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**Paul Ricoeur's Concept of Subjectivity and
the Postmodern Claim of the Death of the Subject**

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Paul Ricoeur's Philosophical Hermeneutics

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Hermeneutics – an introduction; ‘a hermeneutic circle’

Philosophical hermeneutics has undoubtedly grown to be one of the most significant streams of thought in contemporary philosophy. The reason for this lies in the crucial problem of interpretation. Both the need for interpretation and the question of how to do so are fundamental, not only in philosophical hermeneutics and currents of thought drawing on hermeneutic discoveries such as deconstruction (Silverman 1994, 34-35), or literary studies, but also by other schools which do not overtly profess their indebtedness to hermeneutic investigation (Jervolino 1990, 1). Hermeneutics regards interpretation as a process which can be defined as inconclusive and contextual. It sets itself the task of delineating what we mean by interpretation and what actually happens when we interpret, and what also happens when we arrive at a meaning.

The giants of contemporary hermeneutics – Heidegger, Gadamer, and Ricoeur – have developed their hermeneutic theories in different ways. Ricoeur's is the one which brings into discussion other and versatile schools of thought. The early encounter in Ricoeur's hermeneutics is phenomenology – with an emphasis on the questions and structures of consciousness. This is followed by a study of the vastness of the language of symbols and myths, and then it is coupled with an in-depth discussion of psychoanalysis – a consequential encounter within the circumscriptions of the hermeneutics of suspicion. Freudian

psychoanalysis is an important theory which nourishes the crux of Ricoeur's hermeneutic venture – the hermeneutics of the self. Especially in his later works, the question of the creation of meaning finds its place in the discussion of ethical, political and religious issues. An undeniably idiosyncratic trait of his hermeneutic investigation is the juxtaposition of opposing philosophies and accounting for the possibility of co-influence and dialogue. Contextuality, divergent premises, different points of departure and versatile queries feed the conflict of interpretations which he fully acknowledges.

The enormous impact of hermeneutics and the use of hermeneutic methodology in today's philosophies coalesces with and follows the 'linguistic turn' (Jervolino 1990, 33). Language itself becomes the crux – the springboard, the center, the medium and the true object of philosophical interrogation. The floating signifier has begun to reign in the realm of philosophical investigation – the ever-shifting, multiple, ambiguous reality of language attempting to grasp a meaning. Various currents of thought have grappled with the issue of interpretation while the possible/impossible encounters between philosophical hermeneutics, deconstruction and poststructuralism bring about significant gains for each. Being contested by external, divergent modes of thinking, hermeneutics as an art of interpretation benefits from new and unexpected insights. The process of co-influence and co-fertilization extensively marks today's philosophical arena. Nevertheless, Ricoeur's hermeneutics, taking into account these manifold and conflicting streams, would rather not try to synthesize the opposing views, but to acknowledge the differences which are irresolvable.

The overarching subject matter of Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics, which arises from his anthropology, concerns the human being who is capable of understanding himself in a life-long process. The possibility of understanding comes from the relation of the self to the Other and to the world. As an agent responsible for one's life, the human being is both capable and vulnerable. The intersecting capabilities and vulnerabilities comprise one's life. Ricoeur's

hermeneutics differs from Martin Heidegger's as displayed in *Sein und Zeit* (1927) for whom the major concern is man's being in the world.

The two questions which Ricoeur sets himself to answer and which become central to his philosophical hermeneutics are: "who am I?" and the second, which he sees as closely related to the first: "how should I live?" Ricoeur rehabilitates the fundamental importance of the question: "who am I?," by means of which he attempts to understand the nature of subjectivity. Significantly, for him the former question is closely interconnected with the latter, which is purely focused on morality. For Ricoeur, the moral aspect imbued in the second query seems to be an integral part of something inseparable from the substance of the first question. The irreplaceable and irreducible importance of the second question: 'how should I live?' is seen through the fact that it is only by answering this question that one finds a true answer to the question of 'who am I?' For Ricoeur, embarking on a journey to uncover the truth about 'who am I?,' returning to '*to ti en einai*' in Aristotelian sense, raises a number of other questions: 'who is speaking?,' 'who is acting?,' 'who is telling a story?' All of them seem to lead to the issue of responsibility, as for Ricoeur the questions related to identity are inextricably interwoven with the matter of taking responsibility for the Other. They are interconnected with yet another query: 'who is suffering?' The suffering Other becomes the center of Ricoeur's ethics and concomitantly his hermeneutics of the self.

Ricoeur pays a great deal of attention to the role of community in the formation of the self, especially in cases when the ethical dilemmas involving the self are juxtaposed against the demands of a community. In the context of responsibility, the self is viewed as the correlate of the community. In cases where conflicts arise, Ricoeur speaks of the need to grant community the status of something which undergoes attestation; the philosopher refers here to the concept of attestation which he uses in terms of the human 'self' attesting to oneself in each case.

Community figures here as ‘person’ – Ricoeur deploys the metaphor of the ‘spirit’ in the community life (Meech 2006, 75).

The direction of his philosophical enterprise follows the route from the anthropological research, through phenomenology and the philosophy of reflection towards philosophical hermeneutics. The way he conducts his research can be summed up as a perpetual recognition of new possibilities without losing track of the considerable gains from the various schools of thought which he was indebted to. Ricoeur displays a remarkable sense of continuity; retaining the initial premises, his philosophical endeavor gradually evolves to encompass the possible and meaningful alterations in perspective. With a debt to Husserl, Sartre, Merleau-Ponty, Gabriel Marcel, Jean Nabert and others, and also impacted by the contemporary achievements in linguistics and semiotics, Ricoeur is well equipped to develop textual hermeneutics – his unique theory of interpretation. This text-oriented hermeneutics, treating the text as a central category, differs substantially in many respects from Heidegger’s ontological hermeneutics and Gadamer’s historical hermeneutics. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics is governed by the categories of discourse and meaning, distance, symbol and metaphor. He holds to the so called semiological model, applicable both in linguistics and the much broader studies of cultural and social phenomena. The insights coming from phenomenology, existentialism, and philosophy of reflection are reworked for Ricoeur when he is confronted with the contesting assumptions of psychoanalysis.

This marks the crossing of a new threshold – the problematic nature of interpretation and meaning requires an update. Ricoeur enters a new phase – the hermeneutics of suspicion – where he discovers a fresh angle to his phenomenological hermeneutics – and his analysis leads him to deem Freud, Marx and Nietzsche masters of suspicion. Seeking the new relation between acting and speaking, he becomes more concerned with discourse and meaning which comes to the self by the power of words. The response to the contestation resulting from the

poststructuralist theories is enriched by the inclusion of the hermeneutics of suspicion. The hermeneutics of understanding is revisited.

