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From Philosopher to Network. Using Digital Traces for Understanding Paul Ricoeur’s Legacy

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Abstract

What is the difference between a researcher in philosophy and a philosopher? There are two kinds of answer that we can give to this question. We can say that the difference lies in a sort of internal quality; or, as the authors of this paper do, we can argue that a philosopher would not be a philosopher without the intervention of an ensemble of social actors such as universities, departments, funding, colleagues, editors, journals, media, and so on. In the first section, referring to actor-network theory (ANT), the authors define the philosopher as a Leviathan, i.e. a macro-actor that became macro- not thanks to his/her essence, but because he/she succeeded in translating the interests of other actors. In the second section, it is introduced the notion of digital traces, and the homology between ANT and the image of the social reality we can obtain from a process of extraction, treatment, and (visual) restitution of digital traces. In particular, the authors stress the potential of a digital traces-based scientometric for studying actor-networks related to the academic world, but also its limit. In the third section, the specific case of the actor-networks related to philosopher Paul Ricoeur is considered. First, on the basis of a scientometric analysis of the digital traces contained in the bibliographic database Scopus, and secondly by extending the exploration to digital traces available on the Web via web mapping. In the conclusion, the authors affirm that the merit of their digital hermeneutics consists in bringing forward a «world of the text» which is probably less romantic, but certainly more authentic than the «world of the text» to which Ricoeur has often referred to.

Introduction

What is the difference between a common researcher in philosophy and a «true» philosopher? Why does a philosopher have (alive or dead) so much influence beyond his/her discipline in the public sphere, while a researcher struggles to make his or her voice heard, isolated in the department office of his or her provincial university? Why is it that a philosopher is widely cited, while a researcher has a hard time gathering a few citations in the course of a lifetime?

Let's consider the case of Heidegger. By using Google Ngram Viewer, we can easily see how this author has dominated the intellectual debate in the twentieth century, compared with some of his German (Cassirer, Husserl, Jaspers, Natorp, Scheler) and non-German (Russel, Wittgenstein, Sartre) contemporaries¹. Incidentally, Cassirer & Co. are philosophers and not researchers. In fact,

¹ <https://books.google.com/ngrams>. Google Ngram Viewer is «an online search engine that charts frequencies of any set of comma-delimited search strings using a yearly count of n -grams found in sources printed between 1500 and 2008 in Google's text corpora in American English, British English, French, German, Spanish, Russian, Hebrew, or Chinese».

most of the researchers' works and certainly all the interest in them has simply disappeared. The history of the world is the slaughterhouse of the world, reads a famous Hegelian aphorism; and of literature, F. Moretti has stressed². Here we affirm that the same also holds true for philosophy.

Even compared to more recent authors such as Derrida, Deleuze, and Ricoeur, Heidegger is the one who rules. Interestingly, Foucault is the only contemporary philosopher exceeding Heidegger, an overtaking that happened in 1991. Who knows what the philosopher of the Black Forrest, the «shepherd of Being», would say about the fact that a homosexual, concerned with madness, prisons, and sexuality raises more interest than him. He would presumably argue that it is «idle chatter», although it will be probably the chatter itself, the one which is made in these days about his *Black Notes*, that will save him. Let's also consider the great success of *Being and Time*, especially after 1960, which surpasses, according to the analytics of Google Ngram Viewer, that of all other Heidegger's publications, and that of all the books of his and our contemporaries we have cited. In this case, it is noteworthy that none of Foucault's published texts is comparable to *Being and Time*. Is it maybe because Foucault is much cited but much less read?

There are two kinds of answer that we can give to these questions. We can say that the difference between a philosopher and a researcher, between the celebrity status of the former and the indifference for the latter, depends on a sort of internal quality. To put it simply, the philosopher is better than the researcher. It might sound a little bit rude, but we could say that a lot of compost is required in order to have a single beautiful flower. Heidegger is the flower of his generation and *Being and Time* is the flower of his production, the result of all the compost produced during the twenties at the Universities of Freiburg and Marburg. Let's then leave to some boring historian of philosophy the dirty task of digging with his or her hands into the compost that made this flower grow, looking for the deepest roots -- the genesis of the work or the idea that has inspired a concept. The work of an historian of philosophy often consists precisely of demonstrating that a certain little known text has not yet been studied enough, and that in reality it *deserves* more attention, and it *merits* to be received in the high ranks of philosophers. How many Ph.D. theses have been written with this intention?

See https://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Google_Ngram_Viewer. Accessed on February 24, 2016. The analysis here is only about the text corpora in English. We were surprised to observe that even in the text corpora in French, despite all the Husserlianism of French philosophy, Heidegger is cited more than Husserl. Husserl dominated over Heidegger only before 1933, between 1936 and 1943, and between 1954 and 1962. These observations deserve a deep analysis that we are not going to undertake in this context.

² F. Moretti, *The Slaughterhouse of Literature*, in «Modern Language Quarterly» 61(1) (2000), pp. 207-227, p. 207.

But the truth is that in the coming generations (if philosophy were to survive as a discipline) nobody or very few will remember Cassirer & Co., while Heidegger will be representative of his time as Plato and Aristotle are representative of theirs. The history of philosophy (which does not correspond to the one described by the historians of philosophy) remembers the winners and cruelly forgets the losers. A philosopher is a philosopher because he or she is the *crème de la crème* of his/her time, because he/she has discovered «a “specific device” of exceptional visibility and appeal»³.

In this context, however, we want to tell another story, certainly tendentious, but not more than the one we have just told. More than thirty years ago, on the basis of Arthur Danto’s insights, Howard S. Becker highlighted the social nature of the artwork, i.e. the fact that an artwork results from the interplay among several actants (the artist, but also galleries, art critics, museums, media, public, etc.)⁴. Needless to say that it has represented a heavy blow for all who used to believe in the «aura» of the artwork. In a similar fashion, one might say that a philosopher would not be a philosopher without the intervention of all related actants, such as universities, faculties, funding, scholars, publishing, journals, media, conferences, associations, public, colleagues, students, etc. After all, our perspective brings a little bit of justice to all «true» philosophers that, for some reasons, have been forgotten, like Benjamin’s angel of history, whose face is turned towards the past: «where we perceive a chain of events, he sees one single catastrophe which keeps piling wreckage upon wreckage and hurls it in front of his feet». In sum, we argue that the philosopher’s «inner» properties are agents among others that when combined together contribute towards making a philosopher more than a researcher.

