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It's About Time: Narrative and the Divided Self

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When I learned that my father had died while I was attending a national communication conference, two worlds within me—the academic and the personal—collided, and I was forced to confront the large gulf that divided them. In this article, I weave the story of that experience into the wider fabric of disconnections that promotes isolation and inhibits risk taking and change within universities and academic disciplines. In the process, I question whether the structures of power constitutive of academic socialization are not as difficult to resist as those of one's family, and the consequences as constraining. I use personal narrative to show how storytelling works to build a continuous life of experience, linking the past to the future from the standpoint of the present; to problematize the process of assigning meanings to memories via language; to draw attention to the significance of institutional depression in universities; and to blur the line between theory and story.

I could not fall asleep. I tossed and turned in my bed, trying to ignore the anxiety churning through my stomach. Sometimes I have trouble sleeping when I'm away from home or when I'm apprehensive about a presentation. But this was different. It wasn't the hotel room or the upcoming convention that was keeping me awake. Something felt terribly wrong, but I didn't know what it was. Finally, at about 7:15 a.m., I got out of bed and headed for the shower.

I don't recall how long I had been standing under the water when I heard the phone ring. A few seconds later, my roommate, Herb Simons, called me. "Art, it's your secretary, Sharon. She wants to speak to you. She says it's very important."

My secretary would not call me at a conference unless the roof was caving in. I knew instantly that her call was personal not departmental. Grabbing a towel, I hurried to the phone, my heart beating rapidly, my mind sorting possibilities.

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The voice on the other end was calm and deliberate.

Art, I don't know how to tell you this. Your sister just called. She said your father died last night. He had a sudden heart attack shortly after eating dinner. I thought I should tell you as soon as possible.

I don't remember what I said next. I recall putting the receiver down, standing naked, water dripping down my body, dampening the carpet at my feet; and Herb looking pale and puzzled, rising from his bed. "My father died last night," I muttered quietly. "I don't know details."

Herb stood in front of me, uncharacteristically silent. His face mirrored the shock that must have shown on mine. Perhaps he sensed the terrible struggle I was having as my mind raced to organize what had to be done next, while my body yielded to the emotional reality of death and loss. I felt dazed and confused, like a boxer who is startled by the first powerful blow from a stronger opponent. Stunned by the punch, he hears competing voices, one inside his head whispering, "Ignore the pain, stay with the game plan," the other calling from the site of his body's pain and injury, rejecting the authority of consciousness over bodily experience.

A voice inside my head said, "Get home to Tampa as quickly as possible. Mother will need you. She'll expect you to take control, help arrange the funeral, and keep the family from falling apart." Suddenly, the three papers I was to present at the convention had little significance. However, I was too responsible to miss sessions without forewarning. I should contact the chair of each program, get someone to substitute if possible, give other participants a chance to prepare for my absence.

But a second voice kept intruding on my thoughts. I felt dizzy and lightheaded, as if I were teetering on the edge of a dangerous cliff. As I wiped away the tears trickling down my face and felt the flood of anxiety swirling through my stomach, I was terrified to realize that I couldn't shut down what I was feeling by an act of willful control. My father's death was not just another event to be organized, experienced, and filed away. It wasn't only my plans for the weekend that had been interrupted, but something much bigger, my self-narrative—the way I recited the story of my life to myself. The plot I had scripted for my life cast my parents and siblings as minor characters. Through this act of imagination, I long ago had recreated myself in order to diminish the significance of a perverse childhood and not be persecuted by it. But now, the unspoken life inside me demanded recognition. I tried to make these feelings go away, but my efforts only intensified their grip. While I stood motionless, memories circulated through my head, flashing back a stream of unconnected, incoherent, and frightening family scenes.

As if the jolts produced by waves of unsolicited recollections were not enough, I also had to contend with the void created by my father's death. At the moment, it didn't matter that as a child my relationship with my father had been so troubled and destructive or that he had grown old and fragile

before I could come to terms with the fierce and violent father of my youth. The chance to rise above these circumstances was gone now. I could never prove any better as a son than he had been as a father. We would never have a final conversation that I could look back on with a sense of resolution or closure. The image I once had of being by his side, of holding or stroking him as he passed—as if a tender, loving touch could magically transform a lifetime of painful experience between a father and his son—had been stolen from me. Our relationship would live on in my mind, but conversation between us had ended. He was gone. We were gone.

I picked up the phone to start informing other people, but as soon as I dialed the first number, I began drifting away. Before I could speak, I dropped the phone into the cradle and was disconnected. When I picked it up, the phone felt heavy in my hand. How could I make plans when I couldn't even hold on to the phone? Fortunately, Herb took control of the situation. He asked me to make a list of people to call and assured me that he would contact them. Then he called the airlines and booked an afternoon flight to Tampa for me.

As I sat in the corner and watched Herb organizing my affairs, I recalled the times I had tried to talk to him about my interest in research on death and dying. These conversations never got very far. Herb resisted my invitations to delve deeper and I usually felt disappointed that we couldn't connect on this topic. Now, I was beginning to understand why these conversations had been so frustrating and superficial. At the time, Herb's parents were dead; mine were alive. For Herb, death had been personalized; for me, it was academic. Under these circumstances, what did we really have to talk about? How could we possibly speak the same language? As a result of my father's death, I had passed into another dimension, one that was missing when Herb and I had tried previously to converse about death. We still weren't talking about death or loss, but when Herb looked at me from across the room, I felt the kind of communion that can only occur when two people are woven into the same fabric of experience.

