

# Constructing “The Heterotopia of Time”: Classical Narrative, Poetic Justice, and Communal Educational Practice

Ziwan Liu\*

School of Chinese Language and Literature, Xi’an International Studies University, Xi’an 710000, Shaanxi, China

\*Corresponding author: Ziwan Liu, 107242025200981@stu.xisu.edu.cn

**Copyright:** © 2026 Author(s). This is an open-access article distributed under the terms of the Creative Commons Attribution License (CC BY 4.0), permitting distribution and reproduction in any medium, provided the original work is cited.

**Abstract:** The aesthetic perception of art, the formative power of classical ethics, and the negotiation of meaning through signs resonate with one another. By reconstructing the concepts of “poetic justice” and the “heterotopia of time” within classical artistic narratives, this study provides an integrated praxis of slow aesthetics, ethics, and politics for educational innovation and management practice. The study engages with existence from multiple dimensions, focusing on the shift in values concerning the individual psyche and communal interpretation. It extends the fuge of moral sentiments—from poetic justice to the fragility of goodness—navigating the uncertainties inherent in art, language, and the value of the Other through a balance of constancy and change, thereby constructing memory, identity, and ethical responsibility. Utilizing the real material force shaped by temporal narrative, the study intervenes to reveal the mechanisms of ideology and power operation. Through engagements with materiality, art, and embodied aesthetic experiences, the study addresses complex events, participating in the formation of social consensus, the accumulation of affect, and the perceptual inscription of the ethical atmosphere of reality. By deepening the dual-shaping function of temporal narrative as material practice through refraction and trans-domain superposition, it resists the crisis of multimedia fragmentation and the problem of materialized emotions. It responds to the practical transformations of daily life with deep historical consciousness, aiming to forge a modern communal meaning characterized by warmth and depth.

**Keywords:** Narrative Pedagogy; Classical ethics; Poetic justice; Community governance; Cross-disciplinary integration

**Online publication:** March 13, 2026

## 1. Introduction

Narrative, as a fundamental mode through which humans comprehend time, construct selfhood, and confront existential uncertainty, becomes the critical site of engagement. Classical ethical narratives possess a dual-shaping function: they inwardly forge self-identity and meaning, while outwardly, through literary-political

intervention, they expose and challenge the mechanisms of social power.

This paper revisits the traditional historical view of time and proceeds along this dual-shaping path. It operates along two intertwined axes: the existence-interpretation-ethics axis addresses questions of mind, identity, and meaning; the power-materiality-aesthetics axis engages with history, capital, and technology. The analysis unfolds within the tension and interplay of these two domains, seeking to transcend the dual predicament of the forgetting of Being and the systematic colonization of the human refractive prism.

Following Stiegler's critique of the algorithmic real-time and the imprisoning accelerated, fragmented spectacles refracted by capital, this study aims to reactivate the truth of a narrative temporality—one imbued with negativity and traumatic real—that has been suppressed by the ideological fantasy of a smooth, commodified digital time. It advocates confronting the very circle of fantasy that frames reality, undertaking what Lacan termed traversing the fantasy—shaking its foundations and accepting its contradictions. Through a classical form of intervention that enframes the connection to the real world, it seeks to reawaken what Heidegger identified as time as the fundamental horizon for the ek-sistence of Dasein, thereby opening a space for an authentic and responsible ek-sistence <sup>[1]</sup>.

By returning to classical ethics amidst narrative crisis and temporal alienation, and by harnessing Žižek's concept of the Event to perceive and alter the very structure of the world, this paper proposes narrative as a battleground and time as its medium. It seeks to permeate the philosophical foundations of time and existence, to reconstruct an ethical symbiosis between the individual and the community within historical time, and ultimately to point toward a praxis that enables new self-formation. The final aim is to advance a narrative politics and a vision of community that retains emancipatory significance in the technological age.

## 2. The Dual-Shaping Function

The temporal narrative of classical ethics serves a dual-shaping function: it forges self-identity inwardly while intervening in structures of social power outwardly. This framework connects traditions from Plato and Aristotle to modern thinkers like Heidegger, Foucault, and Derrida. Across civilizations, two distinct narrative paradigms have co-evolved: The Greek tragic tradition confronts contradiction through sublime destruction and achieves emotional purification. The Pre-Qin Chinese didactic tradition establishes moral exemplars, envisions social blueprints of harmony, and pursues narratives of ethical order. The Greek paradigm of conflict and dialectics provided an enduring archetype for Western concepts of individual rights, critical reason, and the rule of law—a lineage extending through Rome, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment. In contrast, the Pre-Qin paradigm of ritual, music, and harmony established the foundations of Chinese civilization, emphasizing secular ethics, political unity, and cultural continuity—a perspective capable of contemplating all of time and space within a single moment. Tragic narratives etch the existential imprint of individuals who, facing absolute conflict within the bounded polis, define dignity through reason and resistance. Pre-Qin didacticism, emerging from an era of disintegrating rites, imprints the practice of individual ethics—constructing and integrating the self into a differentiated yet harmonious order. By internalizing these ancient narratives—whether rooted in the competitive debate of maritime city-states or the integrative structure of agrarian empires—individuals discern the sources of their predicaments and imagine paths beyond them. This dialogue between communal imaginaries is more than historical comparison; it constitutes a sustained inquiry into the fundamental modes of human political existence. The enduring tension between individual and collective, antagonism and unity,

finds contemporary expression in thinkers like Haraway and Herman, whose work exemplifies the critical construction of decolonized subjectivity within socio-cultural power networks. Simultaneously, within the networked order of objects and the folds of diachronic time, this struggle unfolds as a micropolitical contest—waged through multiscalar critiques of signs and ideology—over the power of representation and aesthetic authority.

