

Metaphor and the problem of reference: a perspective on Ricoeur's semantic model of autonomy

Sara Rocca

Sara Rocca: Metaphor and the problem of reference: a perspective on Ricoeur's semantic model of autonomy. In: *Ostium*, vol. 19, 2023, no. 1.

The aim of this paper is to reflect upon the main problem opened by the semantic model of autonomy proposed by Ricoeur: namely, the problem of the reference of the text. Since a text is, above all, a written work, it acquires a threefold autonomy – from the author's intention, from its being addressed to its original readers, and from the situation of the work. Then the issue gains complexity if one considers the field of literature, and particularly, that of fictional literature, which seems to destroy any reference to our given reality. At this point the role of poetry and metaphor becomes paradigmatic: if we consider metaphor (with its productive reference) as a poem in miniature, it can be assumed as the touchstone through which the theory of verbal signification could achieve its utmost enlargement.

Keywords: semantic autonomy, reference, discourse, metaphor, productive imagination

Introduction

The aim of this paper is to assess Ricoeur's conception of semantic autonomy, with a focus on his theory of metaphor. Since Ricoeur himself discusses it in several texts^[1], my goal will basically consist in showing to what extent metaphor's mode of functioning could be regarded as a paradigmatic example of the semantic model of autonomy. To this end, I will also have to discuss the role of imagination in connection to metaphor, and it will turn out that the notion of productive imagination can provide us with precious insights into the above model.

To begin with, §1 will flesh out the semantic model of autonomy, thereby spelling out its basic elements. Then, in §2 I will directly tackle Ricoeur's idea of metaphor in connection with the notion of semantic autonomy. Finally, in §§3 and 3.1 I will draw upon the notion of productive imagination in order to shed better light upon the arguments presented over the course of the previous sections.

1. Semantic autonomy: its origins, meaning, and consequences

Let us first explain why Ricoeur introduces a semantic model of autonomy and consider the extent to which the very idea of autonomy can be studied from a semantic perspective. The resulting sense of autonomy will prove to be extremely useful for a better understanding of Ricoeur's notion of interpretation, and more generally, of what the ultimate task of hermeneutics is. Indeed, insofar as hermeneutics concerns the interpretation of written texts^[2], one might want to argue that the very idea of interpretation could be understood in various ways: this, I believe, is why the semantic model of autonomy allows Ricoeur both to specify the status of the text and to outline his peculiar conception of interpretation. As we shall see, the text is defined as an autonomous entity (detached from the reality of everyday life) whose self-sufficiency opens up a new space: the world of the text

itself. In this respect, to interpret a text means to understand the world it displays. Such an interpretation-operation is what ultimately reconnects the world of the text with our own world, for it bridges the gap created by the semantic autonomy as such. To interpret a text thereby results in a form of meaning-appropriation, which in turn leads to a re-shaping of reality on the basis of the possibilities disclosed within the world of the text.

The latter point is crucial regarding the more general notion of autonomy, and in more proper terms, the notion of self-understanding. This cannot be reduced to a form of immediate self-transparency, for ontologically, we are always already thrown into a world that precedes us. Self-understanding must accordingly be regarded as a process of self-appropriation: it must be mediated by the understanding of the world, and interpreting a text is one of the ways in which such mediation occurs. In fact, even if texts are autonomous and partially detached from reality, they preserve an indirect reference to it – enlarging, once they are understood, the scope of our possible ways of being-in-the-world.

For a full comprehension of such a link between the world of the text and our own, it is now necessary to spell out the features of the semantic model at stake. Within this model, the notion of autonomy finds its origins in the problem of writing, and specifically, of written texts. Talk of semantic autonomy can thus be traced back to the text being assumed – in its unity – as an autonomous entity in virtue of the following threefold detachment:

- From the intention of the author: the meaning of the text and the subjective intention of the writer no longer overlap.
- From any privileged readers of the text: with the inscription in writing, the text is open to an endless number of possible readers.
- From the original context within which the text was actually written: the ostensive aspect of language as discourse[3] is deactivated.

