

The Excellence Award at the Fonds Ricœur's Summer Workshop 2024

The Ontological Demands of *Darstellung* Ricœur and the Problem of Historical Representation

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Abstract

This paper assesses the possibility of interpreting Ricœur's notion of representation as a form of *Darstellung* in the Kantian sense of exhibition (presentation). The aim is to emphasize the ontological significance of representation as *Darstellung*, through the consideration of the paradigmatic case of historical representations. Indeed, the necessity to adequately interpret the relationship between representation and the represented becomes more compelling when dealing with the representation of history. On the one hand, history becomes objective insofar as it is depicted in historical representations, but on the other, this depiction remains the presentation of an underlying reality that demands to be spoken of. The notion of *Darstellung* thus helps ensure the demand of historical representations to stand for past reality, without being reduced to mere copies of a supposedly pre-given original. This allows for a transition from the epistemological reflection upon historical representations to the ontological consideration of historicity as such.

Keywords: representation; Darstellung; depiction; exhibition; history

Résumé

Cet article évalue la possibilité de considérer la notion de représentation chez Ricœur comme une *Darstellung* au sens kantien de l'exhibition, de la présentation. L'objectif est de souligner la signification ontologique de la représentation en tant que *Darstellung*, à travers l'examen du cas paradigmatique des représentations historiques. En effet, la nécessité d'interpréter adéquatement la relation entre le représenté et la représentation devient plus pressante lorsqu'il s'agit de représenter l'histoire. D'une part, l'histoire devient objective lorsqu'elle est dépeinte dans les représentations historiques. D'autre part, cette représentation reste la présentation d'une réalité sous-jacente qui exige d'être exprimée. La notion de *Darstellung* contribue ainsi à garantir que les représentations historiques répondent à l'exigence de tenir lieu de la réalité passée, sans être réduites à de simples copies d'un original supposé préexistant. Cela permet une transition de la réflexion épistémologique sur les représentations historiques à la considération ontologique de l'historicité en tant que telle.

Mots-clés : représentation ; Darstellung ; description ; présentation ; Histoire

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The paper that won the Excellence Award at the 2024 edition of the Fonds Ricœur's Summer Workshop is published below.

Since 2017, the Fonds Ricœur's Summer Workshops, which take place in Paris during the month of June, have been co-organized by the Fonds Ricœur and the Society for Ricœur Studies. Each year the workshop is dedicated to a specific work by Paul Ricœur on which the presentations and discussions are based.

In 2019, the Fondation Goélands¹ launched an Excellence Award which is given annually to the best paper presented at the Summer Workshop. The winner receives 1000 Euros and, within six months of the Summer Workshop, his or her paper is published in the "Varia" section of the journal *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*.

All *doctoral* or *postdoctoral* researchers selected to present a paper at a particular Summer Workshop and who wish to apply are eligible for this prize. The paper can be presented in either French or English and its length must correspond to the 20–25 minutes allowed for the oral presentation at the Summer Workshop.

The Jury's criteria of evaluation for the Summer Workshops' Excellence Award are as follows:

1. as the Fonds Ricœur's Summer Workshop focuses each year on a specific work by Paul Ricœur, the Jury favours contributions that place this work at the centre of their reflection;
2. the Jury then assesses the scientific quality of the papers in terms of their precision, their argumentative rigour, and their mastery of the secondary literature on the subject;
3. lastly, the Jury particularly values the originality of the contributions, that is, their specific contribution to Ricoeurian research and the novelty of the theses put forward.

In 2024, the 7th edition of the Fonds Ricœur's Summer Workshop was organized by Eileen Brennan, Azadeh Thiriez Arjangi and Jean-Paul Nicolai in Dublin, and was dedicated to *Memory, History, Forgetting*.

The Jury of the Excellence Award was comprised of Azadeh Thiriez-Arjangi, Eileen Brennan, Alison Scott-Baumann and Olivier Abel and was chaired by Jean-Luc Amalric.

The winner of the Excellence Award in 2024 is: Sara Rocca, PhD student at the Universities of Pisa and Firenze. The title of her paper was: "The Ontological Demands of *Darstellung*. Ricœur and the Problem of Historical Representation"

¹ Housed by the Fondation pour l'enfance, an officially recognized non-profit organization, the Fondation Goélands is dedicated to two causes: the fight against genetic diseases (funding studies and research projects) and support for young high school students and underprivileged students (awarding grants and financing equipment, etc.).

Nous publions ci-dessous le texte du lauréat du Prix d'excellence de l'édition 2024 des Ateliers d'été du Fonds Ricœur.

Depuis 2017, les Ateliers d'été du Fonds Ricœur sont co-organisés durant le mois de juin à Paris par le Fonds Ricœur et la Society for Ricœur Studies. Chaque année, l'atelier est consacré à une œuvre spécifique de Paul Ricœur sur laquelle portent les contributions et les discussions.

En 2019, la fondation Goélands² a lancé un Prix d'excellence qui récompense chaque année la meilleure communication présentée lors de l'Atelier d'été. La lauréate ou le lauréat se voit remettre une somme de 1 000 euros et, dans les six mois qui suivent l'Atelier d'été, son texte est publié dans la rubrique « Varia » de la revue *Études ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies*.