### 3. Subject identity and poetic justice

Subject identity is shaped within the dialectical relationship between historical narrative and symbolic power, while *poetic justice* provides an ethical orientation and perceptual scale for this shaping—one that transcends the classical to the contemporary, safeguarding the poetic realm <sup>[2]</sup>. The integration of self-formation and community formation lies in the dialectical relationship between the individual's narrative identity and the grand historical narrative.

#### 3.1. Temporal narrative and history

Žižek points out that history is not an objective process but a narrative of retroactive construction. Dominant historical narratives are a kind of symbolic fiction used to integrate traumatic events and establish continuity. While they represent the unfolding of grand narratives, the critique lies in revealing their repressed surplus, which can lead to decay and sin. I. A. Richards believed that literary interpretation involves readers reorganizing themselves, which expands the examination of etymology and pragmatics. Ernst Cassirer noted that humans create symbols through labor, forming the world of human culture; people no longer live in a merely physical universe but in a symbolic one, where symbolic thought and action constitute human life and are ultimately grounded in the concrete forms of social practice <sup>[3]</sup>. The transition from being to the meaning of symbols points out that linguistic sign systems are the grammar of civilization, whose socio-historical nature sedimentates the temporal experiences and power relations of a community, echoing Gramsci's concept of cultural hegemony. Addressing Peirce's three types of motivation for signs, Umberto Eco notes that the icon can effectively signify by representing its object, making texts vivid and versatile, but all essentially require conventionality for assistance <sup>[1]</sup>. The index signifies emotion-archetype, providing a strong sense of order through its signification, embodying Jung's collective unconscious archetypes. Its foundation lies in the laws that the self's existence and consciousness must grasp, extending to the significance of Eagleton's aesthetic ideology for constructing collective ethical order and realizing world order. The conventional symbol makes the interpretation of meaning accurate and effective, symbolizing power-governance, connecting to Foucault's governmentality. Indexes, data, and labels simplify complex social time into manageable indicators, becoming tools for the operation of power. Conventional symbols (negotiation-struggle) connect to the distribution of the sensible. Jacques Rancière states that subjectification occurs when a subject's name and a predicative form establish a new community among words, thus forming a completely new field of experience <sup>[4]</sup>. The ambiguity of literary language reflects on the relationship between the status quo and history. On one hand, as part of the construction of ideology and power relations, it is an extension of manipulative discourse, constrained by abstract ideology. Eve Kosofsky Sedgwick proposes symptomatic relief as a means of resistance, and Rita Felski advocates a critical philosophy that maximizes interpretive creativity. The concepts and categories of language—citizen, refugee, development—are outcomes of historical struggle and negotiation, determining whose stories can be told and whose time is worthy

of remembrance.

Throughout history, utopian thought has consistently provided a negative force for critiquing reality and an arena for exercising social imagination. Marx's critique of ideology as an inverted reflection provides a political-economic foundation for understanding how symbols mask real social time, how necessary labor time is obscured by exchange value and power relations. From commodity fetishism to Debord's society of the spectacle, including today's information fetishism, this represents the logical evolution of symbolic power. Lefebvre's critique of everyday life, production of space, and rhythmanalysis; O'Connor's proposition of the dual crisis of capitalism's economy and ecology; Kiyooki Hirata's theory of civil society and the reproduction time of the individual and community—all collectively reveal the banality and enchantment of modernity, the destiny of the subject's crisis, the relationship between community, capital, society, and civil society, and the search for an exit. And the politics of time: exploring how power shapes the linear progressive view of history, the rhythms of consumerist time, and how crisis narratives become tools of governance. This directly responds to the theme of temporal narrative in this text.

Against the backdrop of theories of the end of history and algorithms predetermining the future, insisting on a historical view of time means insisting that history is open and participatory, thereby infusing individual life-time with historical agency. Taking material practice as the entry point—temporal narrative—as the starting point of virtual experience, the study analyzes emotions and wills that cannot be materialized or fully articulated. Through reshaping the soul via Chinese and Western classics, and then roaming the genealogy of utopia. The former mines inward into the deep veins of human consciousness; the latter pursues outward the ultimate blueprint of social imagination. This connects to elevating the personal experience of literature, reshaping the soul into a new direction of spiritual exercise with universal methodological significance. Vision and homeland are the ultimate destination. Transcending the perceptual level of the sensible community and the political dimension of the class community, it becomes more inclusive and vital. Shared perceptions, emotional structures, and aesthetic experiences respond to classical and contemporary life. Based on common commitments to justice, responsibility, and the good, responding to classical and Marxist thought, the community is not an external framework. It is formed from within outward, collectively narrating the world through all processes of unification—a field of happy living where we feel both understood and able to fully engage.

### **3.2. The formation of self-identity**

Identity is generated within narrative, which entails the reshaping of memory, attention, and desire. Narrative itself constitutes a practice of sensibility. The ethical dimension of this identity signifies that it is always defined through encounters with the other and within a shared history, integrating the classical pursuit of virtue with the Marxist understanding of social relations. It represents the point of convergence between personal story and collective destiny. Engaging with the posthuman turn toward subjectivity, and building on Butler's performativity, Ballard's dialectic of mutual internal interaction between things and humans, and Foucault's analysis of power and historical knowledge, this perspective emphasizes narrative practice as a crucial form of care of the self (*Souci de soi*)—used to forge a coherent, critical self that resists fragmentation. Foucault's *technologies of the self* and Butler's theory of performativity become key for enacting micro-resistance within interstices and for actively shaping the ethical self. The narrative of Krasznahorkai's *Satantango*, through perspectives such as the doctor's voyeurism and the villagers' mutual surveillance, depicts a micro-

power landscape where a community disintegrates from within, transforming into a mutual prison, with the collective becoming a mechanism for oppressing the individual. The waiting, conspiring, and extreme revelry characterising the characters' gatherings and interactions do not yield genuine solidarity or action; instead, they intensify isolation and paralysis, presenting the absurd visage of what Nancy terms the inoperative community in a state of failure.