Ricoeur's hermeneutics which is predominantly the hermeneutics of the self ripens in the long way of his various responses to the philosophies of his contemporaries. In *Aesthetics of Autonomy: Ricoeur and Sartre on Emancipation, Authenticity, and Selfhood*, Farhang Erfani maintains that the whole body of Ricoeur's philosophical works is demonstrative of his "relentless attempt to understand the dialectical relationship between sedimentation and innovation" (Erfani 2011, 39). In a dialogue with his early interlocutors: Sartre and Merleau-Ponty, he begins to discover a path leading from an existential-phenomenologist stream of thought via reflective philosophy to philosophical hermeneutics, gradually encompassing more and more factors towards a disclosure of the premises of human subjectivity – a mature philosophy of the self. His philosophical itinerary becomes increasingly "a philosophy which seeks to disclose authentic subjectivity through a reflection upon the means whereby existence can be understood" (Ricoeur 1981, 2). In a series of books published in the fifties and sixties: *Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1966), *Finitude and Guilt, Fallible Man* (1986), *The Symbolism of Evil* (1967), he manifests his gradual movement from freedom to necessity, fault and fallibility, thus creating an original philosophy of will. The findings of his long and highly engaging project of the philosophy of will move towards an increasing interest in language, its vicissitudes and vagaries, which he expresses, for instance, in *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975), to culminate in the mature hermeneutic interrogation of human subjectivity in *Oneself as Another* (1990), supplemented with the subsequent, but already initiated in this seminal work on subjectivity and intersubjectivity, studies of ethics, for example, in *The Just* (2000).

The various stages of Ricoeur's research are representative of the manifold ways in which he displaces the subject and recuperates it. The numerous displacements Ricoeur focuses

on in his long philosophical career, his work on the symbolic nature of evil and his debate with psychoanalysis result in his taking cognizance of the conscious self displaced by the unconscious and the use of language in its ambiguity and the multifarious production of meaning. From the shifty grounds of language – a reality of the multitudinous meanings, Ricoeur proceeds to a thorough study of a narrative as a fashion of the organization of meanings, but also a space of meaning generation. The displacement here touches the two-fold status of the narrative: it is innovatively oriented but also it retains the sedimented (Erfani 2011, 48). The narrative has a creative power: we create ourselves by being the narrators of our lives. But narrative is also something beyond our control. Shifting from one pole to the other is the way the ‘self’ partakes in its own creation and displacement. The fruitful encounter with psychoanalysis is no less important in Ricoeur’s career than his ample response to structuralism. He criticizes structuralism because of its being grounded too much in sedimentation and its disregard of changeability and time, as well as a lack of interest in the impact of history and historicity. Ricoeur’s life long project is to grasp the tension between the already there - the belongingness and the necessity of distancing. He paddles his way efficiently throughout his writings to capture the objectivity-subjectivity and the sedimentation-distancing dialectic, thus giving vent in a splendid variety of responses to philosophies which have their share in the thwarting of the subject. Each time his responses occasion very up-to-date attempts to reinstitute the subject. Each of Ricoeur’s answers entails a recognition of new facets in the work on the recuperation of the subject, the various displacements of the subject lead to a better understanding of subjectivity.

In order to understand and fully appreciate Ricoeur’s contribution to hermeneutic philosophy and human sciences it is worthwhile to see his place against the backdrop of the other great contemporary hermeneuticians (Gadamer and Heidegger). As a point of departure of this brief overview of Gadamer’s hermeneutics we use a succinct and telling definition of

hermeneutics by Ferraris who deems hermeneutics “the art of interpretation as transformation” (Ferraris 1996, 1). The brevity of the definition does not preclude its all-around content, an expression of the conceptual foundations of hermeneutics and its task. According to Gadamer, hermeneutics is committed to illuminating the interpretative conditions in which understanding occurs, rather than to elaborating on a formula of understanding. This non-formulaic approach leads Gadamer to an unearthing of the fusion of the horizons of the reader and the text, as well as a focus on the conditions under which the fusion is possible. Gadamer accommodates the factor of time and historicity in his conceptualization of the fusion. He speaks of the continual validating or testing of the reader’s pre-suppositions and maintains that: “An important part of this testing occurs in encountering the past and in understanding the tradition from which we come. Hence the horizon of the present cannot be formed without the past” (Gadamer 1996, 306). Ricoeur’s term of appropriation corresponds to Gadamer’s assimilation to the point of ‘becoming one’s own.’ Gadamer talks about the decisive character of the interpreter’s horizon in understanding “as an opinion and a possibility that one brings into play and puts at risk, and that helps one truly to make one’s own what the text says” (Gadamer 1996, 388).

The hermeneutic circle – traditionally used in hermeneutics and conveying both methodology and a condition of understanding is deployed in differing ways by the iconic figures of philosophical hermeneutics. In a detailed presentation of Heideggerian and Gadamerian varying approaches to the art of hermeneutics, endorsing Schwandt’s contentions, Elizabeth Anne Kinsella notices that for Heidegger and Gadamer the circular aspect of interpretation is not just a methodology, but equally a meaningful and essential characteristic trait of the whole spectrum of knowledge and understanding, which implies one interpretation’s reliance on other interpretations (Kinsella 2006, 3). Most significantly, not only does hermeneutics in its long tradition see interpretation as its essential constituent and *modus operandi*, but unveils the universality of interpretation – viewing it as an ineffable trait of all

human strivings to understand oneself, the Other, the world. The inescapability of interpretation is neatly and compellingly expressed by Thomas Schwandt in “Hermeneutic circle”: “there is no special evidence, method, experience or meaning that is independent of interpretation or more basic to it such that one can escape the hermeneutic circle” (Schwandt 2007, 134). Gadamer insists on the ontological structure of understanding, the crux for him is the interplay of the interpreter’s horizon and the interpreter’s participation in tradition, in the evolving of tradition: “the circle of understanding is not a methodological circle, but describes an element of the ontological structure of understanding” (Gadamer 1996, 293). Importantly, Gadamer also underlines that the fusion of horizons is something neither permanent nor complete, but it is sufficient enough for productive dialogue. Besides, it is vital to see that in the hermeneutic circle understanding is propelled by the influx of information, thus the circle gets augmented and the illumination of meaning is dependent on the possibility of the gradual digestion and interpretation of information.

The hermeneutic understanding happens in words and in time, and all interpretation is situated. It involves the bringing of an individual insight into the situation of interpretation. Hermeneutics acknowledges that interpretation is not done in isolated, artificially constructed circumstances, but it participates in the entirety of differing vantage points of individual interpretations, it is characterized by situatedness, it is located in innumerable social practices, traditions, perspectives and ultimately and potently in ways of construing meaning. This aspect of interpretation is one of the meeting points, or more precisely the point of a clash between hermeneutics and the postmodernist pervasive interest in the outside reality of social practices and the social formation of the human subject. The decentering or the positioning of the human ‘self’ proclaimed in many ways in the postmodern philosophies stumbles against the hermeneutic resistance to offer authoritative readings and easily conceived reconciliations. Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of the self adduces an engagement with a multi-layered understanding

of the human subject. In its fundamental premises, hermeneutics articulates a recognition of the linguistically and historically pre-determined and influenced nature of interpretation. Hermeneutics displays an exquisite comfort with and openness to the ambiguous character of textual analysis. This may be conveyed in a candid expression: “Hermeneutics embraces ambiguity” (Kinsella 2006, 6).

