

The question of Fiction – nonexistent objects, a possible world response from Paul Ricoeur

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Abstract The question of fiction is omnipresent within the work of Paul Ricoeur throughout his prolific career. However, Ricoeur raises the questions of fiction in relation to other issues such the symbol, metaphor and narrative. This article sets out to foreground a traditional problem of fiction and logic, which is termed the existence of non-existent objects, in relation to the Paul Ricoeur's work on narrative. Ricoeur's understanding of fiction takes place within his overall philosophical anthropology where the fictions and histories make up the very nature of identity both personal and collective. The existence of non-existent objects demonstrates a dichotomy between fiction and history, non-existent objects can exist as fictional objects. The very possibility of the existence of fictional objects entails ontological status considerations. What ontological status do fictional objects have? Ricoeur develops a concept of narrative configuration which is akin to the Kantian productive imagination and configuration frames the question historical narrative and fictional narrative. It is demonstrated that the ontological status of fictional objects can be best understood in a model of possible worlds.

Keywords Ricoeur, fiction, nonexistent object, configurational narrative, ontological status.

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Introduction

Within the huge corpus of work by Paul Ricoeur, which dates from the late 1950s up to the 2004, the question of fiction appears under different guises in numerous places. One could argue from the earliest pub-

lication *History and Truth* (Ricoeur, 1955) to his last publication *History, Memory, Forgetting* (Ricoeur, 2000) the question of the veracity of fiction has been raised constantly¹. However, throughout his prolific career the question of fiction is often raised indirectly, for example, in relation to the metaphor (in *The Rule of Metaphor*, Ricoeur, 1975) or in relation to mythology (*The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur 1960). In addition, within the work of Paul Ricoeur there is not one ‘question of fiction’ but a series of questions whereby fiction is explicitly or implicitly mobilized. Therefore, there is no one place where Ricoeur sets out a theory of fiction, fiction it could be argued is often understood as back drop to development of his overall philosophical anthropology or hermeneutic phenomenology. Within this wider philosophical framework the development of the concept of fiction points towards the ontological and epistemological distinctions that can be made between the facts of history and stories. The blurring of boundaries between stories and histories between facts and lies, between facts and fiction, can take place once the question of fiction is raised to that the level of identity, to be precise, the construction of personal identity as well as collective identity. Hence, for example, Ricoeur can claim that the ontological status of verifiable history and of fiction can be ignored because identity of the self is constructed through both history and fiction.

“It is in telling our own stories that we give ourselves an identity. We recognize ourselves in the stories we tell ourselves. It makes little difference whether these stories are true or false, fiction as well as verifiable history provides us with identity” (Ricoeur, 1985, p. 214).

It is important to note that fiction is opposed to verifiable history. Ricoeur has from his earliest works of the 1950s juxtaposed the subjective nature of the historical inquiry with the objective nature of the science of history². In the development of history the role of the text is

1 For the complete bibliography on the work of Paul Ricoeur see www.fondsriceur.com

2 See Ricoeur, 1955, p. 24: “Cette attente en implique une autre : nous attendons de l'historien une certaine qualité de subjectivité, non plus une subjectivité quelconque, mais une subjectivité qui soit précisément appropriée à l'objectivité qui convient à l'histoire

of primary importance, and the textual construction, Ricoeur argues, is part of the very reflexive process itself, this reflexivity is part of the subjectivity of the historian and of man in general.