The paradox of narrative justice introduces Levinas's face of the other, pointing out that the ethical core of self-formation lies in an infinite response to the call of the other, thereby rupturing the self-centered closure of cognition. The integrated scale of judgment and emotion—a concept from Nussbaum—is nourished by the practice of sensibility and provides orientation for ethical identity. It represents a conception of justice that integrates rationality, rich emotion, and attention to concrete situations: a sense of right that can be directly perceived and resonated with inwardly, beyond cold statutes and abstract theory.

Centering on sign, power, and temporal narrative, Althusser and Baudrillard point out that contemporary domination has shifted from direct violence to symbolic power exercised through ideology, signs, and simulacra. This is precisely the code that civilization must decipher. Proceeding from the *critique of sign power* to the *contestation of temporal narrative*, Lefebvre's *critique of everyday life* and O'Connor's crisis theory analyze how power instrumentalizes time and the resulting social acceleration and crisis narratives, thereby proposing the need to reclaim the right to define temporal narrative. Simultaneously, Lefebvre's *rhythmanalysis* and Baudrillard's *critique of signs* analyze how consumer signs manufacture homogeneous, cyclical temporal rhythms, exploring the micropolitics of reshaping life rhythms and revealing a rhythm-critique of signs. Combining Butler's *precariousness* with Althusser's *symptomatic reading*, this approach interprets and constructs counter-narratives from the vulnerable moments of the excluded, contesting the distribution of the sensible to realize counter-narratives of the vulnerable. Paradoxical resistance constitutes true resistance—becoming a lucid Sisyphus who carves marks and fissures of exception within the cyclical, apocalyptic loops of Krasznahorkai. Furthermore, micro fissure resistance must transform private marks into resonant public narratives to converge into a force capable of challenging macroscopic cultural hegemony.

On the other hand, focusing on the practice of *subject identity formation*, Judith Butler's *temporal political commitment of performativity*, along with her theories of performativity and precariousness, demonstrates how the subject shapes identity through repetition, deviation, and resistance within power structures, thereby channeling macro-power analysis into micro-political practice. Pointing toward the goal of poetic justice, and drawing on Badiou's concept of the *Event* or Žižek's *Act*, it explores how radical ethical-political practice can break the closed circuit of the symbolic order, opening a possible space for poetic justice. This connects the discussion of self-identity formation to Bourdieu's theory of symbolic power and involves Foucault's discourse-power, providing a potential avenue for further analyzing the operational mechanisms of sign power. It respectively engages Derrida's deconstruction and Habermas's theory of the public sphere, Butler's performativity theory, precariousness, and the political nature of identity. Althusser's *dialectic of tendencies* posits that changes in society and ideology depend on the arrangement of existing formal elements; one must keenly capture the text's imagination of pathways for cultural and social transformation for deconstruction and reconstruction. Converging with Heidegger's *materialism* on the historical contingency of being, Althusser, in his later years, proposed aleatory materialism, indicating that communist relations exist not only in the interstices of imperialism but also in all marginal zones outside the development of absolute Spirit—places where people can still sustain and continually create joyful communal life. This is not the Hegelian process of

quantitative change leading to qualitative change, but a fundamental reflection on whether singular events can alter the overall situation <sup>[5]</sup>.

While engaging in dialogue with time, literature also constantly reflects on the relationship between linguistic signs and sensory experience, as well as the questioning of subjectivity. The event interrupts the fantasy; Žižek's concepts of ideological fantasy, the Act, and traversing the fantasy, alongside Badiou's *Event* theory, explain how disruptive evental time shatters the signifying, accelerated fantasy time woven by power, arguing for truth procedures and subject fidelity. The theories of these thinkers link identity and structure, demonstrating how subject identity is generated, resisted, and reshaped within the symbolic order and power structures. This is the key connecting self-identity formation and sign power. It involves the genesis and resistance of the subject, aleatory encounters of materialism, fidelity to the event itself, seeing through the void, and moving toward action.

Furthermore, Sohn-Rethel points out that the separation of mental and manual labor, where abstraction becomes the social reality form. Zhang Yibing identifies and characterizes Sohn-Rethel's primary project as a foundation-returning project involving two transcendental frameworks: the shattering of the mirror of the self-existent pseudo-realm of a priori conceptual synthesis, and the objective movement of the transcendental schema occurring in the return to social reality, along with their isomorphic relationship. Sohn-Rethel traces the real socio-historical basis of the entire Western history of ideas and the Kantian a priori philosophical framework's self-sufficient pseudo-realm, particularly its inner ordering mechanism of real abstraction within commodity exchange relations. It highlights the material substrate, relation-construction based on linguistic difference, the order-creating dynamism of social affect, the ideological shaping function, and existential freedom with emancipatory potential—linking the construct of situation with creative media to release emancipatory potential. It illuminates the micro-linguistic shaping of consciousness production, the control over the bodily and affective atmosphere of social existence, the potential practice of introspective bodily perception and material energy, the dramatic shift in cognitive models of individual rights and collective affect, and reflects on specific relations and internal ordering within socio-historical life. It carves out the possible space for constructural thinking on the cornerstone of Marxist epistemology. By distinguishing different levels of human existence—material shaping, relational patterning, order-driving, and functional modeling—as well as the free existential life-construct, and developing upon Marx's political economy, it provides intersecting perspectives that supplement and enrich socio-historical understanding. Within the historical field constituted by the interweaving of multiple levels—materiality, relations, drives, discourse—and filled with power and conflict, it enables the continuous shaping, decoding, resistance, and creation of one's own existence <sup>[6]</sup>.

