ambivalent. He truly has devised the most intricate and elaborate account of narrative identity, at least in philosophical discourses. But at the same time his theory is impractical when it comes to questions the very norms that underpin his theoretical interest. With regard to the ethics of vulnerability that means that we have to look outside the disciplinary boundaries of philosophy and ethics. It is a fact that in neighbouring disciplines such as social psychology, moral psychology and literary studies, the conceptualizations of narrative, narration, and sometimes even ethics is more sophisticated than the philosophical inventory. In order to clarify the connection of ethical violence and narration, we will look mainly into the work of Ellinor Ochs. In her book *Living Narrative*, the trained linguistic anthropologist offers a concise array of

concepts with which narrative practices can be analysed in more detail. Although Ochs is not interested in (ethical) violence, her theory fits the present purpose quite well.

4.1 Ethical Violence and Narration

It is one of Butler's core intuitions that ethical violence, i.e. the violence used in order to maintain a normative order despite its loss of justification, should be avoided and countered. Or in Adorno's terminology, there is a violent aspect to the confrontation of particular interests and universal interest. Violence in general, but ethical violence in particular, has many detrimental affects not only on individuals, but also on communities. According to her analysis, ethical violence undermines precisely those relationships and practices that ethics is meant to sustain. The effects of ethical violence on the individual can be demonstrated with regard to two aspects. For one, it leads to the stabilization of a certain version of personal identity that in turn is violent in character. As Butler has found in Freud and Klein, psychological injuries may contribute to the acquisition of what might be called a fortified identity. This identity is meant to forestall any further weakness and injury in the future. These forms of identity are more effective the more it is reduced to one aspect, or a small set of aspects. This psychological correlation, then, contributes to the perpetuation of violence. A second opening ethical violence utilizes is that it subverts the communication in interpersonal relationships. This second aspect refers directly to the second formulation of Adorno's, where universal and particular interests collide, to the detriment of the particular. In human communication, especially when it comes to harm, affects, and moral accounting, it is important that the interlocutors feel safe enough to share intimate details. This even is expected and demanded in situations of moral deliberation and the

clarification of accountability. When harm has been done, the agent has to make transparent her motives and the contexts she considered herself to be in. In this preliminary way it is comprehensive that some version of the ideal of transparency is in effect. But what is even more important for Butler, that is that first, due to opacities and disorientations, transparency never is possible to achieve completely. The insistence on it, the demand to explain each and every aspect of a harmful action, cannot be fulfilled. It is exactly this what constitutes the perpetuation of ethical violence. Here, the claim to non-violence points into the direction of the modified concept of responsibility. It is based on the mutual acknowledgement that precariousness and disorientations and is the equal predicament for all human beings. The second problem that arises in the context of narrative accounting and the principle of the transparent 'I' is that the perpetrator can frame her motives and contexts in a way that is likely to be excepted by the interlocutor. That is to say that since giving a narrative account of oneself is a shared practice in any given community, the individuals know exactly how to shape their narratives in a way that meets the expectations of the other people involved. One could call these fashioned narratives 'narrative ready-mades'. These are templates for narrative accounting, or merely certain categorizations, ascriptions, norms, and moral commitments. Again, this is an instantiation of ethical violence, or rather a consequence of it, since it gives preference to the universal interests of the community over the particular interests of the individual. The uniqueness, or singularity that each person is, and that each event in this person's life is, gets veneered with conceptual tools that operate within what is commonly known as normal or accepted.

Still, although these claims about ethical violence are plausible, the question still remains to what extent narrative really is inappropriate in the way she outlines. This question could be put just the other way

