# Introduction

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There is no doubt that for Ricœur, reading is not an unthought-of act; on the contrary, it is part of his philosophical reflection. Whether it is because he reads the texts of other philosophers, commenting on them extensively, quoting them, or asserting that these texts are fundamental philosophical references for him, whether it is because he quotes, studies or comments on a wide range of extra-philosophical texts, including scientific, logical, linguistic, structuralist or literary-theoretical works, or whether it is because he himself interprets literary works and biblical or theological texts, it is easy to agree that Ricœur has developed a conscious and intensive reading practice in his writings. The first impression left by his style is that of a thinker who favors dialogue and values intersubjectivity. Better still: could we not say that his need to feed off the texts of others bears witness to an ever-growing demand on himself to invent the creative conceptual means likely to mark his own singularity? What we are saying, in any case, is that for Ricœur, the activity of reading is much more about sharing his readings with his own readers than about a reductive fidelity to the source text. And to be able to honor the virtue of sharing, we may have to start by avoiding all the traps of authority, especially the one into which a canonical text read by a philosopher too sure of his own reading could lead us. Sharing presupposes address, and address underpins an ethics of reading:

> One does not have the right to affirm that the *Meditations* are a great soliloquy, because the one who writes them, and who therefore feels capable of failing, places himself under the gaze of others, whose approval he awaits.[1]

To be an authority by thwarting the ease of authority through sharing: this could perhaps provide clues to the deeper meaning of Ricœur's activity of reading. And yet, however much we

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[1] "Faire intrigue, faire question : sur la littérature et la philosophie," in *Cahiers de l'Herne - Ricœur*, eds. Paul Ricœur, Bruno Clément (Paris: Editions de l'Herne, 2004), p. 198.
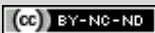
may suggest that it is in the name of a certain plurality of truth put into tension by the reading of texts that Ricœur deploys his own rhetoric - by implementing strategies of appropriation of the texts read, of neutralization of contrary positions, of incorporation of ideas and concepts taken from a varied repertoire, but also by updating the classics - the fact remains that this theme of Ricœurian reading raises as many questions as it seems to resolve. Acceptance of the plurality of truth, yes, but for what purpose and at what cost? What is this reading ethic based on?

First, we should note that Ricœur's explicit and dramatized reading sometimes takes on exponential proportions, revealing an exhaustive use of bibliographical reference and quotation that is not without violence towards its potential reader. The latter, in turn, is compelled, in his own work of reading Ricœur, to make manifest certain procedures presiding over the choices of readings that the philosopher has left in the shadows.

It should also be noted that Ricœur's actualizing appropriation of the philosophical texts he reads corresponds paradoxically to a concern for preserving the philosophical tradition at a time when its reading is under threat from all sides. On the one hand, the structuralist hegemony seeks to extend its authority beyond linguistics and anthropology, and proposes new ways of reading all texts. On the other, the Heideggerian critique of Western metaphysics provides powerful conceptual tools for re-reading all philosophy. Finally, the Marxist interpretation of the philosophical tradition historicizes truth and, while reading it in a reductive way, intends to force every philosopher of the present to be himself read from his own situation. In his 1961 essay "The History of Philosophy and Historicity",[2] Ricœur rejects this idea, defining philosophy as a search for truth that lives only by the historical overcoming of its social situation through its works. To be an authority by thwarting the ease of authority through sharing — this, then, is what could perhaps provide clues as to the deeper meaning of Ricœur's activity of reading.

It is probably fair to say that the problems of reading posed by Ricœur are those facing the philosophical institution of his time. For even within the philosophical tradition, which paradoxically must be preserved, the spirit of system threatens to reduce the singular truth of a text. This is why, if: "I do not have the right to say that a philosophy is only a 'moment'"[3] that has its meaning outside itself in an all-encompassing system is because, without succumbing to the schizophrenia of singularity, "I" must see that each philosopher nevertheless gives a unique form to a universal problem. But just as paradoxically, the spirit of the system threatens the philosophical tradition outside philosophy, as a whole series of gestures of hegemonic appropriation compete with it under the guise of a plurality of discourses on truth. On this point, it could perhaps be said that Ricœur's difficulty lies in defending a certain classical canon without being content to be a historian of philosophy.