1. The philosopher dies, the network returns

Our perspective on philosophy here is borrowed from Bruno Latour’s version of the actor-network theory (ANT). According to a general «principle of symmetry», in ANT, relations are privileged over substances, and no essential distinction can be made among beings. There are, we believe, several reasons to disagree with Latour’s ANT. We can, for instance, accuse Latour of being too relational⁵. We have suggested, for instance, the possibility to advance a hermeneutic, and specifically Ricoeurian, critique to ANT⁶. For us, to account for (social) reality as a network (i.e.

³ F. Moretti, *The Slaughterhouse of Literature*, p. 212.

⁴ H. S. Becker, *Art Worlds*, University of California Press, Berkeley and Los Angeles 2008.

⁵ G. Harmann, *Prince of Networks. Bruno Latour and Metaphysics*, re.press, Melbourne 2009.

⁶ See, for instance, A. Romele, *Herméneutique du digital. Les limites techniques de l’interprétation*, in «Etudes Digitales» 1(1) (2016), forthcoming.

nodes plus edges) is not enough; one must also be able to recognize different types of nodes and relationships⁷. In other words, putting together ANT and hermeneutics is to combine, according to us, multiplicity and multidimensionality. ANT sees the (social) reality as a flatland; hermeneutics, by contrast, makes the differences appear in altitude. .

Latour himself has recently criticized some exaggerations of ANT: «this theory played a critical role in dissolving overly narrow notions of institution, in making it possible to follow the liaisons between humans and nonhumans, and especially in transforming the notion of “the social” and society into a general principle of association [...] And yet, we understand this now, this method has retained some of the limitations of critical thought: the vocabulary is liberating, but too limited to distinguish the values to which the informants cling so doggedly»⁸. We all agree on this point, then. But we also agree on the idea that ANT still represents a powerful intellectual tool for approaching the social nature of technological and cultural artifacts; hence its consequences must be explored all the way down, before looking for the way up. This is also the posture that we will assume in the next paragraph about the use of digital traces: several researchers, especially in philosophy, do not take enough time for considering the theoretical challenge that digital traceability poses to old philosophical notions: subject, substance, responsibility, merit, guilt, etc.

According to ANT, what is the difference between a philosopher and a researcher in philosophy? A philosopher is the one who has inverted the force of attraction, the one who draws more attention to himself or herself rather than the attention he or she pays to others (there are, of course, different degrees in this inversion of forces; the researcher and the philosopher are at different points on the same line). To put it a little bit differently, the philosopher is a Leviathan, a macro-actor who became macro not because of his or her essence (in the exaggeration of ANT, there is no intrinsic difference between micro and macro-actors. In our more temperate version, such a difference is an element among others), but because he or she succeeded in translating the interests of other actors. «Translation» refers in ANT to «all the negotiations, intrigues, calculations, acts of persuasion and violence, thanks to which an actor or force takes, or causes to be conferred on itself, authority to speak or act on behalf of another actor or force»⁹. The central position of the macro-actor is not at

⁷ N. S. Contractor, P. R. Monge, and P. M. Leonardi, *Multidimensional Networks and the Dynamics of Sociomateriality: Bringing Technology Inside the Network*, in «International Journal of Communication» 5 (2011), pp. 682–720.

⁸ B. Latour, *An Inquiry Into the Modes of Existence*, Harvard University Press, Cambridge MA 2013, p. 64.

⁹ M. Callon, and B. Latour, *Unscrewing the Big Leviathan; or How Actors Macrostructure Society, and How Sociologists Help Them to Do So?* in K. Knorr and A. Cicourel (eds.), *Advances in Social Theory and Methodology*, Routledge and Kegan Paul, London, 1981, pp. 277-303, p. 278.

risk, because the Leviathan is seated on «black boxes»: «to build a Leviathan it is necessary to enroll a *little more* than relationships, alliances and friendships. An actor grows with the number of relations he or she can put, as we say, in black boxes. A black box contains that which no longer needs to be reconsidered, those things whose contents have become a matter of indifference»¹⁰. The emergence of a macro-actor, then, is inversely proportional to the evidence of the network that has initially made it. This is probably the reason why we tend to attribute an aura to an artwork or to a philosopher. The more a philosopher becomes a philosopher, the more his or her role is seen as *legitimate, deserved, natural, and necessary*.

Now, what happens when the Leviathan dies? Does the network disappear? Not at all. The network is instead maintained by its actants, and new actants arrive. But the network, formerly darkened by the impression of an aura, suddenly becomes visible. To paraphrase one of Ricoeur's most popular sentences, we can say the philosopher dies, the network returns.. Such a network is not static because as long as as the throne is empty, several pretenders come forward. In the meanwhile, as shown in *figure 1*, the king's (second) body (his or her works) is dismembered. Its parts (the keywords) become yearned symbols of honor, prestige, and recognition among the members of the network.

¹⁰ M. Callon, and B. Latour, *Unscrewing the Big Leviathan*, pp. 284-285.

2. Digital Traces

As defined by B. Bachimont in the article published in this issue, digital trace is the status of a digital object after the passage of a being, the act of an entity or the completion of a process. A digital trace can be voluntary (message), involuntary (mark) or provoked (measure). Conceptually, we can distinguish between a phenomenological and a pragmatic perspective on (digital) traces.