around: How could narrative accounting be part of a moral practice that orientates itself towards non-violence, precariousness, and vulnerability? Ricoeur could not answer to these questions although he contributed many insights about how identity can be understood as to be constituted by narrative, and how narrative identity intrinsically is a normative concept to the extent that the quest for narrative unity is a prerequisite to aiming for a good life. And by this omission, he lines up with the many philosophers that seem to presuppose that narrative, due to its ubiquity, is a commonly known fact. Others, mostly analytically trained philosophers such as Goldie, do actually care for a rich and operational concept of narrative, but at the same time try not to inflate the concept. These lean definitions of narrative often are useful to highlight one function of narrative, such as keeping track of one's experiences, or integrate an emotional component into our understanding of human beings. But these definitions are not at all useful when it comes to trace the disorientating aspects of narrative itself. In other words, many philosophers use a tool, without assuring themselves about the structural flaws and shortcomings of this very tool. Butler is to be included into this group, but at least she points the way in a fruitful direction. The ideal of the transparent 'I', and the often unclear set of norms that facilitate narration and narrative accounting, are just two examples of how narrative subverts the very idea of ethics. Still, her concept of narrative is fragmentary and sketchy. This is why we will look into ideas of narrative outside of academic philosophy. As it will become clear at the end of this section, there is more to find than one would expect.

The heuristic of narrative, as it is present in the many works that have been discussed above, often seems to remain on a superficial level, the definitions are about narratives as a theory about story-telling, and about narration, which is a theory about the practice of story-telling.

But when it comes to an analysis of the norms that facilitate narrative interlocution, these accounts often are coarse, they do not allow for a fine-grained analysis of the many perspectives, roles, and practices that are addressed by narrative. Fortunately, this is not true for some disciplines in the vicinity of philosophy. For example, in literary studies, there is narratology, the scientific inquiry into story-telling. But also, there are many empirical researches within social psychology and transcultural anthropology that have had the need to improve their empirical findings by honing the theory of narrative and story-telling. We will look into three such conceptual works, namely that of Kenneth Gergen in *Relations and Realities* (Gergen 1997) and prominently into the work of Elinor Ochs and her seminal book *Living Narrative* (Ochs and Capps 2001). We will look through their accounts on narrative and narrative constitution with Butler's claim in mind that there are many aspects to a life and to story-telling that make self-narration difficult and sometimes impossible.

On first sight many of the aspects in Gergen's work looks familiar to what we have encountered in Ricoeur and Butler. He agrees that there is a hermeneutic benefit to self-narration because it helps to put an action into the context of preceding and subsequent events. He defines self-narrative as an individual's account of the relationships among self-relevant events across time, and the present life, in its totality, is not a mysterious or sudden event, but a sensible result of a life story. That is all well known and compatible with what we already know. What is interesting in Gergen is his understanding of what self-narratives ultimately amount to: 'I want to consider self-narratives as a form of social accounting or public discourse. In this sense, narratives are conversational resources, constructions open to continuous alteration as interaction progresses. Persons [...] do not interpret or "read the world" through narrative lenses; they do not author their own lives. Rather, the self-narrative

is a linguistic implement embedded within conventional sequences of action and employed in relationships in such a way as to sustain, enhance, or impede various forms of action. They are cultural resources that serve such social purposes as self-identification, self-justification, self-criticism, and social solidification' (Gergen 1997, p.188). This is a substantial shift compared to what we have discussed so far. Here, self-narratives can be used to quite different ends, they are a resource that is available for all members of a language-community, and that are used in certain relationships with others. This is just opposite to what Butler and Ricoeur think about narrative. Relationships are not constituted by narrative interlocution, but are formed in advance, they are expressions of that relationship. But what really is helpful in Gergen is that he asks what a 'well-formed' narrative is, and who has to determine this quality, or who decides what counts as a good narrative, and what not. This is especially important since it allows us to translate Butler's criticism of the demand for transparency as just one case among others, that all are candidates for well-formed, or not-so-well-formed narratives. Narratives that fail to approximate conventional forms are regarded as nonsensical. And in that regard, telling somebody that one is not able to give a coherent narrative of oneself, because one is substantially and existentially disorientated, surely will be regarded as nonsensical. Or think of Ricoeur's remark that narrative unity is a necessary prerequisite of taking responsibility for one's actions. That is sensible, whereas the failure to establish this coherence often is regarded as nonsensical, if not pathological. There are various remarks to be found in Schechtman where she clearly states that the failure to establish normal narratives often is a sign of insanity and psychological illness.