Ricoeur’s critique of structuralism instigates his subsequent focus on the studies of language and discourse. He criticizes structuralist scientific methodology and revisits the role of language as a residue of meaning. The inquiry into the language of metaphor and symbol results in opening new forays in Ricoeur’s research leading to a mature hermeneutics of the self. Although Ricoeur acknowledges the value of structuralism as science, he downgrades its possibility to be a legitimate philosophy. According to him structuralism impedes self-reflection and thus it cannot ascertain itself as a philosophy (Ricoeur 1981, 10). Undoubtedly, he finds himself under an enormous impact of the structuralist method, viewing it as formative in his work on language, understanding and interpretation. In an introduction to *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, John B. Thomson explains Ricoeur’s acknowledgement of the imperative force coming from structuralism: “A genuinely receptive philosophy must nevertheless be receptive to the structuralist method, specifying its validity as an abstract and objective moment in the understanding of self and of being” (Ricoeur 1981, 10).

In a nutshell, the retrieval of the subject in Ricoeur’s hermeneutics is achieved via various momentous detours and a mindful recognition of the possibilities imbued in existentialism, philosophy of reflection, phenomenology, structuralism, and psychoanalysis grafted onto hermeneutics. His vigilant customizing of the discoveries of philosophical currents adduces an exceptionally trenchant and sophisticated philosophy of the human subject. The back and forth movement of his research is demonstrative of conceding to the implications of various philosophical tendencies which he senses as penetrating and impossible to be ignored.

The self that he attains in the long, attentive hermeneutic investigation is an increasingly enriched one. The recuperation of the self is defensible and capable of counterbalancing the emptiness of the postmodern claim of the absence of the subject. Ricoeur's voice in contemporary philosophy is irreplaceable in the ongoing contemporary debate regarding the Cartesian Cogito – the subject-object model of our experience of ourselves and the world. The encounter between Ricoeur's conceptualization of subjectivity and the postmodern claim of the death of the subject revolves around the different and engaging responses to Descartes' Cogito.

Textual hermeneutics – text as a central category

Ricoeur's hermeneutics inscribes itself in the history of hermeneutics as both science and the art of interpretation. In modern times the aim of reaching the meaning – the task of hermeneutics – starts at the turn of the eighteenth and nineteenth century with Friedrich Schleiermacher's thesis of the need to search for meaning by means of understanding the author's mind. The subsequent hermeneutic philosophies offer versatile approaches as for what is or should be the point of hermeneutic investigation. Martin Heidegger's ontological hermeneutics is followed by the brilliant work of his disciple – Hans-Georg Gadamer's stimulating work which focuses on the dialectical character of the text's and reader's horizons (Robinson 1995, 1). Gadamer's historical hermeneutics is usually contrasted with Jürgen Habermas's hermeneutics and his insistence on the revival of the Enlightenment project (Habermas 1992, 196).

Ricoeur's hermeneutics takes two directions. His hermeneutics is mostly text- and discourse-oriented, and mainly operative within the reader's realm; he moves between the objectivity of the text and its concurrent openness. The other direction is his hermeneutics of suspicion – a somewhat confusing term which we discuss in the next subsection. This trend is

expressive of the hermeneutic “willingness to suspect” as contrasted with its other motivation – the “willingness to listen.” This succinct definition reverberates more than once in Thisleton’s seminal work *Hermeneutics: An Introduction*, where he quotes Ricoeur’s famous words: “‘Hermeneutics seems to me to be animated by this double motivation: willingness to suspect, willingness to listen; vow of rigor, vow of obedience’ [Ricoeur 1970, 27]” (Thisleton 2009, 233).

Ricoeur develops his theory of interpretation as a philosophy of interpretation and understanding of text. His fundamental question upon which he builds this theory is the one about the means through which textual understanding is possible. The three great contemporary icons of hermeneutics: Heidegger, Gadamer and Ricoeur investigate understanding and contribute to the theory of understanding in differing ways. By comparison, Gadamer’s major objective is to find an answer to the query of how understanding is possible, Heidegger asks about being – the kind of being we speak of when we mean being that consists in understanding. Ricoeur’s centering on textual interpretation comprises language, discourse, text, and a reflection on the self. Crucially, his theory of interpretation revolves around the category of conflict; conflicting interpretations and the problematic of the domination of interpretations. Ricoeur’s attempt is to conflate the textual function of interpretation with contemporary ontological theory and its findings. Therefore, he views the process of interpretation as existing within the cycle built by the link between the interpreter and interpretation. Ricoeur’s point of departure is the assertion that interpretation is possible because of the clash between authorial intentions and the objectivity of what a given statement means (Imani 2011, 1624).

His theory of interpretation rests on three essential concepts: explanation, understanding and appropriation, and involves four steps of the interpretative process: distanciation, appropriation, explanation and interpretation. His discussion of the various levels of distanciation encompasses: “(a) text as a relation of speech to writing, (b) text as a structured

work, (c) text as the projection of a world, and (d) text as the mediation of self-understanding” (Imani 2011, 1624). Ricoeur is interested in the movement from speech to writing; he notices that when put to writing discourse does not remain entirely unchanged. He notices: “It is with writing that the text acquires its semantic autonomy in relation to the speaker, the original audience and the discursive situation common to the interlocutors” (Ricoeur 1981, 37). In his theory of text, he also pays attention to text as having a structure: “Text implies texture that is the complexity of composition, text also implies work, that is labor in forming language. Finally, text implies inscription, in a durable monument of language, of an experience to which it bears testimony” (Ricoeur 1981, 37). He talks about the world of text – that is what he means by the projection of the world, and eventually, he explains that the final stage of distancing is an experiencing of the text as mediation of self-understanding. Significantly, the scrupulous analysis of what text is leads Ricoeur to see how the notion of the text exceeds the rigid frames of writing or discourse: “By all these features the notion of the text prepares itself for an analogical extension to the phenomena not specifically limited to writing, nor even to discourse” (Ricoeur 1981, 37).

