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REFLECTIONS ON POETIC WORK: HEIDEGGER AND RICOEUR¹

Abstract. In this essay I analyze Ricoeur’s philosophy of cultural objects as an alternative to Heidegger’s hermeneutics of the onto-poetic origin of art that explicitly remains reserved in accepting a starting point based on the distinction between subject and object. After introducing Heidegger’s poetics of Being – that I will call onto-poetics – as presented in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, I explicate how Ricoeur proposes a mytho-poetic approach that rests on the notion of objectivity. The concept of poetic work remains the focus of this article, examined first from Heidegger’s angle and then from its Ricoeurian rival. The essay concludes that Ricoeur’s proposal of a poetico-speculative disclosure of what is retains a firm connection to the notion of objectivity as well as that of work, whereas Heidegger’s analysis gradually shifts from *ergon* to *energeia*, thus replacing the notion of work by that of alethic strife.

Keywords: poetics, work, culture, bios, logos, being, ergon

1. Introduction. 2. Heidegger’s poetics of Being. 3. Ricoeur: The “signs of man” and works of art. 4. Thoughtful works, embodied Being, and expressive acts. 5. Λόγος: the communicative works of *l’esprit*. 6. Work: Ricoeur’s dialectics of discovering interpretation.

1. INTRODUCTION

In contrast to Martin Heidegger, who constantly criticized the modern subject–object dichotomy, and aimed to surpass that in his own explorations,² Paul Ricoeur argues that modernity is so thoroughly dif-

¹ Research for this essay has been supported by The Finnish Academy of Science and Letters.

² Cf. M. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, in: *Holzwege*, GA 5, Klos-

fused with critical thought that there simply are no means for returning to a pre-critical primary naïveté, or an “innocent” existence in the presence of Being. In *The Symbolism of Evil* (1960) Ricoeur asserts, however, that “I believe that being can still speak to me”³, by which he means that the question of human existence is still relevant at the age of objectivity. Even though Being does not “speak” directly to the modern human, it is approachable indirectly by critical reflection – in *post-critical* interpretation that does not set aside but utilizes the objective explanation for gaining an existentially pertinent understanding.

Ricoeur’s *post-critical* hermeneutics employs the notion of objectivity to achieve a secondary naïveté. Already in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1949), Ricoeur maintains that “if life begins beyond anxiety, there is a way back from there to here, to a naïveté, albeit a naïveté which has matured in the experience of anxiety”⁴. The secondary innocence, matured by critical distancing that dislocates a human being from himself and thus results in anxiety, is the state of *post-critical* interpretative “wondering” at the “ciphers” of nature and the experience of cultural being⁵. Instead of pretending to be able to suspend the prevailing dichotomy between subjectivity and objectified existence, a philosopher who seeks understanding – according to Ricoeur – must accept this critical condition and determine how this polarity can still work for us *post-critically* – in interpretative reflection that is able to re-appropriate human existence.

The current essay analyzes Ricoeur’s philosophy of cultural objects as an alternative to Heidegger’s hermeneutics of the onto-poetic origin of art that explicitly remains reserved in accepting a starting point based on the distinction between subject and object. After introducing Heidegger’s poetics of Being – or onto-poetics, as I will define it – as presented in *The Origin of the Work of Art*, I explicate how Ricoeur pro-

termann, Frankfurt a.M. 1977, 63–65 (*PLT*, 73–75). Pagination to the English translations is given in brackets.

³ P. Ricoeur, *La symbolique du mal*, Aubier, Paris 1960, 327 (352).

⁴ P. Ricoeur, *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, Aubier, Paris 1949, 80 (83).

⁵ P. Ricoeur, *La symbolique du mal*, op. cit., 25–26, 326–328 (19, 350–353).

poses a mytho-poetic approach that rests on the notion of objectivity. The concept of poetic work remains the focus of this article, examined first from Heidegger's angle and then from its Ricoeurian rival. I will conclude that Ricoeur's proposal of a poetico-speculative disclosure of what is retains a firm connection to the notion of objectivity as well as that of work, whereas Heidegger's analysis gradually shifts from *ἔργον* to *ἐνέργεια*, thus replacing the notion of work by that of alethic strife, which does not recognize the dichotomy between a subject and object, but an opposition between the World and the Earth instead.

2. HEIDEGGER'S POETICS OF BEING

It is problematic to claim that Martin Heidegger is an aesthetic in the sense of a philosopher of art. If Heidegger of *The Origin of the Work of Art* would be called an aesthetic, he definitely is not an aesthetic in a conventional modern sense that keeps its focus on beauty, taste, and objects or art, but only because he connects *αἰσθητά*, or sensible phenomena, with the alethic discovery of the truth of being⁶, in the 1956 Addendum to the *Origin*, Heidegger maintains that the work moves deliberately "on the path of the question of the nature of Being"⁷. Heidegger insists that the *Origin* concerns the Being-question rather than aesthetics in its modern sense that presupposes subject-object dichotomy: "Reflection on what *art* may be is completely and decidedly determined only in regard to the question of *Being*"⁸. This *Frage nach dem Sein* overcasts all other explications of the *Origin* – it is the very *origin* of the work of art and not a work of art which Heidegger is interested. Still, the *Origin* is also a reflection on what art is, even though this

⁶ M. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, GA 2, Max Niemeyer Verlag, Tübingen 1967, 33 (BT, 29); M. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, op. cit., 24–26, 67–70 (38, 77–79). Cf. I.D. Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, Cambridge UP, New York 2011, 40–42, 47–62; J. Taminiiaux, *The Origin of 'The Origin of the Work of Art'*, in: *Reading Heidegger: Commemorations*, ed. J. Sallis, Indiana UP, Bloomington 1993, 400.

⁷ M. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, op. cit., 73 (85).

⁸ Ibid.

reflection remains open-ended; “what art may be is one of the questions to which no answers are given in the essay,” the Addendum states bluntly.⁹

The earlier-written Epilogue that was added to the original 1935/36 lectures softens, however, the impression of Heidegger’s disinterest in the question of art itself. Even if the puzzle pertaining to art is far from resolved in the *Origin*, Heidegger’s work has to do with “the riddle of art, the riddle that art itself is”¹⁰. The question of the nature of art, Heidegger claims, is part of that puzzle. Consequently, Heidegger’s response to Hegel’s proposition that art remains for us “something past” – that art does not vividly speak of the formation of the Spirit anymore in the age of philosophy – is that the final judgment of the truth of Hegel’s claim will have to be postponed; art can perhaps still invigorate our existence. For all those who are influenced by Greek philosophy “there is concealed a peculiar confluence of beauty with truth,” Heidegger argues.¹¹ For this reason, as Heidegger maintains elsewhere in the *Origin*, “art lets truth originate”¹². Beauty, in other words, is not conceivable apart from the *a-lethic* notion of truth, or truth as the disclosure of what is. The truth Heidegger discusses in the *Origin* is not *adequatio* – the correspondence between mind and the objects of reality – but *die Wahrheit des Seins*, “the truth of Being”¹³. The riddle, again, pertains to art that *is*, but according to Heidegger’s *Epilogue* it is not wholly insignificant that it is *art* that is.