However, what happens in writing is not something completely new, but rather “the full manifestation of discourse”[4]. Clarifying this statement is of the utmost importance because it will enable us to grasp a series of fundamental elements proper to Ricoeur’s model. First, what the just quoted passage implies is that the problem of semantic autonomy places us at the level of discourse (the semantics of sentences), which is important for at least two reasons. One is that Ricoeur refuses to consider language as a virtual system of signs closed in on itself; instead, what matters is not the virtual existence of the system, but the living and communicative function of language. The other is that he rejects the traditional (Aristotle-inspired) view of metaphor as a deviant kind of denomination. In so doing, he is able to connect the work of the metaphor with predicative activity within the context of a full sentence. As a result, both the analysis of the text and the analysis of the metaphor belong to the homogenous ground of language as discourse.

Second, the above statement means that even at the level of discourse in oral communication, there obtains a dynamic of detachment that reaches its peak in the “fixation” in writing: Ricoeur calls it the dialectical movement between *event* and *meaning*[5]. On the one hand, the discourse as such happens as an individual event, namely, it is the occurrence of a sentence that actualizes language in the present time. On the other hand, the discourse is understood as meaning (an identical unity that can always be re-identified). Such a movement of distantiation “of the saying in the said”[6] is amplified in the case of writing, since the meaning of the written sentence becomes a completely independent unity. The difference is due to the fact that within oral discourse, despite the distantiation, it is nonetheless possible to refer back to the speaker (thanks to the self-referential function of language) and to appeal to a shared situation that plays the referential pole of the discourse. In contrast, after the inscription in writing, the meaning can no longer be reduced to the subjective author’s intention (it is independent from any given subject), and there is no situational

context common to both the author and the reader. Besides, as Ricoeur claims, “hermeneutics begins where dialogue ends”[7]: it is when the mutual interaction between a speaker and a hearer is no longer possible – as in the case of writing – that the need for interpretation emerges.

Before continuing, though, an important element needs to be stressed. When we consider a text as a whole (or a metaphor as “a poem in miniature”[8]), we are dealing with something that is more than a mere sequence of sentences. A text can be regarded as a work, as a closed and finite totality that is governed by the rules of literary genres, yet at the same time undergoes a process of individualization (thanks to the role of style). This is why the comprehension of a text must comply with its distinctive nature, which is in fact connected with the effects of inscription in writing. Two consequences follow from this.

On the one hand, the text must be regarded as an individual work that demands a specific form of *understanding*. Yet, this point is related to the effects of writing on the self-referential power of language and brings out one of Ricoeur’s polemical targets: the tradition of romantic hermeneutics, which had reduced the problem of interpretation to the one of understanding – identifying the latter with the possibility of an empathic transfer into the author’s intention. However, even if the text can be deemed an individual product, Ricoeur refuses to endorse this strategy: since the exteriorization in writing sets off a non-coincidence between the author’s intention and the meaning of the text, understanding can no longer be reduced to such a transfer. Rather, it must be put into a dialectical relation with the explanation of the text as a form of objectification. Here we can already notice how the text’s semantic autonomy contributes to reshaping the idea of understanding: since the text becomes the “paradigm of distantiation in communication”, distantiation ceases to be a by-product of methodology that hermeneutics is meant to overcome (Gadamer). Quite the contrary. It represents the very condition of possibility for such understanding (for interpretation itself)[9].

On the other hand, the concept of work implies a peculiar form of objectification, for an individual event takes the shape of a structured meaning. Thus, the meaning-understanding must also embrace a form of *explanation* of the text’s structural features. Yet it would be a mistake to ascribe a structuralist position to Ricoeur. Quite the contrary, he assumes discourse as the starting point of reflection, thereby criticizing the idea that language can be regarded exclusively as a closed system of signs where the meaning would be the result of internal differential relations between the signs[10]. Even if a written text overcomes the transient nature of the event by becoming a stable unit of sense, a discourse always preserves a referential pole. Therefore, an explanation of its structural features does not exhaust its meaning[11]. Nevertheless, semantic autonomy does lead to the problem of reference, and further difficulties emerge within the field of literary fiction. Here what Jakobson calls the poetic function of language imposes itself at the expense of the others: it is “the set toward the message as such, focus on the message for its own sake”[12]. Ricoeur himself acknowledges the problem, stating that in the case of fiction (or in the field of poetry) the referential function seems to disappear altogether. In fact, even if writing interrupts the original commonality of situation between the speaker and the hearer, it might still be possible in certain cases to appeal to a non-situational reference “thanks to the unique spatio-temporal network to which both writer and reader ultimately belong”[13]. But this is not the case with fiction, where there is no “connection to the unique space-time network common to ostensive and non-ostensive description”[14]. For instance, metaphors overrule the habitual connections between concepts, producing new forms of association that reshape the usual scaffolding of reality.