Vitally, for Ricoeur, interpretation is not just an identification of the structures of language, but a being-in-the-world unfolding in front of the text. The link with Heidegger here is very clear. Ricoeur speaks of understanding as of a structure of being-in-the-world. The last level of distancing is the one in which the interpreter finds out that the text is the mediation of self-understanding. The relationship of the parts of the text to it as a whole – the hermeneutic arc – is Ricoeur’s interpretative tool. The continuous passage from parts of the text to its whole – the movement shows that some particular expectation of meaning is either validated or not – makes the interpretation move forward, the end of the interpretative process is staved off, the level of understanding is deepened and heightened. The movement backwards and forwards enhances the unearthing of the text’s meaning. Ricoeur operates within the area of the text’s

closedness, its subjective meaning and its openness or objectivity – what does it potentially say? Appropriation is the stage of the interpretative process when the meaning of the text becomes familiar. The passage from distanciation to appropriation is expressive of the interpretative dialectic of the known and the unknown, the familiar and the unfamiliar. Through appropriation, interpretation enables one to see things anew and to orient oneself in a different way in the world. Ricoeur proposes to see two ways of viewing the text-interpreter relation; one focuses on the internal nature of the text only, the other sees both the inside and the outside of the text and the world of the interpreter as conflating with the world of the text to form a new understanding. Ricoeur endorses the second as genuine understanding; the interpretative process in which the world of the interpreter and that of the text combine, there comes to an interaction between the text and the reader. It is an exchange between two worlds. The interpretative process constitutes the production of meaning – distanciation and appropriation are the two sides of the dialectic of interpretation, they are constitutive of the text's meaning.

As we have already mentioned, Ricoeur's discussion of the interpretative process draws upon Heidegger's being-in-the-world. The being-in-the-world is prior to our reflecting on the world; the understanding of meaning is preceded by the understanding of being-in-the world. In the first place, Ricoeur joins hermeneutics to phenomenology and his version of hermeneutic investigation is hermeneutic phenomenology. He uses two routes to graft hermeneutics onto phenomenology. The short route is an ontology of understanding. Here Ricoeur follows Heidegger, he discloses: "I call such an ontology of understanding a short route because, breaking with any discussion of method, it carries itself directly to the level of an ontology of finite being in order there to recover understanding, no longer as a mode of knowledge but as a mode of being" (Ricoeur 1974, 6). He deploys Heidegger's ontology to show understanding as grounded in being: "In order to question oneself about being in general, it is first necessary to question oneself about that being which is "there" of all being, about *Dasein*, that is about that

being that exists in the mode of understanding being” (Ricoeur 1974, 6). He attests to Heidegger’s ontology as an initial step. The acceptance of the reversal of the relation between understanding and being leads him to set off his own direction of philosophical hermeneutics encompassing reflection and semantics.

Ricoeur’s research with regard to interpretation and understanding is mainly reader-oriented, he seeks to cross the line between the subjectivity of the text and its objectivity. It is primarily an interpretation of the symbolic discourse. Ricoeur’s interrogation opens a new foray. In his study of language, meaning, action and subjectivity, he enters into the dialogue with the tradition of hermeneutics with a new impetus (Ricoeur 1981, 1). With efficacy and clarity he surpasses the rigidity of research in the long history of hermeneutics – the scrutiny of the text’s inner subjectivity and upgrades an immanent dimension – the text’s openness. He sees interpretation as a process of new disclosures in its potentiality to disclose not only new readings but also new ways of being. The new reading entails the reader’s new orientation, or his/her orienting himself/herself in the world. Ricoeur’s grounding of the interpretative process in existence allows one to see the interconnection between understanding and experience and an understanding of oneself. The opportunity for interpretation resides in the site of the mediation between text and its interpreter. Interestingly, Ricoeur explicates that the appropriation stage of interpretation – the making of the text as ‘one’s own’ is not an act of possession, but rather he deems it an act of dispossession of the narcissistic ego. It is this very space which is productive in the revealing of the text’s world and the revealing of the text’s meaning (Ricoeur 1981, 36). Ricoeur makes this point clear in *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation* in the following way: “...subject appropriates – makes his own – the matter of the text only in so far as he disappropriates himself and the naïve critical, illusory and deceptive understanding which he claims to have of himself before being instituted as subject by the very texts which he interprets” (Ricoeur 1981, 36).

Besides his reflection on text, interpretation and understanding, Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics encompasses a discussion of the categories of discourse, metaphor and symbol. The basic term for Ricoeur here is a sentence which he treats as a small unit of meaning. He views it as the mediation site between the world of linguistic signs and the extra-linguistic reality; the site of the production of meaning: "It is only on the level of a sentence that language can refer to something, that the closed universe of signs can be related to an extra-linguistic world" (Ricoeur 1981, 12). Crucially, Ricoeur's analysis of discourse revolves around an assertion of the dynamics of discourse, he understands discourse as an event. He claims that: "If all discourse is realized as an event, all discourse is understood as meaning" (Ricoeur 1981, 11). John Thompson expounds: "The hermeneutical discourse on action is supported by a series of arguments which are worthy of more detailed consideration. The focal point of these arguments is the concept of the text, which Ricoeur employs as a model for the analysis of human action" (Thompson 1981, 125). The critic explains Ricoeur's insistence on the import of the dialectic between meaning and event. For Ricoeur discourse has the character of an event: "Discourse has an eventful character, in so far as to speak is to realize an event which immediately disappears" (Thompson 1981, xi).

Ricoeur is interested in the interconnection between discourse and creativity, the polysemic nature of meaning. His studies of language and the language of metaphor entail insightful unveiling of the creativity of language. For him interpretation is operative in the surplus of meaning: "Polysemy, by endowing the word with the surplus of meaning that must be sifted through interpretation, provides the basis for the creative extension of meaning through metaphor" (Ricoeur 1981, 12). He accentuates the level of the sentence as the true place where the meaning begins and from which it spreads to embrace the entire discourse. Hermeneutics is in comfort with the ambiguous nature of interpretation, it is cognizant of the complexity of the interpretative venture, recognizing the non-singularity of interpretation. The semantics of the

sentence is for Ricoeur the actual perspective of meaning formation and the site where polysemy of language comes to its realization: “The actual functioning of polysemy can only be grasped by a semantics of the sentence. For words have meaning only in the nexus of sentences, and sentences are uttered only in contexts” (Ricoeur 1981, 10). His interest in the workings of metaphor, masterfully delineated in *The Rule of Metaphor*, but also elaborated upon in his other works, underscores the transformative force of metaphor and the transformative force of interpretation. The ambiguous character of text’s reading, the resistance to the univocality of interpretation partakes in the possible re-descriptions of reality. Metaphor, via its creativity, brings about an unexpected transformation which can be extended and which extends itself upon the ways in which literary texts operate. Ricoeur affirms: “The emergence of sense is accompanied by a transformation of the referential dimension, endowing metaphor with its power to re-describe reality. The nature of this transformation, which affects not only metaphor but literary works in general, is clarified by the concept of the text” (Ricoeur 1981, 13).

