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Chapter 10

Exploring Imagination
with Paul Ricœur

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This chapter examines the particular significance of Paul Ricœur's contribution to a philosophy of imagination.[1] Before Ricœur's hermeneutics, most phenomenological accounts of imagination concentrated on its role as vision, as a special way of *seeing* the world. Husserl described the act of imagining as a "neutralized" mode of seeing, Sartre as an "unrealized" mode of quasi-seeing, and Merleau-Ponty as a dialectical counterpart of the visible—which privileging of the visual is undoubtedly related to the primary role "description" holds in the phenomenological method. With the hermeneutic turn in phenomenology, however, the visible no longer takes precedence over all else: as philosophy moves from description to interpretation, the imagination is considered less in terms of "vision" than in terms of "language." Or, more exactly, imagination is assessed as an indispensable agent in the creation of meaning in and through language—what Ricœur calls "semantic innovation."

The present study analyzes key steps in Ricœur's hermeneutic exploration of imagination—an exploration that is less systematic than episodic in nature. Ricœur's tentative and always provisional probing of a poetic hermeneutic of imagination represents, I maintain, the ultimate, if discreet, agenda of his entire philosophical project. And it is my view that Ricœur's hermeneutic discussion of the imaginative function—from *La Symbolique du mal* (1960) and *La Métaphore vive* (1975), to *Temps et récit* (3 vols., 1983–1985), *Ideology and Utopia* (1986), and *Du texte à l'action* (1986)—represents the most powerful reorientation of a phenomenology of imagining toward a hermeneutics of imagining.

The Linguistic Imagination

Insofar as hermeneutics is concerned with multiple levels of meaning, it is evident that images can no longer be adequately understood in terms of their

immediate *appearance* to consciousness. Replacing the visual model of the image with the verbal, Ricœur affirms the *poetic* role of imagining: its ability to say one thing in terms of another, or to say several things at once, thereby creating something new. The crucial role imagination plays in this process of semantic innovation was to become one of the abiding concerns of Ricœur's later philosophy.

Before proceeding to Ricœur's original contribution to the philosophy of imagination, let us consider his critical summary of the available theories of images. In *Du texte à l'action*, he discusses the often confused nature of modern philosophies of the image, arguing that the radical equivocity at the heart of the imaginative activity has led to a series of rival accounts, located on two opposite axes. On the one hand, theories of the *reproductive* imagination explain the process of imagining in terms of the *object*; think, for example, of Hume's empiricist account of the image as a faded trace of perception (a weakened impression preserved and represented in memory). On the other hand are theories of the *productive* imagination, which explain our imaginative activity in terms of the *subject*, a human consciousness that is fascinated by its own images. Examples of this theory include the German Idealist and Romantic accounts in Kant and Schelling and Sartre's existentialist descriptions in *L'Imaginaire*. But this basic distinction between the reproductive and productive roles of imagination does not resolve the aporetic nature of our inherited understanding of imagining. Ricœur extends the problematic horizons of this debate as follows:

> The productive imagination, and even the reproductive to the extent that it comprises the minimal initiative concerning the evocation of something absent, operates . . . according to whether the subject of imagination is capable or not of assuming a critical consciousness of the difference between the real and the imaginary. The theories of the image here divide up along an axis which is no longer noematic but noetic, and whose variations are regulated by degrees of belief. At one end of the axis, that of a noncritical consciousness, the image is confused with the real, mistaken for the real. This is the power of the error denounced by Pascal; and it is also, *mutatis mutandis*, the *imaginatio* of Spinoza, contaminated by belief for as long as a contrary belief has not dislodged it from its primary position. At the other end of the axis, where the critical distance is fully conscious of itself, imagination is the very instrument of the critique of reality. The transcendental reduction of Husserl, as a neutralization of existence, is the most complete instance of this. The variations of meaning along this second axis are no less ample than the above. What after all could be in common between the state of *confusion* which characterizes that consciousness which unknown to itself takes for real what for another consciousness is not real, and the *act of distinction* which, highly self-conscious, enables consciousness