The *Epilogue* argues that the relation between art and truth is based on the notion of work. Heidegger’s definition of work is rooted in his conception of the advent (or be-coming, *ad-ventus*) of the truth of Being. The mediating term between this be-coming as *alethic* appearing – in which the beautiful lies according to Heidegger – and actuality understood as reality, and furthermore as experienced objectivity, is *ἔργον*,

⁹ Ibid.

¹⁰ Ibid., 67 (77).

¹¹ Ibid., 69 (79).

¹² Ibid., 65 (75).

¹³ Ibid., 22–23, 69 (36–37, 79).

work, which *is*.¹⁴ The work, in other words, dwells between Being and beings. The work, “in the manner of *ἐνέργεια*”, or efficient activity, is the appearance of truth as *aletheia* in the mode of truth setting itself into the work. “Appearance (*das Erscheinen*) – as this being of truth in the work and as work – is beauty,” Heidegger summarizes.¹⁵ Put differently, beauty is the appearance of truth setting itself into the work. In this sense, Heidegger argues in the *Epilogue*, “the beautiful belongs to the advent of truth”¹⁶. To analyze this becoming (*das Sichereignen*) of the truth of Being as his grounding question, Heidegger’s leading problem is therefore “to bring to view this work-character of the work”¹⁷. The *Epilogue* argues that the *Origin* concerns not only an origin, but in particular the origin of the *work* of art.

Heidegger’s journey in *The Origin of the Work of Art* through the notions of thing, work, truth, and art invites to notice the poetic nature of all works of art – it is feasible to maintain that the *Origin* is more poetics than aesthetics of being, that is, it concerns more expressing Being than art and beauty.¹⁸ Heidegger’s distinction in the *Origin* between poetry (*Dichtung*) and poesy (*Poesie*) even calls into question an affiliation between the poetics of being and a poetic work of art; Heidegger indicates that even art as a whole could not possibly exhaust the essence of poetry (*Dichtung*) in the manner in which he had defined it.¹⁹ In other words, Heidegger’s poetics is fundamentally not

¹⁴ Ibid., 69 (79).

¹⁵ Ibid.

¹⁶ Ibid.

¹⁷ Ibid.

¹⁸ William Richardson’s seminal *Through Phenomenology to Thought* already connects Heidegger’s *Origin* and the concomitant essay *Hölderlin and the Essence of Poetry* by arguing that these “two contemporary and complementary texts should be thought together”. Cf. W. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1974, 403.

¹⁹ M. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, op. cit., 62 (71–72). Even though poetic composition (*Dichtung*) is for Heidegger a wider concept than poesy (*Poesie*), Heidegger argues that poesy is privileged because it relates to speech (*Sprache*) that has the unvanquished capability of bringing Being into the Open. “Projective saying is

about objectified or objectifiable (that is, thing-like) poetic compositions, poems (*Poesie*), which are mere prime examples of artworks at work, or even about the expressivity of different art forms – according to Heidegger, therefore, all the work of dis-closing truth is onto-poetic.

Because of his conception of poetic work, Heidegger is bothered by the fact that *thingness* (*die Dingheit*) in the artwork can lead us to think that art lies in the artistically shaped thinglyness – that we reduce art’s thingly element to “thing-being” (*das Dingsein*), by which art is then defined as presentation or reproduction.²⁰ Heidegger maintains, in contrast, that the thingly substructure (*der dingliche Unterbau*) of an artwork has no bearing on the work at all, that “art is truth setting itself to work”, and this disclosure, or the unconcealedness of beings’ being, is what is at work in the work of art.²¹ Thinglyness, then, is not the foundational determinant to the work of art. The artwork is therefore also not reducible to an equipment that only lacks usefulness, because art lets beings’ being be present. Art’s work is, Heidegger argues, to set up (*aufstellen*) a world and to set forth (*herstellen*) the effortless, untiring, and self-enclosing Earth (*Erde*) “in the Open” of this world.²²

Put differently, art’s work is to strive for dis-closing beings in their be-ing, or letting beings stand in the clearing of the truth of being, to let this truth happen in the placing (*Stellen*) and framing (*Ge-stell*) of the artwork.²³ This truth “happens in being composed, as a poet composes a poem,” and that therefore “*all art*, as the letting happen of the advent of the truth of what is, is in its being *poetry* (*Dichtung*)”²⁴. Poetry,

poetry,” Heidegger defines. Correspondingly, poetry (*Dichtung*) is “the saying of the unconcealedness of beings,” while poesy (*Poesie*) is “the most originating [form of] poetry in the essential sense”. Heidegger’s conception of *Dichtung* potentially surpasses all forms of art, however, because he generalizes it to mean onto-poetic articulation in general. Cf. *ibid.*, 61–62 (71–72).

²⁰ *Ibid.*, 11–12, 15–16 (26–27, 30–31).

²¹ *Ibid.*, 21, 24–25 (35, 37–38).

²² *Ibid.*, 29–34 (42–46).

²³ *Ibid.*, 37–40, 51 (49–51, 61–62).

²⁴ *Ibid.*, 59 (70).

which is not reducible to mere poesy (*Poesie*), or linguistic work,²⁵ however, unfolds and lets happen in discourse (*Sprache*) the Open which enables beings to “shine and cling”²⁶. Art says projectively what is, and preserves it in the work that takes place in history – only insofar as art does this is it originating, founding, and at work.²⁷ In short, for Heidegger, art is ultimately about the poetic becoming of Being.²⁸

As also indicated by Heidegger’s exegeses of Hölderlin’s poems, poetic dwelling overcasts the notion of work. Even though the working human subject is “full of merit” when “establishing himself on the earth” by work, all this is, according to Heidegger, “never more than the consequence of a mode of poetic dwelling”²⁹. If poems as artworks are interesting, they are such only because they highlight “thinking of Being”, and open humans to their dwelling that is poetic – truly, *dichterisch wohnt der Mensch auf dieser Erde*.³⁰ This ontological clearing, or lighting, is the essence of poetry (*Dichtung*).³¹

In the end, therefore, I argue that Heidegger’s conception of the work of art *as work* remains trivial. Instead of *ἔργον*, the essence of Heidegger’s thoughts on work lays in *ἐνέργεια*, or the effectuous mode of presence: “to be a work means *to set up* a world,”³² and “the work as work, in its presencing, is a *setting forth*”³³. Heidegger’s interest is directed to the duality of *aufstellen* and *herstellen*, in light of which the notion of work loses its imminent value. The secondariness of the no-

²⁵ Ibid., 59–62 (70–72).