However, the problem fiction has been formulated in Philosophy in terms outside of the direct relation between history, narrative and truth. It has been raised through formal semantics and formal logic. Ricoeur does not attempt to give a theory of fiction that could be translated into formal semantics, however, in attempt to elucidate an understanding of what Ricoeur's implicit theory of fiction could be, this short article will refer to a problematic of fiction that has come to the fore recently. In formal logic and formal semantics the question of fiction has been related to the question of non-existent objects. The question of the existence of non-existent objects what could be referred to more generally as questions relating to the metaphysics of fiction (a term borrowed from Amie Thomasson, in *Fiction and Metaphysics*, 1999). It must be said from the outset Ricoeur never sets out a theory directly in relation to the problematic of non-existent objects, however, through the entanglement with adjacent concepts such as narrative, phenomenological experience of fiction, the fictive experience of time he sets out a mobilization of fiction which could be useful for the development of a possible world solution for the problematic of non-existent objects. There is risk of reducing Ricoeur's argument to a traditional formal semantic understanding of fiction or to cognitive linguistic approach to Fiction. However, this risk will be overcome by focusing initially on framing what the problem of fiction is within the work of Paul Ricoeur and by resisting any temptation to risk a formal semantic translation of an implicit theory of fiction. It is through the question of time and our experience of time that the overlap can occur, for Ricoeur our understanding of time is one that takes place through a fictive experience of time. Hence, instead of treating objects as objects in the world the existence of time for Ricoeur raises fundamental issues in relation to time as a fictional device and as element of the world. There is an oversimplistic dichotomy between language which

(...) nous attendons que l'histoire soit une histoire des hommes et que cette histoire des hommes aide le lecteur, instruit par l'histoire des historiens, à édifier une subjectivité de haut rang".

refers to the world (of experience) and language which does not refer to the world (fiction). The example of time which Ricoeur analyses in great deal in *Time and Narrative* demonstrates that time (as an abstract noun) is referring to an experience which is fictive (narrative time) and non-fictional (Chronological time). In this short article, the question of fiction for Ricoeur will be posed in relation to his treatment of fictive experience of time in *Time and Narrative*. It is hoped that his development of the configuration of fictive experience will aid in the understanding of fiction in more general terms outside the strict constraints of fiction as the existence of non-existent objects.

1. The problem with Fiction

The possibility of the existence non-existent objects, or fictions, raises fundamental epistemological and ontological questions within different philosophical traditions and none the more so than within the philosophical hermeneutic project of Paul Ricoeur. For the moment non-existent objects and fictions will be used interchangeably, however, it will become clear that there is a distinction operating within the use of fiction by Ricoeur. For Ricoeur the ability of language to refer to the real world or possible worlds becomes a cornerstone for the development of philosophical project where the mediation of the world through language is presupposed. For Ricoeur, this turn to language takes place through the development of his hermeneutic project which starts out with the symbol, then the metaphor, then the text. Historically, the turn towards language can be seen in the work of Edmund Husserl in terms of the question of intersubjectivity and the phenomenological experience and, similarly, within the work of Martin Heidegger whose *Dasein* is being whose questions the very meaning of being. The philosophical tradition of hermeneutics i.e. Dilthey, Schleiermacher had give prominence to the role of language and interpretation. For Paul Ricoeur the starting out within the thickness of language brings with it all the presuppositions of language; one presupposition is the ability of language to refer to the world or to possible worlds. However, this opposition between reference to the world and reference to possible worlds is over-simplistic as the whole project of deconstruction has demonstrated, the kernel critique within the work

of Jacques Derrida is this very opposition itself between referring and non-referring. Derrida explored the constant deferral of referring in the very term *différance* which refers to differing and deferring at the same time. It could also be argued that the very notion of reference contains within an ontological model of presence which Derrida sets out as part of his initial grammatological project that becomes Deconstruction. Nonetheless, non-referring nouns, or nonexistent objects, have had a prominent place in the history of philosophy, from golden mountains to mythological figures such as Ulysses himself³. The problematic can be dated as far back as Plato and Parmenides and has led to the development of numerous formal responses in logic, for example, from Russell, Frege, Quine⁴ to more recently with Priest (2005)⁵. The origin of the term nonexistent objects is attributed to Alexius Meinong, who was a student of Brentano and would, therefore, be situated within the phenomenological tradition. In phenomenology, therefore, the question of nonexistent objects and intentionality can be dated back to Meinong. Within phenomenology the question of intentionality or the principle of intentionality refers to the relationship with the world which is constantly in a mode of attending to, to think is to think of something, to speak is to speak of something. To simplify the Meinong stance we could say that the central issue for Meinong was the possibility desire for something that does not exist – a golden mountain, therefore, intentionality does not require the existence of an object. The complexity of the question of intentionality cannot be fully explored here, however, suffice it to note that Meinong will place value-feelings as the mode of intentionality:

“Value-feelings are existence-feelings. Already implicit here is the proposition that value-feelings are in the first instance oriented not toward a certain thing, but toward the

3 For an extensive overview of the term ‘nonexistent objects’, see Reicher, 2015.

4 Frege-Quine make a distinction between existential quantifiers and existence, this is done through the use (\Box) which is determined as having an ontological import.