Sont éligibles à ce prix toutes les chercheuses et tous les chercheurs en doctorat ou postdoctorat admis à présenter une communication à l'édition des Ateliers d'été, et qui souhaitent candidater. La communication peut se faire en français comme en anglais et sa longueur doit être conforme à la durée de 20-25 minutes accordée à la présentation orale lors de l'Atelier d'été.

Les critères d'évaluation du jury concernant le prix d'excellence des Ateliers d'été sont les suivants :

1. l'atelier d'été du Fonds Ricœur portant chaque année sur une œuvre spécifique de Paul Ricœur, le jury privilégie les contributions qui placent cette œuvre au centre de leur réflexion ;
2. il apprécie ensuite la qualité scientifique des communications proposées : c'est-à-dire leur précision, leur rigueur argumentative et leur maîtrise éventuelle de la littérature secondaire concernant le sujet abordé ;
3. il valorise enfin tout particulièrement l'originalité des contributions, c'est-à-dire leur apport spécifique à la recherche ricœurienne et la nouveauté des thèses avancées.

En 2024, la septième édition des Ateliers d'été du Fonds Ricœur était organisée à Dublin par Eileen Brennan, Azadeh Thiriez Arjangi et Jean-Paul Nicolai et elle était consacrée à *La Mémoire, l'histoire, l'oubli*.

Le jury du prix d'excellence était composé de Azadeh Thiriez Arjangi, Eileen Brennan, Alison Scott-Baumann et Olivier Abel et présidé par Jean-Luc Amalric.

La lauréate 2024 est : Sara Rocca, doctorante aux Universités de Pise et de Florence. Le titre de sa communication était le suivant : "The Ontological Demands of Darstellung. Ricœur and the Problem of Historical Representation"

² Abrisée par la Fondation pour l'enfance, reconnue d'utilité publique, la fondation Goélands se dédie à deux causes : la lutte contre les maladies génétiques (financement d'études ou de projets de recherche) et l'accompagnement de jeunes lycéens et étudiants défavorisés (octroi de bourses, financement d'équipements, etc.).

The Ontological Demands of *Darstellung*

Ricœur and the Problem of Historical Representation

Sara Rocca

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Introduction

This paper aims to explore the possibility of interpreting Ricœur's notion of representation as a form of *Darstellung* in the Kantian sense of exhibition (presentation). More precisely, the idea is to stress the ontological significance of representation conceived as a form of exhibition of reality through the consideration of a paradigmatic case: that of historical representations and the ontology they implicitly entail. I believe that the notion of *Darstellung* can be adopted as a guideline to move from the epistemological reflection upon historical representations to the ontological consideration of historicity as such,³ offering valuable insights into the epistemology and ontology underlying Ricœur's conception of historical knowledge.

Considering the historical field, the core of the problem can be summarized in the following terms. The representative character of history (or better, historiography) makes it a construction authored by historians, yet this construction constitutes a reconstruction of the past. Thus, it is crucial to clarify how historical representations preserve their extralinguistic character (what makes them representations of past reality), given the constructive nature of the representative process itself. I contend that part of the solution lies in Ricœur's own utilization of the concept of *Darstellung*, and in the lexicon of depiction it involves. Indeed, interpreting historical representations as *Darstellungen* of past reality helps avoid both considering them as pure linguistic constructions or fictional representations (with no relatedness to an external reality), and reducing them to mere verbal costumes (lacking any actual function in conferring objectivity and truth upon the past). Rather, the objectivity of historical knowledge is achieved through the productive activity of the historian. However, this objectivity is granted insofar as historical representations exhibit an underlying reality that demands to be expressed, and ultimately, requires ontological consideration to be adequately accounted for.

³ Although it might seem controversial to make a Kantian reference to ensure an *ontological* significance for the notion of representation, I believe that the possibility of interpreting the latter as a form of presentation will be the key to overcoming a series of particularly urgent issues in relation to the historical field. In general terms, I contend that an appropriate transposition of the notion of exhibition could help provide a basis for the ontological vehemence of representation that Ricœur strives to account for. However, for a discussion of Ricœur's use of Kantian criticism in an effort to remove the risk of collapsing the philosophical endeavour into a premature ontology, see for example Chiara Pavan, "La pensée de l'être comme pensée des limites. Une étude de Ricœur sur la négation dans la critique kantienne," in *Ricœur et la pensée allemande de Kant à Dilthey*, eds. Gilles Marmasse and Roberta Picardi (Paris: CNRS Éditions, 2019), 37–67.

I will therefore proceed as follows:

- I will first tackle the main problems concerning the notion of representation in its general sense: I will try to show how the very epistemological treatment of such a notion demands an acknowledgment of its ontological value.
- Then, I will turn to the specific case of historical representation in an attempt to highlight why this case can be assumed to be paradigmatic. It is precisely when it comes to the representation of history that the problem of reference and the recognition of the standing-for character of representation becomes more compelling.