²⁶ Ibid., 60–61 (70–71).

²⁷ Ibid., 62–66 (72–75).

²⁸ Cf. J. Taminioux, *The Origin of ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’*, op. cit., 404.

²⁹ M. Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, GA4, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 1981, 89 (113).

³⁰ Martin Heidegger, “(...) dichterisch wohnt der Mensch (...)”, in: M. Heidegger, *Vorträge und Aufsätze*, GA7, Klostermann, Frankfurt a.M. 2000, 191–193 (*PLT*, 211–213).

³¹ M. Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, op. cit., 41–43, 144–151 (58–61, 165–172). Cf. W. Richardson, *Heidegger: Through Phenomenology to Thought*, op. cit., 443, 460–464, 469–471.

³² M. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, op. cit., 30 (43). Italics added.

³³ Ibid., 31 (44). Italics added.

tion is also indicated in that the notion of striving (*Streit*) – which arises from this duality of setting up and setting forth – replaces the notion of work; the work is “striving the strife” (*Bestreitung des Streites*) to set up and set forth, that is, to let truth happen in this striving “in which the unconcealedness of beings as a whole, or truth, is won”³⁴. In summary, I maintain that Heidegger does not fully elaborate the notion of work as work, because he conceives an artwork to be at work only when it maintains the function of dis-closing the becoming of the truth of Being as essentially onto-poetic dwelling (*ποίησις*).

3. RICOEUR: THE “SIGNS OF MAN” AND WORKS OF ART

Paul Ricoeur, one of Heidegger’s notable critics, approaches expressive human acts and the works of art somewhat differently, but still maintains a firm connection to the poetic. In particular, for Ricoeur the notion of the “signs of man” (*les signes de l’homme*), or human achievements, which for Heidegger represents mere culture in the face of onto-poetic dwelling,³⁵ culminates in Ricoeur’s interpretation of the function of art precisely as poetics. To trace Ricoeur’s line of thought as a culturally deep-rooted alternative to Heidegger’s hermeneutics – which Ricoeur accuses of being “too direct” since “the sunken Atlantes” has been lost in modernity and a reappropriative understanding is possible only by critical reflection³⁶ – I will first introduce Ricoeur’s conception of the “signs of man”, and its relation to work. This leads us to consider how products of work such as art transcend the natural environment to a human world, and to focus lastly on the relationship between the works of the mind (or spirit) and poetic art.

³⁴ Ibid., 36, 42 (48, 54).

³⁵ Cf. M. Heidegger, “(...) dichterisch wohnt der Mensch (...)”, 195 (215); M. Heidegger, *Erläuterungen zu Hölderlins Dichtung*, op. cit., 42–43, 89 (60, 113); J. Taminiaux, *The Origin of ‘The Origin of the Work of Art’*, op. cit., 397; I.D. Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, op. cit., 52–53.

³⁶ P. Ricoeur, *Le conflit des interprétations: essais d’herméneutique*, Seuil, Paris 1969, 10–11 (6–7); P. Ricoeur, *La symbolique du mal*, op. cit., 326 (349, 352).

Before moving into this discussion, I should acknowledge that understanding the human subject and its cultural world is the grounding question in Paul Ricoeur's work. Heidegger, of course, could criticize him at the outset for being trapped in the misconceptions of modern subjectivism that reinforces the subject–object dichotomy, thus making it more difficult to ask the being-question.³⁷ I am not assured, however, that such characterization would be completely accurate in Ricoeur's case; I will argue that cultural objectification, in the sense Ricoeur introduces it, is necessary for a poetic understanding of humanly conceived being – it is a transcendental condition for human existence.

For Ricoeur, culture, as the context of situatedness that is saturated with objects (including values) produced by human work (generally, by action) that mediates the idea of humanity, defines a human being who is both creative and capable – who has the potential of sublimating himself by transcending his brute animal nature and creating a human world – thus transforming the mute life into articulated life. Anthropologically defined, this idea is included in Ricoeur's term “capable man”, *l'homme capable*, which calls for the “signs of man”, *les signes de l'homme*, as its corollary. According to Ricoeur, the prime examples of these cultural signs are the “‘works’ of art and literature, and, in general, works of the mind [or spirit]” (*les oeuvres de l'esprit*);³⁸ all these manifest the capable human being while also asking to be interpreted as essentially poetic.

Ricoeur's *On Interpretation* (1965) confirms my introductory summary of his hermeneutics of cultural works. As Ricoeur states in this text, reflection is not only “the positing of self” but also “the effort to recapture the *Ego* of the *Ego Cogito* in the mirror of its objects, its works, its acts”³⁹. The self is attained only through its objectifiable acts, that is, it has to be mediated by objectifying means – again, by the “signs of man”. Ricoeur's philosophy is therefore not a philosophy of immediate consciousness in a Cartesian or Husserlian manner but

³⁷ Cf. I.D. Thomson, *Heidegger, Art, and Postmodernity*, op. cit., 52–53.

³⁸ P. Ricoeur, *L'homme faillible*, Aubier, Paris 1960, 139 (123).

³⁹ P. Ricoeur, *De l'interprétation: essai sur Freud*, Seuil, Paris 1965, 51 (43).

follows the French reflexive tradition;⁴⁰ for Ricoeur, reflection is reappropriating “the act of existing that we deploy in effort and desire”⁴¹. This effort to exist is apparent, however, only as “works (*les oeuvres*) whose meaning remains doubtful and revocable”⁴². For Ricoeur, reflection thus turns to critical hermeneutics that includes all speculation: “The ultimate root of our problem lies in this primitive connection between the act of existing and the signs we deploy in our works; reflection must become interpretation because I cannot grasp the act of existing except in signs scattered in the world. That is why a reflective philosophy must include the results, methods, and presuppositions of all the sciences that try *to decipher and interpret the signs of man*”⁴³.

In other words, the human works that constitute culture are necessary for reflectively attained self-understanding, that is, for the internalized hermeneutics of the self. A subject’s understanding of his or her existence is based on interpretation that concerns the meanings imbedded in human works.