5 Graham Priest (2005) has proposed a theory of nonexistent objects that treats “there is” and “exists” as synonyms. He interprets quantification as utterly ontologically neutral. The quantifier should express neither “there is” nor “there exists”. Rather, quantifier expressions should be read “For some x, ...x...”, where “For some x, ...x...” does not imply that there is (or exists) an x such that ...x...”. See Reicher, 2015.

existence of this thing. This state of affairs comes out quite unmistakably in the fact that instead of the existence of the thing in question, it can be the non-existence of it on which the value is set” (Meinong, 1983, p. 120).

In this quotation, the distinction is made between the desire not for a certain thing in-itself but the very existence of this thing itself, hence the possibility to desire for something not to exist. The value feelings which can be understood as existent desire/feelings can be the desire of the non-existent and hence the existence of the non-existent object.

However, we could also find a parallel within the notion of value judgment or the Kantian notion of critique. For Kant the in the *Critique of Judgment* the very notion of judgment is based on the ability ‘to think the particular as contained under the universal’ (Kant, 1987, p. 18), the ability to abstract from the particular to the universal. The judgment can also be transcendental as it sets out a priori the conditions necessary for the movement from the particular to the universal. Hence, once the question of the movement beyond the particular empirical experience is framed by Kant in terms a movement towards transcendental a priori which is beyond experience, the question of representation of something which does not exist is posed. Kant poses the concept as which is beyond the object (the objectness of the object). At the origin of the question of the existence of non-existent object is the Kantian distinction between concept of an object and the object’s actuality. As Kant states:

“Now insofar as the concept of an object also contains the basis of the object’s actuality, the concept is called the thing’s *purpose*, and a thing’s harmony with that character of things which is possible only through purposes is called the *purposiveness*” (Kant, 1987, p. 20).

The thing’s purpose is also contained within the things concept and the thing’s concept is distinction the things actuality as an object. Hence within the Kantian analysis for our analysis there is a distinction between the existence of the object and the concept of the object. This enables a further distinction between notions of concrete denotative language referring and abstract denotative referring which can be descriptive and

temporal or durational references. The reference to action taking place and time in the world – to reach the summit⁶ for example refers to something that comes into being once it is achieved.

Nonexistent objects, therefore, pose fundamental questions in relation to language and the world, in particular in relation the referring nouns and non-referring nouns. Let us take a relatively simple example of what the problem of fiction is and how this can be framed in relation to nonexistent objects. The example is the first line of James Joyce's *Ulysses* it reads as follows:

“Stately, plump Buck Mulligan came from the stairhead, bearing a bowl of lather on which a mirror and a razor lay crossed” (Joyce, 1997, p.5).

This famous opening scene of the novel where the central character Stephen Dedalus is presented through a secondary character Buck Mulligan in the tower on Sandycove beach as he wakes up on June 16th morning in Dublin. In order to elucidate the problem, the question of fiction could be oversimplified as ‘how do readers distinguish between language which refers to the real world and language that refers to an imaginary one shared by the author, narrator and the reader’. On the surface language expressions there would appear at first glance to be no linguistic differences within this sentence that would mark it as fiction. The use of the past tense preterit (came) (crossed)⁷, nominal referring entities (nouns), and referring expressions such Buck Mulligan, stairhead, bowl, lather, mirror, razor would all be present in a historical account which is non-fictional. However, this is a radical oversimplification, the sentence is fictional and how that fictionality is determined is the central issue to the existence of nonexistent objects. A more close analysis of

6 This can also be seen as part of the verb categorization or verbal typologies where verbs can be determined as durative, temporal, instantaneous etc. For a full analysis see verbal typologies see Vendler, 1957. Vendler's typology is seen as the first attempt to give a complete typology of verbal forms his classification is state, activity, accomplishment and achievement.