I. The General Problem of Representation: How to Interpret the Relationship Between Representation and the Represented

The two main difficulties related to the notion of representation that I would like to consider are, firstly, the specific way of interpreting the relationship between representation and the represented, and secondly, the peculiar ambiguity pertaining to representation meant as linguistic exteriorization. In this first section, I will therefore try to emphasize how the concept of *Darstellung* can be regarded as condensing Ricœur's stance on the issue, necessarily leading to the acknowledgment of the extralinguistic value of representations.

To begin, let me stress one point that will also be fundamental in connection with the specific case of historical representations, that is, the legitimacy of extending the terminology of *Darstellung* from the properly intuitive field to that of writing and literary representations.⁴ In fact, as is well known, the Kantian notion of *Darstellung* as the exhibition of concepts and ideas is not immediately connected to the problem of linguistic exteriorization. On the contrary, in his 3rd *Critique*, Kant explicitly contrasts the exhibition (*Darstellung*) meant as an intuitive representation with the expression (*Ausdruck*) meant as a non-intuitive one.⁵ Accordingly, if one considers the schematic exhibition of a concept, the term *Darstellung* specifically indicates its intuitive presentation—or, if referring to the first *Critique*, it would indicate the intermediate representation that allows the concept to be presented in intuitions.⁶

⁴ This is quite important since Ricœur emphasizes the positive power of *Darstellungen* in augmenting the meaning of reality also in the case of historical representations, despite the lack of intuitiveness. See Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 567.

⁵ See Immanuel Kant, *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, trans. Eric Matthews and Paul Guyer (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1998), §59.

⁶ I will refer to Kant's use of the term in the 3rd *Critique*, where he presents schematic and symbolic exhibitions in terms of *Darstellungen* (whereas in the *Critique of Pure Reason*, the preferred German word used to refer to the schematic representation was *Vorstellung*). In the scope of this paper, I cannot delve into the problematic variations in terminology between the 1st and the 3rd *Critique*. However, Ricœur himself points out the importance of the shift from *Vorstellung* (as representation) to *Darstellung* (as presentation). See Paul Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination* (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 2024), lecture 6. For an accurate discussion of the different uses of the term *Darstellung* in the 1st and 3rd *Critiques*, see Martha B. Helfer, *The Retreat of Representation. The Concept of Darstellung in German Critical Discourse* (New York: State University of New York Press, 1996), 22–50.

Nonetheless, at this stage of the discussion, what we can retain from the Kantian notion is precisely the understanding of such exhibiting activity as conveying a space of appearance and intelligibility.⁷ As Ricœur himself puts it, what is essential is the idea of the schema as the “sphere of possibility that is opened by this structure,” the “horizon of possibilities” entailed by the schema itself.⁸ Still, if the Kantian *Darstellung* was a non-discursive exhibition of a conceptual unity (or, in the case of the symbolic exhibition, of an idea of reason), in Ricœur’s case the notion of *Darstellung* can be identified in the idea of the presentation of a more original dimension of reality through and within works of art.⁹ The work is a *Darstellung* of reality insofar as it depicts some of its deeper and non-manifestative characteristics, rather than re-presenting an already given original. We face here the idea of a pre-objective dimension of reality that cannot be properly given or grasped, and yet, one which is made manifest through the representative activity performed by imagination.

This representative activity should thus be considered as the presentation of hidden possibilities of sense, which occurs as a depiction and results in what Ricœur calls an “iconic augmentation” of the meaning of reality. That is to say, it is an activity of exhibition of reality capable of conveying a new and broader space of intelligibility and visibility for the represented. The point is then to understand the key role that the notion of *Darstellung* can play in ensuring the referentiality that characterizes the representative activity of imagination—both granting the demand to stand for the represented while avoiding its reduction to a mere reproduction of a pre-existing reality. From this perspective, the standing-for character cannot be grounded in an original/copy kind of model, but in a broader and alternative conception of the referential character of representation itself: a conception broad enough to also encompass indirect ways of aiming at reality, with no immediate or direct relatedness to the perceptual givenness. Therefore, Ricœur advances the idea of a second-order reference which re-describes reality by revealing new dimensions of it and unfolding yet unexplored possibilities of sense. As he points out, this second-degree of referentiality is disclosed precisely through a suspension of the objective reference to the

⁷ For a discussion of the appropriation (since Ricœur’s early works) of the paradoxical character of the Kantian schematism as an “espace d’apparition et un espace d’intelligibilité,” see Jean-Luc Amalric, *Paul Ricœur, l’imagination vive. Une genèse de la philosophie ricœurienne de l’imagination* (Paris : Hermann, 2013), 168–177. On the inseparability of the “puissance de (faire) voir” and the “puissance de dire”, see also Michaël Foessel, “Les deux voies du schématisme. Ricœur et le problème de l’imagination transcendante,” in *Ricœur et la pensée allemande de Kant à Dilthey*, eds. Gilles Marmasse and Roberta Picardi, 81–96.

⁸ See Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, lecture 5.