For Gergen, who positions himself clearly as a constructionist, the properties of well-formed narratives are culturally and historically con-

tingent. That almost is common sense today, but at this point of our discussion, it is a pointer that is helpful. For Gergen, it is of great import to inquire into contemporary narrative conventions: ‘What are the requirements for telling and intelligible story within the present-day culture of the West? The question is particularly significant, since an elucidation of these conventions for structuring stories sensitizes us to the limits of self-identity’ (Gergen 1997, p.189). And the limits of self-identity is topical for Butler, as we have shown above. Gergen does not stop here, but devises six such conventions, and it is worth recounting them. He starts with the convention that narration incorporates establishing a valued endpoint, that means the endpoint is valued or desirable. He points out that these valued endpoints are derived from the culture’s ontology and construction of value. Secondly, there is the demand to select endpoints that are relevant to this endpoint. It is the endpoint that dictates the selection of the events, and in this sense this is a substantial reduction of the candidates from which one can choose. Thirdly, he identifies certain conventions that determine how to order the events in the narrative. This ordering should be linear and temporal, in most cases. Fourthly, there is a general tendency to expect the stability of the identity. Once the identity is defined by the story-teller, the individual will retain this identity or function within the story. This observation, again, is quite helpful. If stability is what is expected by the listener, the teller will tend to select only those values and events, that feed into this image of stability. Also, and we will discuss this in the last section of this chapter, it is not always true that the teller of the story, the agent or character in that story, and the person whose identity is meant to be constituted by this narrative are identical. As MacIntyre already knew, we are merely co-authors of our life-narratives, and in order to answer the questions ‘Who am I?’ and ‘What should I do?’, we first have to find out part of which pre-

existing stories we are. Given that an individual figures not only in her own life-story, but in many narratives of other people, the stability of that narrative identity becomes problematic. One example would be stigmatization. Once one is categorised into a population that displays stigma X, for example, not being able to tell a story from beginning to end, this stigma will not fade, and the stigma will become one aspect of the thus stabilized identity. Gergen adds two further conventions, causality and linguistic marker to begin and end the interlocutory episode of telling a story. But we have discussed these conventions elsewhere in depth. What Gergen adds to our present discussion is a reflective and critical treatment of the conventions of narration that have not been discussed in the authors I have elaborated on. The space of possible identities an individual can or cannot assume in a given community is limited by these very conventions. There are not an infinite number of possible identities, or selves. Instead, these possibilities are contained by the imperative to stay within the culturally prevalent conventions of intelligibility: ‘...in order to maintain intelligibility in the culture, the story one tells about oneself must employ the commonly accepted rules of narrative construction. Narrative constructions of broad cultural usage form a set of ready-made intelligibilities’ (Gergen 1997, p.199).

Narrative constructions, for Gergen, are linguistic tools with important social functions. They establish what he calls the capacity for relatedness. He also is aware of the fact that narratives of self-stability play a crucial role within a culture. Relationships tend to stabilize themselves, and it is only because of this that we can speak of institutions, cultural patterns, and individual identities. This is where the social demand stems from, and consequently one must be capable of making oneself intelligible as enduring, integral, and endowed with a coherent identity. But identity in this perspective is not an achievement of the mind, but the very result of

shifting relationships to a multiplicity of others. Therefore, people may portray themselves in many different ways, depending on the relational context. One acquires not a deep and enduring true self, but a potential for communicating and performing a self. This easily can be linked to Butler. For her, the relationality of humans is a universal predicament, which can or cannot succeed. Humans enter the world in a vulnerable state, and this vulnerability will persist throughout their lives. In this regard, what is important is not to find one's true self, or to perform the same identity over and over again. Relations are crucial, and if narrative is a resource with which future relations are secured, than narrative is helpful. Gergen supports her view on narrative, and also on the problems around transparency and stability. In Gergen's terms, we need to negotiate the limits of intelligibility, when the present set of conventions rather encourages to acquire a stable identity, which neatly fits into the templates of narrative ready-mades.

Even more support comes from linguistic anthropologist Elinor Ochs. Her contribution to our present interest of improving our understanding of Butler's ethics of vulnerability is twofold. First, she develops four narrative dimensions that, in difference to Gergen, is not so much concerned with narrative as a communicative resource, but is highly useful to approach the situation of telling a story in far more detail. Of course, she agrees with many of the core claims of narrative identity, such as that narratives are ordered accounts of events and experiences and others. But the essential addition to our present analysis is that the four narrative dimensions allow us to expand on Butler's claim that there are non-narratable aspects to life. As it will turn out, there are many more.