In *The Rule of Metaphor* (1978) Ricoeur recognizes the creative and recreative power of language – the manifold ways in which language constructs the world that we perceive. The analysis of metaphor with which he begins the book is enriched by the study of symbol and myth. This abundantly enlightening and informative book on the workings of metaphor draws on Aristotle’s poetics and rhetoric and gets to the gist of what metaphor is. Ricoeur follows the history of metaphor, its nature stretched between rhetoric and poetics as indicated by Aristotle. He speaks of two characteristics of metaphor: metaphor is “something that happens to the noun” and secondly “is defined in terms of movement” (Ricoeur 2003, 17). Both of the two characteristics refer to motion. Metaphor is thought of as an event, a change, that occurs and expresses the heterogeneous functioning of the noun. Ricoeur delves into the pivotal role of the noun in metaphor creation: “A noun must always be either (1) the ordinary word for the thing

(*kurion*), or a strange word (2), or a metaphor (3), or (4) an ornamental word, or (5) a coined word, or (6) a word lengthened out, or (7) curtailed, or (8) altered in form (1457 b 1-3). This textual bridge explicitly joins the theory of metaphor to that of *lexis* by means of noun” (Ricoeur 2003, 17). Ricoeur conducts a meticulous analysis of the functioning of metaphor, disclosing in an extensively studious way the essence of ‘the rule of metaphor,’ its divisible nature encapsulated in the word ‘phora’ - movement. Crucially, he expounds the representative displacement which occurs and its far-reaching character observed by Aristotle:

The epiphora of a word is described as sort of displacement, a movement ‘from...to...’. This notion of epiphora enlightens at the same time as puzzles us. It tells us that far from designating just one figure of speech among others such as synecdoche and metonymy (this is how we find metaphor taxonomized in the later rhetoric)...(Ricoeur 2003, 18).

A complete presentation of Ricoeur’s theory and findings regarding metaphor outstrips the length of this work. However, we would like to pinpoint one more aspect among many other raised by Ricoeur in this consequential book to demonstrate the scope of his in-depth study. Ricoeur articulates his understanding of metaphor by suggesting the two-fold character of the term: “The same term sometimes designates the genus (the phenomenon of transposition, that is the *figure as such*) and sometimes the species (what later we will call the *trope of resemblance*)” (Ricoeur 2003, 18). This is a thesis he works on in an elaborate way throughout the book. In the observations of the complexity, perplexity, enigma and an amazing richness of metaphor, Ricoeur’s study does not find a counterpart in works discussing the topic. His views clash with the Saussurian postulates. He talks about the psycholinguistics of metaphor, explains the interplay of meaning on the level of word and sentence. He discusses metaphor and reference, metaphor and metaphysics, and a plenitude of other highly interesting facets of the inimitable nature of metaphor.

Ricoeur’s project to present the various aspects of metaphor: dissemination, appropriation, collusion, idealization relates not only to metaphor itself, but also in a more general sense to the entirety of his hermeneutic investigation. The analysis of metaphor radiates

onto other facets of his inquiry, permeates other problematics and leads to mature, synthetically oriented discoveries in the versatile spheres he ventures to interrogate; the hermeneutics of the self is one of the major concerns and best examples of the inimitable character of Ricoeur's approach. While the style of his works at face value seems and often is regarded as convoluted, this turns out to be a superficially recognized and totally untrue feature. The astoundingly wide spectrum of the topics that he discusses and the bold, unorthodox manner that he deploys coalesce with his characteristic way of developing a given theme in the subsequent publications. In this way he wants to bespeak the unexhausted possibilities of grappling with a particular problem, as well as the boundedness of the interconnection of one particular issue to another. Employing such an attitude, not only does he demonstrate a scholarly mastery, but even more profoundly the core of the hermeneutic investigation.

His in-depth inquiry into the functioning of the metaphor, which is a substantial part of his theory of interpretation encompasses observations which touch upon more far-reaching concepts and larger spheres of investigation. One of the intriguing vistas which he opens in *The Rule of the Metaphor* is the interrelation between his direct findings regarding metaphor and metaphysics. He discloses:

If the substitution theory of metaphor presents a certain affinity to the raising of the sensible into the intelligible, the tension theory eliminates every advantage that accrues to this later notion. The play of semantic impertinence is compatible with all the calculated errors capable of making sense. So it is not a metaphor that carries the structure of Platonic metaphysics; metaphysics instead seizes the metaphorical process in order to make it work to the benefit of metaphysics" (Ricoeur 1978, 348).

The excerpt quoted above demonstrates Ricoeur's remarkable recognition of the interweaving, adoptive and assimilative processes which sustain the co-beneficial existence of concepts and philosophical positions.

Besides a wide-ranging study of metaphor, Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics comprises an analysis of symbol. Language is not for him an object but the site of mediation. He conveys the moving of language beyond itself, for instance, in the following words: "Language is that

through which, by means of which, we express ourselves and express things. Speaking is the act by which the speaker overcomes the closure of the universe of signs, in the intention of saying something about something to someone; speaking is the act by which language moves beyond itself as a sign toward its reference and toward what it encounters” (Ricoeur 1974, 85). His study of language delves into the specificity of the figurative language, the unfixed character of the symbolic language, the meaning which evolves. The potentiality of understanding in new and creative ways is constitutive of the essence of the symbolic expression. Symbol contributes to language in such a way that it is not achievable in the non-symbolic modes of expression. Ricoeur explicates the workings of symbol, underlining its exquisite potentiality of inviting interpretation, of instigating thought: “In it a primary, literal, worldly, often physical meaning refers back to a figurative, spiritual, often existential, ontological meaning which is in no way given outside this indirect designation. The symbol invites us to think, calls for an interpretation, precisely because it says more than it says and because it never ceases to speak to us” (Ricoeur 1974, 28). Ricoeur adduces an exceptionally comprehensive study of symbol in *Interpretation Theory: Discourse and the Surplus of Meaning* (1976).

Narrative is another category which is the focal point of investigation in Ricoeur’s textual hermeneutics. His work in this area encompasses two aspects: narrative as a generator of meaning and the organizational-structural capabilities of the narrative. The interrogation is mostly conducted in *Narrative and Time*, which gives an account of the constitutive and structuring role of time in narrative and the ways in which narrative creates meaning. The book shows how an understanding of human action happens in time and is interwoven with time. The temporal aspect exerts an enormously consequential role – the events which belong to the past, the present ones and those which are to occur are all formative of the narrative structure, but the ways or realizations are many and they bespeak the complexity of the interaction between

characters and actions. It is the narrative which makes it possible for all the various elements: the characters' deeds and their partaking in the movement of the action to be united into an understandable, coherent whole.