⁹ Although I cannot delve into the points of convergence and differences between the two conceptions, I would like to briefly mention that one of Ricœur’s key interlocutors in this context (besides Kant) is clearly Gadamer, particularly in his reflection on the work of art. Gadamer rejects the idea of reducing the work to a mere copy of an original, striving instead to account for its ontological significance. He adopts indeed the lexicon of *Darstellung* to conceptualize the work of art as a *presentation* that produces an *increase in being* in reality. See Hans-Georg Gadamer, *Truth and Method*, trans. Joel Weinsheimer and Donald G. Marshall (London: Continuum, 2004), 102–171. Since a thorough examination of this issue lies beyond the scope of this paper, I refer readers to Grondin’s stimulating discussion of the different nuances of the meaning of *Darstellung* in Gadamer’s text. See Jean Grondin, “L’art comme présentation chez Hans-George Gadamer. Portée et limites d’un concept,” *Études germaniques*, vol. 62 (2007), 337–349.

given and results in an increase in the meaning of reality itself. Evoking Dagognet's work,¹⁰ Ricœur claims:

“This iconic augmentation proceeds by means of abbreviations and articulations, as is shown by the careful analysis of the principal episodes of the history of painting and the history of all types of graphic inventions.”¹¹

Besides, this second-order reference actually represents the “primordial reference” of representations, thanks to which “our profound belonging to the lifeworld is allowed to be.”¹² Such primordial belonging is thus what is exhibited through the depiction performed by imagination, and the aforementioned increase in meaning takes the form of an iconic augmentation of the lifeworld. In this sense, we can understand why the operation of representing reality acquires an ontological significance. The underlying conviction is that our perceptual relation to the world already involves a misplacing of this profound belonging since it “levels out differences and smooths over contrasts.”¹³ It is as if there were an intrinsic richness of reality and a series of possibilities of meaning that are filtered and blocked by the ordinary subject/object polarization. Nonetheless, the exhibiting and mediating activity of imagination fulfils the function of actualizing these possibilities and of presenting this richness, allowing such a primordial dimension to be discovered.

This offers a brief outline of how the notion of *Darstellung* can provide a possible interpretation of the relationship between representation and the represented, one which avoids overly simplistic accounts of the problem of referentiality. In this sense, we will examine in greater detail how, since Ricœur conceives of imagination as depiction, the importance of the Kantian reference lies in the possibility of intertwining verbal and visual aspects to produce something new—a possibility that enables Ricœur to both overcome the idea of imagination as a mere illustration of the given and explore its actual productive function.¹⁴

¹⁰ See François Dagognet, *Écriture et iconographie* (Paris : Vrin, 1973).

¹¹ Paul Ricœur, *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics II*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and John B. Thompson (London: Continuum, 2008), 171.

¹² *Ibid.*, 170.

¹³ *Ibid.*, 171.

¹⁴ By stressing the intertwinement of the visual and linguistic facet, Taylor encompasses the role of depiction within a broader discourse on the role of figuration as a means of retrospectively understanding Ricœur's whole conception of imagination. See George H. Taylor, “The Deeper Significance of Ricœur's Philosophy of Productive Imagination: The Role of Figuration,” in *Productive Imagination: Its History, Meaning, and Significance*, eds. Saulius Geniusas and Dmitri Nikulin (London: Rowman and Littlefield, 2018), 157–182. For the present discussion, though, I find it more convenient to appeal to the restricted idea of depiction as a *mediating* activity between the visible and intelligible (corresponding to the Kantian notion of *Darstellung*), while Taylor's emphasis on the notion of figuration aims to present it as the common ground of sensible and intelligible. Nonetheless, the possibility of incorporating the role of depiction into the reflection on figuration (developed during the years of *Time and Narrative*) is particularly useful in connection with the problem of historical narratives, which depict past reality precisely through the strategies of emplotment (*configuration*).

We can now concentrate on the sense according to which literary representations can be understood as exhibitions of reality in a Kantian sense. First, it is important to make explicit the overall importance that Kant acquires in Ricœur's reflections on imagination. In fact, it is precisely by focusing on the functioning of imagination within literary works that Ricœur displays the deep meaning of the process of representing reality. In this context, Kant's paramount importance comes from his rupture with a philosophical tradition that had reduced imagination to the problem of "having images," in turn, conceived as mere shadows of reality—according to the scheme of original (*Ur-bild*)/copy (*Ab-bild*). Kant's treatment of the notion of *Einbildungskraft* instead points to a conception of imagination as a productive power of shaping reality—a production of forms that confers intelligibility on the world.¹⁵

Echoing Kant's breakthrough in speaking of a productive imagination, Ricœur thus points out that the product of imagination is not a copy or proxy of reality—a mere re-presentation (*Vertretung*) of it. Quite the contrary, as mentioned above, its standing-for character is grounded in the idea of representation as a depiction (*Darstellung*) of reality. Literary works represent reality insofar as they exhibit a dimension that would otherwise remain hidden, and which takes shape precisely through the depicting activity that characterizes these representations as *Darstellungen*. As a result,

“far from producing only weakened images of reality, [...] literary works *depict reality by augmenting it with meanings* that themselves depend upon the virtues of abbreviation, saturation and culmination, so strikingly illustrated by emplotment.”¹⁶