Starting from the abstract logic of commodity exchange, it establishes, within the domains of critique of sign and power, temporal narrative and history, and subject and identity formation, a theoretical and practical pathway from the critique of sign power to the contestation of temporal narrative, and then to subject identity formation. It clarifies the ultimate goal of poetic justice and provides an intellectual-historical root for understanding the real forms of social domination.

### **3.3. Poetic justice and future technologies**

A Stieglerian defense positions poetic justice as an ethical practice that counters the hegemony of functional information and defends the negentropic value of human experience. A Žižekian sublimation further demands traversing the fantasy to identify with those stances of life and forms of experience marked as impossible or

superfluous by the symbolic order, such as the techno-utopia of efficiency-first. The narrative of the virtual world lays down the foundational narrative logic for designing open, immersive virtual spaces. Confronted with technological rationality, Nussbaum's poetic justice exemplifies an indispensable mental capacity and ethical stance, a poetic core that, through narrative imagination, attends to particularity, complexity, and emotion, thereby enabling a humanized scrutiny and judgment of technological schemes. It is, moreover, a core practice for shaping a more inclusive cultural structure of feeling within the field of the distribution of the sensible. The villagers metaphorically represent contemporary individuals as bare life, abandoned by the political-economic order yet subjected to secondary dispossession within the communal dream—which is, in reality, a new order promised by swindlers—thereby revealing the illusory and dangerous nature of communal promises.

For Butler and Foucault, the formation of self-identity signifies that identity is not merely constructed within temporal narratives but is performatively generated through repetitive practices within the framework of social norms and symbolic power. Foucault's late work on technologies of the self constitutes precisely a response to this: an active, ethical self-formation that creates folds of freedom within power networks. Through Levinas and Nussbaum, the formation of self-identity is perpetually oriented toward the face of the other. Narrative imagination enables people to stand in someone else's shoes, which is not merely a cognitive exercise proposed by Nussbaum but, as Levinas suggests, an infinite ethical response. This forms the affective and ethical foundation of poetic justice. Its formation is not merely a supplement to legal justice but a justice of perception and judgment. It demands attention to particularity, complexity, emotion, and contingency, thereby enabling more inclusive and humane judgments.

In the contemporary era, the formation of poetic justice occurs within the contestation over the distribution of the sensible. Narratives on social media, the representation of history in film and television, the establishment of public monuments—all are battlegrounds where we shape what Raymond Williams termed the structure of feeling of a cultural community, and where people negotiate which temporal narratives—national, subaltern, ecological—to affirm.

This orientation toward the spirit of utopia—the very pursuit itself—embodies Bloch's principle of hope and Jameson's political unconscious: identifying within narratives the repressed possibilities of the future, treating utopia as a negative force critiquing the imperfections of the present world, and as an exercise in social imagination. This leads to three practical narrative engagements: the poetic republic, the inscription of power by signs, and the revival of classical ethics.

#### **4. Critique in the digital age, media studies, and platform politics**

This reveals how contemporary reality is dismantling this narrative nature. It places narrative theory, the philosophy of time, and the established principle of self-construction and narrative as the shaping and redemptive function of time within the most destructive context of the present, creating a sharp tension. The dissolution of narrative coherence by digital technologies and algorithms, and virtual avatars; the crisis of identity narratives brought by the digital age, where algorithms, virtual avatars, and the like lead to the fragmentation of self-narrative, eroding its coherence and authenticity; the alienation of temporal experience—these directly undermine the core function of narrative constructing the self. Simultaneously, theories such as new materialism, planetary critique, and postcolonial materialism expand the agency of the object, demanding that narrative incorporate dimensions of ecology, technology, and global justice. They require the expansion of

the critical horizon from human society to technological objects and planetary ecology, revealing the breadth and depth of the crisis. This serves as the theoretical anchor point and problem field in reality. It specifies the unprecedented crisis currently confronting humanity's narrative nature, thereby endowing the theory with urgent contemporaneity. The heterotopia of temporal narrative can function as a space for poetic practice, constructing heterogeneous temporal experiences within the environment to resist the homogenization of technological time. Micro-political resistance within the symbolic world disrupts the colonization of logic and affect through strategies such as creative misreading and affective excess. Placing semiotic-linguistic principles within the context of digital platforms uncovers the deep operations of contemporary cultural power and its possibilities for resistance.

#### 4.1. Micropolitical resistance of the sign

Through creative misreading, data noise, and heterogenized expression, the smooth operation of algorithms is disrupted, thereby carving out pathways for cognitive awakening and consciousness from within the system itself. The trajectory from the public practice of Wittgensteinian language-games to Srnicek's diagnosis—that platform capitalism rewrites dominant rules through algorithmic logic—reveals a fundamental shift: the construction of inter-subjectivity is no longer a matter of free negotiation among subjects. Instead, it is predicted, steered, and commodified by sentiment-analysis algorithms. Consequently, linguistic usage increasingly conforms to algorithmically legible prototypes of affective tags, resulting in a new form of expressive cliché. The construction of narrative identity becomes ensnared in algorithmic feedback loops. When individuals fashion their self-stories on social media, they unwittingly perform the role prototypes recommended by algorithms, leading to a modal alienation of identity.

For Lacan, the subject is constituted within the symbolic order, an order structured and sustained by linguistic signs. In the technological era, this symbolic order is expanded. The profusion of cultural signifiers coalesces into data-avatars—new composite signifiers assembled from the subject's behavioral data, social graphs, and preference tags. Within the avatar, the ancient demarcation between image-signs and linguistic signs dissolves and becomes quantifiable. This avatar is no longer a body schema in the Merleau-Pontian sense, but an archival portrait perpetually calculated by the platform, one that can be disassembled and reconfigured at will. This precipitates a profound crisis of narrative coherence. A chasm emerges between the durational perception of the offline body and the fractured trajectories of multiple online virtual avatars—a gap that proves unbridgeable, plunging self-narrative into multiple and contradictory scripts.