7 ‘Lay crossed’, raises an interesting problematic of the distinction between past participle as adjectival forms and past participle as agentless passive forms – the razor was crossed by someone. However, we do not have the time to explore the fully complexity of this sentence.

the sentence from literary theory or critical theory perspective raises the traces of points of view within the sentence, the traces of the point view enable a distinction between statement (énoncé) and utterance (énonciation). Within the field of linguistics the tradition of enunciative linguistics, which stems from the work of Emile Benveniste, would argue that there is a trace of the act of utterance within the statement itself⁸. This is demonstrated here through the use of an ‘ing’ form in ‘bearing’, indicating a non-complete action or an action in process depending on the grammatical perspective adopted. This point of view of the action taking place is also emphasized through the juxtaposition of tense, ‘came from the stairhead bearing’. The point of view is equally present not only in the grammatical structures but also at a semantic level, the use of stately, plump. This analysis of the sentence which attempts to find markers within the sentence that indicate forms of fictionality, is itself problematic as the analysis itself is mobilizing forms of literary analysis of critical theory analysis which rely on specific linguistic analyses. The problematic of fiction is seen, therefore, primarily as stylistic; a stylistic analysis underpinned by a linguistics of the surface traces of language operations.

However, in terms of non-existent objects we could formulate it as follows ‘Stephen Dedalus’, the central character in James Joyce’s *Ulysses*, is a non-referring noun, as Stephen Dedalus does not refer to a real person in the world. However, automatically the complexity of the issue comes to the fore, Stephen Dedalus does refer to something, yet that something does not exist in the real world. In addition, the naming of fictional character Stephen takes on different forms, even, in the opening sequence, he is referred to as different names (as named entities) ‘Kinch’, ‘feaful jesuit’, ‘old chap’, ‘my love’. The difficulty of naming becomes a central feature of the novel where the son is search of a father and the father of a son – a name in search of thing. From a formal semantics perspective we could use an approach which might help distinguish between Stephen Dedalus (noun referring to the real world) and {Stephen Dedalus}

⁸ See Emile Benveniste (1966) for his analysis of the ‘De la subjectivité dans le langage’, and this is further developed in the analysis of the implicit in the work of Oswald Ducrot.

(non-referring to the real world but to a possible world). However, even this formal distinction does not advance our argument, as Thomasson has pointed out that fictional entities i.e {Stephen Dedalus} are equally inhabitants of the actual world just as non-fictional ones are i.e Stephen Dedalus. The fundamental presupposition here is one of the ontological status, Thomasson, therefore, attributes full ontological status to fictional entities, they are inhabitants of the actual world, in the sense that they exist in and across multiple readings and interpretations of the reader and in the imagination of the author. The ontological status of the fictional entities is in a process of sedimentation over the course of the novel, their ontological status accumulates through an interdependency of historical reference to themselves (anaphoric and cataphoric reference) within the text of the novel.

It is in the context of the Artifactual Theory of Fiction proposed by Thomasson that the exploration of fiction and narrative configuration in the work of Ricoeur overlap. The distinction that Thomasson makes between fictional works as semantic-syntactic entities as different to fictional objects, reflects a parallel distinction made between world of fiction and fictional configuration in the Ricoeur's analysis in *Time and Narrative*. This overlap could be determined, as is it will be argued later, by a possible world framework. Possible world frameworks enable the establishment of fictional entities in other worlds outside the *actual* world.

2. Ricoeur and the world of the work, working of the work of Art

The problem of fiction is given a predominant role in the overall project of *Time and Narrative* but it is outlined fully in the second volume whose subtitle is 'The configuration of time in fictional narrative'. In this volume Ricoeur explores explicitly the role of fictional configurations and in the second part of the volume gives a very detailed analysis of some key canonical literary texts by Virginia Woolf, Thomas Mann and Marcel Proust. This detailed exploration demonstrates that there is a fictive experience of time which we shall return to slightly later. Nonetheless, at the outset of volume two Ricoeur makes very explicit the epistemological claim to true narrative that historical narrative holds. Throughout

Time and Narrative Ricoeur distinguishes between historical narrative and fictional narrative, historical narrative maintains its truth-value as reference to the actual world. It is this truth-value ambition of historical narrative that enables the formulation of fiction as a distinct and different form. One defining characteristic of “fiction”, for Paul Ricoeur, is the ambition not to constitute a true narrative.