The four dimensions Ochs brings to the table are tellership, tellability, linearity, and moral stance. She also concedes that the essential features of narrative are description, chronology, explanation, and evaluation. This is

nothing new to us. But the narrative dimensions certainly are. Tellership denotes the extent and kind of involvement of conversational partners in the actual recounting and narrating. Other than implied by others, stories are quite rarely told by just one teller. Often, there are co-tellers, and co-tellership is what dominates in her empirical research. Tellership could be translated with noteworthiness. One might be inclined to think that it is the teller who finally decides if one event is noteworthy, or tellable, or not. But this would be flawed. Again, there are many conventions of what counts as tellable, and what not, or what counts as a good story, and what not. Here, the existing relations of dominance become important, Ochs notes that ‘...the standards [...] are typically controlled by more powerful interlocutors’ (Ochs and Capps 2001, p.121). The aspect of dominance is important here. The asymmetric control of narrative standards can induce a reluctance to narrate certain aspects, especially when they are not accepted by co-tellers. Here, the impossibility to narrate is clearly rooted in relations of power.

Next is the narrative dimension of tellability. It is the extent to which an account conveys a sequence of reportable events and makes a point in a rhetorically effective manner. This is a qualitative assessment of how the narrative actually achieves the perlocutionary interests of the narrator or the tellers. It can be high or low, and this depends on the success of the story, and how the listener behaves. In Butler’s prime example of narrative accounting in moral deliberation, the interest is to be excused, or even forgiven by the patient. The tellability determines if this interest is implemented. Here, it would be possible to orient the narration towards the goal and the person of the listener.

Ochs also introduces the dimensions of embeddedness and linearity, both of which are not as relevant as the other dimensions. Embeddedness denotes to what degree a narrative stands on its own, or how embedded

it is in the course of conversation. Also, it is about if interlocutors ask questions or interrupt etc. Linearity is about the stringency of the narration, and if it follows a causal, temporal, and overall closed path, or if it is rather meandering. The last narrative dimension is what Ochs calls moral stance. This is about the assumed moral stance, i.e. what the narrator assumes how events are to be evaluated and judged, and how the listeners will assess said events. Here, again, power-asymmetries come into effect. Ochs claims that moral stance can deflect narratives: '[T]ellers find it difficult to confront community and institutional ideologies and sensibilities about what should not be told' (Ochs and Capps 2001, p.253). This is congruent with Butler and Adorno, a reformulation of the ethical violence that occurs when the universal interest clashes with the particular interests. It is a culture of dominance in which the demand for stability and transparency evolved, and to question these relationships of dominance often mute the narrations that could subvert their dominance. For Butler, philosophical reflection can be one of many spaces where these power structures have to be confronted. That is the very definition of the practice of critique.

Ethical violence is violence that occurs in the forceful implementation of rules that otherwise would not be adopted. Butler clearly has a point to integrate this concept into her moral philosophy. For her, ethical violence sides with narrative conventions when it is determined who is allowed to tell what to whom. This is a critical perspective on the social dimension of story-telling, a perspective that is remarkably absent in any other account of narrative identity. At least in Ricoeur, any obstacle which might forestall narration is merely another task in the course of the quest for narrative unity. This short glimpse into neighbouring disciplines demonstrates that those scholars who operate with narrations on an empirical level, cannot help but to put these aspects center stage of their concep-

tualizations of narrative practices. The first question always has to be why somebody is allowed to narrate, or which conventions are in power to prohibit it. This is not an empirical corroboration of Butler's ethics, but it underpins the imperative not only to do philosophy, but also to engage in social criticism and social theory to get a better understanding of in which stories one is implicated and plays a role.