On that long plane ride home, I realized as never before that I was a human being. It sounds strange to say that, I know, but I believe it is true. My father's sudden death forced me to grasp the significance of how contingent, limited, and relative human experience can be. Most of us realize that fear of death lingers behind the absorbing details of our everyday lives, but we keep our fear sedated because we sense it could infect us if we let go. When our lives are interrupted by the reality of death, our immunity is weakened. Then, if we allow it, we can drop the canopy of dishonesty covering the brute fact that we don't really control our own lives.

One of Freud's greatest contributions was to show how meaning is made out of errors, accidents, and unexpected events (Brill, 1938). Chance changes us (H. Becker, 1994). My father's death made it possible, even necessary, for me to see the consequences of splitting the academic self from the personal self in a new light. At my university, or at conferences, I normally move in

and out of analytical or conceptual frames without experiencing anything akin to an experiential shock or epiphany. But when my father died while I was attending a national communication convention, two worlds within me collided, and I was stunned to learn how tame the academic world is in comparison to the wilderness of lived experience.

As I looked out the window of the plane and saw how small the roads, farms, cars, and houses looked from above, I was reminded of Ernest Becker's (1973) remarks about the puniness of life in the face of the overwhelming majesty of our universe. I felt confusion swelling within me as competing parts of my self struggled for supremacy. A voice inside me questioned the motivation for my drive and dedication as a social scientist. "Admit it, Art, your work sucks energy away so you don't have to face the reality of the human condition." I had no ready response, but I was inspired to scribble some notes on the pad on my lap.

Academic life is impersonal, not intimate. It provides a web of distractions. The web protects us against the invasion of helplessness, anxiety, and isolation we would feel if we faced the human condition honestly. Stability, order, control—these are the words that social science speaks. Ambiguity, chance, accidents—these are the terms that life echoes. Suppose we achieved the stability, order, and control we seek, what then? No variance—no differences—no chance—no fun—no adventure—no vulnerability—no deniability—no flirtation—no love.

The notes didn't help. They only exaggerated the divisions tugging within me. I felt an obligation to answer back to the first voice, but the only thing I could think of was to reaffirm my commitment to the Deweyan premise that no matter how honest we are about the tragedy of the human condition, we still have to point ourselves toward some hopeful, creative activity. What was it Ernest Becker (1973) said in the final lines of *The Denial of Death*? "Fashion something—an object or ourselves—and drop it into the confusion" (p. 285). But, these words begged the question of how to narrow this large gulf between my academic life and my personal life. It now seemed obvious to me that life had a different shape and texture than the ways it was sculpted in the classroom and in scholarly journals.

Now, the academic man in me stood face-to-face with the ordinary man. What did they have to say to each other? Could they get in touch with each other? Integrate? Harmonize?

The sad truth is that the academic self frequently is cut off from the ordinary, experiential self. A life of theory can remove one from experience, make one feel unconnected. All of us inhabit multiple worlds. When we live in the world of theory, we usually assume that we are inhabiting an objective world. There, in the objective world, we are expected to play the role of spectator. It is a hard world for a human being to feel comfortable in, so we

try to get rid of the distinctively human characteristics that distort the mythological beauty of objectivity. We are taught to master methods that exclude the capriciousness of immediate experience. When we do, we find ourselves in a world devoid of spirituality, emotion, and poetry—a scientific world in which, as Galileo insisted, there is no place for human feelings, motives, or consciousness. In the objective world, the goal is to speak nature's language without the intrusions of human subjectivity. In some quarters, this kind of world is the only rational world and the only world that can produce knowledge that makes a difference.

I suspect there are as many kind, decent, and loving people inhabiting the objective, scientific world as there are in any other reality. But, there is nothing inherent in the scientific method that requires these traits. Findings do not become less scientific if the scientist who reports them has undesirable personality traits or character flaws. Remember the Milgram (1963) experiments on obedience? They were ingenious and elegant exemplars of social scientific research, but they also were spiritually offensive.

Laing (1982) warns that "what is scientifically right may be morally wrong" (p. 22). Scientists don't normally worry about the moral consequences of the knowledge they produce or about what they had to do to get to the truth, but that doesn't mean we (or they) shouldn't thoroughly pursue such issues. Reciting a litany of ruthless indiscretions, Apter (1996) calls psychology "an intrusive and frequently cruel discipline" (p. 22) that contributes significantly to human suffering. In the name of science, psychologists too often use their warrant of expertise not only to manipulate variables but also to manipulate people and their lives (Apter, 1996); and psychology has not cornered the market on these dubious practices.

One of the lessons that I learned when I first read Kuhn's (1970) *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions* 20 years ago was not to expect too much from science. Kuhn's exemplars taught that the history of science offered no compelling reason to think it is possible to distinguish what is in our minds from what is out there in the world. Kuhn urged scientists to exercise caution, to guard against being smug about pushing the rhetoric of objectivity and value neutrality. Scholars like Joan Huber (Huber, 1995; Huber & Mirowsky, 1997), who proudly display this smugness, often miss the point. The problem is not with science but with a reverent and idealized view of science that positions science above the contingencies of language and outside the circle of historical and cultural interests (Denzin, 1997). Scientific method per se does not make it possible for the mind to transcend the skin. Even when science does improve our predictions, it cannot necessarily tell us what to do. When we know how to predict and control behavior, we do not consequently know how to deal with a person justly or empathically (Rorty, 1982). It's too bad that a century of social and behavioral science has not notably improved our capacity to predict and control (Cergen, 1982; Rorty, 1982); but even if it had, as Rorty (1982) observes, it would not necessarily help us evaluate the

moral or ethical grounding of our actions. Some empiricists may still see social engineering as a moral exemplar of the best that rationality and method can offer, but most of us recognize that the haunting question of how to live a good and ethical life cannot be circumscribed by appeals to hard facts and objective methods.