“I am giving the term “fiction” a narrower extension than that adopted by many authors who take it to be synonymous with “narrative configuration”. This equating of narrative and fiction, of course, has some justification inasmuch as the configuring acts, as I myself have maintained, an operation of the productive imagination, in the Kantian sense of the term. Nevertheless I am reserving the term “fiction” for those literary creations that do not have historical narrative’s ambition to constitute a true narrative” (Ricoeur, 1985a, p. 3)⁹.

Ricoeur’s distinction between ‘fiction’ and ‘historical’ narrative relies on the teleological nature of the texts, the ambition of historical narrative is to construct and constitute history itself, the verifiable facts of the truth of the past, the telos of fiction is not the same, what that *telos* is, is another question be it aesthetics, pleasure, passing the time but that is the question of literary theory. The purpose of historical narrative is not the same as the purpose of fiction. Another aspect to this distinction is the lack of intervention of the part of the enonciator in the narrative itself, the historical narrative attempts to hold up the facts of history objectively for reflection¹⁰. Fiction, therefore, refers to ‘literary creations’

9 “Fidèle à la convention de vocabulaire adopte pour le premier tome, je donne au terme de fiction une extension moindre que celle adoptée par les nombreux auteurs qui le tiennent pour synonyme de configuration narrative. Cette indetification entre configuration narrative et fiction n’est certes pas sans justification, dans la mesure ou l’acte configurant est, comme nous l’avons nous-mêmes soutenu, une opération dans l’imagination productrice, au sens kantien du terme. Je réserve toutefois le terme de fiction pour celles des créations littéraires qui ignorant l’ambition historique de constituer un récit vrai” (Ricoeur, 1984b, p.12).

10 Emile Benveniste (1966, p. 239) gives very detailed analysis of the differentiation between ‘discours’ and ‘histoire’, the primary distinction is that of the relationship between

which, it could be argued, is akin to the ‘fictional works’ of Thomasson. It is of importance to point out that literary creations include all forms of myths, poems, etc. but Ricoeur’s analysis in the *Time and Narrative* will focus on literary creations which came to the fore with what has been determined as the modern novel and in particular the modern novels realist tendencies. Hence, the examples chosen and given a full analysis in volume II of *Time and Narrative* are part of the canon of modern novel.

In relation to our original question of fiction, which was to look to the structure to determine the distinction between fiction and nonfiction, has now been replaced by the epistemological claim of the text. However, Ricoeur through the development of three forms of *Memesis*, namely, *Memesis I* – imitation, *Memesis II* – configuring and *Memesis III* – refiguration, has emphasized the common structural elements between historical narrative and fictional narrative. The use of narrative configuration is the common ground between both narrative modes; narrative configuration take places through the development on notions of plot or emplotment (*mise en intrigue*) which Ricoeur explored as *Memesis II*. The difference, as Ricoeur (1984b, p.126) points out, is that the literary critic can ignore the difference which effects the referential dimension of the narrative and concentrate on the common structural characteristics of the fictional narrative and the historical narrative. In the overall work of Paul Ricoeur it can be noted that in the 1960s there were direct confrontations with more structuralist modes of analysis that placed the emphasis the revelation of the structure of the text, the structure of the narrative, where the question of the referential nature of fiction could be suspended or totally ignored. It is, therefore, in closure of fiction to self-referentially which enables the development of modes of literary criticism where the semiotic nature of the text and fiction is developed. Within the analysis of time Ricoeur demonstrates the achronic analysis of narratology or narrative semiology raises questions about the nature of Time or the fictive experience of time. The parallel here is between Thomsson’s claim to

the speaker and what is being said as temporal distance and without the subjectivity of the speaker and the second is the historical intention of the text.

distinguish between the semantic-syntactic entities, the closed semiology of the text, and the fictional object, the world of the text, which refers to the opening of language onto the possible world of fiction.