4.2 Narrative Unity and Precarious Identities

One of the results of the in-depth reconstruction of the ethics of vulnerability, its critical stance towards narrating oneself, and Ricoeur's account of narrative identity turned out to be the contrarian placement of the unity of a narrated life. Butler certainly admits that narrative practices play an important role in every-day life. Without a certain degree of narrative capacity it is almost impossible to maintain one's status as a member of a community, and as a receiver of care and support. But she opposes the requirement to aim for coherence and unity when it comes to narrative accounting. Her criticism is twofold: With regard to a proper theoretical understanding of personal identity it obscures the many areas of one's existence that remain opaque. Moreover, it contributes to a flawed conception of a solitary conception of identity, which omits the fundamental relationality of a person's identity. Secondly, she points out that the very practice of narrative accounting, understood as the situation of interlocution, is governed by norms that have a different temporality than that of the narrator. This dispossesses the narrator of her own since she has to follow rules that are not quite compatible with her experiences. In this sense, narrative unity is regarded as another cause for opacity.

Narrative unity is heavily debated in philosophy and neighbouring disciplines. So much so that MacIntyre begins his chapter about narrative

unity hardly with any definition, but with a defence against two common objections to it. One objection draws upon the indication that modern social life is fragmented into a multiverse of norms and modes of behaviour. Consequently, any claim for narrative unity of a life has necessarily to fail. This seems to be a similar objection than the one Butler offers. But there is an important difference. Although Butler opens the field of her inquiry to all of the social sphere, and although she demands that in order to counter the histories of the reproduction of violent behaviour prevalent in a given society it should be imperative to include social theory and critique into one's practices. But this is not meant to be a collection of factual evidence for the fragmented self in modernity, but rather in order to understand the ways in which social conventions contribute to reductionist, stabilized notions of personal identity. MacIntyre also discerns two more philosophical objections to the claim for unity, and that are first the atomistic theories of action and personhood as they are developed in analytical philosophy. These accounts are due to their radical difference in philosophical method not quite applicable here. But a second philosophical critique draws upon the claim that instead of seeking unity, philosophers should acknowledge that the contextual enacted self is nothing but an unconnected series of episodes.

This last objection is quite intriguing. Until now, Butler seems to subscribe to the episodic understanding of identity. Especially in her work on performativity of identities she puts emphasis on the fact that the performative iteration of norm-guided behaviour basically is a series of merely similar, but not identical iterations. The norms, as she claims, are enacted differently each time, and that one should think of this jitter as the place in which change of normative orders originates. On the other hand, her turn to ethics substantially operates with strong claims about constant features of human existence. When she states that '...[t]he ap-

prehension of precarity of others - their exposure to violence, their socially induced transience and dispensability - is, by implication, an apprehension of the precarity of any and all living beings, implying a principle of equal vulnerability that governs all living beings.' (Butler 2010, p.xvi), then at least the precariousness of humans seems to exist outside the performative and episodic plane. In order to clarify this ambiguity it is necessary to look into the debates around narrative unity and episodicity. There is a second problem with radical episodicity. In many accounts of moral philosophy the persistence of a person is of highest import. In order to be accountable for one's actions, and to take responsibility for their outcomes, it is presupposed that the persons are persistent in time, and not episodic. The consequences are apparent. When harm has been done and moral deliberation about accountability take place, the shared assumption of the temporal persistence of persons is indispensable. Part of this moral deliberation is to ascertain that the person who acted problematically is the same person that now is addressed and confronted with claims of compensation. It is easy to imagine that if the addressee replies that although it could be that one episodic part of her engaged in that problematic action, she now is in another episode and therefore not accountable for past episodic states of herself. The question is how Butler's account is capable to cope with this argument. Again, the situation is ambiguous. On the one hand, it seems that she provides a sufficiently stable criterion for personhood, and that is the principle of equal vulnerability. To endorse this standpoint of vulnerability is to say that a person has been, is, and will forever be vulnerable. To acknowledge that harm has been done is, at the same time, to acknowledge that the other person is vulnerable. But this only results in the identification of former and present states of a vulnerable living being. But moral deliberation takes place between persons understood as agents in a series of events.

The level of how to think about living beings in general is not relevant to the task of the identification of the perpetrator with the person addressed in this interlocution. In order to improve the understanding of how episodic performativity and persistent vulnerability figure in moral deliberation, we have to look deeper into the debates around narrative and episodicity.

