

Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies

ERRS

Introduction

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Guest editors

Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies, Vol 7, No 2 (2016), pp. 8-13

ISSN 2156-7808 (online) DOI 10.5195/errs.2016.376

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Introduction

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“If one can speak of truth in relation to the work of art, it is to the extent that this designates the capacity of the work of art to break a path in the real by renewing the real *in accordance with the work itself*, so to speak.”¹ Paul Ricœur

The time has come to acknowledge the relevance of Ricœur’s philosophy for the study of the arts and philosophical aesthetics. Indeed, if the philosopher does not put this field at the center of his work, the development of Ricœur’s studies on the philosophy of action and the philosophy of the imagination, especially since the 2000s, have now placed us in a brand new situation: we may thus consider, at the same time, that the Ricœurian conception of the imagination determines that of action, and that the latter is not restricted to the fields of ethics, politics, history. In a recent statement, Michaël Föessel also remarked that “we have not paid enough attention to this occurrence of the term ‘aesthetic’ in [Ricœur’s] work, a term which, after all, he rarely uses.”² With this in mind, the theme of this issue of *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies* will necessarily imply that we need to read Ricœur’s work again. New interpretations of the philosopher’s best-known books – with *the Rule of the Metaphor* and *Time and Narrative* as a Gordian knot of this journey – can be crossed, superimposed, or even confronted, and less-known texts or texts from the margins can be rediscovered. Studies on the arts and philosophical aesthetics, from a Ricœurian perspective, might even take on the task of getting us to recall the inexhaustible character of the philosopher’s main works, and showing, moreover, that there simply are no minor texts by him on the subject.

In this movement from text to action, where imaginative variations unfold, and where new vistas on possible worlds are opened up, one can recognize how different modalities of expression operate, like so many mediations, between being and action. There is no doubt, however, that Ricœur would be more on the side of language than on that of perception, to use the terms of a key passage in “Imagination in Discourse and in Action.”³ But this positioning is not of an ideological or political order nor is it even a matter of a subjective personal decision; it refers to what it was that directed the elaboration of his *Philosophy of the Will*, when Ricœur considered that, Merleau-Ponty had “perfectly marked out the field of the phenomenological analysis of perception and of its mechanisms, [so] all that remained open to [him] [...] was the field of practice.”⁴ “Imagination in Discourse and Action” – undertakes to recall the link between the first elaborations of the *Philosophy of the Will* and a philosophy of imagination still in the course of being elaborated. The second volume of *Time and Narrative* extends this orientation into the field of fictional literature, with, as we know, examples drawn from works by Thomas Mann, Marcel Proust and Virginia Woolf. The art of the novel is undoubtedly an area into which Ricœur

has been able to project himself when it comes to aesthetics. These developments of *Time and Narrative* correspond to some kind of test for his own hypotheses, and in a field that the philosopher was then in the best position to question. Yet, Ricœur has never essentialized the field of literature and literary theory; nor did he establish a hierarchy among the arts or try to constitute a hypothetical system of fine arts. What is at stake is more an effort to articulate time and narrative and, to do that when it comes to the issue of fiction, to unfold a “triple *mimesis*.” Other forms of testing could have already been envisaged at that time; other modes of mimetic synthesis could have been interrogated, outside the novel framework – or historical narrative.