However, in this short article we do not have the space to elaborate on the fully consequences on the treatment of time by fiction. Ricoeur distinguishes between different forms of time, chronological and non-chronological. In addition, narrative time which might appear to be the placeholder of fiction is shown not to be a primordial characteristic of fiction, narrative time is present in fiction and non fiction. Nonetheless, for the moment it suffices to note the common ground on which Ricoeur points to in relation to fictional narrative and historical narrative is the concept of configuration. The configuration of time as whole which is chronological as finite but also cosmological as infinite, it is this act of configuration which will be distinctive of Ricoeur's analysis of time.

The concept of configuration, which Ricoeur borrows from Louis O Mink and Aristotle, enables him to develop a second form of mimesis, moving beyond the simple action of imitation of copy that was the characteristic of mimesis I. It is as a configurational act that Ricoeur applies the concept to historical comprehension and also includes all forms of narrative intelligence (Ricoeur, 1983, p.129). The configurational act is both chronologic and non-chronologic:

“This configurational act consists of “grasping together” the detailed actions or what I have called the story's incidents. It draws from this manifold of events the unity of one temporal whole” (Ricoeur, 1984a, p. 66)¹¹.

The operation of configuration takes into account the whole of the actions' details in the framework of a unit which is a temporal totality. A temporal unity which refers to total temporality beyond the individual incidents of the story, beyond the individual events of the story. The configurational act, is the act of plot or emplotment which takes as reference

¹¹ Cet acte configurant consiste à “prendre ensemble” les actions de détail ou ce que nous avons appelé les incidents de l'histoire; de ce divers d'évènements, il tire l'unité d'une totalité temporelle (Ricoeur, 1983, p.129).

the overall unit of time. Ricoeur's analysis of the act of the whole gathering/grasping together ('prendre ensemble') has another significant origin whose genealogy can be traced to Kant's operation of judgement.

"It will be recalled that for Kant the transcendental meaning of judging consists not so much in joining a subject to a predicate as in placing an intuitive manifold under the rule of a concept" (Ricoeur, 1984a, p. 66)¹².

The transcendental sense of the judgment is the ability to place the particular in the rule of the concept. As Kant states:

"Judgment in general is the ability to think the particular as contained under the universal. If the universal (the rule, principle, law) is given, then judgment, which subsumes the particular under it, is *determinate* (even though [in its role] as transcendental judgment it states a priori the conditions that must be met for subsumption under that universal to be possible" (Kant, 1987, p. 18).

The aesthetic judgement of taste is opposed to determining judgement in the sense that the aesthetic judgement of taste reflects the total as free play between understanding and imagination. The similarity is therefore between the aesthetic judgment and the configurational act, an act which attempts to include the whole. It is the configurative element thanks to which the emplotment transforms the events into story/history. The configurational act is the productive imagination in the Kantian scheme. It is within the concept of emplotment that Ricoeur's analysis moves to the problematic of the world of the text or the "world of the work".

The possible world of the work, the world of the text, enables the development of a problematic and terminology which takes referentiality as central issue. It is important to note here that before Ricoeur develops an extensive analysis of different forms of fiction, his emphasis is constantly related to the value of the fictional experience in an overall

¹² On se souvient que pour Kant le sens transcendantal du jugement consiste moins à joindre un sujet et un prédicat qu'à placer un divers intuitif sous la règle d'un concept (Ricoeur, 1983, p.129).

hermeneutic project where self-understanding is mediated through language and, therefore, through different modes of narrative. It is world before the text or after the text, for Ricoeur this is embedded in the very notion of fiction itself:

“Fiction, I have said, continually makes the transition between the experience that precedes the text and the experience that follows it” (Ricoeur, 1985a, p. 73)¹³.