Most importantly, as Ricoeur stresses, it is the structure of the narrative, with its various constitutive elements and its critical moment which is productive of meaning and actually allows one to understand each of the characters; an understanding which leads to an unveiling of the true sense of what or who they are. The crisis in the narrative and the coherence of all that happens in it are of seminal importance not only for the characters themselves. The crisis has a power of projecting itself beyond the fictive world. The meaning generated by narrative is extended and extends itself beyond it. Ricoeur fully recognizes the figurative and configurative potential of fiction and its bearing on the life of its recipient: "Fiction has the power to 'remake' reality and, within the framework of narrative fiction in particular, to remake real praxis to the extent that the text intentionally aims at a horizon of a new reality that we may call a world. It is this world of the text that intervenes in the world of action in order to give it a new configuration or, as we might say, in order to transfigure it" (Ricoeur 1991, 10).

Ricoeur's textual hermeneutics is an original, multi-dimensional theory which embraces the categories of discourse and meaning, distance, symbol and metaphor, narrative along with the concept of the three-fold *mimesis*: preconfiguration, configuration and reconfiguration. In this highly reader-oriented theory, Ricoeur's use of the 'hermeneutic circle' in combination with the aforementioned categories yields significant results as for the possibility of understanding the self via the narrative employment. The ethical, emotional and cognitive intricacies of the self get mediated by means of the practice of narrative unity. They become conceivable and meaningful. The subject is not given, and cannot be taken for granted. Ricoeur deploys a meticulous study of discourse and narrative to demonstrate how the human

subject emerges in and through narrative, and how the temporal aspect is the fundamental one for its constitution.

In the subsequent section we tackle the problematic of how, according to Ricoeur, the subject constitutes itself in the process which is not so much a discovery of consciousness but rather a discovery of meaning. We see his textual hermeneutics as meaningfully related to the hermeneutics of suspicion, by means of which he shows how the subject undergoes displacement in order to return to its 'being' and the enriched 'meaning.' His attempt is to relate Freudianism to philosophy of reflection via the mediating function of archeology. Most significantly, Ricoeur insists on the inextricable bond between the archeology of the subject and its teleology: "In order to have an *arche* a subject must have a *telos*" (Ricoeur 1970, 459). The philosophy of reflection conflates thus with the findings of psychoanalysis – an understanding of the subject, a reflective subject is based both on a return to its 'origins' and the teleological perspective it is immersed in. We should like to accentuate the import of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion and his re-addressing of Freud's psychoanalysis in an understanding of the subject by resorting to the two subsequent citations encapsulating the gist of his reflection in this area. Ricoeur states concisely: "The subject is never... the subject one presupposes" (Ricoeur 1970, 459). He delves into the problematic of the unveiling of the subject and the positing of its existence by drawing attention to the formation of meaning and the subject's belongingness to meaning: "...if the subject is to attain to its true being, it is not enough for it to discover the inadequacy of its self-awareness, or even to discover the power of desire that posits its existence. The subject must also discover that the process of "becoming conscious," through which it *appropriates* the meaning of its existence as desire and effort, does not belong to it, but belongs to the *meaning* that is formed in it" (Ricoeur 1970, 459). The focus on meaning is an essential link between the two angles of Ricoeur's hermeneutic interrogation in his pursuit of the human subject: textual hermeneutics – understanding achieved through the theory of

interpretation and his hermeneutics of suspicion. The latter is the subject matter of the next section.

Hermeneutics of suspicion

The driving force behind Ricoeur's philosophical hermeneutics is an understanding-oriented and suspicion-oriented investigation. Ricoeur's hermeneutics of understanding, his textual hermeneutics investigates our confrontation with the functioning of the narrative and symbol so that we succumb to their creative power and we allow them to affect us. His hermeneutics of suspicion is an attempt to unearth the projection of our own wishes and constructions into the text. The critical aspect is operative here. The univocal and unilateral interpretations topple, the certainties are questioned and undermined. The objectivity of texts' meaning is challenged. The crux of the hermeneutics of suspicion is a demystifying work.

One of the pivotal theories which in an enormous way fed Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion is psychoanalysis. Ricoeur's study of Freud's psychoanalytic theory in many ways paved the way to the maturation of his hermeneutics of the 'self.' His immense interest in Freud's psychoanalysis gives rise to *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*. In this inspirational book Ricoeur attempts to re-trace and re-examine the dispossession of immediate consciousness. This approach originates inventive and multifarious articulations of the fundamentals of self-creation, which constitute an important groundwork for Ricoeur's concept of subjectivity. The passage quoted below conveys the intricacies of the constitution of the subject in light of the psychoanalytic underpinnings:

The necessity of this dispossession is what justifies Freud's naturalism. If the viewpoint of consciousness is – from the outset and for the most part – a false point of view, I must make use of the Freudian systematization, its typography and economics, as a “discipline” aimed at making me completely homeless, at dispossessing me of that illusory Cogito which at the outset occupies the place of the founding act, *I think I am...*

will no longer know the meaning of object, subject or even thought; the avowed aim of this discipline is to shake the false knowledge which blocks access to *Ego Cogito Cogitatum*. This dispossession of immediate consciousness is governed by the construction of a model, or set of models in which consciousness itself figures as one of the places. Thus consciousness is one of the agencies in the triad unconscious-preconscious-conscious (Ricoeur 1970, 423).

Ricoeur deploys the findings of psychoanalysis to displace the subject and re-claim it. The backward and forward movement of his investigation is constitutive of his hermeneutic methodology. The study of Freud manifests well the recasting of the conscious self and its subsequent recuperation.

Ricoeur's research is a kind of circuitous route; the unresolved problems are rekindled in the subsequent works and achieve a new shape and meaning. Significantly, the movement backwards and forwards, which is demonstrated in the various forms of displacing the subject and its subsequent restoration, is very well noticeable in his hermeneutics of suspicion regarding the conscious human self. Ricoeur shows how in the psychoanalytic approach the conscious self gets displaced and how the unconscious and the language of desire constitute the 'self' anew. His hermeneutics, which makes space for the interplay between the conscious and the unconscious with its abundance of the symbolic language, results not only in reclaiming the subject but in its enrichment. The requirements of the unconscious mind, the hidden fantasies and instincts accounted for in psychoanalysis, provide a possibility of the dispossession and a renewed constitution of the subject. It is the joint work of the interpretative and explanatory poles that allows for an unearthing of the essence of human subjectivity. Psychoanalysis, which serves the role of a great suspicion-creator, coupled with the enormity of the deep-seated intricacies of language, can be viewed as the battleground for the signifying systems constitutive of human subjectivity, in which the subject gets deconstructed and created anew. Psychoanalysis as a science partakes in the "search of a comprehensive philosophy of language to account for the multiple functions of the human act of signifying and for their interrelationships" (Ricoeur 1970, 3). Ricoeur's encounter with psychoanalysis is interlaced

with and yields significant results for his hermeneutics of symbols. The study of language becomes the central interrogative power which animates his hermeneutics of the self. The self exists in language and through language. In *Freud and Philosophy* Ricoeur notices: “the semantics of desire relates to the dynamics expressed in the notions of discharge, repression, cathexis etc. But it is important to stress from the start that this dynamics – or energetics or even hydraulics – is articulated only in semantics: the vicissitudes of instinct to use one of Freud’s expressions, can be attained only in the vicissitudes of meaning” (Ricoeur 1970, 6).