Foucault's concept of discursive struggle and Deleuze's *detrterritorialization* provide the theoretical groundwork for a cross-domain battle against reified concepts in discourse and signification. When platform algorithms seek to fix the pathways of meaning for signs, the core of resistance lies in the active, creative deployment of semiotic principles to enact disruption. This encompasses: first, the deliberate subjectivization of channels through defamiliarizing expressions that defy prototypes, thereby producing semantic deviation; second, the distortion of inter-subjectivity via meaningless social interactions, actively generating individual singularity, cultural novelty, and psychological grounding for the collective; and third, the reconfiguration of image-language relations through the creation of composite texts such as memes, leveraging their rapid dissemination and polysemy to foment swift, flat rebellions of meaning within platforms, while simultaneously allowing for the sedimentation of understanding across complex, deep cycles of time.

Within the digital context, narrative is not merely the shaping of time; it is a struggle over meaning

conducted within a specific algorithmic-capital semiotic system, a struggle already conditioned and distorted by the Other. The narrative act is invariably a unidirectional participation in inscription, a passive writing into the meta-narrative co-constituted by infrastructural machines, data logic, and surveillance capital. Therefore, contemporary narrative wisdom entails more than telling a good story. It necessitates a trans-domain, cross-civilizational grasp of the underlying grammar of signs and the logical direction of domain-specific temporality. It calls for lucid resistance for reclaiming, within the interstices of algorithmic discipline, even the most minute narrative sovereignty and temporal heterotopia on behalf of life experiences and collective imaginations that resist quantification. This constitutes the ultimate practice of choosing survival within a destructive cycle.

## **4.2. From the critique of production to the algorithmic-aesthetic critique**

The ambience of digital platforms is the outcome of a material operation of power rooted in data extraction and algorithmic labor. Extending the Marxist critique into the digital realm—incorporating spatial, corporeal, and posthuman turns—this analysis interrogates how attention is reconstituted as an object of exploitation and how affect is captured and commodified by algorithms, thereby advancing a political-economic critique of contemporary dilemmas and the persistent pathologies of modernity. Tracing a theoretical trajectory from Marx and Althusser to Benjamin and Eagleton, the classic critique of social production evolves into a critique of the productivity of digital media and its political economy and a critique of cultural signs and aesthetic struggle. Consequently, the critique of signs and power now focuses specifically on the operation of cultural hegemony at the algorithmic level, shifts within artistic narrative, and the revitalization of Sino-Western dialogue.

The primary sites of power have shifted from the macro ideological state apparatuses of social production to digital platforms, algorithms, quotidian perception, and artistic aesthetics. Correspondingly, the mechanisms of domination have transformed: traditional economic exploitation, class oppression, and cultural hegemony are being displaced by data exploitation, perception-shaping, affective commodification, and the micro-disciplinary regimentation of content processes, summarized as commodification, affective-behavioral surveillance, and symbolic-systemic violence. First, this reorients the critical starting point for analyzing symbolic domination: Baudrillard's mirror of signs must be extended into the mirror of algorithms and data. The contemporary non-coercive character of power is more subtly embodied in personalized information streams, precision emotional marketing, and preference-based content targeting, which collectively manufacture a more insidious form of consent. This dynamic responds to the cross-domain permeation within the ideological sphere and confronts the concrete transformations identified by critiques of digital capitalism, platform re-feudalization, and the privatization of public space—marking a transition from geographical localization to the struggle for cultural hegemony within digital space. Anti-colonial localization efforts must now grapple with the heterogeneous and fragmented development between online and offline spheres, a condition that translates into the problem of power entrenchment within the digital realm. Thus, while global platform capital dissolves geographical boundaries, it simultaneously erects new, more fortified privatized domains of power through data walls and algorithmic logic.

Second, within the nexus of signs, discipline, and the aesthetics of the alienated gaze in contemporary visual politics, a semiotic analysis of the oil painting *Vision* directly reveals the microscopic entanglement of symbolic discipline and aesthetic struggle. Corresponding modes of resistive practice, therefore, turn toward algorithmic resistance, narrative contestation, aesthetic intervention, and micropolitics—specifically, contesting interpretative authority, constructing new narratives, and engaging in artistic practices of the alienated gaze.

This advances a new process of Sino-Western discursive subject-formation, albeit one accompanied by the attendant problems of re-authoritarianization and platform fragmentation, which create new territories where power concentrates in the hands of a few oligarchs, resulting in a form of techno-authoritarianism.

Consequently, the argument points squarely toward aesthetic struggle, positing that artistic narrative is not merely reflective but is itself the frontline in the contest over the distribution of the sensible. This includes the struggle for aesthetic hegemony in contemporary art and criticism. This engagement moves beyond the framework of the problematic, symptomatic reading, and ideology—traversing from the critique of production and the symbolic order to the post-revolutionary atmosphere and global capitalism, while encompassing Althusser’s formulations of ideological state apparatuses and symptomatic reading. Synthesizing this with the analysis of social production and building upon Baudrillard’s symbolic political economy of simulation and simulacra, and through interdisciplinary dialogue engaging with material substrates, there emerges an aesthetics of ambience or atmosphere and an interactive aesthetics. These aesthetics possess both fluid and transcendent functions, generating new meaning in the process of reshaping human cognition, affect, and aesthetic order, thereby fostering collective identification among the populace. At the intersectionality of modes of identification, this line of inquiry investigates the becoming of the posthuman era within specific relations of production and particular contexts<sup>[7]</sup>.