A fierce critic of narrative accounts in general, but their claim for narrative unity in particular, is Galen Strawson. In his widely cited article *Against Narrativity*, he argues against a wide variety of aspects and claims of narrative accounts of personhood. He inquires into the reasons why narrativists think that their theses are plausible at all, if narrative is or at least should be a part of every human's existence, and how narrative unity gets established in the first place. He discerns two theses about narrativity. The one is the psychological narrativity thesis which claims that life is experienced as a story, or a collection of stories. The ethical narrative thesis assumes that in order to live well, one has to have a rich narrative outlook of life. Strawson thinks that both theses are wrong, and he thinks that their widespread acceptance in and outside of philosophy is regrettable. Overall, Strawson's arguments against both theses is far from convincing, and it is more than surprising that so many authors, proponents and opponents of narrativity alike, refer to it so extensively. Strawson's argument comes down to the factual claim that '...there are deeply non-narrative people and there are good ways to live that are deeply non-narrative' (Strawson 2004, p.429). He takes this non-narrative population to be 'genetically determined', and hence sees his opposition to narrative in general vindicated. This is hardly a proper philosophical argument. Eventually, Strawson even is flippant, for example when he quotes Ricoeur on how a subject could acquire an ethical character if not through narrative, and Strawson states that 'I think

that those who think in this way are motivated by a sense of their own importance or significance that is absent in other human beings' (Strawson 2004, p.429). Again, *ad hominem*-arguments rarely are accepted in philosophy, but here one is inclined to agree. Especially in Charles Taylor's analysis of modern identity, his support of the claim that life is meant to be a narrative quest seems to demanding in terms of time and hermeneutic capabilities that it conveys the impression that a professor of philosophy is theorizing his own life form.

A more useful criticism of narrative unity is to be found in John Christman. He wonders how the claim for narrative unity, understood as the expectation that quite disparate entities such as experiences, memories, and expectations are to be unified in a story, is possible at all. In his view, the claim is either adding nothing at all to the demand that the subject reflects, interprets, and speaks about her own experiences. He states that 'under most interpretations of the idea of narrativity culled from philosophers (and others) the condition of narrativity for the unity of selves, persons and personalities, is either implausible or otiose.' (Christman 2004, p.697). he approaches the topic with the hypothesis that not only narrative unity, but narrative in general is misunderstood by many scholars in the field. They often offer argumentations that seem to be circular. For example, this circularity presents itself when narrativists claim that experiences have a narrative proto-structure, and because of that, we need to deploy a narrative framework. This echoes the criticism of Williams who observed that in order to select those narratives about human beings, we need to have the concept of person in the first place. This is the same circularity.

After reviewing some of the major players in the narrative camp, like Schechtman and Gergen, he concludes that we are basically left with a variety of this circularity and the more or less trivial insight that human

beings, or selves, or persons, are reflecting and interpreting their experiences. Also, he looks closely at other candidates for a unifying principle or framework, other than narrative, that is. Besides the plot, which is the narrative form of unification, he looks more closely at causality, the relation of function, and the relation of theme. Certainly, there are causal relations in a narrative, but there are many types of narrative accounts, many of them are highly fragmented. And with regard to self-constituting narratives it is immediately clear they leave out most of the causal sequences that are part of the events which are recounted. So causal relations is not a good candidate to establish unity of a narrative. The same holds for the relation of function, or a teleological relation. Here, he confronts thinkers like Taylor, MacIntyre, and Ricoeur directly, who all propose teleological ethics and claim that human beings ultimately orient themselves towards *the good*. Christman points out that humans engage in all sorts of different projects in parallel, and that it is quite difficult to identify the *telos* in this plethora of life projects. He concludes that teleology and the unity of a life only can be applied to flourishing lives. Here, he can be aligned with Butler, and Adorno, for that matter, since both are sufficiently Freudian as to know that (psychological) damage, injury, or even trauma are part of every human's life. Christman's analysis comes to the result that 'when the idea of narrativity is unpacked, we see the deeper condition lying beneath it. What is truly necessary for a unified life in these theories is the capacity for reflection on events (one's own and those of others) in a spirit that attempts to render the events coherent within the categories of meaning available to the subject' (Christman 2004, p.706-707).