And yet, Ricoeur claims that each discourse is about something, so that even within literary fiction, there obtains no complete eclipse of reference. What is at stake is the possibility of expanding the very notion of reference. And this is what he does through the idea of *productive reference*, which – given the specific nature of the text – takes the shape of the *world of the text*.

2. The interactive functioning of metaphors

Before moving on, let me elaborate on the metaphor's mode of functioning.

Ricoeur rejects the Aristotelian idea to the effect that a metaphor "consists in giving a thing a name that belongs to something else" [*Poet.* (1457 b 6-9)]. What follows from such a tropological model is that metaphors are henceforth tied to the level of "a segment of discourse" (the name) rather than to the full discourse, being thereby reduced to "a mere ornament"[15]. Briefly said, to think of metaphors as name-substitutions entails:

- a possible paraphrasis that is exhaustive;
- the lack of new information provided by such figurative use of a name;
- a merely decorative function.

On the contrary, Ricoeur feels the urge to stress the cognitive power of metaphors. To do so, he embraces an interactive theory according to which metaphors work at the level of the functioning of entire sentences[16]. In this way the metaphor turns out to be the product of a predicative synthesis that no longer consists in a substitution of names, but in the attribution of bizarre predicates; it is a synthesis that breaks the common conceptual order by associating semantic fields that are usually separated and distant. On the level of *sense*, the metaphor functions as follows:

- A predicative synthesis produces a clash that "leads one to seek out a meaning beyond the lexical meaning"[17]. Indeed, because of the impossibility of understanding the sentence literally, on pain of a contradictory result, the synthesis generates a semantic shock.
- In response to the shock, the reader brackets the literal sense of the sentence and produces a new predicative pertinence by finding a new metaphorical sense, which reduces the distance between the semantic fields. Thus, the metaphor is not the clash itself, but rather its resolution: a "shift from literal to figurative sense"[18] at the level of the sentence, a "*contextual* change of meaning"[19].
- As a result of the resolution, a *semantic innovation* (the new pertinence that arises on the ruins of the shared conceptual order) is established, one that teaches us something new.

What is learned here, then, is a new way of connecting concepts, and – in close association with the productive reference that accompanies this new sense-effect – a way of *seeing* things *as...* For example, when we consider Shakespeare's words "time is a beggar", as soon as we interpret the sentence figuratively, time is immediately *seen as* a beggar[20]. Such a new way of seeing is the referential counterpart of the new way of interpreting the predicative attribution on the level of *sense*.

I think it is necessary to stress this interplay between the second-level sense (the metaphorical one) and the second-level reference (the productive reference produced as its correlate). We have seen how the metaphor results in a semantic innovation whose possibility lies in the freedom to go beyond the lexical meaning. What is at stake is thus a particular kind of autonomy (the autonomy from the literal sense of our statements); accordingly, the metaphor can be regarded as an autonomous process that consists in an innovation within the semantic dimension of meaning. Moreover, this autonomy has a correlative side on the level of reference: for if in its lexical sense the discourse always has a referential pole (the common objective world), the autonomy from the lexical sense also results in the autonomy from the objective reference. We can see how metaphors concretely produce the third detachment mentioned above, namely, the detachment from the situational context of everyday life in which all discourses take place and to which they all refer.

Nevertheless, this distantiation is only the negative condition for a broader referential power to be released. Hence something happens on the level of *reference* as well, and this is what properly

unfolds the cognitive value of the metaphor:

Just as the metaphorical statement captures its sense as metaphorical midst the ruins of the literal sense, it also achieves its reference upon the ruins of what might be called [...] its literal reference. If it is true that literal sense and metaphorical sense are distinguished and articulated within an interpretation, so too it is within an interpretation that a second-level reference [...] is set free by means of the suspension of the first-level reference[21].