My personal struggle after my father's death was not a scientific crisis but a moral one; and the moral questions that were raised cast a long shadow over both my personal and my academic lives. I needed to take the measure of my own life and of my father's too. How were the different parts of my life connected? What values shaped the life I wanted to live? What would my academic life be if I could bring those values into play? What would it feel like? Remembering the ways I had resisted and rebelled against my family socialization, I questioned whether I had done the same in my academic life or whether the structures of power constitutive of academic socialization aren't even more difficult to resist than those of one's family. Was the academic life I was living one that I had chosen, or was it one chosen for me by my mentors and by the orthodox academic practices I had unconsciously internalized and embodied? As the product of a working-class family without a history of high culture, love of books, or even a university education, I had always felt uneasy and doubtful about whether I really fit as an academic. I knew it was not coincidental that I had chosen to teach at universities like Cleveland State, Temple, and South Florida, where many of the undergraduates come from working-class backgrounds. It was not difficult for me to feel in touch with my students because the part of me that was working-class kid was never removed totally from the ground of my students' world of experience.

However, I had to admit that my capacity to draw meaningfully on my personal experience in order to touch undergraduate students where they live did not carry over to the rest of my academic world. In the classroom, I thrived on an ability to call on stories that painted my life into their picture. When I was successful, it was largely because of the tacit knowledge we shared, connecting their lived experiences to mine. But the world of academic scholarship made different demands on me. As Robert Coles (1989) suggests, graduate education usually teaches us to cover the details of individual experience beneath a blanket of professional jargon. Coles refers to professional, academic socialization as a form of indoctrination into the mind-set that theory is the way to get to the core of things. One learns that entering a discipline means stepping into a world that has its own language; if you want to live in that world, you better be able to speak that way. We learn to tell our version of the lives we study by translating the terms ordinary people use into the categories and jargon that comprise our field's theoretical language. Looking back on his education, Coles realizes *now* that he learned to force the stories his patients told into the theoretical constructs that had been forced into him. These theories substituted for the concrete details of stories, the teller's representation of the lived life giving way to the social scientist's

expertise at abstracting its meaning. Usually, the theory is there *before* the story is heard and, thus, the tale works to service the theory that explains it.

Moreover, scholarly inquiry is not assumed to start at the site of one's own experience. We learn to "receive knowledge" by focusing outward, relying on the wisdom of our predecessors to preview our own experiences and expectations. "Review the literature; see what others have said; stand on the shoulders of the giants," we are told. Start at the site of what they write and you can at least avoid being accused of stupidity or ignorance. Fair enough. But how was this helping me *now*? I had studied, theorized, and taught about loss and attachment for more than two decades, but I had to admit that I didn't really begin to *know* loss until I experienced my father's death. And the more I thought about my own experience of loss, read other people's accounts of loss, and reviewed the theoretical and research literature, the more I began to understand that the academic world was not in touch with the everyday world of experience, the ordinary world. The research literature offered me data, labels, categories, and theoretical explanations, but it didn't express how loss felt and it didn't invite engagement with the particularities of the experience. Indeed, the academic world was long on conceptualizations and short on details; long on abstractions, short on concrete events; long on analysis, short on experience; long on theories, short on stories. I had no desire to get rid of concepts, abstractions, analysis, or theory. Like most academics, I know them as the tools of my trade. It was the imbalance that troubled me—how quickly we turn lives and experiences into texts and concepts (Jackson, 1995).

Was it possible to create and inhabit a different world of inquiry, one better suited to integrating the academic and the personal selves, which are so alienated from each other by traditional academic practices? Referring to philosophers, Richard Rorty (1991) says, "We all hanker after essence and share a taste for theory as opposed to narrative. If we did not, we should probably have gone into some other line of work" (p. 71). Certainly, that's the prevailing wisdom of the academy. But in the same essay, Rorty recommends a healthy dose of detailed narrative as an antidote to the essentializing proclivities of social theorists: "Earlier I said that theorists like Heidegger saw narrative as always a second-best, a propeaedeutic to a grasp of something deeper than the visible detail. Novelists like Orwell and Dickens are inclined to see theory as always a second-best, never more than a reminder for a particular purpose, the purpose of telling a story better. I suggest that the history of social change in the modern West shows that the latter conception of the relation between narrative and theory is the more fruitful" (Rorty, 1991, p. 80).

Among the definitions for *academic*, *Webster's New World Dictionary* (1966) includes "too far from immediate reality; not practical enough; too speculative" (p. 7). It's not far-fetched to extrapolate "distanced from reality; remote; impersonal." How about "disinterested" or "neutral"? (I fantasize printing T-shirts that say, "I'm an academic, I'm neutral.") I had been clothed in this

image of academic life for 25 years, but I was just realizing how poorly it fit me. Knowledge isn't neutral; and it can never be disinterested (Denzin, 1992; Jackson, 1989).

Still, I had to remind myself that the problem is not with the university *per se*; nor is orthodox social science the problem. These are institutions created by other human beings and sustained by our complicity. We share responsibility by following rules, both tacit and explicit ones, that keep them going.

We know we're onto something, when we're told, "You mustn't think that way." That's the feeling I got when I read Huber's attacks on interpretive social science and qualitative research (Huber, 1995; Huber & Mirowsky, 1997). I had to wonder why she was telling me that I mustn't think these thoughts. Her warnings give me pause to consider whether I've been playing according to rules I didn't know I was following. Laing (1969) declares that "unless we can 'see through' the rules, we only see through them" (p. 105). If we collectively stop complying, we stand a chance of exposing and breaking the rules against seeing the rules. We can begin thinking thoughts we're not supposed to think. Then, who can say what new shape our institution may take?