In this sense, even if scientific knowledge and theoretical discourse unquestionably say true things, the ethical challenge for philosophy undoubtedly rests, according to Ricœur, on a reading capable of bringing ontological truth to life above the scattering of actual history and on the bangs of the spirit of system. Clearly, the duty to read "the unity of truth" in the conflict between contradictory philosophies and the truth of the philosophical problem must take into account the prejudice of philosophical truth, without assuming it in a total reading. This task then takes the "gaping tear" as its figure, and the task of transforming the "mortal dilemma" into a

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[2] Paul Ricœur, *History and Truth* (Evanston, Illinois: Northwestern University Press, 1965), p. 63–77.

[3] *Ibid.*, p. 67.

"living paradox,"[4] of "finding in philosophers something to re-engender metaphysics,» to "revisit metaphysics that is not closed," and to "reactivate themes that are, if not unused, at least secondary,"[5] and so on.

In view of the complexity of these threats, which require us to read as philosophers, Ricœur's relationship between reading and interpretation becomes clearer. By the time of *The Conflict of Interpretations*, a certain definition of the symbol had made it possible to assign conceptually the place of otherness in relation to the philosophical tradition, and to specify the rules of any interpretation under its control. Moreover, by making the idea of conflict a structural dimension of the reading of philosophers[6], Ricœur reflexively defines his own style of dialogical reading at the junction of the hermeneutics of the recollection of meaning and the hermeneutics of suspicion. Three features stand out: the development of a philosophy radically hostile to any totalizing interpretation of the history of philosophy; a new way of reading certain philosophers, classifying them according to their own way of interpreting; and finally, a recognition of the need to read philosophically texts other than those of the philosophical tradition.

More specifically, with regard to this last trait, it should be emphasized that, according to Ricœur, it is necessary to assume the circle in which philosophy is engaged: the act of reading, in fact, presupposes a clear delimitation of the disciplinary spheres to which this act applies at the same time as it produces them. We should also point out that, despite this admission of hermeneutic circularity, we are entitled to wonder about Ricœur's true relationship with the human sciences, insofar as he situates himself "above them" while at the same time arbitrating between them through his reading.

Be that as it may, if it is incontestable that Ricœur has constantly reflexively practiced a very particular reading activity, does his ethics of reading provide the means for a complete theory of reading? In *Time and Narrative* II, after having "read" a whole series of theories to which he refuses to grant the gift of reading fictional narratives, Ricœur goes on to clarify that it is the act of reading that gives ontological consistency to narrative. He then proceeds to offer a kind of proof by deed, through specific readings of three major literary works whose ontological consistency, he believes, depends on the existence of the privileged reading he gives them. We then have to wait until chapter 4 of *Time and Narrative* III[7] to find what must nonetheless be considered a certain detailed theory of reading, which at this stage only applies to literary works in general.

We are then forced to note a number of theoretical divisions in Ricœur's reading: between the assumed activity of reading, on the one hand, and the theoretical justification of reading decisions, on the other. Between the explicitness of a general theory of philosophical reading of extra-philosophical content, on the one hand, and the absence of a general theory of philosophical reading of a philosophical text, on the other.

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[4] Paul Ricœur, "The History of Philosophy and the Unity of Truth," in Ricœur, *History and Truth*, p. 41–56.

[5] "De la volonté à l'acte, un entretien de Paul Ricœur avec Carlos Oliveira," in *Temps et récit en débat*, eds. Christian Bouchindhomme, Rainer Rochlitz (Paris: Cerf, 1990), p. 17–36.

[6] It is worth recalling that three of his collections of articles published in French by Seuil are precisely entitled: *Lectures* (*Lectures*, vol. 1, 2 and 3).

[7] Paul Ricœur, "World of the text and World of the reader," in *Time and Narrative III* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1988).

Finally, it should be noted that Ricœur's rhetorical devices both obscure and fictionalize oppositions in the service of a genuine strategy of conflict. Whether by accumulation, reference, omission, amplification or dramatization, Ricœurian writing sometimes seems to hide as much as it reveals the weight of the readings that make it up, which form a complex network where explicitness mingles with the implicit. The task of the Ricœurian reader is therefore anything but simple, since we who wish to read him must accept his conception of sharing without conceding anything to the ease of his authority.