As we can see, the idea of iconic augmentation also holds in the case of literary works. Accordingly, in the context of this discussion, I believe that the most important point to be stressed is that to maintain their referential power, literary works need not establish a representative relation to reality in the sense of an objective or direct mirroring relationship to the given. The final aim of literary representations is rather to offer a re-description of the world, in which imagination “creates” its own original instead of providing a mere copy of it. It is through the productive activity of imagination that the surplus of meaning that permeates reality gains visibility and readability. Representation thus makes the represented manifest and intelligible, available for the very first time. In doing that, it functions as:

“the abolition of the objective for the sake of an *ontological redescription*, as if there were a bedrock of reality before the division in objects in our ordinary perception. Is it not possible to say that poetic *imagination schematizes this pre-objective apprehension?*”¹⁷

¹⁵ On the innovation and specificity of Kant's account of imagination, see Alfredo Ferrarin, “Kant and Imagination,” *Fenomenologia e società*, vol. 32 (2009), 7–18. See also his essay: “Productive and Practical Imagination: What Does Productive Imagination Produce?,” in *Productive Imagination: Its History, Meaning, and Significance*, 29–48.

¹⁶ Paul Ricœur, *Time and Narrative I*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer (Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1984), 80.

¹⁷ Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, lecture 19 (emphases added).

In this passage, Ricœur precisely addresses the ontological resonance of the process of re-description of reality in which the representative activity of poetic imagination results. Referring to the specific case of metaphors, quoting Aristotle, Ricœur further characterizes this activity of re-description as the power of “setting things before the eyes,”¹⁸ of actualizing unexplored possibilities through a restructuring of the shared scaffolding of reality. Considering the Shakespearean metaphor “time is a beggar,” this ontological re-description means that “to depict time in terms of the characteristics of a beggar is to see time as a beggar.”¹⁹ The ultimate result of the exhibition, then, is to open up a new —non-perceptual—way of seeing reality.

Hence, we find the idea of schematism at work in Ricœur’s reflections on both metaphor and narrative. In the first case, its role is to give an image to the emergent metaphorical meaning by tracing the metaphorical attribution back to a rule that allows its meaning to be explained. Imagination schematizes that “pre-objective apprehension” which substantiates the possibility of a metaphorical re-description of the given, as it makes visible (schematizes) a different way of being-in-the-world. It uncovers the ontological basis on which the second-order reference of representations is grounded. In the case of narrative, conversely, Ricœur borrows the work of productive imagination to account for the very structuring act that produces the *emplotment*. The latter involves the coherence and unity of the narrative, as well as the intuitive presentation of the various elements that constitute the story—both owing to the synthetic work of imagination. Thanks to this synthetic activity, narratives manage to bestow sense and unity on events and actions, making the pre-narrative structure of our lives explicit and intelligible. Also in this case, imagination schematizes the pre-objective apprehension we have of the deeper meaning of our temporal existence by depicting it within the unitary whole of a story.

To conclude, I believe it is essential to stress the utmost importance of the ontological rootedness of imagination in this original and immediate belonging to the lifeworld. It is precisely this rootedness that enables imagination to provide such an original dimension with an exhibition, giving a manifestative—albeit indirect—status to our pre-objective belonging to the world. It is only by accepting this original grounding that it is possible to bestow an actual ontological vehemence upon the idea of this second-order referentiality. And I contend that this possibility is fundamental since Ricœur himself strives to conceive such referentiality as a power that—though indirectly and always inadequately—still manages to grasp reality, and consequently, cannot and must not be reduced to a mere psychological or arbitrary production of the subject.²⁰

¹⁸ Paul Ricœur, *The Rule of Metaphor. The Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny, Kathleen McLaughlin, and John Costello (London: Routledge, 2003). Of great importance in this context are the 7th and 8th studies, in which Ricœur confronts the specific problem of metaphorical reference and its ontological implications. However, I also refer to a passage from the 1st study (*ibid.*, 70) in which the Aristotelian expression is mentioned within a broader consideration of the rhetorical tradition and the specific idea of hypotyposis. I believe that this passage is particularly poignant since Kant himself refers to the rhetorical notion of hypotyposis (*subiectio sub adspectum*) to introduce the notion of *Darstellung* in the aforementioned §59 of the 3rd *Critique*.

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, 252 (emphasis added).

²⁰ On the importance of considering the ontological implications that imagination acquires in Ricœur’s reflection, see Graziella Travaglini, “Imagination and Knowledge in the Metaphorology of Paul Ricœur,” *Theoria*, vol. 85 (2019), 383–401.

II. The Standing-For Character of Historical Representation: *Darstellung* as the Exhibition of Past Reality

Moving now to the specific case of historical knowledge, the final aim of this section will be to show —by means of the notion of *Darstellung*—how the epistemological treatment of historical representations necessarily leads to an ontological consideration of our historical condition and historicity as such. In fact, Ricœur states very clearly that “standing for condenses [...] all the aporias linked to [...] the historical knowledge of *constructions* constituting *reconstructions* of [...] past events.” And yet, we still need to clarify how the epistemological structure of representation grants the possibility of reaching “the threshold of an *ontology of existence in history*.”²¹