### **4.3. Dirlik: Global capitalism, flexible production, and post-revolutionary critique**

Within the complex historical circumstances of the present, any radical thinking about the era cannot sever its ties with Marxism, lest it forfeit the aspiration for the epoch’s integral emancipation. Oriented toward a revolutionary process grounded in imagining new future possibilities, Dirlik employs globalization as a perspective for comprehending the current world order. Distinct from struggles over theoretical dialogue, discursive authority, or cultural capital, his approach directly emphasizes the formation and inherent logic of this new phase. Consequently, emancipation is deeply embedded in the analysis of the prevailing social context, making the question of hegemony central. This is not merely about acknowledging the explicit discursive presence critiqued by postcolonial theory, but involves the subversion of dominant discourses and the critique of their complicity with other ideological formations of capital. It draws upon Jameson’s mapping of the discursive contest over power within contemporary knowledge systems and cognitive cartography. By clarifying and refining the social context, Dirlik secures his own right to name the contemporary socio-historical conjuncture. Revolution, society, and history confront capital’s hegemony alongside new forms of practical activity and cultural critique<sup>[8]</sup>.

Subsequently, narratives across spatial and temporal dimensions are created and combined in diverse forms. From Laocoon to Long Diyong’s proposition, it is noted that in narrative, the novel exists as both a spatial and a temporal entity; spatial form must be constructed upon a temporal logic to establish narrative order. This leads to a concrete dissection of the mechanisms of symbolic domination, analyzing how contemporary power—cultural hegemony and symbolic violence—operates through non-coercive signs, ideology, and discourse. This constitutes the dimension of power wielded by cultural capital within the symbolic world.

## **5. The heterotopia of time: Ethics, politics, and pedagogical practice**

Formally, it constructs a heterotopia that resists the alienation of time through the narrative structure of the

circle and the linguistic practice of force. Using the prism of the conflictual ethics of classical tragedy and the integrative edification of pre-Qin narratives to refract the contemporary incapacity for collective narrative, it employs the circle of phenomenological and aesthetic spatio-temporal structures—a metaphor for a stalled dialectical practice, an eternal dialectical oscillation between suspended hope and disillusionment, construction and collapse—symbolizing both total disintegration and the quest for totality. The slow aesthetics of narrative ethics serve as a form of resistance that rebuilds an ethical community. Through the totalizing form of art, it counteracts the total disintegration of the experiential world, depicting the perpetual dialectic of meaning production and dissolution after such disintegration, as well as the concealed operation of power within cyclical structures. Ethically, it demonstrates, amidst the ruins where action is rendered ineffective, the alternative goodness pertaining to life itself, enacted through a steadfast adherence to form and narrative—an aesthetics of force it advocates. Proceeding from the classical ethics of time, it becomes a constantly rewritten, dynamic, and living world of dialectical images through cross-cultural translation and transmedial adaptation.

### **5.1. The prism of tragedy: Refracting conflict and the individual in polis narrative reconstructing**

It seeks to reconstruct and defend the classical spirit in education, politics, and ethics. Man acquires a destiny only through apprehended responsibility; with the binding force of a responsibility that applies to him, the self-existence filled by time becomes a whole life. Jaspers notes: The self-education of the actor, and self-education directed at the public spirit, demands contemplation and the taking of responsibility, the extent of which far surpasses the mechanisms of law and order. This responsibility lies in understanding rules and relations, and it must, in the simplest way, find any determinate order, yet also liberate all people in everyday life, preserving all unforeseeable possibilities <sup>[9]</sup>.

Tragic narrative dramatizes the acute internal contradictions of the polis, compelling the audience to engage in collective ethical reflection within the public sphere. Refracting the conflict between the individual and the collective within the Greek polis narrative, it served as the core ritual of civic, religious, and political education. When the law of the polis completely diverges from natural justice, the irreconcilability of conflict leads to the self-destruction of the community, for the polis itself implies a certain transcendence and suppression of the blood-based family. Even an individual, like the female Antigone, in facing the unjust power of the community, possesses a tragic nobility in her resistance based on a higher law. Human rational logos, in probing ultimate truth, may touch upon and shake the foundations of its own and the community's existence. Oedipus achieves the redemption of the community through his individual destruction. Krasznahorkai's cyclical time and collective disillusionment, implosion of consciousness and melancholic stasis, circles of exile and memory, extreme ethics and the witnessing of trauma, as well as the folds of history and the paradox of homecoming, reveal the most fundamental tension in human spiritual narrative—that between the divine and the human, the longing for fusion and the inevitability of separation while existing within a metamorphic condition. Oedipus gaining the wisdom of inner sight after blinding himself metaphorizes that true cognition requires a painful cost, and the individual assuming guilt for the polis constitutes a profound ethical model within the polis narrative.

Education is the transmission of a negentropic refractive habit—a mode of thinking and feeling that is slow, deep, and complex. Classical tragedies share the commonality of placing conflict within and at the core of the communal polis. The choices of individuals—be it Antigone, Oedipus, or Creon—directly concern the survival of the polis. The publicization, intensification, and tragic rendering of conflict is precisely the artistic

refraction of the culture of public debate under Athenian democracy. Through watching, the citizens internalized the polis spirit—the cornerstone of contrapuntal thinking and value affirmation through struggle.

## 5.2. Civilization and community shaped within the collective psyche

The origins of human civilization are often analogized to the initial incisions deeply carved into the historical strata. These marks are not arbitrary imprints, but rather narrative forms and spiritual schemata that crystallize after specific material forces have acted upon the collective psyche. Through the internalization of these narratives, the individual essentially repeats civilization's primordial incisions, thereby affirming their position and value within the community. Consequently, in stark contrast to the intense conflicts of Greek tragedy, the focus of classical pre-Qin narrative shifts from the irreconcilable contradictions within the city-state to the pursuit and restoration of an ethical order oriented toward the common good of all under heaven (*tianxia wei gong*). Self-discipline and the restoration of rites (*keji fu li*) aimed to recover the ideal social order embodied by the Zhou ritual system, which integrated humaneness (*ren*) with ritual propriety (*li*). Familial and kinship ethics served as the extension and cornerstone of state political ethics; the two were isomorphic rather than antagonistic. By internalizing this system of ritual incisions, which proceeds from the intimate to the distant, individuals locate their definitive place within the hierarchical structure of ethical human relations and moral norms, thereby securing the stability of the entire world (*tianxia*).