Taking as his starting point Ricœur's theorization of the act of reading in *Time and Narrative*, and insisting on the fact that, according to the philosopher, there is an essential lacuna in any text that constitutes the very space of reading, Bruno Clément proposes an interesting exercise in reading applied to Ricœur's work. Through an analysis of the writing processes and reading protocols at work in the work, he first attempts to show how *Time and Narrative* is likely to affect the regime of philosophical speech. Secondly, it attempts to assess the extent to which the very writing of *Time and Narrative* is affected by the propositions put forward by Ricœur in this book, concerning time, the writing of philosophy and the reading of texts — whether of philosophy or literary theory.

For his part, Vinicio Busacchi takes a strictly philosophical standpoint, arguing that Ricœur's problematic of the act of reading needs to be understood by distinguishing two levels: methodological and speculative. His aim is to develop an analysis of Ricœur's method and then of his philosophical style, showing that these essentially refer to the same concept of critical hermeneutics. This concept, consisting of a philosophical core centered on the hermeneutic-anthropological dimension and underpinned by the idea of narrative identity, ultimately explains Ricœur's approach to texts and his literary choices. Ultimately, these are all gestures stemming from a specific vision of man, and this is what philosophical hermeneutics leads us to outline and explore.

Felice Maria Fiorino examined the relationship between the experience of reading as Ricœur sees it, and the status of ipseity in his philosophy. Beyond the hermeneutical and narrative dimensions of the self, the author has set out to analyze the phenomenological and existential aspects of the correlation between reading and being oneself. Firstly, he argues that Ricœur's approach to the effects of fiction on identity owes much to the phenomenological tradition — he is thinking in particular of Sartre's critique of the ego and Husserl's theory of imaginative variations, but also of Iser, Poulet and Ingarden. Secondly, the article argues that the embodied, temporal nature of reading may well be correlated with the phenomenological anchoring of the self within the very framework of its fictional experiences. Then, finally, an analysis of Ricœur's reading of Musil's *The Man without Qualities* enables the author to argue that such fiction, read "philosophically" in a certain way, makes a certain radical categorical change thinkable.

Blake Scott responds to Edward Saïd's criticism that Ricœur's philosophy does not take sufficient account of "worldliness." Far from yielding to the easy option of a straightforward defense of Ricœur, and aware that a certain skepticism as to the relevance of Ricœurian philosophy to social theory is indeed tenable, Scott chooses to take up the challenge. After a precise summary of Saïd's critique and the formulation of the real difficulties to be retained, the article focuses on Ricœur's model of the triple mimesis of action. As this relates not only to time, but also to space, it proposes that the narrative and construction capacities attributable to the structure of the triple mimesis can be subsumed under a more general capacity for designing. The article then examines Ernst Wolff's social interpretative theory of the "technicity" of action, praising its effectiveness in

conceptualizing the central role of material or technical circumstances in Ricœur's work. Finally, in an attempt to address Saïd's concern, the author suggests that Michel de Certeau's distinction between strategies and tactics certainly serves to highlight the inherent asymmetry between actors and their technical conditions, but does not necessarily imply adherence to Saïd's exaggerated conclusion that this asymmetry is constitutively oppressive.

Finally, Kevin Chaves' article makes the original and highly interesting argument that science fiction, as a literary genre structured by technological metaphor and utopian displacement, reveals certain fundamental limits of Ricœur's hermeneutics of fiction. Although he defends a theory of narrative configuration independent of literary genres, his own interpretative practice favors works whose formal stakes are closely linked to specific generic characteristics, in particular "fables about time". According to the author, if we mobilize Ricœurian analyses of utopia, productive imagination and the mimetic arc, it becomes possible to argue that science fiction constitutes a paradigmatic genre capable of understanding the extent to which fictional narratives function as ethical laboratories. In the first part, the author elaborates what a Ricœurian theory of science fiction might be, by placing Ricœur's reflections on utopia and ideology in dialogue with the work of Suvin and Jameson. He develops the argument that science fiction's cognitive strangeness and futuristic temporality call for a theoretical extension of the Ricœurian narrative model capable of taking into account the question of literary genre. The second part of his article analyzes the role of technological metaphors as productive frameworks in two exemplary works. William Gibson's Neuromancer and Octavia Butler's Xenogenesis trilogy. One of the merits of this article is to show, through these readings carefully chosen by the author, that science fiction on the one hand fulfills the ethical function that Ricœur attributes to fiction, but on the other hand forces us to rethink his hermeneutic model by insisting on the structuring role of literary genre in the symbolic life of narratives.

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