The claim and demand for the narrative unity of a life, or life-story, or subject is essential to most of the accounts of personal identity, and even more so for the hermeneuticist and teleological ones. At the same time,

it is central to Butler's criticism, and also central to the changes she proposes for our understanding of responsibility. Christman's commentary that the unity of a life can only be ascribed to a given life retrospectively, and that it often is exemplified in successful lives. That strengthens the plausibility of Butler's approach, who consequently approaches narrative from the perspective of social relations, violence, and narrative failures. In the face of those accounts of narrative identity and its impact on ethics, this surely is a welcomed and necessary change of perspective. On the other hand, if Christman and Williams are right that we always have to bring an evolved or acquired understanding of personhood into the discussions about narrative and ethics, then this might be true for Butler as well. As we have shown in the first chapter, her notion of personhood is founded in precariousness, vulnerability, and disorientation, and that surely is a concept of personhood that is just as limited as the anthropological and universal ascription which are part of the hermeneuticist and teleological approaches. More work needs to be done to figure out if it is possible at all to clarify the mutual conditionality of our understanding of personhood and moral philosophy. Heuristically, that certainly is true. We need to start with the theories we have at hand. But remains to be seen if the result could amount to an account where identity and ethics could be derived from narrative practices. The inquiry presented here gives many reasons to be sceptical about this.

4.3 Towards and Ethics of Vulnerability

It is to collect the results of this study in personal identity and normative frameworks. This inquiry has been motivated by the question of how plausible the ethics of vulnerability is. Therefore, it has been necessary to reconstruct Butler's proposal in minute detail. Central to her ethics is the claim that precariousness universally is the state in which human be-

ings live. They are dependent from others in the early, formative years of their lives, and these relationships will have a lasting impact on the lives lived. Also, they are born into historical settings of norms and discourses, that are, as a totality, incomprehensible. This amounts to various opacities about oneself, the motives which guide actions, and especially how to behave in scenes of address in which one is asked to account narratively for ones actions. She identifies the guiding principle of narrative accounting as the principle of the transparent 'I', i.e. that in order to be forgiven, it is expected and necessary to make oneself completely transparent for the other, and that by means of telling a story in which all events, motives, experiences, and (ethical) evaluations are included. But due to the opacities and disorientations this is impossible, and therefore it is necessary to alter the notion of responsibility from the principle of transparency to the mutual acknowledgement of one's own limitations of knowing oneself.

Butler's account is compelling for man reasons, especially because of its radical reversal of the notion of responsibility. It also appeals because it is founded on a robust concept of relational identity, where relations with others are prior to the, often retrospectively ascribed, notions of personhood and selfhood that give primacy to the individual. This approach is even more promising for ethics since the reason for ethical deliberation emerge from interpersonal conflicts and sociality in general. It is due to the social nature of human existence that we need to provide a rationale for our ethical commitments, and this is more promising when this social dimension is part of that theory. Also, Butler's account is consequently constructed around the human predicament of vulnerability, which she uses in order to establish an ethics that demands to engage in non-violent behaviour. Non-violence is not a quasi-religious stance or attitude, but established as a moral claim that has to be answered again and again

in any given situation, and according to the specifics of that situation. Non-violence, in this sense, is a *carefully crafted fuck you* (Butler 2010, p.182).

Butler develops her ethical account by an extensive critique of narrative accounting. She targets the claim for the unity of a life narrative and the enforcement of transparency. Unfortunately, she merely points to ‘narrative practices’ but she omits to present a thorough analysis of any theory of narrative. This gave reason to shape this thesis in the way it exists now. There are two possible problems with Butler’s criticism. For one, it appears to neglect the many accounts of narrative identity, and it certainly is possible that there is a theory of narrative that can cope with opacities and disorientations. This is why we have discussed Ricoeur in depth, since he has elaborated the most sophisticated theory of narrative in philosophy. The second problem with Butler is that her account seems to prompt the position that in scenes of address, ethical deliberation and narrative accounting, it is acceptable just to keep quiet, or to point to the plethora of disorientations and opacities and ultimately refuse to talk to the other person, or even to refuse to establish any relationship with that person. For the remainder of this section, we will look briefly into both of these problems.