A communal imagination grounded in universal morality and public good takes the blurred, fluid boundary of all under heaven as its limit. This narrative perspective directly links the evolution of social forms—from the Great Unity (*datong*) to the Moderately Prosperous Society (*xiaokang*)—to material-property relations (goods and labor for oneself) and modes of power succession (the great passing it on hereditarily as ritual). While acknowledging the limitations of *realpolitik* (thus strategies were devised, and warfare arose from this), it simultaneously establishes the eternal moral benchmark that the world belongs to all (*tianxia wei gong*). By internalizing this narrative, individuals gain the spiritual impetus to transcend immediate political reality and aspire toward a higher moral community.

Through the edification of ritual and music (*liyue*) and the ideal that the world belongs to all, pre-Qin narrative established the foundation for Chinese civilization—one that emphasizes hierarchical harmony, ethical integration, and the moral community. In both Eastern and Western traditions, archetypes, typified environments, and symbolic landscapes are not mere backdrops but internalized psychic and fateful topographies; setting and character alike are enmeshed in an inescapable, viscous temporality. The core of such a narrative is integration and edification. It does not dramatize irreconcilable internal conflict but instructs on how to dissolve latent conflict through the permeating influence of ritual and music and the cultivation of virtue (*de*), ultimately achieving a harmonious world where those nearby are pleased, and those from afar are drawn. This constitutes a fundamental narrative divergence from the Greek tragic path, which exposes, intensifies, and seeks catharsis through conflict.

The Greek conflict–speculation model, transmitted through Rome, the Renaissance, and the Enlightenment, provided the ancient archetype for individual rights, critical reason, and the rule-of-law tradition in Western philosophy, politics, and jurisprudence. The pre-Qin harmony–order model laid the groundwork for Chinese civilization's emphasis on secular ethics, political unity, and cultural continuity, establishing the conception of all under heaven (*tianxiaguan*) as a cognitive paradigm for managing internal and external relations.

Identifying the sources of contemporary predicaments and exploring possible paths forward necessitates

engaging these two modes of communal imagination. Their dialogue is not merely a historical comparison but a sustained inquiry into the fundamental differences in patterns of human political existence. The tension between ideal order and actual disorder, and the narrative emphasis on restoring order from chaos through cultivation and edification, suggests possibilities for resolving civic contradictions and implies an openness of cultural boundaries. Horace's *dulce et utile*, Schiller's proposition that beauty is freedom in appearance, and the unification of theoretical and practical reason—leading from division toward an integrated, whole person—represent, on a narrative level, an active practical response to modern problems and dilemmas. It advocates cultivating depth through engagement with classics, philosophy, and complex art to counteract the superficial consumption of signs. Moving beyond mere critique, it seeks to reconstruct the individual through classical frameworks, to revive ethical education for a new era—fostering ethical personhood and critical thinking through concepts such as the narrative self and tragic consciousness—thereby repairing the narrative self fragmented by contemporary conditions. Simultaneously, it calls for theoretical innovation to propel socialist theory toward an interactive turn, focusing on interactive value, co-creation, and the politics of memory. By adopting a clear stance against the permeation of capital and its forms, it posits that utopian thought should serve as a negative and critical force to stimulate social imagination and ethical practice, defining survival as the exercise of narrative authority. Choosing survival entails persisting in narrative, upholding ethical responsibility, and dwelling in justice alongside others. From individual cultivation and social theory to existential resolve, this constitutes the practical enactment of theory and its ethical trajectory.

### **5.3. Cultural capital: The sign as identity construction and medium of power**

Bourdieu's concept of cultural capital manifests a shift toward a medium of power predicated on the adept mastery of temporal narratives, thereby monopolizing the authority to assign meaning. The Deconstructed Community focuses on how boundaries are constructed, identity is consolidated, and power is allocated through shared symbolic systems—myths, historical narratives, rituals, emblems, discursive styles, and so forth. The Formation of Common Imagination relies on epics, textbooks, monuments, commemorative ceremonies, and the like, fusing imagistic and linguistic signs to shape a community's shared memory of origins, archetypal heroes, and traumatic narratives, thereby laying the foundation for affective identification. The Establishment of Discursive Norms involves the community's definition of which modes of speech are deemed reasonable, authoritative, or appropriate—including various academic and official discourses—to maintain internal order and exclude the alien. Inter-subjectivity is reflected here in its reliance on the tacit understandings within the community. The Circulation of Symbolic Capital, according to Bourdieu, means that the appreciation of specific, elevated artistic symbols and the mastery of specialized terminologies become forms of capital that distribute prestige and power within the community, thereby reproducing the social structure.

Through the analysis of communal practices and the diachronic study of signs, the core narratives and temporal memories of a community are historically deconstructed, revealing their processes of construction, the suppressed voices of the Other, and the power relations they serve. *Creating Open Spaces Within the Community* encourages diverse expressive styles and narrative forms, challenging monolithic discursive hegemony and facilitating discursive democratization. *Cross-Boundary Symbolic Translation* involves actively attempting to translate and introduce the community's own symbols and narratives to other communities, including engaging in dialogue to reflect on one's own presuppositions and limitations during dissemination. This fosters a more inclusive ethical atmosphere, environmental and affective sites of repair, and public

heterotopias.