It was not until the last chapter of *Critique and Conviction* (1998) that Ricœur found not only a form of reflexive feedback on the issue of aesthetics but a reorientation of the latter in a direction that was not solely determined by language and the literary arts. True, Ricœur begins by recognizing that his main contribution to these areas concerns the question of narrative, but he uses analyses whose reach is indeed that of aesthetic experience in general. Above all, in the light of this text, a certain reading of the work becomes apparent from which emerge certain elements and principles of a thought on art or aesthetics. Ricœur claims a certain Kantian heritage and he also grafts elements onto his discourse, which come directly from his critical hermeneutics. He redeploys this hermeneutic path by confronting it with the critique of ideologies and contemporary Anglo-American philosophy, generally included under the heading, “Analytic philosophy” – which, according to his own wishes, must be seen as much as possible in relation to “Continental philosophy.” It is noteworthy that within the framework of his relationship to the arts and aesthetics, Ricœur not only disregards certain disciplinary and ideological boundaries, but strongly links aesthetic experience to the world of sociality and the communicability of narratives, figures and forms. By constituting the genuine practical and symbolic link between an ante-predicative level and a real world subjected to the rules of a certain consensus – as being linked to the affirmation of dissension – artworks, whatever their content, technical forms or modalities, provide this real world with a meaning free from ideological distortions. They remain nevertheless attached to the production of a common world.

As we know, some of Ricœur’s analyses have however been confronted with some serious misunderstandings, a very critical reception, or even strong opposition. The contributors to *Temps et récit de Paul Ricœur en débat* (1990), for example, tend to read *Time and Narrative* as a dogged search for continuity.⁵ They even suggest that concordance has been given primacy over discordance there, in line with the Aristotelian primacy of tragic *muthos*. From this they infer that the philosopher has difficulty – or is unable to – properly understanding the fundamental ruptures of modern and contemporary art, openness to radical novelty, the connections with political utopias, and the *perpetuum mobile* of the avant-gardes. Some concepts developed in the twin texts, *The Rule of the Metaphor* and *Time and Narrative*, may have obscured and limited the scope of the analyses as a consequence of not being recaptured in the dynamics of the whole of Ricœur’s hermeneutics. Can we really speak, in hermeneutics, about a primacy of concordance over discordance? Things prove to be a lot more complex at the level of the entire Ricœurian corpus. On another level, namely, that which concerns the epistemic relation to symbolic functioning and the cognitive value of the arts, an equally suspicious reading has appeared, particularly from those claiming to draw on analytic aesthetics or analytic philosophy of art.

Whether one places oneself in the literary and visual arts fields, in the tradition of critical theory or in that of analytic philosophy, Ricœur's contribution to the philosophy of art and aesthetics has undoubtedly not received the recognition that it deserves. In most cases, the criticisms of his work reveal a misunderstanding of Ricœur's thought, which, in retrospect, might arouse astonishment. With regards to those criticisms that essentially rely on the legacy of Critical Theory (the "Frankfurt School"), a type of ignorance of Ricœur's actual positions and proposals can be fairly readily observed. In particular, reference may be made to a 1973 text entitled – "Hermeneutics and the Critique of Ideology" – whose analyses invalidate certain interpretations that would have to suspect "conservative" leanings within Ricœur's hermeneutics.⁶ With regards to the reference to analytic aesthetics or the analytic philosophy of art, it should be remembered that, within the framework of French or Francophone philosophy, Paul Ricœur conducted pioneering work by including in his analyses references to the work of Beardsley, Goodman and Danto. Although he could not then focus his attention on the many developments that occurred after *Languages of Art* – or on Danto's philosophy of art – Ricœur was a wise critic of the Goodmanian philosophy from the time of *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978). Moreover, a number of links could be meticulously established between the Ricœurian conception of the metaphorical and the metaphor approach in Danto's philosophy of art.

While taking into account the numerous dialogues conducted throughout Ricœur's philosophical work, it is necessary to place oneself under the double clarification of a critical hermeneutics and a philosophy of the imagination. The aim of this issue of *Études Ricœuriennes / Ricœur Studies* is to take a step forward in that direction, following attempts that have already been made elsewhere. In addition to the necessary developments at the theoretical level, that is, essentially, in relation to philosophical aesthetics, the choice was made to open the field to poetics and the visual arts.