Ricoeur’s narrative account of personal identity and the ethics he develops in *Oneself as Another* in fact is comprehensive and complex. Starting with the theory of speech-acts, he is in the position to approach narrative practices in a way that not only tackles the problem of integrating idem- and ipse-identity, but also to shed light on the intricacies of the very process of emplotment. But although he differentiated the plot or fabula from those events in a life that rather are ruptures or turns, and in this sense would agree with Butler, he opts to align himself with MacIntyre and establish the unity of a narrative life as the central requirement for

living a fulfilled and ethical life. Any failure to establish this unity is merely another task in the life-long quest for narrative unity, an ideal that remains questionable even if one does not agree with Butler.

There is a further difference between Butler and Ricoeur, and that is the understanding and integration of violence into their respective ethical accounts. For Butler, violence is a necessary part of the formation of the subject. It can be originated in human interaction, but also can stem from norms. Since human life is rich with rules, this form of violence is a pertinent aspect to consider. In Ricoeur, the asymmetries of power and the use of force are of course rejected since they are opposed to the ethical aim to live a good life, with and for others, in just institutions. But he misses out on apply this on the very practices of narrating oneself. He never seems to recognize the connection between violence and psychological fragmentation which often is associated with trauma.

Lastly, we briefly discuss the aspect of the failure of narrating oneself, or the collapse of tellability. On first sight, this aspect of Butler's criticism is hardly convincing. If one imagines that in any situation of deliberation one of the interlocutors claims that he cannot explain what she did or why, due to the many opacities and disorientations that one philosopher has elaborated on so extensively, it would be barely acceptable. We maintain the the expectations of transparency, and we believe that, at least in principle, everything can be expressed in language and interlocution. With a closer look into Butler, it has become clear that she does not argue in favour of ethical escapism. She has made a decent case for the many sources of disorientation, which emerge from the temporality of human existence, but also from the genealogical formation of personhood, and from the violence which humans experience in the course of their lives. The question, then, is not so much if she is right or

not, but rather, given that self-narration often collapses, how do we cope with this collapse?

For the purpose of sketching the route to a possible answer to this question, I would like to introduce an argument by German philosopher and journalist Carolin Emcke. After more than a decade of journalism, in which she travelled to many regions of war and conflict, she had experienced the collapse of narrative and unity many times. Eventually, she felt the need to question her own practices from a philosophical point of view, and the results are presented in her essay *Zeugenschaft und Gerechtigkeit* (Emcke 2013). This essay gives valuable hints how to continue Butler's ethics of vulnerability that is more explicit about how to cope with the collapse of tellability. Emcke writes about her motivation: '...einerseits die Schwellen des Erzählbaren zu lokalisieren und andererseits ebendiese Schwellen als – gemeinsam – überschreitbare zu behaupten. Einerseits die Wirkungsmacht von Leid und Gewalt zu beschreiben, wie sie ihre Opfer verunsichern, verstören, versehren, wie sie die eigene Vorstellungskraft übersteigen, das Vertrauen in die Welt irritieren, die Fähigkeit, "dies zu beschreiben". Andererseits aber die Möglichkeit des Mitteilens, des An-Vertrauens an jemand anderen, und die Aufgabe der "Re-Humanisierung durch Zeugenschaft" zu beleuchten' (ibid., p.76). She agrees with Butler especially in the relation between violence and the *thresholds of tellability*. But what she adds to this is that she sees the possibility to re-humanise the victims of violence by means of testimony, or to be more precise, second-hand-testimony.

This is helpful for many reasons. Butler lets her analysis and with the statement that opacity is a problem for narrative accounting. She also integrates this narrative failure into her concept of responsibility. What Emcke adds is the perspective that in situations in which a person is addressed, and she cannot tell her story in a proper way, testimony by

others is practical way of finding a solution for this situation. It thereby reinforces the emphasis on social relations. Butler has left the dyadic and dialogical scheme of narrative accounting untouched, in which one addresses the other and wants to negotiate responsibility and expects transparency. With Emcke it is possible to undo this dialogical structure and expand the scene of address as much as it is needed. There is always the possibility to include others into this situations, and asking for help in this sense clearly is a case of what Butler has in mind when she demands that we have to vacate self-sufficient 'I'.

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