As I hope this section will clarify, from an epistemological standpoint, the notion of *Darstellung* helps appreciate the specificity of Ricœur’s conception of historical knowledge. This conception offers an alternative path between a positivistic view of history wherein the objectivity and truth of historical representations are supposed to be independent from historiographical research and the process of history-writing, and a constructivist conception of historical narratives that would ultimately fail to ground the referential character of history in an extra-textual reality (and consequently, could not explain the difference between the reference of history and that of fictional narratives or other types of literary works). Thus, it is crucial to understand what kind of objectivity we can claim within the realm of historical knowledge, and how much we can convey about the past. In this realm, indeed, objectivity itself acquires a non-naïve sense, as it is achieved only through and within the historian’s work—at the end of all its phases. Historical representations are then the final products of this work, which stand for past reality to the extent that they make the past objective by depicting historical facts into narratives.²² However, since this objectivity depends on the selective, interpretative, and productive features of historiographical work, a purely epistemological consideration is insufficient to adequately address the issue of the reference of history and its status.

Therefore, Ricœur strives to ground the standing-for character of historical representations in an ontological consideration of our human existence as intrinsically historical. Within such consideration, our ontological condition is primarily defined as a form of being-in-debt with the past, whose enduring efficacy compels us to respond to its demand to be spoken of. In this sense, the ontological reflection serves Ricœur to give substance to the epistemological claim of objectivity and truth in history. Historical representations are deemed as the presentation (*Darstellung*) of past reality which actualizes its unspoken possibilities, thereby conferring on it its objective value.

At this point, we should notice that Ricœur himself takes the notion of *Darstellung* into account precisely at the intersection of the “epistemology of historiographical operation” and the

²¹ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 274–275 (emphasis added).

²² In more precise terms, historical facts as such arise only when being depicted in historical narratives. It is the narrative configuration that confers coherence, meaning, and unity upon past events, thereby endowing them with a proper objective status. Since the 1950s, indeed, Ricœur has emphasized the necessity of the work of the historian in raising “the past itself to the dignity of a historical fact”. Paul Ricœur, *History and Truth*, trans. Charles A. Kelbley (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1965), 23.

“ontology of the historical being.”²³ As just mentioned, such a consideration becomes particularly meaningful when examining the standing-for character of historical representations and explaining what guarantees the possibility of conferring a referential capacity, and with it a potential truth value, on those historical representations. In this context, indeed, the legitimacy of transposing the reflection on the notion of *Darstellung* from the field of aesthetics to the historical one is advocated by Ricœur himself:

“My thesis here is that its belonging [that of historical representation] to literature [...] does not set a limit to the problematic of representation-supplement. [...] The *ontological structure of Darstellung continues to demand its rights*. The whole of textual hermeneutics is thus placed under the theme of the increase in being applied to the work of art.”²⁴

As we can see, the ultimate purpose is to reconnect the idea of representation as standing-for the past (expressed by the problematic of the representation-supplement) with the idea of representation as *Darstellung*, specifically, as something more than a mere copy of a supposedly given past event, something which in fact produces an increase in being in reality (an augmentation of our understanding of the past). The point is thus to transpose to the historical field the reflection carried out in the first section in an attempt to understand how the notion of *Darstellung* allows us to affirm simultaneously:

- the subjective constitution of historical representation, and more precisely, the interpretative nature of historiography as such (which does concern not only the representative moment, but the entire historiographical operation);²⁵
- the objectivity of our historical knowledge, that is to say, the very possibility of speaking of truth in history.

As Roberta Picardi brilliantly points out, Ricœur seeks to reconnect the epistemology of history with the ontology of the historical condition,²⁶ to the end of avoiding the claim of absolute knowledge of history, while offering clarification and an ontological basis for what the

²³ Ricœur, *Memory, History, and Forgetting*, 280.

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 566 (emphasis added). In the following lines, Ricœur mentions Gadamer’s take on Hegel in connection with overcoming Schleiermacher’s idea of hermeneutical understanding as an actual restoration of the “original thought.” However, even if Hegel’s distinction between *Vorstellung* (as a mere subjective and non-living representation) and *Darstellung* (as a higher and objective mode of representation) seems tempting, I agree with Makkreel’s stance: “Because Hegel proceeds historically and insists that everything be constantly refined, his dialectic manifests certain parallels to hermeneutics. Nevertheless, [...] he is more concerned with the logical explication of a total system than with the understanding of historical process.” Therefore, Makkreel concludes that Kant’s philosophy could instead be closer to contemporary hermeneutics, to the point of being considered “proto-hermeneutical in that it takes seriously the problem of compensating for the limits of the understanding through feeling, reflective judgment, and interpretation.” Rudolf A. Makkreel, “Gadamer and the Problem of How to Relate Kant and Hegel to Hermeneutics,” *Laval théologique et philosophique*, vol. 53 (1997), 151–166.

²⁵ See Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 340.