> to posit something at a distance from the real and thus produce the alterity at the very heart of existence? Such is the knot of aporias which is revealed by an overview of the ruins which today constitute the theory of imagination. Do these aporias themselves betray a fault in the philosophy of imagination or the structural feature of imagination itself which it would be the task of philosophy to take account of? (Ricœur 1986a: 215–16)

Ricœur appears to answer yes to both parts of the question. The fault of most philosophies of imagination, in other words, has been their failure to develop a properly hermeneutic account of imagining in terms of its most basic structural feature of semantic innovation.

Hermeneutics—the "art of deciphering indirect meanings"—acknowledges the innovative power of imagination. Contra Sartre, who argued in *L'Imaginaire* that imagination was condemned to an "essential poverty" because it was a *negation* of the perceptual world, Ricœur maintains that imagining is a simultaneous juxtaposing of two different worlds, real and unreal, which produces new meaning. This power to transform given meanings into new ones enables one to construe the future as the possible theatre of one's liberty, as a horizon of hope. Thus, the age-old antagonism between will and necessity (or, in Sartre's terms, between *l'imaginaire* and *le réel*) now turns out to be entirely surmountable.

Ricœur's preference for a semantic model of imagination over a visual one makes possible a new appreciation of this properly creative role of imagination. If images are *spoken* before they are *seen*, they can no longer be construed as quasi-material residues of perception (as in empiricism), nor as neutralizations or negations of perception (as eidetic phenomenology tended to believe). For Ricœur, the productive power of imagination is primarily verbal, and the verbal metaphor in poetry epitomizes the way in which imagination conjoins two semantic fields, making what is predicatively impertinent at a literal level into something predicatively pertinent at a new (poetic) level. Or, to use Ricœur's graphic phrase, "Imagination comes into play in that moment when a new meaning emerges from out of the ruins of the literal interpretation" (Ricœur 1986a: 213–19).

Taking up Aristotle's definition of a good metaphor in the *Poetics* (1459a: 4–8) as the apprehension of *similarity*, Ricœur points out that it is not a matter of similarity between already similar ideas but between semantic fields previously considered *dissimilar*. It is the "semantic shock" engendered by the coming together of two different meanings, which produces a *new* meaning. And imagination, Ricœur claims, is precisely this power of metaphorically reconciling opposing meanings, forging an unprecedented semantic pertinence from an old impertinence. So if one wants to say with Wittgenstein,

for example, that imagining is a "seeing-as" (seeing one thing in terms of another), then this is only the case insofar as the linguistic power of conjoining different semantic fields is already at work—at least implicitly.

This is a decisive point. For new meanings to come into being, they must be spoken or uttered in the form of new verbal images. And this requires that the phenomenological account of imagining as *appearance* be supplemented by its hermeneutic account as *meaning*. Imagination can thus be recognized as the act of responding to a demand for new meaning, the demand of emerging realities to *be* by *being said* in new ways. It is a Janus facing in two directions at once, back to the being that is revealed and forward to the language that is revealing. And at the level of language itself it also does double duty, for it produces a text that opens up new horizons of meaning for the reader. The poetic imagination liberates the reader into a free space of possibility, suspending any reference to the immediate world of perception (the author's and the reader's) and thereby disclosing new ways of being in the world (Ricœur 1984b). The function of semantic innovation—which is most proper to imagination—is therefore, most fundamentally, an ontological event. The innovative power of linguistic imagination is no "decorative excess or effusion of subjectivity, but the capacity of language to open up new worlds" (Ricœur 1984b: 44). The function of imagination in poetry or myth is defined accordingly as the "disclosure of unprecedented worlds, an opening onto possible worlds which transcend the limits of our actual world" (45).