As indicated by his reference to the “signs” and the “works of the mind (*l’esprit*)”, Ricoeur relates cultural-hermeneutic deciphering to mytho-poetic language.⁴⁴ This brings us again close to the notion of poetics that explores the human relationship to beings and to Be-ing.⁴⁵ Ricoeur argues that culture is essentially poético-symbolic, since “the poetic keeps man’s cultural existence from being simply a huge artifice, a futile ‘artifact’, a Leviathan without a nature and against nature”⁴⁶. The symbolic function of language enables the poetic expression of profound human experiences that are rooted in mute life – comparable to Heidegger’s “Earth” (*Erde*) in the sense of the sheltering ground “on

⁴⁰ P. Ricoeur, *Intellectual Autobiography*, transl. K. Blamey, in: *The Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur*, ed. L.E. Hahn, Open Court, Chicago and La Salle 1995, 6.

⁴¹ P. Ricoeur, *De l’interprétation: essai sur Freud*, op. cit., 54 (46).

⁴² *Ibid.*, 54 (46).

⁴³ *Ibid.* Italics added.

⁴⁴ *Ibid.*, 502 (522).

⁴⁵ Cf. *Ibid.*, 529 (551).

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, 503 (524). Cf. also *Ibid.*, 163 (161–162).

which and in which man bases his dwelling⁷⁴⁷ – and also the search for human possibilities. Ricoeur maintains that if there is no connection between a human subject and poetic language, no proper human existence prevails. I cannot but argue that this focus on essentially poetic culture is the high point of Ricoeur’s analysis in *On Interpretation*; the last page of its conclusion propagates a hermeneutics of mytho-poetics⁴⁸.

Even though the poetic seems to overcast the notion of work, just as it did with Heidegger, Ricoeur retains a connection to human works by highlighting the nature of mytho-poetic creation that challenges life in its muteness and instinctivity. Artworks, Ricoeur argues, are human creations rather than instinctual representations, because they establish possibility, or a world of fantasy. “A poet is like a child at play,” Ricoeur summarizes; “he creates an imaginary world which he takes very seriously”⁴⁹. Rather than speaking only of life, or manifesting the determining power of our instincts, “the work of art goes ahead of the artist; it is a prospective symbol of his personal synthesis and of man’s future, rather than a regressive symbol of his unresolved conflicts. (...) The work of art sets us on the pathway to new discoveries concerning the symbolic function and sublimation itself”⁵⁰. Put differently, the work of art demonstrates human expressivity by utilizing the mytho-poetic function, but also firms the connection between poetics and culture. Ricoeur maintains that an artwork not only enriches culture with new meanings but it is a work done by an artist. “Fantasy,” Ricoeur argues, “finds expression as an existing work in the storehouse of culture (*comme oeuvre existante dans le trésor de la culture*)”⁵¹. In brief, for Ricoeur poetic works are works that pertain to cultivated human agents; they are signs of culturally existing human beings.

⁴⁷ P. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, op. cit., 28 (41).

⁴⁸ P. Ricoeur, *De l’interprétation: essai sur Freud*, op. cit., 529 (551).

⁴⁹ Ibid., 167 (165). Ricoeur partially quotes Freud’s *Der Dichter und das Phantasieren*.

⁵⁰ Ibid., 176 (175).

⁵¹ Ibid., 175 (174).

4. THOUGHTFUL WORKS, EMBODIED BEING, AND EXPRESSIVE ACTS

For a fuller understanding of Ricoeur's conception of human works as poetico-cultural signs, it is helpful to reconnect with his early work. Ricoeur's *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* (1949), for example, examines "fundamental human possibilities" by describing the "fundamental structures of the [human] voluntary and involuntary"⁵². Ricoeur's analysis necessitated a theory of action for the clarification of his key assertion that a human being "finds" himself in the actualization of his capabilities: "In waking up from anonymity I discover that I have no means of self-affirmation other than my acts themselves. (...) I project my own self into the action to be done"⁵³. Ricoeur's conviction is probably best summarized in his claim that "in *doing* something, I make *myself* be (*je me fais-être*)"⁵⁴. In other words, Ricoeur maintains that the human subject can only be found as an active, reflective agent.

Even though acts are firmly connected with fundamental human possibilities, Ricoeur's initial analysis of the voluntary and the involuntary circulated around the notion of will. According to Ricoeur, the "I will" opens the possibility of intentional doing and making.⁵⁵ "I create myself as an actual living unity in my act: in that moment of choice I come to myself, I come out of the internal shadows, I irrupt as myself, I ek-sist. (...) Such is the novelty of choice: suddenly my project is determinate, my reasons become determinate, I become determinate"⁵⁶. Ricoeur stresses that a subject's *intention* determines his projects, which then reflectively determine their agent. A capable human being is first and foremost a willing being, albeit an embodied one: "I feel capable, as an incarnate being situated in the world, of the

⁵² P. Ricoeur, *Le volontaire et l'involontaire*, op. cit., 7 (3).

⁵³ Ibid., 56–57 (57–59).

⁵⁴ Ibid., 54 (55). Cf. also Ibid., 163 (171–172).

⁵⁵ Ibid., 9–10 (5–6).

⁵⁶ Ibid., 163 (172).

action which I intend in general”⁵⁷. Ricoeur is convinced, however, that the human voluntary is not separable from action, since already the *act* of choice – which enables self-understanding in reflection – grounds a person’s ek-sistence, that is, his or her subjective actuality as a capable human being.

Ricoeur’s subsequent work *Fallible Man* (1960) continues to insist upon the connection between being embodied and being able to perform mental operations: “it is necessary to make the power of existing pass from the register of ‘living’ to that of ‘thinking’”⁵⁸. Instead of human intentionality, Ricoeur’s attention is now, however, also directed to human rationality – Ricoeur opens his analyses with “knowing” (*connaître*)⁵⁹. This “transcendental moment” is necessary but, as Ricoeur argues, “not sufficient,” since this necessary condition asks for continuous practical and affective verification⁶⁰. Ricoeur maintains that only the “essential openness or accessibility to *ἔργον*, to the ‘work’ (*l’oeuvre*) or the ‘project’ of man as such, grounds the person in giving him a horizon of humanity”⁶¹. A person is formed only in connection with the joyful idea of being able to exercise reason that has the goal of contributing to the ideal of humanity by a subject’s own work. Ricoeur describes a human subject, therefore, as “the disproportion of *βίος* and *λόγος*”⁶² – meaning the disproportion of living and thinking in the same subject who thus lives in a state of perpetual and primordial conflict.

