

Opening Unknown Time – Spring 2013 Orientation for Week 2

First, my apologies for the technical difficulties in the phone call. We'll try to make sure it doesn't happen again. In the meantime, the recording for the phone call will go on line as usual.

We spent much of the phone call getting clear on the “non-story story” of the conductor. The basic idea is that we can tell a story about how stories come to be. The story in the reading for week one has three ‘moments’: the eruption of the past into the present, the reaction/response, and the imposition of order. You might want to reflect further on how the ‘eruption’ of the past parallels the ‘coming into being’ of the future (p. 99). We could think of it this way: in erupting into the present, the past takes over control of time’s dynamic, even though no story has yet been set up.

By the way, as I mentioned in the phone call, the word ‘moment’ (my word; it’s not in the text) does not have to be understood in a temporal sense. If you trace back its roots, the word ‘moment’ is identical to the word ‘movement’, and it can be used to refer to an ‘essential factor’ in a situation, like one of the movements in a symphony. The fact that it’s difficult to keep this meaning of ‘moment’ separate from its temporal sense just shows how committed we are to the usual linear understanding of time.

Now with respect to the way we engage experience, all three of these moments take place ‘before’ any story is set up. That is why ordinarily they do not constitute a story at all. There is no narrative, no unfolding from one to another. It may not be quite right to say that they are simultaneous, because they don’t occur ‘at the same time’; rather they are atemporal.

Usually, of course, we do not focus on the way that our experience is set up. Instead—and this is what the reading for next week emphasizes—we conduct time toward replication of what has already happened, so that the past proliferates and binds. We have access (p. 121) to the outcome of the process, but not to the process itself. It is always already too late to introduce fundamental change.

Of course, this is exactly why the text tells the ‘no-story’ story. The aim is to show us the process rather than the product. Given that the reading for week two emphasizes how stuck we are in particular products, in what has already been conducted, we might want to look for other ways to discover the process through which a product or situation arises. One way would be to look back at the history (the process) of how a situation arose. Here is a suggested approach: choose a situation in which you are presently involved and that feels somehow stuck or difficult to deal. It would be good to choose a situation that arose unexpectedly, because such a situation would seem to trace most directly the ‘no-story story’ of eruption/reaction/imposition. For instance, it might be a phone call, email, or chance encounter that suddenly presents you with an unexpected situation.

However it arises, suddenly you find yourself in that situation. In that ‘eruption’ has something been left out—some other circumstance? In your reaction, is something being ignored? In the order you impose, is something being added that has no real bearing?