In phenomenology, the concept refers to the effort of *maintaining* the ontological distance between the facts and their (digital) representations¹². According to Levinas, for instance, a trace is not a sign like any other. It is certainly possible to use a trace as a sign: a detective examines everything in the area where a crime took place; a hunter follow the traces of a game; a historian studies the vestiges of an ancient civilization in order to get in touch with their world. Yet, according to him, «a trace in the strict sense disturbs the order of the world»; «only a being that transcends the world can leave a trace. A trace is a presence of that which properly speaking has never been there, of what is always past»¹³. According to Derrida (whose attitude here is very close to the general critique he made to Levinas's approach in *Violence and Metaphysics*), trace does not break with ontology, but rather is the break (the difference) that constitutes the structure of being itself. The history of metaphysics, he argues, is the history of the reduction of the trace, which is the absence of presence¹⁴. Finally, in Ricoeur, the trace (a concept he developed in the last volume of *Time and Narrative* and in *Memory, History, Forgetting*) is already at the frontier between ontology and epistemology. And this probably explains the surprising success of his reflections in the current debate on digital traces¹⁵. For him, a written trace is the point of articulation between the inner time (the veracity of memory) and the social time (the truth of history)¹⁶.

In pragmatism, the concept of trace indicates the possibility of *recovering*, at least partially, the epistemological distance between the representamen and the represented. Peirce famously

¹² For a phenomenological reflection on digital traces, see F.-D. Sebbah, *Traces numériques. Plus ou moins de fantôme(s)?*, in C. Larssonneur, A. Regnauld, P. Cassou-Noguès, and S. Touiza (eds.), *Le sujet digital*, Les presses du réel, Paris 2015, pp. 114-126.

¹³ E. Levinas, *The Trace of the Other*, in M. Taylor (ed.), *Deconstruction in Context*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1986, pp. 345-359, p. 358.

¹⁴ J. Derrida, *Of Grammatology*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1997, p. 71.

¹⁵ See A. Serres, *Quelle(s) problématique(s) de la trace?*, *Texte d'une communication prononcée lors du séminaire du CERCOR (actuellement CERSIC), le 13 Décembre 2002*, http://archivesic.ccsd.cnrs.fr/sic_00001397/document. Accessed on February 5, 2016.

¹⁶ O. Abel, *The Trace as Answer and as Question*, <http://olivierabel.fr/ricoeur/the-trace-as-answer-and-as-question.php>. Accessed on February 7, 2016.

distinguished between signs the indexes, icons, and symbols. He defined indexes as signs whose relation to their objects consists in a correspondence in fact. The most well-known example is that of the weathercock: «a weathercock is an index of the direction of the wind; because in the first place it really takes the self-same direction as the wind, so that there is a real connection between them, and in the second place we are so constituted that when we see a weathercock pointing in a certain direction it draws our attention to that direction»¹⁷. Other examples of indexes are those, which have been explicitly rejected as traces by Levinas, like the relation between the victim and his or her murder. However, it is not Peirce, but the Italian historian Carlo Ginzburg who proposed to make of indexes (or clues, as he called them) a paradigm for many «soft» sciences¹⁸. And it is precisely in this sense, i.e. for indicating an epistemological process characterized by a certain degree of uncertainty, that the term «digital traces» became popular in communication and media studies, especially in France¹⁹.

Although on several occasions we have assumed a phenomenological perspective on digital traces, in this context we have decided to give them more credit. First, by using them empirically in order to approach the social reality of Paul Ricoeur's legacy, as we are going to do in the next paragraph. Second, by proposing in theory a philosophy which has a strong similarity to a digital traces-based view, as we have done in the previous part of the article. In fact, there is homology between ANT and the image of the social reality we can obtain from a process of collection, treatment, and (visual) restitution of the digital traces (incidentally, does this process entertain any relation with the Ricoeurian notion of threefold mimesis?)²⁰.

In the last few years, ANT has found an important ally in scientometrics for studying actor-networks related to the academic world. Indeed, scientometrics, a discipline started in the sixties by D. de Solla Price²¹, is meant to evaluate the weight and reciprocal role of researchers based on the network of citations. As noted by E. Garfield, use of citation analysis for evaluating scientists has

¹⁷ C. S. Peirce, *Collected Papers*, 2.286.

¹⁸ C. Ginzburg, *Clues: Roots of an Evidential Paradigm*, in *Clues, Myths, and the Historical Methods*, John Hopkins University Press, Baltimore 1989, pp. 96-125.

¹⁹ See, for instance, Y. Jeanneret, *Complexité de la notion de trace*, in B. Galinon-Méléneec (ed.), *L'homme trace. Perspectives anthropologiques des traces contemporaines*, CNRS Editions, Paris 2011, pp. 59-86.

²⁰ On this homology, see B. Latour, P. Jensen, T. Venturini, S. Grauwin, and D. Boullier, *The Whole is Always Smaller Than Its Parts. A Digital Test of Gabriel Tarde's Monads*, in «The British Journal of Sociology» 63(4) (2012), pp. 590-613. For a partial critique of it, see N. Marres, and C. Gerlitz, *Interface Methods. Renegotiating Relations Between Digital Social Research, STS and Sociology*, in «The Sociological Review» 64(1) (2016), pp. 21-46.

²¹ D. de Solla Price, *Networks of Scientific Papers*, in «Science» 149 (1965), pp. 510-515.

raised (and continues to raise) a lot of discussion. Yet, Garfield concludes, «citation rates say something about the contribution made by an individual's work, at least in terms of the utility and interest the rest of the scientific community finds in it»²². In the last few years, the success of scientometrics had mainly been related to its power to generate quantitative metrics to measure scientists' performances. But what is interesting for us is the interpretation of ANT of this technique as a «qualitative scientometrics»²³. Callon et al. underlined the interest of analyzing scholars' texts in order to visualize actor-networks and to map science. Even if this first work focused mainly on the use of co-word analysis as a qualitative scientometric technique for identifying actor-networks in academia, this approach can also be applied to co-citation analysis. In particular, Henry Small showed interest in using maps of science based on citation networks. He said that «[i]n the case of scientific literature, a spatial representation can facilitate our understanding of conceptual relationships and developments»²⁴. More specifically, he stated with respect to patterns emerging through the citation network that they «show how researchers go about embedding their work, both cooperatively and competitively, in the work of prior authors»²⁵. So even if scientometric studies have mainly focused on building indicators such as the impact factor, the eigen factor, the h-index, etc. for comparing and measuring scholars and scientific sectors, scientometric experts have more recently²⁶ appreciated the importance of studying the actor-network's influence on the role of a researcher, for example, through the analysis of co-authorship networks²⁷. In this sense, scientometrics together with ANT can be very useful to our study in order to identify the actants related to an author that contribute to make him/her clearly more important than other contemporary authors. The risk of a scientometric analysis is however that it limits its analysis to those (human) actants, presumably academics who have published scientific papers.