Put differently, the *βίος*–*λόγος* conflict – the conflict of life and thought, sensing and thinking, or “seeing and saying” as Ricoeur also calls it, thus echoing but yet distancing from Heidegger’s *Urstreit* between clearing and concealing⁶³ – correlates with the equally funda-

⁵⁷ Ibid., 189 (203).

⁵⁸ P. Ricoeur, *L’homme faillible*, op. cit., 152 (136).

⁵⁹ Ibid., 36 (17).

⁶⁰ Ibid., 152–153 (136).

⁶¹ Ibid.

⁶² Ibid., 148 (132). Cf. also Ibid., 157 (141).

⁶³ Cf. Ibid., 45, 157 (27, 141); M. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*,

mental fact of work, to which the “radical transformation of the animal ‘environment’ into a human ‘world’ is self-evidently related”⁶⁴. The human world that differs from the bare living nature, Ricoeur asserts, is created by work. In *Fallible Man*, Ricoeur goes so far as to argue that through work “human existence takes on the character of a *rationaly organized battle* against nature that makes nature appear as a reservoir of forces to be conquered”⁶⁵. This striving against life in life repeats the primordial *βίος–λόγος* conflict at the level of human action. Consequently, Ricoeur points out, “the difficult” (*le difficile*) becomes a fundamental aspect of human reality, but only in connection with and through work – according to Ricoeur, the material objects of human interest are not pure natural products but rather defined by their possessiveness, that is, by the evaluation of their worth.⁶⁶ In short, “man, because he produces his livelihood, is a living being who works (*un vivant qui travaille*)”⁶⁷. Since the human subject is an active agent – he makes himself be⁶⁸ – the fundamental conflict of “seeing and saying” is literally worked out as (difficult) work.

Ricoeur’s analysis includes the idea that the initially sharp distinction between *βίος* and *λόγος* is not unbridgeable; hence, it results a conflict at the level of a human subject. Work, as thought-based action in the natural environment, implies that Ricoeur also locates “my body” – with which a person works – both in connection with the natural and the human. Even more, Ricoeur argues that the body is “an originating mediator ‘between’ [a person] and the world”; that is, a subject’s body (which remains a non-problematizable Marcelian mystery) mediates between his or her subjectivity and the human world: “I participate

op. cit., 42, 48 (53–54, 58–59).

⁶⁴ P. Ricoeur, *L’homme faillible*, op. cit., 130 (114).

⁶⁵ Ibid., 132 (116). Italics added.

⁶⁶ Ibid., 130, 132 (114, 116).

⁶⁷ Ibid., 130 (114).

⁶⁸ Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, op. cit., 54 (55). Cf. also Ibid., 163 (171–172).

actively in my incarnation as a mystery”⁶⁹. It is precisely *this* body, *my own* body, that provides means for both distancing myself from brute nature and acting in the human world in the process of work: “In a word, my body opens me to the [human] world by everything it is able to do”⁷⁰. As in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, Ricoeur thus insists that subjectivity is also dependent on embodied being.⁷¹ *Fallible Man* reiterates this conviction, however, by maintaining that the body is “the mediator of the intentional consciousness”,⁷² and it is therefore “implicated as a power in the instrumentality of the world, in the practicable aspects of this world that my action furrows through, *in the products of work and art*”⁷³. Ricoeur, in short, extends his analysis of the βίος–λόγος conflict by taking into account the level of corporeal human action, and furthermore the level of human artifacts – the level of work and art.

Restated in slightly different words, Ricoeur argues in *Fallible Man* that the human world is the necessary correlate of a subject’s existence,⁷⁴ since “the world of persons expresses itself through the world of things by filling it with new things that are human works”⁷⁵. The human world is constituted by work, and filled with works – which Ricoeur understands intrinsically as “*expressions* in the broad sense of the word”⁷⁶. Indicated already by his allusion to the products of human action as work and art, Ricoeur maintains that human works are not only free acts but also profoundly expressive; they speak of the human character: “Bergson, in his famous analysis of the free act, caught a glimpse of all that philosophic reflection could reap from these acts

⁶⁹ P. Ricoeur, *L’homme faillible*, op. cit., 37 (19); P. Ricoeur, *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, op. cit., 18 (14–15).

⁷⁰ P. Ricoeur, *L’homme faillible*, op. cit., 38 (19).

⁷¹ Cf. P. Ricoeur, *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, 189 (203).

⁷² P. Ricoeur, *L’homme faillible*, op. cit., 38 (20).

⁷³ *Ibid.*, 38 (19–20). Italics added.

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*, 38 (20).

⁷⁵ *Ibid.*, 65 (48).

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, 76 (59). Italics added.

and feelings, »each of which represents the entire soul, in the sense that the whole content of the soul is reflected in each of them«. Between certain expressive acts and »the whole personality« there is, he says, »that undefinable resemblance that one sometimes finds between the artist and his work« (*entre l'oeuvre et l'artiste*). The question of whether or not these highly expressive acts are precisely what one looks for under the name of free act does not interest us here. What does interest us is only the totality that is revealed through them”⁷⁷.

Human action, especially in its refined forms such as art, is expressive because it transcends the natural environment by representing the human *thoughtful intentionality* that ultimately defines a human subject as a free agent. The highly expressive acts of art, in other words, bring forth the capable human being, *l'homme capable*.

5. ΛΟΓΟΣ: THE COMMUNICATIVE WORKS OF *L'ESPRIT*

Even if the capable human being is “an incarnate being” situated in the world, *Fallible Man* affiliates a subject as a person with the idea of humanity. A person’s *body*, a biological entity that situates him or her, relates to speechless life, whereas human character, intentionality that leads to thoughtful self-expression, opens itself – by the means of a *person’s* body – to the human world: “‘My’ character is implied in the humanity of my individual existence as the zero origin of my field of motivation, [or inspiration]”⁷⁸. Despite his or her individuality, a human subject partakes in humanity, which according to Ricoeur is not to be understood as “the collective sense of all men, but the human quality of man”⁷⁹. This human quality is the “zero point” of a subject’s incentive. As Ricoeur stresses, humanity is a defining principle, or “the mode of being on which every empirical appearance of what we call

⁷⁷ Ibid., 76–77 (59–60).

⁷⁸ Ibid., 78 (61). Although Ricoeur uses the French word “motivation”, he does not refer to instinctual motivation but rather to *l'esprit* – that is, to the human spirit, ethos, or wittiness.

⁷⁹ Ibid., 87 (70).

a human being should be patterned”⁸⁰. A person, albeit an embodied one, is constituted by the *idea* of being human and not by his body.