From this perspective, it seemed interesting to take advantage of this special issue by – reissuing a bilingual version of a little-known text by Ricœur entitled "Architecture and Narrativity," from a 1996 lecture. The philosopher produces a reflection in which he engages certain categories elaborated in *Time and Narrative*. Ricœur considers that the common ground between narrative or narrativity and inhabited space or architecture is *time*. In this context, he proposes to rediscover in architecture the three stages of his *Triple Mimesis*, namely *prefiguration*, *configuration* and *refiguration*. Thus, "prefiguration" will be related to "the act of inhabiting"; "configuration" refers more directly to "the act of building"; and "refiguration" institutes a level of exchange between the act of inhabiting and the act of building, generally through an opposition of the first *vis-à-vis* the second. But in so far as the question of space is not entirely that of time, *differences in the modalities of this implementation are inevitable*. According to Ricœur, it can be said, however, that architecture and town planning produce a "space-time" where narrative and architectural elements can be exchanged, and where, in the end, it is possible to speak of "architectural narrativity." The significance of this text also lies in the way in which it indirectly testifies to the evolution of a thought: halfway between *Time and Narrative* and *Memory, History, Forgetting*, the article deals with an object which one can imagine has always been considered with interest by the philosopher.

In the second article of this thematic issue entitled, "The Ricœurian Philosophy of Aesthetics Between Poetics and Ethics," Samuel Lelièvre considers that it is more important to

envisage a Ricœurian philosophy of aesthetics than a “Ricœurian aesthetic.” It is a matter of recapturing what is at stake by linking this reflection to the poetic and ethical orientations of the author of *The Philosophy of the Will* and to developments relating to a philosophy of the imagination. The question of aesthetics must then be linked to a hermeneutical tradition, with its multiple currents, in its connection with Kantian criticism. Samuel Lelièvre finally places an aesthetic perspective in a dialectic between communication and ontology; he refers to Ricœur’s efforts to describe this movement of works towards the production of a common world. One cannot forget, in the context of this reconstruction of a Ricœurian thought of art and aesthetics, the reference to Anglo-American analytic philosophy and the use of Goodman’s work since *The Rule of Metaphor*. The philosopher combines phenomenological, analytical and critical approaches, not because of some sort of eclecticism, but because it is necessary in order to maintain a principle of discontinuity between the explanation that the explicative sciences can offer, on their side, and the understanding that is at stake in interpretative disciplines. The Ricœurian philosophy of aesthetics must be linked to a general non-intentional framework, which is that of Ricœur’s critical hermeneutics – centered on the concepts of text and distanciation, the hallmark of this hermeneutics lies in its capacity to re-establish links with the field of the historical and social sciences.

In her essay, “Otherness and Singularity in Ricœur’s Hermeneutics of Works of Art,” Annalisa Caputo also seeks to recapture the general philosophical issue of the relationship between Ricœur’s work and the arts and aesthetics. The author then places herself on the level of a dialogue between the work of art and the philosophical effort to recapture it. This dialogical dimension of Ricœurian hermeneutics was particularly obvious in a text entitled, “Sur un autoportrait de Rembrandt”: here the philosopher is not isolated in his meditation but is connected to the creative work and the political community. Ricœur’s discretion regarding aesthetics could be explained by this particularly marked effort to avoid the dangers of the short way of ontological hermeneutics. Philosophy can be revitalized through contact with the language of art; here it discovers another mode of communication, one that is no longer that of the concept. It is not so much a matter of understanding a work, of exhausting its meaning, but rather of understanding oneself in front of the work. In a way very similar to the functioning of metaphor, the work of art introduces tensions among several levels of meaning. If the concept is addressed to everyone, the work of art is a singularity that is addressed to each individual. There will therefore be a necessary dialogue between philosophy and art – something that is depicted in the painting by Rembrandt that Ricœur refers to –, an exchange between the perceptible work and its unfinished interpretation. Philosophy opens itself in this way to its other, that is, to a symbolic language in which the perceptible presence of the world is revealed. Reflexive philosophy experiences its own limit and, through the work of art, gives itself the conditions for a possible response.