#### **5.4. The traditional incapacity and the shift in leadership in the collective narrative**

Literary principles exist within the eternal dialectic between the fluidity of media, forms, and fields on one hand, and the constancy of emotional archetypes and deep narrative structures on the other. Their contemporary reconstruction occurs across three domains: perception, signification, and negotiation. The literary world is generated at the intersection of the geopolitical horizontal axis of space and the civilizational vertical axis of time, through the open interaction between nation and people, and in the intertextuality (Lehtonen) of relationships that traverse medial boundaries. All of this is deeply rooted in the soil of history and culture, forming the material and historical foundation of its literary world. Literary creation transforms historical trauma and collective memory into a universal modern temporality narrative. This process itself turns the particular, materially-based experience into a scene that allegorizes universal human dilemmas—a spatio-temporal cognitive mapping reinforced through media.

With profound seriousness and complexity, it safeguards the possibility of interrogating meaning through art in the night of modernity and affirming the dignity of human existence in the perfection of form. Simultaneously, through its rich literary texture, it challenges, deepens, and invigorates contemporary thought in a post-metaphysical age, realizing a genuine dialogue between thinking and poetry. It further involves reconstructing collective narrative mechanisms, creating discussion and creative spaces—both real and virtual—that adhere to the laws of temporal narrative, such as building slow-reading communities and historical reenactment projects to practice the ideal of a poetic republic. It promotes ethical revival education, introducing tragic ethics, narrative creation, and deliberative discussion into pedagogy to cultivate individuals with historical consciousness, critical thinking, and ethical resilience. It involves constructing a Nancyian inoperative community—cultivating spaces of being-with that do not pursue efficiency or fusion but instead involve mutual exposure in separation, sharing vulnerability and needs—as a fundamental resistance to instrumental rationality.

Simultaneously, the dissolution of grand narratives and the difficulty of achieving consensus mean that the cacophony of information dissipates traditional authoritative narratives, while the negative information cocoons and emotional tribalism accelerated by technological development hinder the formation of a new consensus, plunging the community into a cacophony of fragmentation. The algorithmic homogenization and platformization of memory mean that the preservation and transmission of collective memory are shifting partly from traditional history books, archives, and educational systems to trending topics, viral phenomena, and commemorative activities determined by capitalist power and consumption. Memory becomes fluid, manipulable, and easily forgotten. The colonization of the public sphere is evident in how spaces for public dialogue, which should facilitate rational deliberation, are monopolized by the infrastructures of commercial platforms. The rules of dialogue, visibility, and even the topics themselves are surreptitiously shaped by the commercial logic and regulatory policies of the platforms.

The reconstruction of community, therefore, necessitates the creation of alternative narrative infrastructures—establishing decentralized, non-profit community media, archives, and collaborative writing platforms aimed at fostering slow, deep, publicly concerned narratives. It involves launching transparency and accountability campaigns to promote social auditing and ethical deliberation of key events influencing public narratives, thereby contesting the right to the distribution of the sensible. It combines offline and online efforts to cultivate rituals of publicness, initiating moderated public deliberations, story-sharing sessions, or collective

creation projects based on concrete issues to practically rebuild a narrative community grounded in dialogue and shared action. Through countless interdisciplinary, trans-era intellectual journeys and explorations, it forges mental habits capable of confronting complexity.

## 6. Conclusion

Amidst the network of objects and diachronic folds, the contemporary reactualization of classical ethical temporal narrative manifests as a dual practice. Internally, it employs narrative and technologies of the self to forge an ethically resilient narrative identity within conditions of acceleration and alienation. Externally, it intervenes in the fields of signs and the sensible, contesting discursive authority over temporal narrative, and—guided by the criterion of poetic justice—shapes a more inclusive community of the sensible. This constitutes both a resistance to the colonization of technological time and an infusion of critical and emancipatory dimensions into the moral-aesthetic construction of states and civilizations.

In constructing a contemporary polis-community, to relinquish narrative authority is tantamount to the demise of meaning. All theoretical contestation ultimately points to the Hamletian question of to be or not to be, which, in the contemporary context, signifies the choice of an examined existence of active narration and ethical commitment against oblivious destruction. This is both the conclusion and the starting point of all inquiry.

## Disclosure statement

The author declares no conflict of interest.

## References

- [1] Zhao YH, 2025, *Lectures on Semiotics*. Peking University Press, Beijing.
- [2] Hu JZ, 2020, *Experiencing the Beauty of Life's Value*. Shandong Literature and Art Press, Jinan.
- [3] Wang YC, 2019, *The Tradition of Modern Chinese Literary Theory*. Beijing Normal University Publishing Group, Beijing.
- [4] Jacques R, 2024, *Community: Theory and Practice — Community as Dissensus*. Translated by Zhang Ying. Nanjing University Press, Nanjing.
- [5] Guo H, 2018, *Aleatory Encounters of Materialism*. Beijing Normal University Publishing Group, Beijing.
- [6] Zhang YB, 2018, *Discovering Sohn-Rethel: The Hidden Socio-Historical Mechanism of the Genesis of A Priori Conceptual Synthesis*. Beijing Normal University Publishing Group, Beijing.
- [7] Jin W, 2025, *Western Literary Theory*. Zhejiang Gongshang University Press, Hangzhou.
- [8] Hu DP, 2018, *Post-Revolutionary Atmosphere and Global Capitalism: Marxist Studies in the Era of Flexible Production*. Beijing Normal University Publishing Group, Beijing.
- [9] Karl J, 2022, *What Is Education?* Translated by Yang Yunshuo. Jiangsu Phoenix Literature and Art Publishing House, Nanjing.

### Publisher's note

Bio-Byword Scientific Publishing remains neutral with regard to jurisdictional claims in published maps and institutional affiliations.