A hermeneutic approach to imagination thus differs from a structuralist or existentialist one precisely by this concentration on "the capacity of world-disclosure yielded by texts." In short, hermeneutics is not confined to the *objective* structural analysis of texts, nor to the *subjective* existential analysis of the authors of texts; its primary concern is with the *worlds* that these authors and texts open up (Ricœur 1984b). Moreover, for Ricœur, the human subject can only come to know itself through the hermeneutic detour of interpreting signs—that is, by deciphering the meanings contained in myths, symbols, and dreams produced by the human imagination. The shortest route from the self to itself is through the images of others.

And by projecting new worlds, the hermeneutic imagination also provides us with projects of *action*. In fact, the traditional opposition between *theoria* and *praxis* dissolves as the metaphors, symbols, or narratives that imagination produces provide us with "imaginative variations" of the world, thereby freeing us to conceive of the world in other ways and to undertake actions that might lead to its transformation. Semantic innovation can thus point toward social transformation. The possible worlds of imagination can be made real by action—a crucial point to which I shall return in my discussion of the "utopian imagination" below.

The Symbolic Imagination

Having outlined Ricœur's hermeneutic account of imagination, I now proceed to a systematic exploration of four key categories: (1) the symbolic imagination, (2) the oneiric imagination, (3) the poetic imagination, and (4) the utopian imagination.

The Symbolism of Evil marks Ricœur's transition away from descriptive phenomenological reflection on intentional modes of consciousness toward the hermeneutic conviction that meaning is always mediated through signs and symbols of our intersubjective existence. He shows that a rigorous interpretation of the founding myths of Western culture (e.g., Adam, Prometheus, Oedipus) enables us to disclose the symbolic relation of the human subject to meaning. Suspending the conventional definition of myth as a "false *explanation* by means of fables," Ricœur attempts to recover myth's genuinely *exploratory* function. Once we accept that myth cannot provide us with a scientific account of the way things really are, we can begin properly to appreciate its creative role as a *symbolizing* power. As a double intentionality, wherein one meaning is transgressed or transcended by another, a symbol is a work of imagination that enables being to emerge as language (signification) and, by extension, as thought (interpretation). Ricœur examines three principal categories of symbol in *The Symbolism of Evil*: cosmic, oneiric, and poetic.

Cosmic symbols refer to a human's primary act of reading the sacred *on* the world. Here, the human imagination interprets aspects of the world—the heavens, the sun, the moon, the waters—as signs of some ultimate meaning. Here, the symbol is both a thing and a sign: it embodies and signifies the sacred at one and the same time (Ricœur 1969: 10–11). In other words, when dealing with cosmic symbols the imagination reads the things of the world as signs, and signs as things of the world. As such, the symbolic imagination is already, at least implicitly, *linguistic*, which Ricœur makes clear in *Freud and Philosophy*:

> These symbols are not inscribed *beside* language, as modes of immediate expression, directly perceptible visages; it is in the universe of discourse that these realities take on a symbolic dimension. Even when it is the elements of the world that carry the symbol—earth, sky, water, life—it is the word (of consecration, invocation or mythic narrative) which says their cosmic expressivity thanks to the double meaning of the *words* "earth, sky, water, life." (Ricœur 1965: 23–24)

Ricœur can thus affirm that the "expressivity of the world comes to language through the symbol as double meaning" (24). For a cosmic symbol—like any other kind—occurs whenever "language produces composite signs

where the meaning, not content to designate something directly, points to another meaning which can only be reached (indirectly) by means of this designation" (Ricœur 1965: 24). Illustrating this linguistic property of symbols, Ricœur comments on the phrase from the Psalms "The skies tell of the glory of God" as follows: "The skies don't speak themselves; rather, they are spoken by the prophet, by the hymn, by the liturgy. One always needs the word to assume the world into a manifestation of the sacred (hierophany)" (25).