[Lived experience] brings us to a dialectical view of life which emphasizes the interplay rather than the identity of things, which denies any sure steadying to thought by placing it always within the precarious and destabilizing fields of history, biography, and time. . . . It remains skeptical of all efforts to reduce the diversity of experience to timeless categories and determinate theorems, to force life to be at the disposal of ideas." (Jackson, 1989, p.2)

How to encompass in our minds the complexity of some lived moments of life? You don't do that with theories. You don't do that with a system of ideas. You do it with a story." (Coles, 1989, p.128)

What I remember best about that weekend in Tampa, right after my father died, was how hard I struggled to explain my father to myself. I didn't want to romanticize our family history—it wasn't pretty—but I didn't want to demonize it either. Strong as his grip had been on us, we hadn't been paralyzed by it. His life had been unbearably sad and weary, filled with disappointments, burdens, and betrayals; but ours had not. We got out of prison; he stayed.

I called my mother and told her I wanted to speak at dad's funeral. Then, I locked myself in my office and started to re-create him. It was time to dig up the past. Kierkegaard (1959) says, we live forward, but we understand backward. To move forward, I felt I had to look behind. I never understood my father; never really tried to. For a long time, I was so ashamed of him, I could scarcely bring myself to admit he was mine. Later on, I had forgiven him, largely because I hated hating him—hated the kind of person it made me. Now that he was dead, I missed him. Looking in the mirror, I saw his face

etched onto mine and I realized he would always be there looking back at me. I closed my eyes and remembered:

I'm 12 years old. It's a damp, gray, smoggy, afternoon in Pittsburgh. I'm running down Beechwood Boulevard, hurrying to get home. I glance at my watch as I run. It's 6:30. My god, I'm an hour late for dinner, he's going to kill me. What can I tell him? I know, yes, I'll say the newspapers were late, so I couldn't finish delivering them on time. I turn onto Northumberland, picking up the pace. But look at me, there's a hole in the knee of my pants from where I fell, and I'm sweaty and dirty from playing basketball. He's not going to believe me. He'll take one look at me and—Wham! I can already feel it. Maybe he won't be home. I can't remember, was he working away from home today? Oh, please, please don't be home. I turn the corner onto Severn Street. I'll be home in another minute; I've got to slow down, catch my breath. I don't see our car, what a relief; then I do—Shit! Fear rumbles through my body! I hate that house! I hate him! I tiptoe up the steps of the front porch, open the front door gently, and close it quietly behind me. I try to scoot swiftly up the stairs to my room to change my pants, but before I can move, I hear my mother's voice calling from the kitchen, "Arthur, is that you? Where have you been? I kept your dinner warm in the oven."

Before I can answer, he's standing there in front of me, ready to pounce. I already feel his invincible power—hard, relentless, unforgiving. "Don't lie to me, Arthur. You were out playing ball, weren't you?" he asks.

"No, the papers got there late. I just finished delivering them."

"Why you lazy, no-good liar, just look at you, you're filthy," he screams in my face, punching me in the stomach.

"Mike, stop. You'll hurt him," my mother shouts, grabbing at him, but he pulls away and she moves back. Doubled over from the force of his punch, I can't escape. He's too large; I'm too weak. The room is too small and too cluttered. I'm his prey, cornered in his territory; and the fierce, frenzied look on his face shows he won't be denied. Now he moves in for the kill. Unbuckling his belt, he grabs me by the collar with one strong, meaty hand and holds me tightly. Over and over and over again, he belts me with his strap. "I work like a slave, while you play! I'll teach you. You no-good little liar. You'll learn."

Later that night, I lay on my bed, licking my wounds and plotting how I could escape this prison. Why hadn't I just kept running, past our house, out of the neighborhood, away from the anger, the fear, the hitting, the hate? What did I do wrong? Okay, I was late for dinner. We always eat at 5:30, except when he's late, then we wait, no matter how late he is or how hungry we are. But all I really did was stop to play, have some fun. Why can't I have fun?

I opened my eyes and reentered the present. Why? I ask myself. Why did he do those things? What made him so violent and impulsive? Where did all that pent-up fury come from? What satisfaction could he possibly have derived from pounding the flesh of a little boy half his size? After all, the fights never really changed anything. I didn't learn any lessons, except perhaps to make promises and tell lies. Surrounded by the hundreds of books lining the shelves of my office, I searched alone for answers. Quietly, I culled details from the recesses of my memory, replaying the stories he had told us over and over again when we were children—stories about poverty, abandonment, fear, and anti-Semitism. When I was a child, I thought these stories were

boring, irrelevant, and pathetic. I had no sympathy for the man I feared most. Too often, dad had been a rotten bastard, and if he suffered before I was born, well, that was no reason to take it out on me. Besides, I was too busy learning to read the signs that tipped off an impending fit of rage—so I could get the hell out of the way—to care about whether there was a good explanation for dad's uncontrollable anger. That I survived the beatings—that all of us did—was remarkable enough.

Hacking (1995) cautions against the impulse to place old actions under new descriptions: "There is no canonical way to think of our own past. In the endless quest for order and structure, we grasp at whatever picture is floating by and put our past into its frame" (p. 89). To say I was abused by my father is to apply a term that was totally outside my interpretive structure as a child. If the folks in my neighborhood were asked to account for such beatings, I can just hear them saying "Abuse? Who knew abuse? We didn't know from abuse; we knew from discipline." Situating my father's violence within the cultural narrative of child abuse would be an act of "semantic contagion" (Hacking, 1995, p. 256), endowing my story with meanings that weren't available at the time these events were lived. Child abuse was not part of the conceptual space in which we lived. I never placed myself in the child abuse narrative, never thought myself a survivor, never considered my father's brutality a way of accounting for any of the mistakes I made or misfortunes I encountered later. Perhaps I was never sufficiently unhappy to need that story, or perhaps I just couldn't accept the vulnerability it implies. More likely, it never appealed to my appetite for complexity. Yes, I can remember those beatings vividly, but what is it about me that they explain? I don't know.