The reflection on language is central in Ricoeur’s later works. The linguistic turn is the genuine driving force behind his hermeneutics of the self. This may be expressed in a lapidary way: “Man is language as both Ricoeur and Heidegger are fond of saying” (Ricoeur 1970, 10). According to Ricoeur, psychoanalysis is a science articulating a new approach to the meaning of desire; it manifests the fundamental role of language in the creation of the self. Language and desire are inextricably interlocked. Ricoeur asks questions expressive of his strong conviction that desire is imbedded in language: “how do desires achieve speech? How do desires make speech fail, and why do they themselves fail to speak?” (Ricoeur 1970, 6). Ricoeur articulates the interconnectedness between symbol and language in a variety of ways in *Freud and Philosophy*, and draws attention to the necessity of speech as the space where symbolism actually emerges, where expression becomes a viable possibility. The same observation concerns also dreams, he concludes that an understanding of dreams is feasible via language, they are intelligible only when conveyed in language: “There is no symbolism before man speaks, even if the power of symbol is grounded much deeper. It is in language that the cosmos, desire and the imaginary reach expression: speech is always necessary if the world is to be recovered and made a hierophany. Likewise dreams remain closed to us until they have been carried to the level of language through narration” (Ricoeur 1974, 13).

Most crucially, interweaving the results of his studies of the symbolic language and desire, he relates the problematic of symbolism to the issue of interpretation. The problems of symbolism and interpretation are for him mutually interrelated; he views this kind of ‘kinship’ as central: “mutual relationship makes the hermeneutic problem a unique one” (Ricoeur 1970, 8). On a different place he rearticulates this groundbreaking conviction thus: “The problem of symbolism enters a philosophy of language by the intermediary of the act of interpretation” (Ricoeur 1970, 8).

Ricoeur devotes a lot of space in his research to the study of psychoanalysis, which is mostly done in *Freud and Philosophy*, and sees it as an intriguing approach which entails unearthing new vistas in an understanding of human subjectivity. The specificity of the dismemberment of the human subject which psychoanalysis offers, for Ricoeur, is a productive challenge. The discovery of the meaning of human desire is not just simply important in itself. More profoundly, Ricoeur locates his hermeneutics of the self in words, their symbolic meaning and the interconnection between desire and language.

Psychoanalysis is an inspiring terrain for the revelation of the hidden meaning. Discovery and explication are two fundamental tasks of the hermeneutic endeavor. Psychoanalysis exerts an important influence on Ricoeur’s theory of interpretation. He affirms that desire is embedded in language, but it is prior to culture and language. His analysis of desire embraces a whole range of approaches, including Hegel’s dialectics: “Hegelian exegesis of desire and of the reduplication of consciousness in self-consciousness” (Ricoeur 1970, 63). The entirety of his studies of desire in *Freud and Philosophy* is saturated with a continuous investigation of the symbolic language. Symbol becomes the central category here: “The word symbol seems to be suited to designate the cultural instruments of our apprehension of reality: language, religion, art and science. The task of a philosophy of symbolic forms is to arbitrate

the claims of absoluteness of each of these symbolic functions and the many antinomies of the concept of culture that result from these claims (Ricoeur 1970, 10).

Ricoeur's debate with structuralism, which aims to point at its flaw – an inability to present how language operates, and which is a running thread in his other works, finds its expression also in *Freud and Philosophy*. He combats the one-dimensionality and reductionism of the structuralist approach. He upgrades the plurivocity of language and signification. Language as a locus of signification is always some distorted entity, the immediate meaning is subverted by another meaning which is there. The semantics of desire and the language of dreams constitute an important site for Ricoeur's critique of structuralism. The discussion of language and its generation of multifarious meanings become the focus of his hermeneutics of suspicion:

Along with dreams is posited what I called above the semantics of desire, a semantics that centers around a somewhat nuclear theme: as a man of desires I go forth in disguise-*larvatus prode* by the same token language itself is from the outset and for the most part distorted: it means something other than what it says, it has a double meaning, it is equivocal. The dream and its analogues are thus set within a region of language that presents itself as a locus of complex significations where another meaning is both given and hidden in an immediate meaning" (Ricoeur 1970, 7).

Ricoeur displays an exquisite eagerness to show and account for the hidden recesses of language, the complexities of its functioning, "apparent meaning and hidden meaning, symptom and fantasy, instinctual representative, ideas and affects – with economic concepts such as cathexis, displacement, substitution, projection, introjection, etc." (Ricoeur 1970, 257). The hermeneutics of symbols is an important terrain where his discoveries concerning human subjectivity emerge with an exceptional power – his hermeneutics of symbols conflates with the hermeneutics of the self. The critical force of the hermeneutics of suspicion brings about a novel, significant insight into subjectivity. Ricoeur gives vent to his criticism of Descartes' Cogito and the structuralist understanding of language operation, for instance, in the following way: "the structuralist linguistics is yet another triumph of a "Cartesian' science. For it is only

by exiling the “body” from the “soul,” “language” from “speech” that a “Cartesian” science is established” (Ricoeur 1974, xi).

By locating his hermeneutics in language, in words which are of special symbolic importance, Ricoeur offsets an immensely significant turn in his phenomenological hermeneutics and philosophy of reflection; from this position stems an increasing maturation of his concept of human subjectivity. Ricoeur’s embeddedness of his hermeneutics in the word is open, searching and reasoned. He demonstrates a continuous interest in symbolic language. The privileging of this type of language in his hermeneutics overlaps with and is fully expressive of his outstanding engagement in the reflection on Freud’s psychoanalysis and Nietzsche’s philosophy. The centrality of the focus on language in his analysis is matchless. In the preface to *The Conflict of Interpretations* one reads: “Although every word is already latently rich in polysemy, for Ricoeur the hermeneutics of language centers upon certain privileged words, those of the *symbolic word*. Hermeneutics becomes primarily under Ricoeur’s use, the interpretation and investigation of those words which have a certain type of multiple sense” (Ricoeur 1974, xiii).

The deployment of the discoveries from the reflections on Freud and Nietzsche underwrite Ricoeur’s debunking of the Cartesian *ego*. He speaks of the subject who is not a knower, but rather a discoverer of himself/herself exerting an exegesis of his/her life:

A purely semantic elucidation remains suspended until one shows that the understanding of multivocal or symbolic expressions is a moment of *self*-understanding; the semantic approach which thus entails a *reflective* approach. But the subject that interprets himself while interpreting signs is no longer the *cogito*: rather he is a being who discovers, by the exegesis of his own life, that is placed in being before he places and possesses himself. In this way, hermeneutics would discover a manner of existing which would remain from start to finish a *being-interpreted* (Ricoeur 1974, 11).