In the second category of symbols—the *oneiric* or dream image—we witness a shift from the cosmic to the psychic function of imagination. Here, Ricœur speaks of complementing a phenomenology of religious symbols (*à la* Eliade) with a psychoanalysis of unconscious symbols. To this end, he invokes the works of Freud and Jung, who investigated links between the symbols of the individual unconscious and symbols as "common representations of the culture or folklore of humanity as a whole" (Ricœur 1969: 12). Ricœur spells out the rapport between cosmic and oneiric symbols as follows: "To manifest the 'sacred' on the 'cosmos' and to manifest it in the 'psyche' are the same thing . . . Cosmos and psyche are two poles of the same 'expressivity': I express myself in expressing the world" (12–13). It is precisely this expressive function of the psychic or oneiric image that establishes its intimate relation to language. As Ricœur remarks, dream images must be "originally close to words since they can be told, communicated" (13).

The third modality of symbols—the *poetic*—completes the double expressivity of cosmos and psyche. Here, the creative powers of imagination are most evident; in fact, it is only in this third category that Ricœur (at least in *The Symbolism of Evil*) uses the term "imagination" in any systematic sense. It is the poetical perspective, he argues, which enables us to draw back from both the religious images of cosmology and the dream images of psychoanalysis, disclosing the symbolic function of the image in its nascent state. In poetry, Ricœur maintains, the symbol reveals the welling up of language—"language in a state of emergence"—instead of regarding it in its hieratic stability under the protection of rites and myths as in the history of religion, or instead of deciphering it through the resurgences of a suppressed infancy (14). In this sense, the poetic epitomizes the symbolic imagination.

Ricœur insists, however, that these three levels of symbolism are connected: the structure of poetic imagination is that of the dream as it draws from fragments of our past and future, and it is that of hierophanies that disclose the heavens and the earth as images of the sacred. In all three instances, what is at issue is not the image-as-representation but the image-as-sign, a crucial distinction to which Ricœur returns again and again, critiquing the representational model of the image as mere negation or modification of perceptual reality (*à la* Sartre):

> It is necessary firmly to distinguish imagination from image, if by image is understood a function of absence, the annulment of the real in an imaginary unreal. This image-representation, conceived on the model of a portrait of the absent, is still too dependent on the thing that it makes unreal; it remains a process for *making present* to oneself the things of the world. A poetic image is much closer to a word than to a portrait. (Ricœur 1969: 13)

To be fair to Sartre, while most of his examples of the "unrealizing" function of imaging are drawn from visual representation, he seeks to establish the image as a dynamic act of consciousness rather than a quasi-perceptual thing in consciousness. Still, Sartre, like Husserl before him, fails to adequately grasp that signification and imagination are not two opposed modes of intentionality but are inextricably related through their common belonging to language. Ricœur therefore prefers Bachelard's position, which he approvingly cites: "The poetic image becomes a new being of our language, it expresses us in making us that which it expresses" (13).

The Symbolism of Evil concentrates on the cosmic symbol. Ricœur describes this initial phase of the hermeneutic project as a "re-enactment in sympathetic imagination" of the foundational myths where Western man sought to communicate his first experiences of the cosmos. Myths are understood as symbolic stories—or, more precisely, as "species of symbols developed in the form of narration and articulated in a time and a space that cannot be co-ordinated with the time and space of history and geography" (Ricœur 1965: 25).[2] This sympathetic reimagining of the cosmic images of our foundational myths demands that Ricœur abandon the original phenomenological dream of a philosophy without presuppositions. Indeed, it presupposes that which descriptive phenomenology often tended to ignore—language. The hermeneutics of symbols must begin from a full language, that is, from the recognition that before reflection and intuition there are already symbols. And precisely because language has become so formalized, transparent, and technical in the contemporary era, our need to rediscover language's inventive powers of symbolization is all the greater.