²² E. Garfield, *Is Citation Analysis a Legitimate Evaluation Tool?*, in «Scientometrics» 1(4) (1979), pp. 359–375, p. 372.

²³ M. Callon, J. Law, and A. Rip, *Qualitative scientometrics*, in M. Callon, J. Law and A. Rip, *Mapping the Dynamics of Science and Technology*, Macmillan, London 1986, pp.103-123.

²⁴ H. Small, *Visualizing Science by Citation Mapping*, in «Journal of the American Society for Information Science», 50(9) (1999), pp. 799–813, p. 799.

²⁵ H. Small, *Visualizing Science by Citation Mapping*, p. 800.

²⁶ For the last developments of scientometrics, see L. Leydesdorff, *The Challenge of Scientometrics: The Development, Measurement, and Self-Organization of Scientific Communications*, Universal Publishers, Boca Raton 2001.

²⁷ A. L. Barabási, H. Jeong, Z. Néda, E. Ravasz, A. Schubert, and T. Vicsek, *Evolution of the Social Network of Scientific Collaborations*, in «Physica A: Statistical mechanics and its applications» 311(3) (2002), pp. 590-614; E. Otte and R. Rousseau, *Social network analysis: a powerful strategy, also for the information sciences*, in «Journal of information Science» 28(6) (2002), pp. 441-453.

In this paper, we argue that, in order to unscrew the Leviathan, we cannot limit our analysis to digital traces of scientometric databases such as Scopus or ISI Web of Knowledge²⁸. Surely, as we will see in the following lines, these traces have the advantage to be well formatted, easily (even if expensively) accessible and treatable according to clearly defined methods. We propose however hereto compare the network of (human) actants related to a philosopher built thanks to scientometric traces with the network of (human and nonhuman) actants that can be identified on the basis of digital traces available on the Web. Such traces are more difficult to define and to catch, but they have the big advantage of not being related to a specific sector, such as academia, but rather to be the output of the more general power of traceability of Web-based digital technologies. Considering all this, in the next paragraph, we will take into account the case of the philosopher Paul Ricoeur, whose popularity has particularly increased after his death in 2005, and even more after the decennial of his death in 2015.

3. Paul Ricoeur as an actor-network

In this paragraph, we try to identify the actor-network related to Paul Ricoeur. Firstly on the basis of digital traces contained in a scientometric database (*figure 2*) and secondly, by extending the exploration to digital traces available on the Web (*figure 3*).

Our scientometric analysis is based on Scopus, a bibliographic database containing abstracts and citations for academic journal articles. According to official figures provided by Elsevier²⁹, it covers nearly 22,000 titles from over 5,000 publishers, 24% of which are from the social and human sciences. We looked for the query «Ricoeur OR Ricœur» in the titles, abstracts and keywords of the articles and we could extract all publications categorized in the field human and social sciences, a total of 1172 publications. It is worthwhile to note that the Scopus database also includes numerous publications (279) in the field of hard sciences, notably in medicine and nursing studies that include the words «Ricoeur» or «Ricœur». Yet we believe that these publications are not so representative of the phenomenon that we are studying because if we consider conferences and members of the main associations related to Ricoeur, these disciplines are hardly represented. The corpus of publications considered is distributed between 1966 and today, but the majority of publications (1111) are from the last ten years, after the death of the philosopher. The majority of publications

²⁸ M. E. Falagas, E. I. Pitsouni, G. A. Malietzis, and G. Pappas, *Comparison of PubMed, Scopus, Web of Science, and Google Scholar: Strengths and Weaknesses*, in «The FASEB Journal», 22(2) (2008), pp. 338-342.

²⁹ *Scopus Content Overview*. Scopus Info. Elsevier. <https://www.elsevier.com/solutions/scopus/content>. Accessed on February 18, 2016.

has been published in the following journals: *Philosophy Today* (30), *Studia Phaenomenologica* (28), *Archivio di Filosofia* (23), *Literature and Theology* (21), *Philosophy and Social Criticism* (15), *Revue de Théologie et de Philosophie* (13), *Hts Teologiese Studies Theological Studies* (12), *Filozofia* (11), *Etudes Théologiques et Religieuses* (11), *International Journal of Philosophy and Theology* (10), *Research in Phenomenology* (10). Some important journals as *Etudes Ricoeuriens/Ricoeur Studies* are not included in the Scopus database and consequently will be not considered in our analysis. Publications are produced mainly by authors affiliated with American (234), British (111) and French (106) institutions, but also Canada (68), South Africa (36), Netherlands (34), Germany (33), Australia (32), Belgium (27), and Italy (25).