Ricoeur’s assertion that a subject opens himself to all human in his human character, or in his individual style of the human mode of being, leads to his maintaining that the human is found in *λόγος* rather than in *βίος*. A human subject exercises mental resources: “I know that I am here because I am not merely the zero point, but I reflect on it”⁸¹. In contrast to the mute *βίος*, Ricoeur argues that *λόγος* quite literally speaks of the human in general, that is, of the idea of humanity: “Everything human – ideas, beliefs, values, signs, works, tools, institutions – is within my reach in accordance with the finite perspective of an absolutely individual form of life. I do not think of my character or my individuality, [however,] when I become before the signs of man, but the humanity of these signs”⁸².

The unavoidable human situatedness does not nullify the idea that the human quality Ricoeur discusses concerns “the signs of man” as meanings that reveal the expressive subject as thoughtful. The idea of humanity, as Ricoeur understands it, connects with thinking and saying – in a word: Signifying. To repeat, “the signs of man” refer to material traces such as artifacts and works of art, but their deeper meaning concerns the human capability to signify. The phrase “signs of man”, at its fundamental level, points therefore to the realm of the universality of meaning rather than of perceivable particulars; Ricoeur argues that “in the *sign* dwells the transcendence of the *λόγος* of man”⁸³. The “signs of man” themselves convey the idea of what it means to be properly human.

Λόγος – understood by the Greeks both as a “word” and an ontologically constituting “principle” – fills nature with significations and thus recreates it as language. Ricoeur maintains, however, that the human unity in *λόγος* is gathered only in the difference of *λέγειν*. The distinction between *λόγος* and *λέγειν*, or between the principal unity in language and the multitude of human discourse(s), leads

⁸⁰ Ibid.

⁸¹ Ibid., 49 (31).

⁸² Ibid., 85 (67–68). Italics added.

⁸³ Ibid., 46 (28). Italics added.

Ricoeur to argue that “the unity of humanity is realized nowhere else than in the movement of communication”⁸⁴. In other words, the idea of humanity is essentially communicative, since its practical function is unification – or sharing (Lat. *communicare*) – in meaning: “From the very first word I designate the self-identity of the signified, [that is,] the meaning-unity which another discourse of mine will be able to recapture and which the discourse of another person will be able to catch hold of in flight and return to me in a dialogue”⁸⁵. Communication, in brief, is the coming of the idea in human discourse; the idea of humanity is brought about *as* discourse. Ricoeur maintains, therefore, that “discourse is the human destination”⁸⁶. Discursive action, in other words, is necessary for the humanity of a human being. Consequently, a human subject is “a plural and collective unity in which the unity of destination and the difference of destinies are to be understood through each other”⁸⁷. Even though a human subject engages in situated discourses – an embodied subject’s openness is limited – they are still discourses that find their unity in the very communicating of the idea of humanity. In summary, then, the human world of significations that is unified in *λόγος* is both my origin and my destination, my *ἀρχή* and my *τέλος* as a human subject.

Not forgetting the *βίος*–*λόγος* conflict to which a subject is primordially bound, the discussion of *λόγος* compels us to summarize that Ricoeur understands a human being as a “mediator of the reality outside of himself,” or as “the Joy of Yes in the sadness of the finite”⁸⁸. The human task is to bring about and share significations, thus transcending the natural world, but to do this as a situated being who partakes in life. Even though the principle of *λόγος* unifies the human under one idea, the reality of *λέγειν* already points to the human condition as situated – the

⁸⁴ Ibid., 154 (138). Ricoeur also maintains in *Fallible Man* that “in being born I enter into the world of language that precedes me and envelops me”. Ibid., 45 (27).

⁸⁵ Ibid., 46 (28).

⁸⁶ Ibid., 159 (143).

⁸⁷ Ibid., 154 (138).

⁸⁸ Ibid., 156 (140).

“disproportion of *βίος* and *λόγος*”⁸⁹ cannot be overcome in a subject himself. “In himself and for himself man remains torn,” Ricoeur concludes.⁹⁰

Alluding to Kant’s transcendental project in the first *Critique*, and also to the artistic genius in the third, Ricoeur argues, however, that the fundamental human disproportion between *βίος* and *λόγος* finds its external resolution in meaningful *objects* – that is, when *λόγος* determines *βίος* in the object as meaning-unity: “The synthesis of the object is the silent synthesis of Saying and of Appearing, but *in* the thing itself, on the object”⁹¹. These determinate objects have therefore also the function of becoming means for human self-reflection, especially in those highly expressive forms that extend the notion of an object from things to quasi-material ideas (such as laws or poems in books; they comprise worth and work): “Man (...) projects these »means« outside of himself. He projects them in works (*dans des oeuvres*) the works of the artisan, of the artist, of the legislator, of the educator. These monuments and institutions extend the synthesis of the thing. The thing was *understood* in the unity of Saying and Seeing; the work is *made* in the unity of Sense and Matter, of Worth and Work. Man, artisan, legislator, educator, is for himself incarnated because the Idea is in itself materialized”⁹².

Put differently, by work the Idea pertaining to *λόγος* assumes a (quasi-)material appearance, rendering it objectifiable, and consequently also suitable as a means for self-reflection. Ricoeur argues seemingly in contrast with Heidegger, who, despite the notion of being-with (*Mitsein*), did not regard cultural objects as primary to Dasein’s constitution⁹³ – that a human subject becomes aware of his own constitution

⁸⁹ Ibid., 148 (132). Cf. also Ibid., 157 (141).

⁹⁰ Ibid., 157 (141).

⁹¹ Ibid., 156 (140).

⁹² Ibid., 157 (141).

⁹³ In the *Origin*, for example, Heidegger contrasts his understanding of art as “the spring that leaps to the [alethic] truth of what is, in the work,” and a cultural understanding of art that reduces it merely to a “commonplace cultural appearance”. Heidegger’s criticism relates to his objection of such conceptions of art that consider

only by this externally mediated resolution in meaningful objects, that is, in works, or the “signs of man”, that convey the idea of humanity precisely as cultural testimonies.⁹⁴

It is feasible to argue that Ricoeur reaffirms rather than rejects the centrality of *λόγος* by utilizing the notion of an object. Ricoeur’s willingness to maintain an indirect connection to *βίος* through the external mediation is understandable, however, because he stresses heavily a subject’s living, or concrete, experience of being in an unsurpassable internal conflict. Still, the notion of being an embodied subject is only implied by the notions of work and object; Ricoeur connects these notions with *λόγος* rather than *βίος*. Ricoeur maintains explicitly that the “works of the mind or wit”, of which art and literature are prime examples, are the “true objects,” the most authentic expressions of human capability, because they demonstrate and communicate the idea of humanity: “»Works« of art and literature, and, in general, works of the mind (*les oeuvres de l’esprit*), insofar as they not merely mirror an environment and an epoch but search out man’s possibilities, are the true »objects« that manifest the abstract universality of the idea of humanity through their concrete universality”⁹⁵.