We will see in §3.1 how this metaphorical reference has the heuristic function of unfolding new possibilities of being, precisely through a suspension of the usual objective reference. This is possible because the meaning of the metaphor is not the result of a mere substitution of names but is instead the final outcome of a creative process which involves the ability of both the writer and the reader. In this respect, it also results in a deeper understanding of our relation to the world.

3. The schematic work of productive imagination

It is now possible to assess the specific role of productive imagination in the functioning of metaphor. In fact, metaphorization – as the operation of reducing the logical distance between semantic fields – can be better understood through the notion of imagination with regard to the following two points:

- the logical distance is only the negative side of a more complex dynamic: metaphorizing is a process of imagining that allows the grasping of the similar “*despite difference, in spite of contradiction*”[22];
- at first, such similarity is not something to be explained, but something to be grasped[23] – the result of immediate understanding, which Ricoeur compares to Wittgenstein’s *seeing as*[24].

This second point enables us to get a better grasp of the first moment of the dialectic between understanding and explanation that underlies the reception of a metaphor (as well as that of a text): it is a form of understanding that can neither be taught nor explained. Here Ricoeur retrieves the Aristotelian idea according to which the metaphor is “a sign of genius, since a good metaphor implies an intuitive perception of the similarity in dissimilar” [*Poet.* (1459 a 5-8)]. From the reader’s angle, this implies that the movement of meaning-appropriation cannot be reduced to a form of discursive thought. As a sign of genius, meaning-appropriation is better seen as an immediate grasping directed toward the meaning as a whole, not toward its constitutive parts. In other words, the figurative sense of a metaphorical statement appears as a “sudden glimpse”[25], as something that imposes itself on us. It is only later on that through a movement of explanation, it is possible to reach a deeper form of understanding, that is to say, to examine the logical structure underlying the predicative synthesis and explain why – despite the shock – the unusual attribution makes sense.

Ricoeur clarifies this moment of explanation by referring to Kant’s productive imagination. In fact, although the new pertinence appears as a sudden glimpse, it can be traced back to a rule, to “a method [...] for producing images”[26]. Retrospectively, the role of imagination is to offer a schematization of the bizarre use of predicates that caused the shock; in this way we are able to find a rule according to which it is possible to explain why, despite the logical distance, we are capable of grasping something similar. Through this process of explanation, then, it is possible to gain a deeper form of understanding, and the metaphor ceases to be a mere product of the genius’s subjectivity. It becomes something whose logical status can now be understood according to a rule.

Here we encounter, once again, Ricoeur’s anti-subjectivistic stance. In this respect, the contribution of imagination is paramount: its schematic work uncovers the rule that is at work in the bizarre predication, a rule that allows us to explain the attribution. When this happens, also that initial form of narrow understanding can be seen as directed toward the logical status of the resemblance at its

basis, and thus ceases to be a transfer into the author's subjective intention. What Ricoeur owes to Kant is clear: in his first *Critique*, even if the capacity to judge derives from one's human talent (it is not something that can properly be taught[27]), Kant presents the schema as a method that indicates "the case to which the rules ought to be applied"[28]. Likewise, according to Ricoeur, the synthetic activity that produces metaphors is a sign of genius, and yet it is possible to discover the method that rules the assimilation[29]. Moreover, a subjectivistic interpretation is a fortiori excluded, because as we have seen, the full meaning of the metaphor is unfolded only through the complementary role of the reader. It is not the subjective *event* of predication that constitutes the metaphor, but the very operation of the reader who establishes the new *meaning*. In this case, the autonomy from the author's intention is even more apparent: it is when the reader him/herself repeats the schematic operation of the writer that the meaning properly arises. And yet, the comprehension is not complete until one also considers the referential power that accompanies the new meaning.