Considering that our goal is to identify networks of actants related to Ricoeur, we will not perform popular ranked-oriented scientometric analysis such as impact factor or eigen factor in order to privilege an analysis that identifies the actor-network structures inside the corpus, for instance, the network of cited scholars. As a premise, we can note that in the field of philosophy papers are rarely written by more than one author. Philosophy is essentially an individualist discipline where a scholar carries out a personal reflection throughout his or her life by reading other scholars, rather than through collaborative writing with them. For this reason, we preferred to analyze the network of scholars generated by co-citation rather than co-authorship. So, in *figure 2*, each label corresponds to a scholar and the position of labels is determined by co-citations of scholars in the same paper. It means that the closer the names of the authors are, the more they are cited together. We used fractional counting³⁰ in order to limit the influence of articles that receive a lot of citation or that contain a lot of citations. We considered only those authors who have been cited at least 10 times, that is to say, a selection of 374 authors out of 19000 authors included in the overall corpus. The node «P. Ricoeur» has been deleted in order to reduce the egocentric shape of the network. The data treatment has been performed with VOSviewer³¹, a program intended primarily for analyzing bibliometric networks, and visualization has been performed with Gephi³², a software aimed at visualizing networks. This kind of visualization is useful to show at a glance how the papers mentioning Paul Ricoeur are mainly citing philosophers rather than researchers, and how citing in

³⁰ See N. J. Van Eck, and L. Waltman, *Visualizing Bibliometric Networks*, in Y. Ding, R. Rousseau and D. Wolfram (eds.), *Measuring Scholarly Impact: Methods and Practice*, Springer, London 2014, pp. 285-320, p. 307: «Using the fractional counting methodology, giving a citation to a publication always results in a total bibliographic coupling weight of 1, irrespective of the number of other publications that also cite the same publication».

³¹ N. J. Van Eck, and L. Waltman, *Visualizing Bibliometric Networks*, cit.

³² M. Bastian, S. Heymann, and M. Jacomy, *Gephi: an Open Source Software for Exploring and Manipulating Networks*, *ICWSM 8* (2009), pp. 361-362.

philosophy is an activity respecting hierarchies. The centre of the sphere is occupied by some of the Ricoeur's most influential contemporaries, and, in many cases, direct interlocutors and colleagues, such as Derrida, Levinas, Foucault, Habermas, Gadamer, Arendt, Taylor, and Rorty. Philosophers like Heidegger, Nietzsche, Hegel, Husserl, and Kant, who have been important references for Ricoeur, and hence are important references also for his scholars, have a central position, too. Just a little bit farther, we find other relevant philosophers, who however have played a less significant role for Ricoeur (e.g. Adorno, Benjamin, Davidson) or have been significant just during some periods (e.g. Freud, Dilthey). And we start also to find the most important researchers, like Kearney, Grondin, Dosse, Greisch, Ihde, and Abel. Actually, in many of these cases the frontier between the philosopher and the researcher is rather fluid.

The farther an author is from the centre of the sphere, the less he or she counts for Ricoeur and his community. Although several philosophers occupy a marginal role (this is a clear limitation of the methodology, and discriminations between philosophers and researchers at the edges of the sphere must be based on ethnographic analysis), it is also true that no researcher has a central position. It is noteworthy that in *Figure 2* authors are distributed according to specific areas of interest (Ricoeur was a versatile author, whose researches crossed different philosophical currents and different scientific domains): in the northern section of the sphere, we have mainly authors who concentrate on sociology (e.g. Geertz, Giddens, Bourdieu, Bauman); in the southern part, we find authors who focus on religious and ethical topics (e.g. Kierkegaard, Rosenzweig, Marcel, Nussbaum, Marion, Barth); in the eastern part, there are thinkers in hermeneutics, communication, and postphenomenology such as Schleiermacher, Jervolino, Tompson, Vattimo, and Ihde; finally, in the western section, psychology and identity theory seem to rule (e.g. Freud, Mead, Piaget, Parfit, Dennet). Theories and philosophies of language seem to be distributed on the entire surface (e.g. Searle, Wittgenstein, Austin, Kristeva, Todorov, Fodor), maybe because language, with its potential and its limitations, is for Ricoeur the bridge connecting this variety of topics and approaches.