To reiterate Ricoeur’s position, the “works” of art and literature are concrete because as “objects” they are (quasi-)material manifestations, but they are also universal because as essentially non-material they communicate the *λόγος*-idea as direct outcomings of the human spirit, which creates by discovering the possible they are thus “highly” expressive and meaningful.⁹⁶

it in terms of subject-object dichotomy: “Art is the setting-into-work of truth. In this proposition an essential ambiguity is hidden, in which truth is at once the subject and the object of the setting. But subject and object are unsuitable names here. They keep us from thinking precisely this ambiguous nature, a task that no longer belongs to this consideration, [namely, that art lets truth originate]”. Cf. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, op. cit., 27, 65–66 (40, 74–75).

⁹⁴ P. Ricoeur, *L’homme faillible*, op. cit., 140 (123–124).

⁹⁵ *Ibid.*, 139 (123).

⁹⁶ Cf. *Ibid.*, 76–77 (59–60).

6. WORK: RICOEUR'S DIALECTICS OF DISCOVERING INTERPRETATION

After our analysis that culminates in *les oeuvres de l'esprit* the “works” of art and literature as authentic objects, the poetic is only one step away. I opened the Ricoeur discussion with brief remarks of *On Interpretation*, that is, by introducing the relations between objects, works, the signs of man (such as art), and poetics. The subsequent analysis of Ricoeur’s early works, however, enriched these preliminary remarks, which only set the stage for the examination of Ricoeur’s conception of art’s work in contrast to that of Heidegger. The final remarks concerning Ricoeur’s poetics had to wait until the *βίος-λόγος* conflict was sufficiently fleshed out and the connection between art and the *λόγος*-idea was made clear.

It is necessary to expand the examination, therefore, and clarify the assertion that for Ricoeur the “works” of art and literature are essentially poetic. If Heidegger’s understanding of art was onto-poetic, and the notion of work as work consequently trivialized, does the same threaten Ricoeur’s comprehension of work? In light of Ricoeur’s texts, that remains a real possibility. For example, Ricoeur argues in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary* that poetry (*la poésie*) is “the art of conjuring up the world as created” as well as it is “the order of creation”⁹⁷. Poetics, if anything, is “suitable to the new realities that need to be discovered”⁹⁸ for us to find ourselves as capable human beings – Ricoeur refers to it therefore as “the poetics of freedom” (*la poétique de la liberté*)⁹⁹, but also as “a poetics of being” (*une ‘poétique’ de l’être*)¹⁰⁰. For these reasons, I conclude this examination by returning to the notion of poetics that in Heidegger’s case seemed to overtake the notion of work; my final question is whether the same concerns Ricoeur.

⁹⁷ P. Ricoeur, *Le volontaire et l'involontaire*, op. cit., 32 (30).

⁹⁸ *Ibid.*, 32 (30).

⁹⁹ *Ibid.*, 34 (32).

¹⁰⁰ *Ibid.*, 443 (471).

First, Ricoeur conceives poetics as the restorative discovery of meaning. Aided by imagination, defined as “an indispensable mode of the investigation of the possible”¹⁰¹, poetics frees us from the brute nature to the realm of possible – Ricoeur argues that it effectuates re-discovery and divination: “To understand a poem means for the reader to overcome in turn the fortuitous appearance and to rediscover, not necessarily by understanding but by poetic sensitivity, the »spirit of the song beneath the text which leads divination from here to there«, the network of relations and correspondences which constitute the »glitter beneath the surface« in the poem”¹⁰².

To sum up Ricoeur’s poetics in *The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, the poetic imagination – and the images it produces in poems as “works of the spirit” – revolutionizes the conception of being a subject by introducing the idea of transcendence in presence¹⁰³.

Elaborating this poetics further in *The Symbolism of Evil*, Ricoeur clarifies that imagination should be distinguished from an image as “a function of absence”¹⁰⁴. If an image is “an annulment of real in an imaginary unreal” and concomitantly understood as “the model of a portrait of the absent”, an image-representation is reduced to reproduction¹⁰⁵. For Ricoeur, a poetic image is “much closer to a *verb* than to a portrait”¹⁰⁶ – a poetic image is productive; it makes and introduces the world as renewed. Sharing Gaston Bachelard’s views, *The Symbolism of Evil* also maintains that a poetic image “puts us at the origin of the speaking being (*l’être parlant*); it becomes a new being of our language, it expresses us in making us that which it expresses”¹⁰⁷. Instead of only reproducing meanings, the poetic expression seeks new ways of describing the living human experience of being – the concrete hu-

¹⁰¹ P. Ricoeur, *L’homme faillible*, op. cit., 161 (145).

¹⁰² P. Ricoeur, *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, op. cit., 380–381 (405).

¹⁰³ Cf. *Ibid.*, 456 (486).

¹⁰⁴ P. Ricoeur, *La symbolique du mal*, op. cit., 20 (13).

¹⁰⁵ *Ibid.*, 20 (13).

¹⁰⁶ *Ibid.* Italics added.

¹⁰⁷ *Ibid.*

man existence. Ricoeur concludes that the poetic shows us “expressivity in its nascent state”¹⁰⁸. The poetic makes; it creates by discovering. Despite their differences, Ricoeur’s elucidation of *ποίησις* resembles Heidegger’s convictions.

On Interpretation, which repeats Bachelard’s assertion¹⁰⁹, summarizes Ricoeur’s poetics by defining the “mytho-poetic core of imagination” in relation to “the Discourse as Revelation”¹¹⁰. The poetic is played out as discourse, Ricoeur argues; it is “the element in which the advancement of meaning occurs”¹¹¹ – in a literally radical sense. Ricoeur does not allude to mere literary fantasies but to the “new” reality of the real, that is, to a complete “coming to be” in poetic reflection. As Ricoeur explains later in *The Living Metaphor* (1975), which yet again uses Bachelard’s words¹¹², the poetic discourse differs from a speculative one by bringing to language “a pre-objective world in which we find ourselves already rooted, but in which we also project our innermost possibilities”¹¹³. In short, Ricoeur argues that the poetic discourse reveals our being-in-the-world while, however, being also “our work” as a manifestation of human possibilities.