²⁶ See Roberta Picardi, “« Penser l’histoire » après Löwith : Koselleck et Ricœur,” *Revue germanique internationale*, vol. 25 (2021), 119–143.

epistemology of history legitimately advocates as “critical realism.”²⁷ Let us see then what relevant conclusions we can draw from the previous reading of literary representations as a form of *Darstellung*. We noticed that the impossibility of establishing a direct and immediate correspondence between represented and representation entails neither an absolute lack of referentiality nor a complete loss of the cognitive value of representation. In truth, the impossibility of an immediate and intuitive reference clears the way for the power of imagination to exhibit a hidden dimension of reality—resulting in the augmentation of the meaning of reality itself. In the case of historical representation, the rejection of the *Urbild/Abbild* model holds to the extent that there is no possibility of a proper intuitive recognition of the past (as is still possible through lived memory). As Ricœur points out, the augmentation of the meaning of past reality occurs through the reconstructive operation of the historian, “precisely *because of* the lack of intuition.”²⁸ Past reality, precisely as such, has no intuitive givenness for us. It is the productive activity of the historian that makes it visible and intelligible through its representation. Accordingly, such representation is not a copy of a supposedly already given original. As Ricœur himself states, the “so-called picture theory, which would come down to an imitation-copy, is manifestly excluded.”²⁹

Here, once again, we find the idea of a different kind of representative activity, one which results in the augmentation of the meaning of the represented, and a broadening of our horizon of existence. In this case, however, what is exhibited is not the pre-objective and original dimension of reality in which the subject/object distinction as such is itself blurred. Rather, we encounter the fundamental role of historical imagination in exhibiting the reference of historical narratives, i.e. its role in presenting past events thereby elevating them to historical facts. However, this role still consists in conveying a space of visibility and intelligibility, for the very possibility of the objective manifestation of historical facts depends on the historian’s depicting activity. What is obtained here is a correspondent augmentation of the meaning of history, precisely due to those same selective features of emplotment which, *mutatis mutandis*, were described above.³⁰

It has already been mentioned that the effect of iconic augmentation is produced thanks to both metaphors and fictional narratives. In the specific case of narratives, this augmentation occurs through the writer’s selection of pertinent traits and abbreviations, the production of an effect of saturation, the bestowment of unity upon a succession of events, and so on, or speaking succinctly, through an activity of configuration and codification. Interestingly enough, again in connection to historical narratives, Ricœur explicitly refers to Kantian schematism in order to explain the bond between creativity and codification. The idea of a methodical exhibition— “a rule-governed production”³¹—allows Ricœur to set a limit on the arbitrariness of creativity, preventing the

²⁷ See Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 278.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, 567 (emphasis added).

²⁹ *Ibid.*, 279.

³⁰ Given that the plot construction is already part of the explanation of history (he accordingly states that “to narrate is already to explain,” that is, to go beyond a mere chronology of facts), Ricœur overcomes the limits of a simplistic narrativist conception of historiography. As we will see, he recognizes the paramount importance of historiographical research, of that documentary phase which seems to be overlooked in the narrativist account of history. See Ricœur, *Time and Narrative I*, 178.

³¹ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 253.

consideration of the constructive activity of the historian as an illegitimate or psychological operation.

As already observed, the underlying conviction is that historical facts arise through the depiction that characterizes historical narratives. As a result of this depiction, these facts gain visibility and readability, receiving objective status. However, the point is precisely that such a result is not a mere subjective construction, nor is historical fact a product that is completely relative to a representative system. By conceiving historical representation as a *Darstellung*, we can maintain that history becomes objective insofar as it is depicted in historical representations, and yet this depiction is still the exhibition of an underlying reality. There is “a request, a demand to be spoken of, represented, arising from the very heart of the event.”³² Here we come to the point of intersection between epistemology and ontology, where a reflection on our ontological condition as intrinsically historical is in need. As anticipated above, such an intrinsic historicity of human existence entails a debt towards the past, an ontological bond that urges us to respond to its request to be represented. The endurance of the past consists in a series of possibilities of sense that ask to be taken charge of, interpreted, and actualized. And it is precisely in this condition of being-in-debt that Ricœur ultimately grounds the referential capacity of history, as well as its objective status and truth claim.

This is extremely important to understanding Ricœur’s movement of at once embracing and overcoming both the so-called “linguistic turn” in the philosophy of history and the consequent narrativist view of history. Indeed, in his dialogue with Hayden White—despite agreeing on the importance of the emplotment as the moment of a *mise en forme* that confers on history a unitary and meaningful form—Ricœur takes a stance against the impasse in which White finds himself. From Ricœur’s perspective, the latter completely disregards the importance of documentary proofs and testimony (the very process of historiographical research), and consequently fails to specify “the referential moment that distinguishes history from fiction.”³³ Meanwhile, Ricœur is perfectly aware of the impossibility of finding in narrative *per se* a legitimate answer to the demand of referentiality characteristic of historical representations.

As just mentioned, the scientific procedures of the historian’s work play a fundamental role. In addition to that, however, I would like to emphasize a slightly different point. Both Ricœur and White clearly reject a theory of truth as correspondence, since they contrast the idea of historical representations as mere pictures of historical facts as *per se* objective and already given. Nevertheless, it seems that in White’s text the *mise en forme* is a strategy that “endows the past with meaning because ‘in itself’ it has none.”³⁴ In this way, the narrative structure appears to be a wholly extrinsic constraint imposed by the historian, instead of an exhibition capable of saying something true about past reality. Contrastingly, Ricœur’s ontological reflection and the resulting conception of historical representation as *Darstellung* lead to the idea that the narrative form is not merely an arbitrary and extrinsic imposition on the real. Rather, the ontological structure of *Darstellung* brings to light the pre-narrative structure of reality itself that awaits to be manifested and explained, one

³² *Ibid.*, 254.