Before focusing on this last element, however, we must notice that Ricoeur's way of appropriating Kant's notion of imagination is not without a tension: according to Kant, it was the intellect that provided the rule for the synthetic work of imagination, whereas in Ricoeur's analysis, the rule is provided by the metaphor instead. The new pertinence can rise only after a deconstruction of the previous conceptual order[30]. Nonetheless, the very nature of the Kantian imagination is maintained: since the new pertinence cannot be reduced to a concept (because it emerges on its ruins and despite its identity), Ricoeur needs something to mediate between the conceptual and the intuitive levels[31]. Since this pertinence arises by a suspension of the first-level sense, it is neither a pure concept nor a sensible image. Within this new context, then, the image will be an emergent meaning – one emerging precisely on the ruins of the literal predication.

3.1. The product of imagination: its productive reference

There is another fundamental reason why the reference to Kant is important. When it comes to imagination, Ricoeur attempts to reject a tradition that has always linked the field of imagination to that of perception, seeing the image as a weakened perception, a shadow of it. Thus, the proposed semantic theory must take the opposite path – from language to image – explaining the idea according to which "our images are spoken before they are seen"[32]. First, this claim entails that the image can no longer be seen as a mere reproduction of the real; second, it includes the necessity of rethinking the relation among reality, fiction, and redescription.

Regarding the first point, the Kantian reference is helpful, thanks to his semantic transformation of the notion of imagination. Indeed, Kant's productive imagination (*Ein-bildungskraft*) is distinguished from the merely reproductive one and is far from producing a mere *Ab-bildung* (copy) of things. On the contrary, it should be seen as a more general productive power (also distinct from phantasy) responsible for a synthetic activity that shapes reality. What is essential is that Kant distinguishes "what is empirical-psychological from what is pure and lawful about imagination"[33]. This is important to the extent that according to Ricoeur, imagination is not something completely irrational or psychological; quite the opposite, it must be based on the common conceptual order, using the latter as a means to create a shock operating against its rules: "it must be categorial in order to be transcategorial"[34].

Thus, he retains the notion of productivity as a ruled synthetic activity that shapes reality, but stretches its limits, linking such productivity to a feature that is characteristic of imagination within the field of fiction[35]: its neutralizing function. Thanks to this function, imagination deepens the idea of semantic autonomy in that the detachment from reality observed in §1 now becomes an actual neutralization of the world-thesis. But since this bracketing "is but the negative condition for the release of a second-order referential power"[36], a new referential dimension (i.e., the productive one) is opened up as the positive counterpart of the very suspension of the world. Thus,

the idea is that imagination can be productive if and only if it has no previous reference to an original (of which it should be the copy): “fiction changes reality in the sense that it both *invents* and *discovers* it (italics added)”[37].

By saying this, Ricoeur endorses a creation-manifestation dynamic derived from a very precise ontological perspective: our primordial and more original belonging to the lifeworld is a form of immersion in and immediate relation to this lifeworld. Perception already represents a form of objectification: it “levels out differences and smooths over contrasts”[38]. Even further, signification as such triggers a detachment, an interruption of such an immediate belonging, which is henceforth misplaced. Nevertheless, such belonging remains something we aim at, even if it cannot be said directly (through the literal sense of language). Rather, it represents a dimension that can only be alluded to. Thus, we have to re-appropriate this belonging in an indirect way, and this is why Ricoeur can say that “setting perception aside is the condition for augmenting our vision of things. [...] That this reference-effect is equivalent to moving back up the entropic slope of ordinary perception”[39]. For this reason, it is only by creating something new that a more original level of reality is allowed to manifest itself.

To this extent, the detachment produced by the semantic autonomy appears as just one side of a more complex process, which also comprises a return to reality granted by a deeper understanding of our primordial belonging. Therefore, if the distantiation from our given world is only the negative condition for a broader kind of reference, we must assume reality in a sense that is broad enough to allow us to understand fiction as a form of redescription of it. Reality can no longer be reduced to the given, it must embrace a series of possibilities that humans can unfold. In light of this, the suspension of our commitment to the world *as it is* does not bring us into a realm completely detached from reality; rather, it is the condition for seeing the world *as it could be*. Fiction has the power to open up a space for trying out new ways of being-in-the-world, and to appropriate the meaning of a work of art accordingly means to appropriate ourselves (our possibilities) in a more profound way.