The poetic discovers by revealing the world of both *βίος* and *λόγος*. Truly, then, the poetic expression is “the becoming of our being”¹¹⁴, as both Ricoeur and Heidegger maintain. It opens a subject to the entirety of his or her being: in being, among beings. From this poetic viewpoint, the real, *βίος*, is the possibility for the possible, *λόγος* (“the world grounds itself on the earth, and earth juts through world,” Heidegger formulates)¹¹⁵. Thus inverting the order of belonging, Ricoeur also argues that only in light of *λόγος* is there *βίος* – again, Ricoeur’s

¹⁰⁸ Ibid., 21 (14).

¹⁰⁹ Cf. P. Ricoeur, *De l’interprétation: essai sur Freud*, op. cit., 24–25 (15–16).

¹¹⁰ Ibid., 43–44 (35–36).

¹¹¹ Ibid., 522 (543).

¹¹² P. Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive*, Seuil, Paris 1975, 272 (214–215).

¹¹³ Ibid., 387 (306).

¹¹⁴ Ibid., 272 (215).

¹¹⁵ M. Heidegger, *Der Ursprung des Kunstwerkes*, op. cit., 35 (47).

conception of poetics appears as a close neighbor to that of Heidegger. Stated in Heideggerian terms, the poetic work both sets up a world (viz. *λόγος*) and sets forth the Earth (viz. *βίος*) in “the Open” of this world.

A crucial difference between Heidegger and Ricoeur remains, however. Heidegger’s conception was defined as *onto*-poetics, whereas Ricoeur insisted on focusing on the *mytho*-poetic core of imagination that induces interpretation. When Heidegger maintains that art is completely determined “only in regard to the question of *Being*”¹¹⁶, Ricoeur examines art’s relation to work and signs, the meaning of which “remains doubtful and revocable”¹¹⁷. The revealing reflection, Ricoeur argues, is always interpretation, also in the case of poetic discoveries. Instead of aiming directly at disclosing Being’s being in beings, Ricoeur maintains a critical – yet respectful – distance to the notion of Being altogether.

The poetic truth that reveals, Ricoeur argues in *The Living Metaphor*, is a tensional one; the poetic truth consists of both poetic affirmation and speculative distanciation. At best, from both poetic “is” and speculative “is not,” the interpretative discourse reaches to “is as”; it is a “mixed”, dialectic discourse. As such, it yet again repeats the primordial *βίος* – *λόγος* conflict as an intralinguistic and reflective battle between “the experience of belonging as a whole and the power of distanciation that opens up the space of speculative thought”¹¹⁸. Having confronted this “polysemy of being” in the last pages of *The Living Metaphore*, which also problematize Heidegger’s *Ereignis*¹¹⁹, Ricoeur concludes that “philosophy confirms that thinking is not poeticizing”¹²⁰. The immediate understanding of Being has been lost, and a new comprehension of being in being is achievable only in interpretation that is placed in the intersection of poetic and speculative.

¹¹⁶ Ibid., 73 (85).

¹¹⁷ P. Ricoeur, *De l’interprétation: essai sur Freud*, op. cit., 54 (46).

¹¹⁸ P. Ricoeur, *La métaphore vive*, op. cit., 399 (313).

¹¹⁹ Ricoeur defines Heidegger’s philosophy as “an attempt and temptation that cannot be ignored”. Cf. Ibid., 393–399 (309–313).

¹²⁰ Ibid., 395 (311).

The poetic “preserves the experience of belonging that places man in discourse and discourse in being,” Ricoeur argues, but only when aided by the speculative that articulates this experience¹²¹.

Finally, then, the notion of work. Does it retain its status in Ricoeur’s philosophy of the poetic, or is it lost in the unceasing battle between life and thought? Even though the discussion has seemingly moved away from the “signs of man” to productive imagination, and from the “highly expressive” works of art and literature to the dialectic of “mixed discourses”, the notion of *les oeuvres de l’esprit* is even more relevant to these final remarks than to the previous sections of this essay. In short, then: Yes, the human works are meaningful objects necessary for a subject’s self-reflection. The highly expressive works of art as (quasi-)material works in the external world function as indications of human capabilities. The discussion of *λόγος* and the universality of meaning pointed out, however, that the capability to signify, or to give a personally pertinent existential meaning to these works, is even more significant. This opening led us to the realm of the proper works of the mind: to the realm of communication, discursive action, the poetic discovery of the possible, and finally to reflection, or to “reappropriating the act of existing” that we deploy in works¹²².

Admittedly, the works of *l’esprit* are poetic because they create the possible by discovering it in the very act of re-appropriation. “To understand a poem”, or to reflect the richness of a poem’s meanings, is to “rediscover the spirit of the song beneath the text which leads divination from here to there”¹²³. According to Ricoeur, however, this revealing rediscovery is only possible in interpretation that resorts to the speculative, and only as such roots a person to being by articulating this belongingness: “reflection must become [poetico-speculative] interpretation because I cannot grasp the act of existing except in signs scattered in the world”¹²⁴. A cultural sign – a poem or a painting, for

¹²¹ Ibid., 398 (313).

¹²² Cf. P. Ricoeur, *De l’interprétation: essai sur Freud*, op. cit., 54 (46).

¹²³ P. Ricoeur, *Le volontaire et l’involontaire*, op. cit., 380–381 (405).

¹²⁴ P. Ricoeur, *De l’interprétation: essai sur Freud*, op. cit., 54 (46). Italics added.

example – that conveys a meaning as a work is enriched by this work of the human mind that enlivens it by articulating its significance to a person's existence in his hereness and to his self-understanding as a capable human being; this is the essence of re-appropriation.

In summary, then, the unceasing *art of interpretation* is the ultimate work of the mind that continuously knits together the internal and the external, the speculative and the poetic, and the meaning and the world, while delicately voicing a person's existence to him or her as being in being, and communicating the mode of his or her existence as a capable human being. This poetico-speculative disclosure, I maintain, is the most authentic *l'oeuvre de l'esprit* that Ricoeur's philosophy brings forth: Revelation in Interpretation. In contrast to Heidegger's ontological conception of *ἔργον*, in which Being is at poetic work, the reflective work of interpretation – a true *ἔργον τοῦ ἀνθρώπου*¹²⁵ – grounds the person as a capable human being in giving him or her in poetico-speculative discourse a true horizon of humanity within which existential re-appropriation exults.

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¹²⁵ Cf. Aristotle, *Nicomachean Ethics*, in: *The Complete Works*, Bollingen Series LXXI, vol. 2., PastMasters Database, 1984, 1097b22–28, 1177a18–24, 1179a24–25.

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