This task involves a critical project, for it is only by demythologizing the abuses of myth (as a false explanation of reality) that we can remythologize our contemporary language—restore to it the poetic and symbolic powers of imagination. "The dissolution of the myth as (false) explanation is the necessary way to restoration of the myth as symbolism," writes Ricœur (Ricœur 1969: 249). In short, we need to combine the critical gesture of modernity with the symbolizing gesture of myth if we are to develop an

adequate hermeneutic of human imagination. Instead of adopting the reductive approach of an "allegorical" reading—which would seek to uncover a disguised message beneath the symbols of myth—Ricœur advances a hermeneutic imagination that would, on the contrary, "start from the symbols and endeavor to promote the meaning, to form it, by means of creative interpretation" (Ricœur 1969: 351). This is, I suspect, what Ricœur has in mind when he suggests that it is by "interpreting that we can hear again" (351). Note well that the three kinds of symbol—cosmic, oneiric, and poetic—all find expression in a *linguistic* imagination. For "it is always in language that the cosmos, that desire, and that the imaginary come into words" (351).

The Oneiric Imagination

Whereas Ricœur concerned himself in *The Symbolism of Evil* with those symbols related primarily to mythic accounts of evil, in *Freud and Philosophy* he enlarges the enquiry to analyze the epistemology of the symbol as it manifests itself in the desires of the unconscious (Ricœur 1965: 23). The dream image shows, in exemplary fashion, how we can say things other than what we are ostensibly saying, how behind direct meanings there are indirect ones. Because of this double intentionality, symbols are what "make poets of every dreamer" (24).

The poet is the dreamer writ large. As symbols are essentially "image-words" that traverse "image-representations," imagination is not simply a "power of images" to represent absent objects. The visual images of dreams are sensory vehicles for verbal images that transcend them and designate other meanings than the literal ones. Thus, psychoanalysis recognizes that dream images call forth narrative interpretation. Precisely because dreams—like myths and poems—operate according to a depth-language of layered meanings, they can be recounted and deciphered. Dreams want to *tell* themselves. The dreamer feels closed off in a private world until the dream is recounted. And this power of recounting is exemplified, for Ricœur, in the poetic imagination that exposes "the birth of the word such as it was buried within the enigmas of . . . the psyche" (28).

But if poetry represents the positive pole of dreams, dissimulation represents its negative pole. The basic hermeneutic lesson to be gleaned from dreams, contends Ricœur, is that images are not innocent: they conceal as well as reveal meaning, deform as well as disclose intentions. The work of dream-images provides ample evidence that the symbolic levels of sense are far more complex and oblique than the traditional models of analogy and allegory would allow. Along with Marx and Nietzsche, Freud championed

a hermeneutics of suspicion alert to the distorting and falsifying potential of images. Psychoanalysis was thus a means of detecting the censoring function of dream images—its primary function being to "disclose the variety of elaborate procedures which interpose between apparent and latent meanings" (Ricœur 1965: 26).

But if psychoanalysis promotes a hermeneutics of suspicion, it also points toward a hermeneutics of affirmation. While the former examines how images disguise meanings drawn from our private or collective past by means of an "archaeological" reference back to an experience that precedes them, the latter shows how dream images can open up new dimensions of meaning by virtue of a teleological reference to new worlds of possibility. Because desire is the basic motivation of all such dream images, as Freud argued, these images are ways of *saying* this desire, which they do either by dissimulating it in other guises or by expressing a passion for possibilities not yet realized. The desire of dream images invents a future and thus aspires to a condition of creation, *poiesis*, poetry. It generates a surplus of meaning (*surcroît du sens*)—proof of a level of meaning that is irreducible to a retrospective correspondence between the image of one's dream and a literal event of one's past experience (27). This productive power of images ensures that any adequate hermeneutic of imagination must extend beyond an "archaeology of the unconscious" to include both a "teleology of desire" and an "eschatology of the sacred."