4. Conclusion

I think it is helpful to emphasize how the revaluation of imagination is closely intertwined with the plea for writing to which a lot of Ricoeur’s efforts are committed. The key notion is that of “iconic augmentation”[40], which is to be applied to the effects of metaphors and to those of the text. Besides, Ricoeur himself stresses that the power of metaphors can only be fully understood within the frame of an entire work (the poem). The notion of augmentation quite precisely expresses the status of productive reference as the ultimate effect of the semantic autonomy:

the apparent denial of reality is the condition for the glorification of the non-figurative essence of things. Iconicity, then, means the revelation of a real more real than ordinary reality[41].

Now the effect of augmentation is due to the selection of a limited number of pertinent features of reality thanks to a “strategy of contraction and miniaturization”, which far from being a weakening of reality represents the manifestation of its deepest characteristics. But if this strategy is already at work in writing, the semantic autonomy of the text represents a paradigmatic example of it. As we have seen, such autonomy establishes a threefold detachment from the world, while the text nevertheless maintains a referential pole: its productive reference, i.e., the world of the text that is opened up through this very detachment. As in the case of metaphors, this reference is nothing but a world of possibilities, a world that is absorbed back into the given reality through the process of meaning-appropriation. In this way, the lifeworld itself is enriched, receiving new possibilities of being-in-it.

Bibliography

ARISTOTLE, *Poetics*. Cambridge: Harvard University Press 1932.

BENVENISTE, E.: *Problems in general linguistics*. Miami: University of Miami Press 1971.

BLACK, M.: *Metaphor*. In: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian society*, Vol. 55, 1954-55, pp. 273-294.

CONTINI, A.: *Black e Ricoeur filosofi della metafora*. In: *Aisthema*, Vol. 7, no.1, 2020, pp. 117-151.

DAGOGNET, F.: *Écriture et iconographie*. Paris: Vrin 1973.

DE SAUSSURE, F.: *Course in general linguistics*. London: Fontana/Collins 1974.

FERRARIN, A.: *Productive and practical imagination: what does productive imagination produce?* In: GENIUSAS, S., NICULIN, D. (ed.): *Productive imagination. Its history, meaning and significance*. Lanham: Rowman and Littlefield International 2018, pp. 29-48.

FREGE, G.: *Sense and reference*. In: *The philosophical review*, Vol. 53, no. 3, 1948, pp. 209-230.

GENIUSAS, S.: *Against the Sartrean's background: Ricoeur's lectures on imagination*. In: *Research in phenomenology*, Vol. 46, no.1, 2016, pp. 98-116.

JAKOBSON, R.: *Linguistics and poetics*. In: SEBEOK, T. (ed.): *Style in language*. Cambridge: MIT Press 1960, pp. 1-27.

KANT, I.: *Critique of pure reason*. New York: Cambridge University Press 2000.

PETROVICI, I.: *Philosophy as hermeneutics. The world of the text concept in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics*. In: *Social and behavioural sciences*, Vol. 71, 2013, pp. 21-27.

RICOEUR, P.: *Metaphor and the main problem of hermeneutics*. In: *New literary history*, Vol. 6, no.1, 1974, pp. 95-110.

RICOEUR, P.: *The rule of metaphor. The creation of meaning in language* (1975). London: Routledge 2004.

RICOEUR, P.: *Interpretation theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press 1976.

RICOEUR, P.: *The metaphorical process*. In: *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 5, no.1, 1978, pp. 143-159.

RICOEUR, P.: *The function of fiction in shaping reality*. In: *Man and world*, Vol. 12, 1979, pp. 123-141.

RICOEUR, P.: *From text to action. Essays in hermeneutics, II* (1986). Exeter: Continuum 2008.

RICOEUR, P.: *Cinque lezioni. Dal linguaggio all'immagine*. *Aesthetica Preprint*, vol. 66, 2002.

TAYLOR, G. H.: *Ricoeur's philosophy of imagination*. In: *Journal of French philosophy*, Vol. 16, no. 1, 2006, pp. 93-104.

WITTGENSTEIN, L.: *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986.