³³ *Ibid.*, 253.

³⁴ See Michael S. Roth, “All You’ve Got Is History,” preface to *Metahistory. The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe*, Hayden White (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 2014).

of which we already possess a pre-understanding.³⁵ In this sense, the idea of the presentation of an underlying reality is essential if we are to move beyond a sort of auto-referentiality of historical representations, and it ensures the possibility that we may speak of the extralinguistic reference of historical discourse as something more than an “illusion of reality” — more than a mere linguistic construction or juxtaposition.

Although I cannot delve very far into this issue, it is worth mentioning the anti-structuralist stance that underlies Ricœur’s reflection. In this context, the defence of the extra-textual reference of historical narratives is directed primarily against Roland Barthes’ conception of them as closed textual entities with no external reference, which produce only a mere *referential illusion* by transforming the meaning (the signified, which still represents a linguistic entity) into a “supposed real.”³⁶ From Ricœur’s standpoint, Barthes’ account ultimately reduces the past to a mere propositional fact, thereby depriving historical representations of any potential truth value. In contrast, attention to the entire process of historiographical research, along with the notion of *Darstellung* and its ontological structure, allows for the possibility of securing history’s truth claim, maintaining the past as the “referential stake of this claim.”³⁷

At the same time, extending the rejection of the original/copy model to the field of history prevents an overly simplistic conception of historical facts as completely independent from the historian’s shaping activity. According to Ricœur, historical representation does not have the function of bestowing a verbal exteriorization on a past that is presumed already objective and understandable. Instead, the representative activity is an essential part of the process of understanding/explanation of the past itself. In Ricœur’s words:

“representation on the historical plan is not confined to conferring some verbal costume on a *discourse whose coherence was complete before its entry into literature*, but rather that representation constitutes a fully legitimate operation that has the privilege of *bringing to light the intended reference of historical discourse*.”³⁸

In light of these considerations, it seems to me that by applying the idea of *Darstellung* to the historical field, Ricœur avoids both the risk of a picture theory of knowledge (which would completely disregard the essential role of presenting historical facts in a narrative with its own structural properties), and the fallout entailed in a purely narrativist account of history (which

³⁵ To this extent, the whole of Ricœur’s reflection on the threefold mimesis in *Time and Narrative* becomes fundamental. The narrative configuration of human actions is possible only insofar as there is a synthesis of pre-figuration already at work in our common way of understanding actions, events, and reality as such.

³⁶ See Roland Barthes, “The Reality Effect,” in *The Rustle of Language*, trans. Richard Howard (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1989), 141–148. Besides, Ricœur’s attempt to overcome the structuralist linguistic closure can be traced to his early reflections on metaphorical reference, against Jakobson’s idea of poetic language as “the focus on the message for its own sake.” See Roman Jakobson, “Linguistics and poetics,” in *Style in Language*, ed. Thomas A. Sebeok (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1960), 6–8.

³⁷ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 279.

³⁸ *Ibid.*, 236 (emphasis added).

would end up denying historical narratives any cognitive value).³⁹ The ontological significance of the historian's activity thus lies in giving a voice to the silent request of the past by allowing the reactivation of its unactualized potentialities. In other terms, this significance lies in taking a fundamental decision in favour of the *Gewesenheit* of the past (its quality of having been), rather than its *Vergangenheit* (the quality of a past that "has elapsed and disappeared"⁴⁰). Besides, as Picardi emphasizes, the importance of this Heideggerian reference, and in more general terms, of such a prioritization of the *having been* over the *no longer being* of the past (a priority that can be seen as the openness of the past itself and its enduring efficacy) is strictly connected to the interpretation of our historical condition as a being-in-debt that offers an ontological guarantee to the referential demand of historical discourse.⁴¹

Conclusion

As I hope the present discussion has helped to elucidate, I believe that interpreting Ricœur's notion of representation as a form of Kantian *Darstellung* can provide valuable insights into the epistemology and ontology underpinning Ricœur's conception of historical knowledge. The concept of *Darstellung* enables us to conceive representation as the result of a productive activity of shaping reality, an activity that should not be regarded as merely subjective or arbitrary, but one which renders historicity itself objective and understandable. Through the idea of exhibition, the objectivity of historical knowledge is thus preserved within the very operation of the historian. On the one hand, the notion of *Darstellung* prevents the conception of historical facts as something absolutely given and objective—completely independent from the historian's activity. And yet, on the other, it also ensures the referential constraint of history to the past, giving the latter meaning and visibility through its depiction.

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³⁹ For a discussion of this alternative, see Chris Lorenz, "Can History be True? Narrativism, Positivism, and the 'Metaphorical Turn'," *History and Theory*, vol. 37 (1998), 309–329.

⁴⁰ Ricœur, *Memory, History, Forgetting*, 362.

⁴¹ See Roberta Picardi, "Temporalità, antropologia dell'esperienza storica e memoria in Koselleck e Ricœur," *Conceptos Históricos*, vol. 5 (2019), 66–97.

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