It is this openness of the text onto the world that brings Ricoeur’s analysis beyond literary analysis, language is closed to world and open to the world, the text is closed up itself as self-referential semantic-synaxtic object and open to the world in the creation of meaning. The philosophical implications are in relation to the framing of questions of the self as a narrative self which is constructed through fiction and non-fiction, what Ricoeur has referred to as the hermeneutic approach to subjectivity. In Volume II of *Time and Narrative* Ricoeur gives a thorough examination of specific forms of the modern novel. The closed world of the semiological narratology of textual analysis and literary analysis is confronted by an opening of the text on the world – the world of the work and to the world of the reader. The world of reader is interchangeable with the notion of the real world referred to earlier in relation to Stephen Dedalus. As Ricoeur states in the introduction to Vol II of *Time and Narrative*:

“To open up the notion of emplotment – and the notion of time that corresponds to it- to the outside is to follow the movement of transcendence by which every work of fiction, whether verbal or plastic, narrative or lyric projects a world outside itself, one that can be called the “world of the work”. In this way, epics, dramas, and novels project, in the mode of fiction, ways of inhabiting the world that lie waiting to be taken up by reading, which in turn is capable

13 “La fiction, on l’a dit, ne cesse de faire transition entre l’expérience en amont du texte et l’expérience an aval” (Ricoeur, 1984b, p. 138).

of providing a space of a confrontation between the world of the text and the world of the reader” (Ricoeur, 1985a, p. 5)¹⁴.

This confrontation between the world of the text and the world of the reader points towards the openness of the work of fiction to project a world outside of itself, or Ricoeur states ways of inhabiting the world that are to be instantiated by the act of reading itself. From the perspective of fiction, this confrontation is parallel with the confrontation between *langue* and *parole/discours*; language and discourse. Language is closed in on itself as self-referential system and open as discourse, an aboutness of discourse, discourse is always ‘about something’. The ability for the literary to abolish all demonstrative or diegetic or ostensive nature of language where all reference to reality can be abolished enables what we call literature to exist. As Ricoeur states in a short article “La fonction herméneutique de distanciation”: “C’est semble-t-il, le rôle de la plus grande partie de notre littérature de détruire le monde” (Ricoeur, 2013, p. 69).

The destruction of the world, is not the destruction of the world of the reader, on the contrary the reader is confronted with new possible way of inhabiting the world through an encounter with world of the work. We come to understand through this detour into the possible worlds of fiction. Ricoeur adds another aspect to the analysis of fiction by exploring what the proposition is of the world of the text, the world is not something which is behind the text but something, like a hidden intentionality to be revealed, but something in front of the text as the work unfolds, discovers and revels (Ricoeur, 1984b, p. 73). Here in addition to a theory of fiction an implicit theory of reading is being proposed, to understand oneself before the text is to expose oneself to a much larger proposition of world or possible worlds. Ultimately, to receive a much bigger self.

14 “Ouvrir sur le dehors la notion de mise en intrigue et celle de temps qui lui est appropriée, c’est enfin suivre le mouvement de transcendance par lequel toute œuvre de fiction, qu’elle soit verbale ou plastique, narrative ou lyrique, projette hors d’elle-même un monde qu’on peut appeler le monde de l’œuvre. Ainsi l’épopée, le drame, le roman projettent sur le mode de fiction des manières d’habiter le monde qui sont en attente d’une reprise par la lecture, capable à son tour de fournir un espace de confrontation entre le monde du texte et le monde du lecteur” (Ricoeur, 1984b, p. 15).

This has radical implications in terms of a theory of fiction, the theory of fiction is inherently embedded within a theory of reading where the world of the text is real only in the way that is fictional.

“Il faut sans doute aller plus loin encore: de la même manière que le monde du texte n’est réel que dans la mesure où il est fictif, il faut dire que la subjectivité lecteur n’advient à elle-même que dans la mesure où elle est mise en suspens, irréalisée, potentialisée, au même titre que le monde lui-même que le texte déploie” (Ricoeur, 2013, pp. 73-74).

The world of fiction enables the reader’s subjectivity to be suspended but realised through the interaction with the possible world of the work of fiction. The reader gives a possible ontological status to the fiction through their ability to interpret themselves in light of the fictional experiences. The problem of fiction, understood as the opposition between reference to the world outside the text is confronted with Ricoeur’s contention the world of the reader has an ontological status. The attribution of full ontological status to the character of the novel in the world of imagination of the reader finds a parallel in the analysis of Ricoeur where the world of the work and the world of the reader are given equal status. However, it is only by losing myself as reader that I find myself through wider experience of inhabiting the possible world of the word. The referential aspect of the nonexistent object takes place within the discourse of the world of fiction itself.

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