In *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Ricœur elaborates on this dual function of the hermeneutic imagination as *recollection* and *projection*:

> We may fully comprehend the hermeneutic problem if we are able to grasp the double dependence of the self on the [symbolic images of the] *unconscious* and the *sacred*—since this dependence is only made manifest through the modality of symbolism. In order to illustrate this double dependency, reflection must humble consciousness and interpret it through symbolic significations, rising up from *behind* or in *front* of consciousness, *beneath* or *beyond* it. In short, reflection must include an archaeology and an eschatology. (Ricœur 1974, 328–29)

He argues, moreover, that prophecy always needs demystification. By unmasking the falsifying function of certain dream images, with the help of a psychoanalytic model of "suspicion," we may find ourselves in a better position to restore aspects of these images as "signs of the sacred." Without the hermeneutic detour of suspicion, we would not be able to discriminate between those images that are merely a "return of the repressed" (in Freud's phrase) and those that serve as symbols of an eschatological horizon of possibility.

But it is rarely a simple matter of discriminating between regressive and progressive images. Every utopian image contains an archaic element and

vice versa. Images of the mythic past are often used to allude prophetically to an *eschaton* still to come, and the eschatology of imagination is always a creative repetition of its archaeology. "The progressive order of symbols," as Ricœur puts it, "is not external to the regressive order of phantasms; in plunging into the archaic mythologies of the unconscious new signs of the sacred rise up" (Ricœur 1974: 328).

A critical hermeneutic of imagination, for Ricœur, is one that demystifies the dissimulating property of phantasms in order to release the innovative power of images. Idols must be unmasked so that symbols may speak. And an additional reminder that hermeneutics receives from psychoanalysis is that the images of the unconscious are charged with multiple associations that are irreducible to the level of a one-to-one conceptual correspondence. Dreams provoke rational interpretation, but such interpretation never exhausts them. For, even when infantile or archaic images are deciphered in terms of their regressive reference to the past, there always remains a surplus that points toward an inexhaustible creativity of meaning. This is where Ricœur locates his wager that new meanings *can* emerge, that things as they are *can* change: "liberty according to hope," he writes, "is nothing other, when understood psychologically, than this creative imagining of the possible" (399).

This double axis of archaeological and eschatological reference signals the failure of all theories that seek to reduce the oneiric imagination to a system of speculative reason. There is always more to dream images than has ever been dreamed of in our philosophies. Moreover, it is due to this excess of imagination over reason that symbols call forth a multiplicity of meanings, which in turn give rise to a multiplicity of readings—psychoanalytic (Freud), religious (Eliade), and speculative (Hegel). This is why a hermeneutic of imagination culminates not in absolute knowledge but in a crossroads of interpretations.

The Poetic Imagination

Having concentrated on a hermeneutics of mythic and oneiric symbols in the 1960s, Ricœur turned much of his attention in the 1970s and 1980s to the poetic expressions of imagination. This phase of Ricœur's hermeneutic project includes *The Rule of Metaphor* (1975) as well as his three-volume *Time and Narrative*.

In *The Rule of Metaphor*, as in other works, Ricœur deals with imagination in a fragmentary rather than systematic fashion; it guides and motivates his delivery without ever occupying center stage. It is in this text that he tenders one of his most useful formulations of the distinction between verbal

and nonverbal imagination. Borrowing Kant's terminology, he identifies the former with the productive imagination and the latter with the reproductive. "Would not imagination have something to do with the conflict between identity and difference?" he asks. And he argues that the

> only way to approach the problem of imagination from the perspective of a semantic theory, that is to say on a verbal plane, is to begin with productive imagination in the Kantian sense, and to put off reproductive imagination or imagery as long as possible. Treated as a schema, the image presents a verbal dimension; before being the gathering-point of faded perceptions, it is that of emerging meanings. (Ricœur 1978b: 235)

Placing himself thus in Kant's camp rather than Hume's, Ricœur demonstrates that the metaphor works in the same way as the schema insofar as it functions as "the matrix of a new semantic pertinence that is born out of the dismantling of semantic networks caused by the shock of contradiction" (235). The metaphoric function of imagination involves a verbal aspect to the extent that it involves "grasping identity within differences," establishing the "relatedness of terms that are far apart" such that they confront each other rather than fuse together. This schematism of metaphor "turns imagination into the place where the figurative meaning emerges in the interplay of identity and difference" (236).