As adults, when we are in trouble, disturbed, or unhappy, we may feel a need to look to the past to explain why we cope the way we do. Sometimes that can be helpful and many people testify to the usefulness of such memory work. Yet, it is also true that child abuse can be parasitic on this need. It can smooth the rough edges of an indeterminate past, giving a causal structure that fills in the gaps, reconstituting our self by weaving memories of the past into stories that make sense by appropriating the new ways of talking to reveal the lessons of the past. We say, "Me too, I'm one of them. I was abused," as if we've discovered (or recovered) some new, indisputable truth (Hacking, 1995). But if I ask, "Did my father intend to abuse me?" knowing well that the idea of child abuse was not available to him, then the meaning of his actions becomes considerably less determinate (Hacking, 1995). He operated under a moral code that it was a father's responsibility to prepare his son for a harsh, cruel, unforgiving world. Had he known that one day his actions would be called child abuse, would he have acted that way? Where do we draw the line between the terms that describe our ways of thinking about the meanings of one's actions *now*, and the intentions that motivated one's actions *then*?

Besides, as I sat there in my office, I wasn't trying to explain myself. I wanted to explain him. Not many of us ever try to explain our parents, think about why they turned out the way they did. We don't think it necessary to explain them. We're too absorbed with ourselves. We may use our parents to explain us, but we don't normally dig much deeper into the past; we don't use ourselves to explain them.

Our family relationships were terribly complicated, and no simple labels can suffice. My father's abusive, hateful, volatile temper wasn't all that I remembered. My father was also honest, driven, hard-working, and ethical to a fault. He worked too hard—"like a slave," he would say with conviction—and when he finished for the day, 7 days a week, he was spent. He had nothing left for us. He was not heroic, just an ordinary, fearful, working man. A slave to heavy, demanding, largely unrewarding work; uneducated; insecure; raised a poor ghetto Jew; my father was afraid of life. He used to say proudly, "I ask for nothing from nobody," perhaps because, as Jules Henry (1973) said about such men, "The lava of nothingness boils in his gut" (p. 181). He lived beyond the reach of love and may only have felt alive, achieved an intense feeling of selfhood, when he was knocking against someone who couldn't hit back. I sometimes think he was only alive physically, his spirit having been crushed by life's contingencies. My father had no functional outlet for the desires buried inside him and when they were incited, his powers of resistance were not strong enough to contain the flames—then he exploded. The child in him had been submerged by life's contingencies, and when he saw his children expressing the fullness of a child's life, he had to make them suffer the way he must have suffered too. As Alice Miller (1983) observes in reference to masculine, parental cruelty, "Without meaning to and without realizing it, the father treat(s) his child just as cruelly as he treats the child within himself" (p. 95).

Standing in front of the congregation of relatives, neighbors, and friends, I take a deep breath, hoping to stifle the emotion rising to the surface. My voice cracks as I begin to speak.

There is no formula for triumphing over life's limitations. Every person's life is a singular response to the confusion of existence. . . . There is much in a man's life over which he has no control and for which he is not responsible. . . . Some men are consumed by blows of fate; others find dignity and self-worth by accepting hardship and suffering as a normal condition of life and doing their best to lessen the burden of others. . . . My father would be proud to be remembered as a self-made man who stood on his own two feet and planted them firmly on the virtuous ground of duty, hard work, honesty, and integrity. He was a modest man of simple tastes. Only his immediate family—and a friend or two—ever got to know him, and sometimes he was a mystery to us. . . . My father could not contain the strains of life he felt inside him, the pain and fear and insecurity of his childhood. It was only in his last few years, as I watched his

strength and passion fade, that I realized how vulnerable he was and always had been. My father had to be a man before he could finish being a boy. He was given no time for boyish dreams or adventures. The stark reality of poverty and prejudice allowed no opportunity for escape to the distractions of ambitious undertakings. . . . I wish I could have truly understood and empathized with the massive reality of his boyhood. Then, I might have understood why he couldn't relax and experience more of the joy of life and living. My father was well worth caring about and many of us did care for him deeply. I only regret that he found our caring so difficult to apprehend as we did his. I can only hope and pray that he knows now that his life was meaningful, that we know he loved us as we love him, in our own fallible way, and that we recognized the good in him. . . . Now he can rest, secure and in peace.

David Carr (1986) observes that "Coherence seems to be a need imposed upon us whether we seek it or not" (p.97). But the sense of coherence that we need does not inhere in events themselves. Coherence is an achievement, not a given. This is the work of self-narration: to make a life that seems to be falling apart come together again, by retelling and "restorying" the events of one's life. At certain junctures in life, this narrative challenge can be a terrible struggle, and we do not always succeed. The unity of life, its apparent wholeness across time, is simply there—sometimes figure, sometimes ground (Carr, 1986). When the flow of time is disrupted unexpectedly, the absence of a sense of coherence can become a matter of grave concern, and we become acutely aware at such times that the orderly, well-planned life we thought we were living out has holes in it. At stake are the very integrity and intelligibility of our selfhood, which rest so tenderly and fallibly on the story we use to link birth to life to death (MacIntyre, 1981).