Ricoeur’s hermeneutics of suspicion constitutes an entirely new incursion into the conceptualization of subjectivity. It is a huge *volta* enabling a rediscovery of the subject. The immediacy of consciousness is contested; Marx, Nietzsche and Freud deem the immediate

consciousness a false one. The emptiness of *cogito* gets an answer, the philosophy of reflection entering the scene questions the validity of the ‘univocality,’ the ‘stability’ of consciousness:

The *cogito* is not only a truth as vain as it is invincible: we must add as well, that it is like an empty place, which has, from all time, been occupied by a false *cogito*. We have indeed learned from all the exegetic disciplines and from psychoanalysis in particular, that so called immediate consciousness is first of all false consciousness. Marx, Nietzsche and Freud have taught us to unmask its tricks. Henceforth it becomes necessary to join a critique of false consciousness to any rediscovery of the subject of the *cogito* in the documents of its life; a philosophy of reflection must be just the opposite of the philosophy of *consciousness* (Ricoeur 1974, 10).

The massive analysis of the great masters of suspicion opens limitless opportunities of acknowledging the deconstructive and constructive force of demystification. The archeological work done in psychoanalysis – Ricoeur talks about the archeology of the subject – uncovers new vistas which bring his hermeneutics of the self to full fruition. In *The Conflict of Interpretations* Ricoeur demystifies the two divergent positions of self-creation, he debunks Hegel’s idealism and the ‘realism’ of Freud’s unconscious (Ricoeur 1974, xvi). Discussing Freud’s psychoanalysis, Ricoeur pinpoints the progressive and regressive variations of the same problem. Freudian interpretation is noticeably opposite to Hegel’s. Ricoeur’s reformulation of Freud’s psychoanalysis yields an important result – the tension between familiarity and foreignness inherent in human subjectivity, which Ricoeur notices thanks to psychoanalysis, constitutes a giant leap in his creation of the hermeneutics of the self. Ricoeur explains: “The ego oppressed by the superego is in a situation, with respect to this internal foreigner, analogous to the ego confronted by the pressure of its own desires; because of the superego we are foreign to ourselves: thus Freud speaks of the superego as an internal foreign territory (Ricoeur 1970, 186).

The intersections between psychoanalysis and hermeneutics are invaluable. Ricoeur concedes to the fullness of an impact of psychoanalysis on hermeneutics and their interrelatedness: “Psychoanalysis is an exegetical science dealing with the relationships of meaning between substitute objects and the primordial (and lost) instinctual objects” (Ricoeur

1970, 359). Vially, Ricoeur affirms that psychoanalysis formulates its concepts of desire by a thorough interpretation, and in the interpretative process lies the great kinship between psychoanalysis and hermeneutics.

The trajectory of Ricoeur's hermeneutics of suspicion encompasses also an addressing of Nietzsche's reflection on the power of will. He insists on the interpretative force imbued in Nietzsche's philosophy. Ricoeur compares psychoanalysis and Nietzsche's philosophy in their power to manifest the truth about language's capability to both conceal and reveal meaning. He speaks of the interplay between the interpretive and explanatory roles which stems from the very innate potential of the language itself. Ricoeur discloses:

In Nietzsche values must be interpreted because they are expressions of the strength and the weakness of the will to power. Moreover, in Nietzsche life itself is interpretation, in this way philosophy itself becomes the interpretation of interpretations. Finally, Freud under the heading of dream work, examined a series of procedures which are notable in that they transpose (*Entstellung*) a hidden meaning, submitting it to a distortion which both shows and conceals the latent sense in the manifest meaning. He followed the ramifications of this distortion in the cultural expressions of art, morality, and religion and in this way constructed an exegesis of culture very similar to Nietzsche's (Ricoeur 1970, 17).

The construction of meaning happens in uncovering the affinities between the subliminal and the overt; the going beyond the obvious partakes in the articulation of the non-immediate meaning. Ricoeur highlights the double-fold nature of expression and designation: "We say that words by their sensible quality, *express* significations and that, thanks to their signification, they *designate* something. The term 'signify' covers the two-fold duality of expression and designation" (Ricoeur 1970, 10). The decisive role of the linguistic turn in Ricoeur's research, the out-and-out concentration on the functioning of language which permeates his later works entails not only a significant alteration of his thinking discernible in the acknowledgement and deployment of the novel vantage points, but also is profoundly evocative of the movement from hermeneutics as a mode of knowledge to hermeneutics as a mode of being. The passage marks

a key change and bespeaks the true focus of the hermeneutic investigation. Ricoeur analyzes the passage to an understanding as a mode of being by accentuating the role of language:

The difficulty in passing from understanding as a mode of knowledge to understanding as a mode of being consists in the following: the understanding which is the result of the analytic of *Dasein* is precisely the understanding through which and in which this being understands itself as being. Is it not once again within language itself that we must seek the indication that understanding is a mode of being?" (Ricoeur 1974, 10).

Ricoeur talks about the grafting of hermeneutics onto phenomenology via an ontology of understanding. In that he endorses Heidegger. Ricoeur points to how language functions at all levels of human experience, how it infiltrates being, how language is being, and how it sets in motion the dialectic of presence and absence (Ricoeur 1970, 385).

His hermeneutic of suspicion rests on the demythologization of the given via language with its multiplicity of meanings as a nucleus: "...language makes it possible to generalize the perceptual model of the unconscious. The ambiguity of "things" becomes the model of all ambiguity of subjectivity in general and of all the forms of intentionality" (Ricoeur 1970, 385). The hermeneutics of suspicion underscores the contention that there is not just one correct interpretation and shows that interpretation is contextually reliant – the context of the text itself and also the context of the interpreter are involved. Ricoeur affirms the possibility of confronting interpretations, arguing in favor or against interpretation, arbitrating between interpretations; he notices: "The logic of validation allows us to move between the two limits of dogmatism and skepticism" (Ricoeur 1991, 160). He speaks of the many viable interpretations and the possible conflict of interpretations; these, however, are rooted in "the text's limited field of possible constructions" (Ricoeur 1991, 160). The logic of interpretation means that there is a certain polyphony which belongs to the very meaning of human action, though it is a space of "limited possible constructions" (Ricoeur 1991, 160).

The two-fold allegiance of Ricoeur's hermeneutics; the need to understand and to suspect, sketched here in the form of two subsections, regard, respectively, his textual

hermeneutics and hermeneutics of suspicion. The two aspects of Ricoeur's hermeneutics constitute his premises in an attempt to recuperate the human subject whose death is propounded by his famous French contemporaries: Jean Baudrillard, Jean François Lyotard, Michel Foucault and Jacques Derrida. Ricoeur's re-claiming of the human self via the hermeneutics of the self is an apt defense, which takes into account the cumbersome character of the notion of the subject's absence demonstrative in versatile theoretical positions.

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