Yet the imagination needs images. Without any visual aspect, the verbal imagination would remain an invisible productivity, so the sensible moment of metaphoric imagination remains to be demonstrated. Here, Ricœur calls for a phenomenological psychology of *seeing-as* to complement a semantics of creative *saying*. If the productive imagination were confined to the purely verbal, it would cease to be *imagination*, so Ricœur seeks to graft a psychology of the imaginary on to a semantic theory of metaphor. "Seeing-as" provides a key as the sensible aspect of poetic imagination. It holds sense and image together in an intuitive manner. It selects from the quasi-sensory mass of imagery, producing a certain semantic order, and it can also work to bring conceptual meaning to intuitive fullness. Ricœur thus concludes that seeing-as plays the role of a schema that unites the *empty* concept and the *blind* impression: "Thanks to its character as half thought and half experience, it joins the light of sense with the fullness of the image. In this way, the nonverbal and the verbal are firmly united at the core of the imaging function of language" (207–8).

In addition to combining the verbal and the nonverbal, the metaphorical imagination also produces a new meaning by confronting a literal with a figurative sense. This *tensional* theory of metaphor, as Ricœur terms it, is most obvious in the case of a living metaphor in poetry. For example, in Gerard Manley Hopkins's line "Oh! The mind, mind has mountains," we

find a literal *is not* (the reader knows that literally the mind does not have mountains) accompanied by a metaphorical *is*. This power to transform such a contradiction into a new poetic meaning is evident in the metaphorical function of seeing *x* as *y*, for while we know *x* is not *y*, at a literal level, we affirm that it is, at an imaginative level. Metaphor thus thrives because it introduces the spark of imagination into a "thinking more" (*penser plus*) (Ricœur 1978b: 303). And this thinking more—fundamentally a seeing more and a saying more—attests to the curious paradox that the "concept of imagination, in the context of a theory of metaphor centred around the notion of semantic innovation," is also a "logic of discovery" (22). Here, Ricœur is close to the Aristotle of the *Poetics*, for whom it was vain to ask whether "the universal that poetry 'teaches' already existed *before* it was *invented*. It is as much found as invented" (306).

In *Time and Narrative*, Ricœur develops the ontological implications of "metaphorical reference." He shows how poetic language, whether lyrical or narrative, reveals a capacity for nondescriptive reference that exceeds the immediate reference of our everyday language. While poetic reference suspends literal reference and thereby appears to make language refer only to itself, it in fact reveals a deeper and more radical power of reference to those ontological aspects of our being-in-the-world that cannot be spoken of *directly*. *Seeing-as* thus not only implies a *saying-as* but also a *being-as*. Ricœur relates this power to redescribe being to the narrative power of "emplotment" (*mise-en-intrigue*). Borrowing François Dagognet's term *iconic augmentation*, he points out that the role of the image (*Bild*) is to bring about an increase in the being of our world impoverished by quotidian routine.

We owe a large part of the enlarging of our horizon of existence to poetic works. Far from producing only weakened images of reality—shadows, as in the Platonic treatment of the *eikon* in painting or writing (*Phaedrus* 274e–77e)—literary works depict reality by augmenting it with meanings that themselves depend upon the virtues of abbreviation, saturation, and culmination, so strikingly illustrated by emplotment (Ricœur 1984c: 80).