My father's sudden death disrupted my sense of continuity. Looking back, I saw that one day I had not returned home; instead, I just kept running and didn't stop until I was too far away to see the past behind me. Now, the past was in front of me again. I couldn't change what I remembered taking place. I knew that certain things had happened—violent, harmful, unpleasant things—and I could not change that. However, I reinterpreted or reframed the meanings of these events, I was constrained by the events themselves. They were fixed in my mind, and in my experience, and there was no way to make them vanish. Remaking my father did not mean making him up; there were limits to my interpretations.

The act of reconstructing the meaning of my father's life was an attempt to reclaim my past. I felt a powerful desire to own up to the experiences that had shaped me—for good or for bad—to revise, interpret, and make sense out of my family history from the vantage point of my present situation. I knew there was no getting to the bottom, no transcendental point of view, no final truth to be rendered. Remaking my father was not a disinterested activity. On the contrary, my self-interest was to be served by casting an image of my father that would free me from his grip, point me toward the future.

As Crites (1986) observes, no inquiry aimed at recovering the past is ever conducted in the past: "We appropriate the personal past, in fact, out of the future" (p. 164). In effect, the work of my narrative activity was to restory significant events in my family history into a composition of a continuous life of experience. This is not to say that my life as lived, in fact, is coherent and continuous, only that I would find it impossible to make sense of my life without assuming what MacIntyre (1981) calls the "unity of life," an intelligibility that makes it possible to conceive and evaluate my life as a whole.

The eulogy I delivered at my father's funeral brought a sense of closure, however tentative, to my struggle to make sense of my family history. By this, I mean it marked the end of this phase of my struggle to fit my family story into the larger whole of my life story. I no longer felt I had to hide or deny the validity of the events that I had run from; and I also felt I had achieved a deeper understanding of my father's life that broadened the horizon of the patterns that connected us. But, the personal sense of continuity I had achieved by reframing my father did not carry over to my academic life. I still had to deal with my desire to remake my life as a professor. The epiphany of my father's death had been a turning point in the conversation between my academic self and my ordinary self. Something very personal—my father's death—had unintentionally intruded on my public, professional life. Now I had to confront the challenge of bringing a sense of unity to the divisions expressed by these inner voices. Adam Phillips (1994) says that we all have lives inside us competing to be lived; the accidents that happen to most of us remind us that we are living too few of them. To understand an event in one's life as an accident that was meant to happen, much like a Freudian slip, to see the course of one's life under the influence of coincidence rather than control, and to treat contingency as something not to overcome but to be used is to give oneself the freedom to take chances (Phillips, 1994). This was my opportunity to exercise that freedom, to use this chance to make a different life for myself as a professor. But, to do so would mean to review academic life as I knew it and lived it—to question, evaluate, and critique it as honestly as I could. I wanted to identify some of the consequences of omitting the personal self from academic practices: that is, how our teaching and writing and feelings of well-being are affected. What do we fear? Whose interests are served by our divided self? What would result if we brought these voices into closer contact with each other?

Here at the university, the pain lingers. I cannot clear out. It is hard to heal. Because it is hard to heal I must defend myself: close off, grow scar tissue, thicken my hide. Speech becomes guarded. I give up expressiveness. (Gornick, p. 135)

I was shocked, almost from the moment I left Columbia, by how little I missed it, how relieved I was not to have to plunge, ever again, into that poisonous atmosphere. (Heilbrun, 1997, p. 39)

In 1974, I accepted an appointment as an assistant professor in the Department of Speech at Temple University. I left as a professor in 1984. I recall packing my office to leave Temple in June 1984.

I'm rummaging through old memos and files of minutes of department meetings. I feel sad, but my sadness is not about leaving, it's about the lack of connection I feel here. I have one very close friend in the department and another friend, a much younger man, who also is packing to leave in the office next to mine. I look at the 11 names on the list of telephone numbers of the department area faculty, the ones who teach in Rhetoric and Communication. Three of the people on the list haven't been around all year. At least I haven't seen them. They're not on sabbatical; it's just, well, they're never here. The other seven have been around, but I haven't spoken to two of them in several years. I've exchanged pleasantries with some of the others, but I can't recall a single significant conversation with any of them—ever. I achieved tenure here and was promoted twice, but I would guess that at least two thirds of the faculty never have read anything that I published. Over the years, we've had some big fights in the department and these conflicts have built a huge divide between various factions in the department. I could tolerate the divisions, but what really bothered me was that we never talked about them. We just let the conflicts simmer quietly below the surface. I knew one faculty member who took Valium before faculty meetings to make sure his feelings wouldn't boil over.

Last week, the chair held a farewell party for me and the colleague who was leaving. It was a very uncomfortable evening. Were they celebrating our departure? More than half the faculty didn't come. The ones who were there really didn't know what to say. I didn't know what to say either. They gave me a leather briefcase, a token of their appreciation. Nothing inside it. No farewell speeches. I used to say about my chair, "The good thing about him is he leaves me alone." So, why should I expect things to be any different? It's hard to know somebody you always leave alone. And that's just it. They don't know me, and I don't know them.

I didn't know this was what I was signing on for when I agreed to live "the life of the mind." I'm leaving here today, leaving behind 10 years of my sweat and labor, and it all feels so empty. What difference would it have made if I had never been here at all?