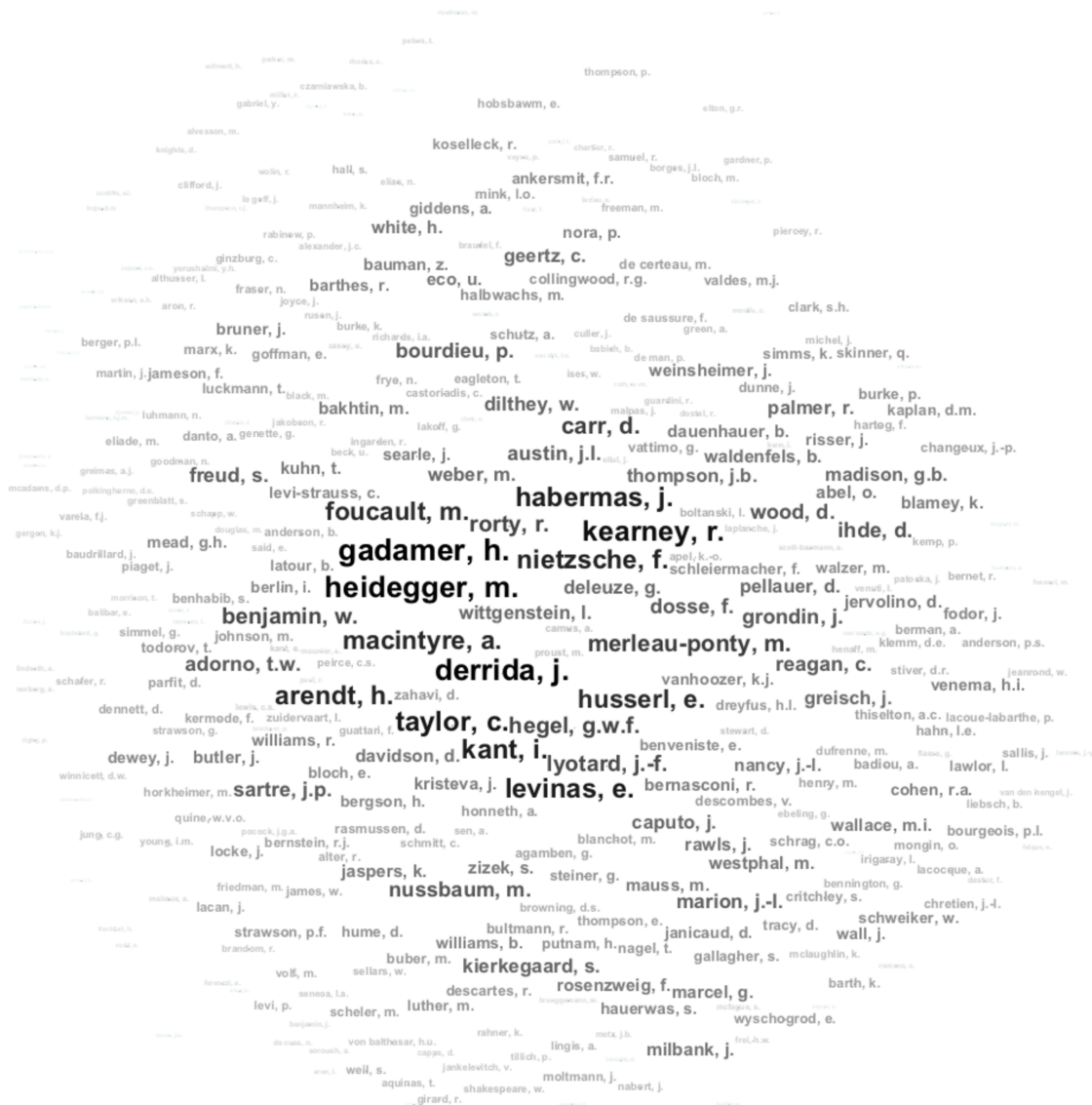


Figure 2. Co-citation network generated by papers mentioning Ricoeur in Scopus (category SHS). Only authors mentioned at least 10 times, excluding Paul Ricoeur. Algorithm: Force Atlas 2. Size and grey level of labels are proportional to the degree.

Scientometric analysis allowed us to explore the network of authors related to Paul Ricoeur. Even if this method has encouraged us to consider Ricoeur as a complex object, it could represent only the academic relations related to him. But our hypothesis is that there is a lot more to be explored. We believe that the «life» of the philosopher after his death goes far beyond the academic sphere, and spills over to other contexts of the social life. In order to investigate Ricoeur’s universe with a wider approach, digital methods have been identified as the most suitable techniques. Here, «digital methods» refer to a series of techniques designed to explore the traces of online interactions as

sources of information on social phenomena. In particular, this study will be based on «web mapping», a method particularly helpful and apt at tracing complex social networks³³. The notion underpinning this method is that hyperlinks can be used as a proxy for social connections. Even though it is very easy to create a hyperlink, it has been repeatedly observed that Web authors tend to be extremely careful in establishing connections. In particular, they prefer to create connections among websites that share their thematic or social focus³⁴. The Web is consequently not randomly and horizontally organized. On the contrary, by linking one discourse to other similar online discourses, the users establish hierarchies and clusters. In our case study, this technique is expected to help us identify the complex network of social actors that have recently interacted around the character and the work of Paul Ricoeur. Thanks to the information retrieved from the digital traces of social action available on the Web, web mapping would provide a more global, interdisciplinary and up-to-date picture of the Paul Ricoeur «object» than the one provided by scientometrics.

Our analysis consisted of two steps. First, we identified the main websites related to Paul Ricoeur. We started from the websites of the Fond Ricoeur and of the Ricoeur Society, then we considered the first fifty results of Google.com, Google.fr and Google.it for the query «Ricoeur». Subsequently, using an automatic crawler (Hyphe of Sciences Po-Paris³⁵), we explored this first list of websites keeping track of all the links that they contain so as to discover other interesting websites. Finally, we selected a corpus of 158 websites. As a general criterion, we did not consider any media and any page dedicated to a specific publication of Ricoeur (such as pages on online book stores or bibliographic databases). Then, we analyzed and visualized the resulting networks using Gephi. This permitted us to identify the specific network topology of social actors related to Paul Ricoeur, illustrating firstly which actants are central and which are peripheral and secondly, if and how websites are gathered into separated clusters. In order to interpret *figure 3*, it is important to know the design rules that have been followed in drawing it. First, the position of the nodes is significant and depends on their connections. The graph is spatialized according to a force-vector

³³ M. Severo, and T. Venturini, *Intangible Cultural Heritage Webs: Comparing National Networks With Digital Methods*, in «New Media & Society», DOI: 1461444814567981.

³⁴ L. A. Adamic, and N. Glance, *The Political Blogosphere and the 2004 US Election: Divided They Blog*, in «Proceedings of the 3rd International Workshop on Link Discovery» (2005), pp. 36-43.

³⁵ M. Jacomy, P. Girard, B. Ooghe-Tabanou, and T. Venturini, *Hyphe, a Curation-Oriented Approach to Web Crawling for the Social Sciences*, working paper, http://www.medialab.sciences-po.fr/publications/Jacomy_Girard_Ooghe_Venturini_Hyphe_ICWSM.pdf. Accessed on February 16, 2016.

algorithm called Force Atlas 2³⁶. Such algorithm works by attributing a repulsive force to nodes and an attractive force to links. Once the algorithm is launched, it changes the disposition of nodes until it reaches the equilibrium that guarantees the best balance of forces. Such equilibrium guarantees that if two nodes are close in the spatialized graph, they are connected to the same set of nodes. So we can suppose that they are thematically or socially related. Second, the size of the nodes (and proportionally the size of labels) is used to rank them. In particular, we have chosen to rank nodes by their «visibility» in the network, computed as the number of links that they receive from other nodes (their «in-degree»). The size of each node is therefore proportional to the number of websites that include a link to it.