B. Keith Putt’s text, “Blurring the Edges: Ricœur and Rothko on Metaphorically Figuring the Non-Figural,” correlates Ricœur’s philosophical analyses and the work of the painter Mark Rothko. It appears then that abstract expressionism illustrates well this thesis of the philosopher that non-figurative art itself allows to refigure the world, and in a much more effective way than can figurative art or so-called realistic images. Although Ricœur never referred to Rothko’s paintings, he was able to express quite directly his interest in the works of Soulages, Pollock and Kandinsky – along with painters such as Klee or Chagall, who partly maintain a symbolically

meaningful link with the figural. It is thus possible to compare Mark Rothko's pictorial procedures with what Paul Ricœur has to say about the mimetic operations of refiguration. This art form can also be understood from the remarks of the philosopher on the tensions of metaphor, the three moments of mimesis, the paradoxes of fiction, and the dynamic schematism of the productive imagination. By producing a form of withdrawal from the common experience – and the world of manipulable objects – abstract painting offers new forms of references and configurations. Imaginative variations trace prospects for a new organization of meaning. However, works not only produce new forms for the understanding: associated with certain moods, they also draw before us new configurations for our action.

In the last text of this thematic issue, Yvon Inizan wonders about the “vast poetic sphere” referred to in *Time and Narrative*, even as Ricœur tries to recapture the link between the analyses that he devoted to metaphor and those developed around narrative. Yvon Inizan's remarks seek to return, initially, to a first region surveyed by Ricœur, namely, that of “regulated creation” in the framework of the literary space. In what sense can we speak of a unity of analyses? Recalling *The Rule of Metaphor* and *Time and Narrative*, Paul Ricœur himself speaks of “twin books.” It is, then, very revealing that, in the space of this questioning, it is the use of Goodman's *Languages of Art*, in particular, that allows Ricœur to better discern the concordance of poetics. This effort to reconquer the unity of the poetic sphere is based on general ideas of the symbol and of art and, more precisely, on a denotative theory of metaphor. Partial analyses of regional objects, recognized as such, are thus linked closely to one another thanks to certain general remarks, which are all lines of perspective that permit us to glimpse an account of artistic creation and the work of art. Since then, and with this search for unity, it has been possible to re-read the pages devoted to art in *Critique and Conviction* where we will see, in particular, a comparison between the work of art and metaphor developed. How, in the end, can we grasp the limits of the “vast poetic sphere”? If this sphere first concerns the operations on language, will it not be said that it is nevertheless permissible to envisage it as spreading out beyond, towards a set of configuration and refiguration operations, and this regardless of the artistic fields, as is explicitly shown by Ricœur's text on architecture?

We thank the Editorial Committee of the Fonds Ricœur for authorizing the publication in French and in English of Paul Ricœur's text entitled, “Architecture and Narrativity,” as well as Robbie Carney for the English translation of this article. We are also grateful to Prof. Jean-Luc Amalric, Prof. Eileen Brennan, Guillaume Braunstein, the reviewers and the authors for having made this thematic issue possible.

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- ¹ Paul Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 1998), 173-4.
- ² Michaël Fœssel, "Monde du texte et monde de la vie," in *Du texte au phénomène: parcours de Paul Ricœur*, M-A. Vallée (dir.) (Paris: Éditions Mimésis, 2015), 21.
- ³ Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action* (London and New York: Continuum, 2008), 164. (This article was first published in English in 1976.)
- ⁴ Paul Ricœur, *Critique and Conviction*, 26.
- ⁵ Christian Bouchindhomme et Rainer Rochlitz (dir.), *Temps et récit de Paul Ricœur en débat* (Paris: Cerf, 1990).
- ⁶ Other texts on hermeneutics, published especially in *Hermeneutics* (Cambridge, UK and Malden, MA, USA: Polity Press, 2013), had also been published prior to the late 1980s and responded to some of the criticisms that would later be made in *Temps et récit de Paul Ricœur en débat*.