The university is filled with professors who are depressed (Tompkins, 1996). I've never considered myself one of them, but I've felt on the edge, fighting against depression a number of times. The experience of depression I'm talking about is not the kind we usually think about. What I'm talking about is *institutional depression*, a pattern of anxiety, hopelessness, demoralization, isolation, and disharmony that circulates through university life. Normally, we don't recognize its institutional form because we take for granted the rules under which institutional depression operates, the rules that isolate us from each other while holding us hostage to the satisfactions presumably derived from the model of solitary productivity that governs university life. When we feel pangs of depression, we normally assign the blame for what we are feeling to powerful others—the administration, the chair, the legislature, or some other figure of authority and power over us. It's

not that they are undeserving of any of the blame. Usually they've earned it. Yet, I wonder what we gain when we take ourselves off the hook and act as if our misery is only the result of what they do to us. Then, we don't have to look at ourselves, look at our own complicity in sustaining the patterns of relationship that bind us to norms of isolation, absence, and unwillingness to metacommunicate. Gornick (1996) expresses this relational stance pointedly: "First you think, It must be them, it can't be me. Then you think, No, it's not them, it is me. Getting to the third thought, It's not them, it's not me, it's the two of us together—that takes some diving" (p. 122).

Rose (1990) notes that one of the ironic qualities of university life is that we do not see ourselves as embedded in a strange subculture, our department life, within the larger culture of the university; and we do not analyze and talk with each other about either culture in profoundly self-critical ways. Recently, four personal accounts that speak to this issue have been published (Gornick, 1996; Heilbrun, 1997; Krieger, 1997; Richardson, 1997; Tompkins, 1996), all written by women. These accounts testify to the deep despair, loneliness, and unhappiness experienced in the institutional lives lived by these very accomplished women. Three of these women retired early; the other two have never held a permanent faculty position. The riskiness of this kind of institutional self-criticism could hardly be more apparent.

The fear of risk and retribution associated with struggles to accommodate difference and change within the existing subcultures of the university goes beyond the local circumstances of these women. It is endemic to the norms of conformity that most of us learn when we are socialized into our discipline (Krieger, 1991; Rose, 1990). As Rose (1990) observes, the way we write is carefully controlled by our disciplines, which have the power to withhold the rewards of publication to nonconforming texts. This is not so much an issue of standards—that is, whether to have standards—but rather a question of which standards to have and whose interests are served by the standards that are accepted and upheld. What is excluded by the rules of conformity that discipline our writing (and the ones that discipline the patterns of interaction among colleagues in a department)?

These questions bring me back to the split between the academic and personal self. After my father's death, I began receiving sympathy cards from people in my field who barely knew me, which reminded me that the split between the academic and the personal world often is severed. This gave me pause to question why it is that you rarely hear anyone talk about their personal lives in the papers they give at conferences, and you seldom see the personal self mix with the professional self on the pages of mainstream journals such as *American Journal of Sociology*, *American Sociological Review*, *American Educational Research Journal*, *Communication Monographs*, *Communication Theory*, or *Human Communication Research*. Obviously, because we've been conditioned to separate the personal and professional domains of experience. It's an essential part of our academic socialization. And why is that the

case? Because it helps us maintain the illusion that the academic self hasn't been prejudiced by the interests of the ordinary, personal self. When we insulate the academic from the personal, we imply that the personal voice is, as Jane Tompkins (1989) observes, "soft-minded, self-indulgent, and unprofessional" (p. 122), whereas the academic voice is exalted as the voice of reason, objectivity, and rigor. So, we learn to hide our personal self behind a veneer of academic and theoretical detachment, fostering the misconception that it has no influence, no place, no significance in our work. Yet, it is rare, indeed, to find a productive scholar whose work is unconnected to his or her personal history. If you are a member of a department long enough, you usually learn the personal story behind each colleague's research interests. Few of us study subjects such as child abuse, addiction, racism, or abortion coincidentally.

We pay a steep price for producing texts that sustain the illusion of disinterest and neutrality by keeping the personal voice out. Our work is underread, undergraduates find many of our publications boring, graduate students say our scholarship is dry and inaccessible, seasoned scholars confess they don't finish half of what they start reading, and the public hardly knows we exist (Richardson, 1994). Oh, we've learned to rationalize these responses, but we know in our hearts we would like them to be different. We do a good job of protecting our secrets—hiding our embarrassment—but we are troubled by how few of us carry a passion for theory and research into our 40s and 50s and 60s and how many of us have lost the excitement and liveliness we once had. We've seen the casualties of an alienated workforce up close, etched on the blank faces of colleagues who caved in, gave up, stopped caring. This, too, is a moral crisis, an epidemic of institutional depression. We turn the other cheek, keep quiet, pretend the moral crisis isn't there, but that doesn't make it disappear.

It's about time we wrestled more openly and collectively with these problems. Instead of hiding the pain many of us feel about the ways we are unfulfilled by the life of the mind, we need to muster the courage to speak the truth about "the emotional fallout" of a lifetime of teaching and research (Tompkins, 1996, p.57). We need to face up to the ways we use orthodox academic practices to discipline, control, and perpetuate ourselves and our traditions, stifling innovation, discouraging creativity, inhibiting criticism of our own institutional conventions, making it difficult to take risks, and severing academic life from emotional and spiritual life. No matter how much change may threaten us, we need to consider alternatives—different goals, different styles of research and writing, different ways of bringing the academic and the personal into conversation with each other.

The desire to bring the personal self into conversation with the academic self was the major inspiration for my turn toward a personal narrative approach to inquiry (Bochner, 1994; Bochner, Ellis, & Tillmann-Healy, 1997; Ellis, 1995; Ellis & Bochner, 1996), an alternative to orthodox social science

that I have been pursuing for much of the past 10 years. Stories ask readers to *feel* their truth and thus to become fully engaged—morally, aesthetically, emotionally, and intellectually (Richardson, 1994). Stories invite us to enter horizons of the human condition in which lived life is shown as comic, tragic, and absurd, and in which endless opportunities exist to create a reality and live it (Coles, 1989).