Before moving on to the analysis, it must be underlined that even if hyperlinks among websites can be considered as a proxy of social relations, hyperlink networks do not always match the state of offline relationships. First, websites are not always up to date and some (especially new) actants may have no website. Second, hyperlinks in different sections of a website may have different meanings that our method is incapable of distinguishing. Even though web mapping is unable to provide an exhaustive description of the social network related to Paul Ricoeur, it may suggest stimulating discussion ideas that go beyond the analysis of academic dynamics provided by scientometrics. In particular, by observing *figure 3*, we can identify three interesting facts. First, the presence of two main national clusters: web digital traces related to Paul Ricoeur appear divided between the Francophone websites and Anglophone websites. As is known, Paul Ricoeur taught for more than twenty years on both sides of the Atlantic. What is interesting to notice is that while the American Ricoeur Society is clearly surrounded by American and British institutions, the website of the Fonds Ricoeur emerges as a general authority of the graph, bridging between the different national webs. Second, actants identified through web mapping are not only related to academia, but they belong to other social fields. Surely, academic institutions, mainly universities where Ricoeur worked (e.g. University of Chicago, University of Paris 10), emerge as authorities of the graph, yet two other important clusters of actants can be identified. Firstly, we have the numerous editors, both in France and the United States (e.g. Seuil, University of Chicago Press, Harvard University Press) who published the work of the philosopher; secondly, there is the cluster of religious (mainly Protestant) actants (e.g. La Croix, Protestants, Institut Protestant de Théologie) who recall the role that the philosopher played and still plays beyond his discipline. Finally, we

³⁶ M. Jacomy, T. Venturini, S. Heymann, M. Bastian, *ForceAtlas2, a Continuous Graph Layout Algorithm for Handy Network Visualization Designed for the Gephi Software*, in «PLoS ONE» 9(6) (2014), <http://journals.plos.org/plosone/article?id=10.1371/journal.pone.0098679>. Accessed on February 16, 2016.

would like to bring the attention to the fact that human actants did not completely disappear from the scene (e.g. Abel's personal website, Michel and Taylor's institutional personal pages, some academia.edu profiles), and yet they are now a minority surrounded by several nonhuman actants such as academics and non-academics institutions.

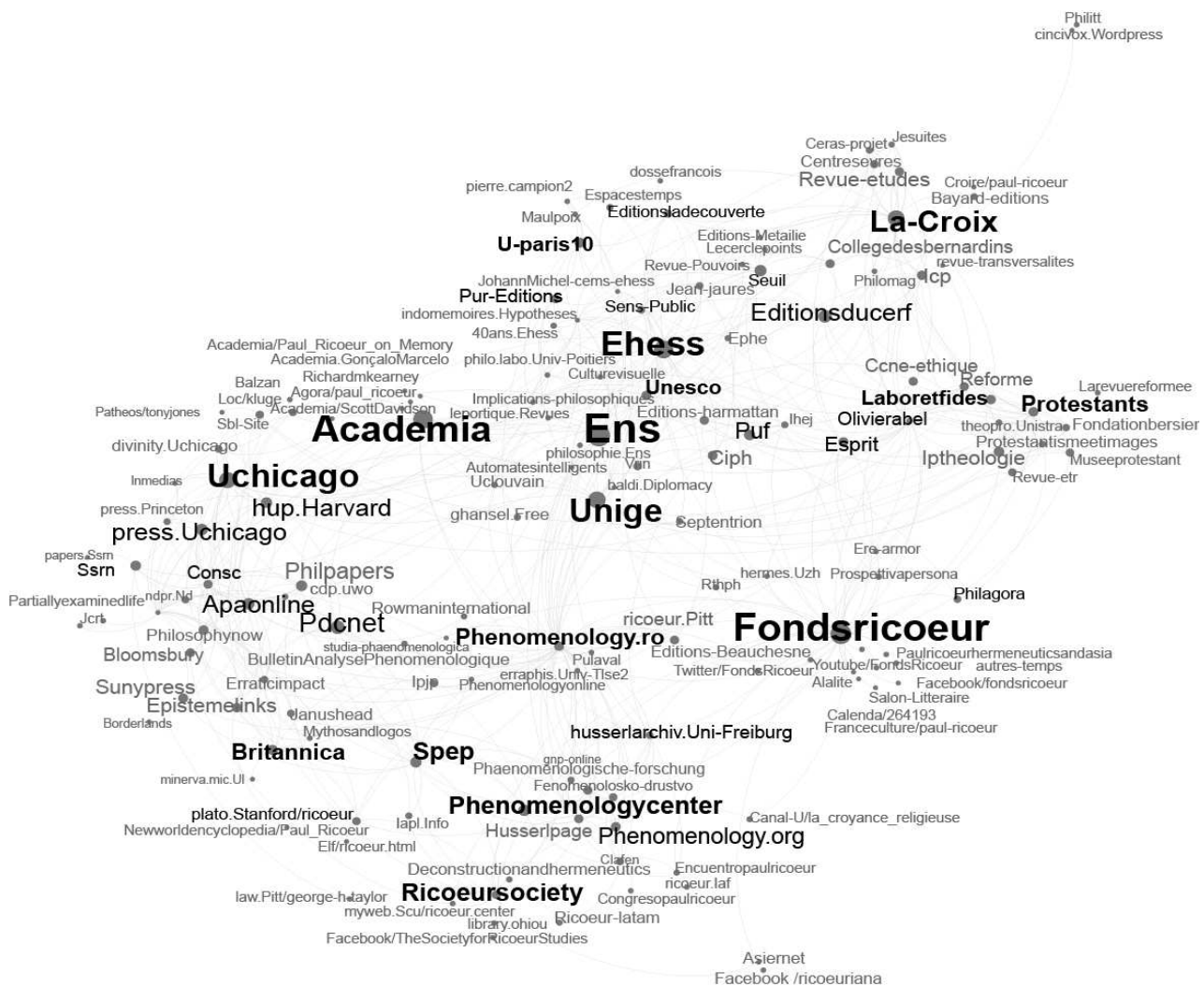


Figure 3. Graph of hyperlinks connecting websites related to Paul Ricoeur (excluding disconnected nodes). Algorithm: Force Atlas 2. Size of labels for websites is proportional to the in-degree.