Notes

[1] See RICOEUR, P.: *Metaphor and the main problem of hermeneutics*. In: *New literary history*, Vol. 6, no.1, 1974, pp. 95-110; ID.: *Interpretation theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning*. Fort Worth: Texas Christian University Press 1976, pp. 45-46; ID.: *The rule of metaphor. The creation of meaning in language*. London: Routledge 2004, p. 271, and ID.: *From text to action. Essays in hermeneutics, II*. Exeter: Continuum 2008, pp. 7-12.

[2] I cannot go any further into the issue of the different ways in which Ricoeur conceives the main task of hermeneutics. Let us say that if at the beginning of his production, interpretation was the interpretation of double-senses expressions (i.e., symbols), during his mature reflection it received an increasingly broader sense, up to its identification with the problem of the interpretation of written texts. See *ivi*, pp. 16-20.

[3] Here the reference is to Benveniste's terminology, since he has distinguished the linguistics of language (whose basic unit is the sign) from the linguistics of discourse (whose basic unit is the sentence). Following this distinction, a necessary demarcation between two kinds of approach emerges: one is the semiotics of signs, the other is the semantics of sentences. See BENVENISTE, E.: *Problems in general linguistics*. Miami: University of Miami Press 1971.

[4] RICOEUR, P.: *Interpretation theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning*, p. 25.

[5] This dialectic is a fundamental starting point, since also the metaphor can be read as such a dynamic movement. See, ID.: *Metaphor and the main problem of hermeneutics*, pp. 103-105.

- [6] ID.: *From text to action*, pp. 75-77.
- [7] ID.: *Interpretation theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning*, p. 32.
- [8] ID.: *The rule of metaphor. The creation of meaning in language*, p. 109.
- [9] See ID.: *From text to action*, p. 72, pp. 80-81, and PETROVICI, I.: *Philosophy as hermeneutics. The world of the text concept in Paul Ricoeur's hermeneutics*. In: *Social and behavioural sciences*, Vol. 71, 2013, pp. 21-27, p. 25.
- [10] In fact, even if according to the classical distinction made by Saussure linguistics should also comprehend an analysis of the level of *parole*, Ricoeur points out that the structuralist approach progressively set aside these kind of analyses in favour of an exclusive consideration of *langue*. For an account of these distinctions, see: DE SAUSSURE, F.: *Course in general linguistics*. London: Fontana/Collins 1974, pp. 13-17, p. 35, p. 165.
- [11] What is important here is the Fregean distinction between sense (or meaning) as an ideal unity, and reference as the objective correlate of sense. See FREGE, G.: *Sense and reference*. In: *The philosophical review*, Vol. 53, no. 3, 1948, pp. 209-230.
- [12] JAKOBSON, R.: *Linguistics and poetics*. In: SEBEOK, T. (ed.): *Style in language*. Cambridge: MIT Press 1960, pp. 1-27, pp. 6-8.
- [13] RICOEUR, P.: *Interpretation theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning*, p. 35.
- [14] Ivi, p. 36.
- [15] ID.: *The rule of metaphor. The creation of meaning in language*, p. 14, p. 51.
- [16] In this sense, Max Black's contribution – among others – is paradigmatic. What is decisive is his claim that a metaphor is an entire sentence (the *frame*) in which the attention is centred on a specific word (the *focus*), which explains the reason why one assumes the statement as metaphorical. See BLACK, M.: *Metaphor*. In: *Proceedings of the Aristotelian society*, Vol. 55, 1954-55, pp. 273-294. On the differences between Black's and Ricoeur's approaches, see CONTINI, A.: *Black e Ricoeur filosofi della metafora*. In: *Aisthema*, Vol. 7, no.1, 2020, pp. 117-151.
- [17] RICOEUR, P.: *The rule of metaphor. The creation of meaning in language*, p. 225.
- [18] Ivi, p. 222.
- [19] ID.: *Metaphor and the main problem of hermeneutics*, p. 99.
- [20] However, we must notice the tension that characterises this kind of predicative assimilation: seeing time as a beggar means in fact to understand that time is a beggar (in a metaphorical sense) and, at the same time, that it is *not* a beggar (in a literal sense).
- [21] RICOEUR, P.: *The rule of metaphor. The creation of meaning in language*, p. 261.
- [22] Ivi, p. 232.
- [23] See ID.: *The metaphorical process*. In: *Critical Inquiry*, vol. 5, no.1, 1978, pp. 143-159, p. 148.
- [24] A focus on the reasons of this reference exceeds the limits of the present discussion. Let us just say that Wittgenstein uses the notion of *seeing as* in connection with a particular kind of visual objects that can be seen in one way or another (e.g., the rabbit/duck's head). What is important is that the vision of the figure as a rabbit (or as a duck) occurs immediately; only then, because of this grasp directed toward the whole, is it possible to interpret its elements as, for instance, the rabbit's ears (or as the duck's beak). See WITTGENSTEIN, L.: *Philosophical Investigations*. Oxford: Basil Blackwell 1986, pp. 194-229.
- [25] RICOEUR, P.: *From text to action*, p. 169.
- [26] Ibid.
- [27] See KANT, I.: *Critique of pure reason*. New York: Cambridge University Press 2000, p. 268 (B-172/ A-133).
- [28] Ivi, p. 269 (B-175).
- [29] Elsewhere, in fact, Ricoeur reproaches what he sees as a subjectivistic drift of the notion imagination within Kant's third *Critique*, exemplified by the notion of reflective judgement. Here imagination is more closely intertwined with the notion of genius, and it is completely freed from the rules of understanding. We deal with a free play of imagination and intellect, whereas in the first *Critique* it was the understanding that provided the rules for imagination. See RICOEUR, P.: *Cinque*