The narrative approach to qualitative inquiry that I favor privileges the story. In our work, (e.g., Ellis & Bochner, 1996) we try to produce texts that show how people breach canonical conventions and expectations; how they cope with exceptional, difficult, and transformative crises; how they invent new ways of speaking when old ways fail them; and how they turn calamities into gifts. These stories activate subjectivity and compel emotional response (Ellis & Bochner, 1992). They long to be used rather than analyzed, to be told and retold rather than theorized and settled. And they promise the companionship of intimate detail as a substitute for the loneliness of abstracted facts, touching readers where they live and offering details that linger in the mind.

After my father's death, I struggled to bring my academic and personal worlds closer together. I had yearned to do so for a long time; now I felt I had no choice. Twenty years earlier, I had been drawn to communication studies because I thought it could help answer deep and troubling questions about how to live a meaningful, useful, and ethical life. Somewhere along the way, these questions gave way to smaller, more precise, more professional questions. But I found, when I began listening more closely, that students were still coming with many of the same searching questions. They express a lot of concern about how to understand the life that is in and around them. They want to lead decent and honorable lives, even in the face of the hypocrisy, sham, and betrayal they've already experienced in life. I know I don't have the answers, but I also feel an obligation to help students address the moral contradictions they feel, bring their dilemmas out into the realm of public discourse, name the silences, make them discussable issues. What is education if not an intense, probing scrutiny of moral choices and dilemmas (Coles, 1989)? What does communication studies (or any of the social sciences) have to offer students if we strip away emotional experience; avoid questions of moral contradiction; or act as if duties, obligations, desire, and imagination are outside the scope of what we teach because they can't be grasped as hard data?

Shortly after I published an essay titled "Theories and Stories" (Bochner, 1994), I got calls and letters from concerned colleagues in my field who wanted to know whether I really was opposed to theory (and whether I'd lost my mind). I tried to explain that I had not juxtaposed stories against theories; I only wanted to create a space for appreciating the value and uses of stories. This is a good place to revise that explanation.

What I want to say now is that there is nothing as theoretical as a good story. The split between theory and story is false—and it's not false. It's not false when theory is viewed in the terms I used earlier in this article—objective, scientific, detached, value-free, beyond human consciousness. Described in these terms, theory becomes an end in itself, divorced from its consequences, politics, and uses. This is the taken-for-granted sense of theory I heard from a colleague at a tenure review hearing, when she observed, "He's published enough, but his work isn't theoretical." It is also the sense of theory promoted by those who see the purpose of communication research, to take one representative example, as the development of middle-range (Burlinson, 1992) or general theories of communication (Berger, 1991), but who do not consider the ways in which describing or explaining reality is different from dealing with it. As Rorty (1979) queries, "What is the point?" "What moral is to be drawn from our knowledge of how we and the rest of nature work?" or "What do we do with ourselves now that we know the laws of our own behavior?" (p. 383). When we don't ask questions like these, we run the risk of forgetting that theorizing is not an activity devoid of context or consequences. Sometimes, the consequences turn out to be wretched. Consider the plight of the kin of Europeans killed in the July 1996 crash of TWA Flight 800. Stuck for 7 days and nights in uncomfortable hotel rooms in an unfamiliar city, frustrated by the cross-purposes of theory and experience, and bewildered by the insensitivity of officials to their emotional trauma, the kin of victims had reached their limits. At a hastily called news conference, a spokesman for the French contingent expressed the feelings shared by many in the group: "We don't care about your theories or your examination of the causes of the crash. We want our bodies and we want to go home" (paraphrased).

But there is no split between theory and story when theorizing is conceived as a social and communicative activity. This is what I mean when I use the term *social theory*. In the world of social theory, we are less concerned about representation and more concerned about communication. We give up the illusions of transcendental observation in favor of the possibilities of dialogue and collaboration. Social theory works the spaces between history and destiny. The social world is understood as a world of connection, contact, and relationship. It also is a world where consequences, values, politics, and moral dilemmas are abundant and central.

As social beings, we live storied lives (Rosenwald & Ochberg, 1992). Our identities—who we are and what we do—originate in the tales passed down to us and the stories we take on as our own. In this sense, stories constitute "our medium of being" (Schafer, 1981). Storytelling is both a *method* of knowing—a social practice—and a way of telling about our lives (Richardson, 1990). As an academic practice, the approach to narrative inquiry that I take changes the activity of theorizing from a process of thinking *about* to one of

thinking *with* (Frank, 1995). Theory meets story when we think with a story rather than about it. As Arthur Frank (1995) points out,

To think about a story is to reduce it to content and then analyze the content. . . . To think with a story is to experience its affecting one's own life and to find in that effect a certain truth of one's life. (p. 23)

Thus, we do not turn stories into data to test theoretical propositions. Rather, we link theory to story when we think with a story, trying to stay with the story, letting ourselves resonate with the moral dilemmas it may pose, understanding its ambiguities, examining its contradictions, feeling its nuances, letting ourselves become part of the story (Ellis, 1995). We think with a story from the framework of our own lives. We ask what kind of person we are becoming when we take the story in and consider how we can use it for our own purposes, what ethical directions it points us toward, and what moral commitments it calls out in us (Coles, 1989).

Narrative ethicists say if it's time to end and you're not sure you've made your point, don't try to explain, just tell another story (Frank, 1995). So, I end with one more story, an aging tale passed down by Gregory Bateson (1979, p. 13).

A man wanted to know about mind, not in nature, but in his private large computer. He asked it (no doubt in his best Portran), "Do you compute that you will ever think like a human being?" The machine then set to work to analyze its own computational habits. Finally, the machine printed its answer on a piece of paper, as such machines do. The man ran to get the answer and found, neatly typed, the words:

THAT REMINDS ME OF A STORY

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