Conclusion: What Hermeneutics in View?

The great contribution of Ricoeur to the theory of interpretation, his intellectual legacy, has been the effort of going beyond the ruinous alternative (that he attributes to Gadamer³⁷) between truth and methods: «The question is to what extent the work deserves to be called *Truth AND Method*, and whether it ought not to be entitled instead *Truth OR Method*»³⁸. He goes on to explain: «Whence the alternative underlying the very title of Gadamer's work *Truth and Method*: either we adopt the methodological attitude and lose the ontological density of the reality we study, or we adopt the attitude of truth and must then renounce the objectivity of the human sciences»³⁹. On the one hand, with regard to the synchronic analysis of Saussurian structuralists (and the poststructuralist perspectives *à la* Derrida), Ricoeur affirms that the discourse «never exists *for its own sake*, for its own glory, but in all its uses it seeks to bring into language an experience, a way of living in and of Being-in-the-world which precedes it and demands to be said»⁴⁰. On the other hand, regarding the diachronic (evenemential) considerations of Gadamer and the later Heidegger, he stresses that «the testimony to *being as...* cannot, in my opinion, be separated from a detailed study of the referential modes of discourse and requires a properly analytical treatment [...]»⁴¹. Such a mixed approach concerns language and all its forms, texts included. The French philosopher often refers to the truth/ontology of the text as the «world of the text» or «thing of the text»: «[...] the thing of the text is the world it unfolds before itself. And this world, especially with respect to “poetic” and “fictional” literature, takes a *distance* with regard to the everyday reality toward which ordinary discourse is directed»; its property consists of forming and transforming «the reader's beings-a-self in accordance with his or her intention»; hence, «the primary task of a hermeneutics is not to bring about a decision in the reader but first to allow the world of being that is the “thing” of the biblical text to unfold»⁴².

³⁷ For a different perspective on Gadamer's hermeneutics, see M.-A. Valée, *Gadamer et Ricoeur. La conception herméneutique du langage*, PUR, Rennes 2013.

³⁸ P. Ricoeur, *From Text to Action. Essays in Hermeneutics, II*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston, Illinois 1991, p. 71.

³⁹ P. Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 75.

⁴⁰ P. Ricoeur, *From Text to Action*, p. 19.

⁴¹ Ivi, p. 20.

⁴² Ivi, pp. 95-96. In this context, Ricoeur is discussing biblical hermeneutics which, interestingly, represents for him both a specific case and a paradigm for hermeneutics in general.

If the merit of Ricoeur's hermeneutics consists of showing the importance of liberating the world of the text through rigorous textual (we can suppose intratextual, but also intertextual, and paratextual) analysis, the limits of his approach lies, for us, in the rather romantic view he still has of such a world. In other terms, his notion of the world of the text remains deeply influenced by the ontological perspective of Gadamer, according to which hermeneutics ultimately consists of a training for passively accepting, as readers, the truth that the Being might or might not donate us as a gift *through* the text. We can then suppose that in Ricoeur all «detailed study» and «analytical treatment» would inevitably bring to the same outputs⁴³.

Our thesis is that the «distant reading» that we have proposed in this article has brought forward another «world of the text», which is the social context in which Ricoeur and his works occupy a central position (more drastically, such a context exists because Ricoeur existed, and because he wrote, and he has been published)⁴⁴. In this sense, interpretation is not about liberating the authentic spirit that, like in an enchanted forest, inhabit (good) books. Rather, it has to do with the possibility of showing, and eventually interpreting and understanding, the condition of production and, as it has been especially the case here, reception of a text corpus⁴⁵. In this article, we have developed such a material hermeneutics, both empirically and theoretically. Empirically, we have shown the interactions between human actants (academics), and the attraction they have for certain concepts,

⁴³ On these points, see A. Romele, *L'esperienza del verbum in corde. Ovvero l'ineffettività dell'ermeneutica*, Mimesis, Milan 2013.

⁴⁴ F. Moretti, *Distant Reading*, Verso, London 2013. To be precise, Moretti uses network theory in this text only for the internal plot analysis, and not for restituting the world of the text. In their recent article (*Toward a Computational Hermeneutics*, in «Big Data and Society», July-December 2015), J. W. Mohr, R. Wagner-Pacific, and R. L. Breiger argued that the era of Big Data is important because it gives us the opportunity to change the way we formally engage and interpret textual corpora. The new age of computational hermeneutics, they say, provides us with a chance to pursue deeper, subtler and more poetic readings of textual corpora. According to us, these authors are misleading twice: first of all, because they confuse hermeneutics with «close reading»; second of all, because the example they give do not offer any evidence, for us, of the potential of Big Data they announce with great pomp. In fact, they remains at the margins of the «thematic arenas».

⁴⁵ Our hermeneutical approach, then, is somehow closer to P. Szondi's material hermeneutics in *Introduction to Literary Hermeneutics*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2011. We would like to point out, our analyses in *figure 1* and in *figure 2* do not start from Ricoeur's text corpus, but from the ensemble of texts that have been generated by those scholars who have been presumably directly in contact with this corpus. In other words, our analyses are about the world of the text of a corpus of texts that is part of the world of the text of Paul Ricoeur. Whether the world visualized in *figure 3* is still a world of the text, is an open question to which, without any further explication, we want to answer positively (would Ricoeur have any role, would he involve so many social actors, and precisely those actors, if he did not write, and if he did not get published? Maybe yes, but more presumably no).

and certain authors who, in most of cases, have been very important for Ricoeur, too (*figure 1* and *figure 2*). Moreover, we have shown the world that exists beyond these human actants, and that involves universities, publishing, associations, journals etc. (*figure 3*). Theoretically, we have precisely argued that such a world is nothing but the network of social actors that allowed Paul Ricoeur to emerge as a philosopher and to continue to «living up to», and beyond his death. If such an approach can not only be descriptive, but also critical, is a question that we prefer to leave unanswered.