lezioni. *Dal linguaggio all'immagine*. Aesthetica Preprint, vol. 66, 2002, pp. 48-50.

[30] However, Ricoeur stresses that due to this schematization, we are not dealing with free images, but still with bound ones, "i.e., images engendered by poetic diction itself". ID., *The function of fiction in shaping reality*. In: *Man and world*, Vol. 12, 1979, pp. 123-141, p. 133.

[31] Thus, the very nature of the schema is perfectly suited for such mediation: in fact, it is described as "a third thing, which must stand in homogeneity with the category on the one hand and the appearance on the other". KANT, I.: *Critique of pure reason*, p. 272 (B-178/A-139).

[32] RICOEUR, P.: *From text to action*, p. 167.

[33] FERRARIN, A.: *Productive and practical imagination: what does productive imagination produce?* In: GENIUSAS, S., NICULIN, D. (ed.): *Productive imagination. Its history, meaning and significance*. Rowman and Littlefield International: Lanham, 2018, pp. 29-48. For a critical account of Ricoeur's distinction between productive and reproductive imagination, see: GENIUSAS, S.: *Against the Sartrean's background: Ricoeur's lectures on imagination*. In: *Research in phenomenology*, Vol. 46, no.1, 2016, pp. 98-116.

[34] RICOEUR, P.: *Lectures on imagination*, 16:11. Quoted in: TAYLOR, G. H.: *Ricoeur's philosophy of imagination*. In: *Journal of French philosophy*, Vol. 16, no. 1, 2006, pp. 93-104, p. 97.

[35] We will see how Ricoeur conceives the work of imagination as including both a form of manifestation and a form of creation. In contrast, Kant's notion of productive imagination (at least in his first *Critique*) is not related to any form of creation: it is tied to a mediation between the pure conceptual level and the intuitive one. With regard to this point, Taylor stresses that Kant's account of productive imagination is not actually decisive for Ricoeur; on the contrary, according to Taylor, what is fundamental is the role of fiction. See *ivi*, pp. 97-100.

[36] RICOEUR, P.: *From text to action*, p. 170.

[37] ID.: *The function of fiction in shaping reality*, p. 127.

[38] ID.: *From text to action*, p. 171.

[39] *Ibid.*

[40] The notion is borrowed from Dagognet's work. See DAGOGNET, F.: *Écriture et iconographie*. Paris: Vrin 1973.

[41] RICOEUR, P.: *Interpretation theory: discourse and the surplus of meaning*, p. 42.

Sara Rocca

Postgraduate trainee at Charles University

Faculty of Arts

Department of Philosophy and Religious Studies

nám. Jana Palacha 2

11638 Prague

Czech Republic

e-mail: sara.rocca1197@gmail.com