And he places the referential capacity of narrative works under that of poetic works in general, for if the "poetic metaphor redescribes the world, poetic narrative resignifies the world in its temporal dimension to the extent that narrating, telling, reciting is a way of remaking action following the poem's invention" (80). Indeed, human being-in-the-world in its most everyday sense—as Kant and Heidegger realized—involves a process of temporalization that makes our present actions meaningful by interpreting them in terms of a recollected past and a projected future. This capacity of temporal interpretation is that of transcendental imagination.

It is in his analysis of the *configurative* function of narrative, however, that Ricœur most explicitly identifies the role of productive imagination. By

narrative configuration, he means the temporal synthesis of heterogeneous elements—or, more simply, the ability to create a plot that transforms a sequence of events into a story. This consists of "grasping together" the individual incidents, characters, and actions so as to compose a unified temporal whole. The narrative act of emplotment, which configures a manifold into a synthesis, enacts what Kant defined as the productive power of imagination. As a power of grasping the many under the rules of the same, the narrative imagination introduces recollection and repetition into a linear sequence of events (natural time), thus making it into a recapitulative story (narrative time). "In reading the ending in the beginning and the beginning in the ending," explains Ricœur, "we also learn to read time itself backwards, as the recapitulation of the initial conditions of a course of action in its terminal conditions" (Ricœur 1984c: 67). Thus, Ricœur translates the schematism of imagination from the metaphorical act to the larger scenario of the narrative act, extending his analysis of the functioning of the poetical imagination from the unit of the *word* (symbol) and the *sentence* (metaphor) to that of the *text* as a whole (narrative).

Furthermore, as soon as one recognizes the schematizing and synthesizing power of imagination at work in narrative, the very notions of tradition and innovation become complementary. Thus, tradition must be understood not as the "inert transmission of some already dead deposit of material but as the living transmission of an innovation always capable of being reactivated by a return to the most creative moments of poetic activity" (68). So interpreted, tradition can survive from one generation to the next only by fostering innovation. And the reverse is equally true: if tradition cannot survive without innovation, neither can innovation survive without tradition. Once again, imagination plays this reciprocal role. "Innovation remains a form of behaviour governed by rules," writes Ricœur.

The labor of imagination is not born from nothing. It is bound in one way or another to the tradition's paradigms. But the range of solutions is vast. It is deployed between the two poles of servile application and calculated deviation, passing through every degree of rule-governed deformation (70).

And this dual function of imagination as a poetic creation of the new by reference to the old is not just a property of writing but also, equally, of *reading*. Indeed, Ricœur claims that in many contemporary works it is the imaginative task of the reader to complete the narrative sketched out and often deliberately fragmented by the written work: "If emplotment can be described as an act of the productive imagination, it is insofar as this act is the joint work of the text and reader." For it is the reading that accompanies the interplay of the innovation and sedimentation of paradigms that schematizes emplotment. Taking the example of Joyce's *Ulysses* as a narrative full

of holes and indeterminacies, Ricœur concludes that such a text serves as an added invitation to the creative power of the reader's imagination (Ricœur 1984c: 70).

The Utopian Imagination

At this final stage of narrative imagination—the reader's reception of the text—the hermeneutic circle returns to the world of action. The act of reading is the ultimate indicator of the "refiguring of the world of action under the sign of the plot." And as Ricœur is well aware, narrative plots are not confined to literature: a whole set of collective stories and histories, which need not bear the signature of any individual author, exercises a formative influence on our action in society. In his *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, Ricœur names this the "social imaginary" (Ricœur 1986b: 64), which indeed is constitutive of social reality itself. Let us now explore his treatment of these two limit ideas, ideology and utopia, through which he examines the social imaginary.

One of the most controversial aspects of the social imaginary is precisely the role of ideology. Much of critical theory has equated ideology with false consciousness, for it was deemed necessary to expose our ideological fantasies in order to disclose our social reality. One of the first steps in such disclosure was to demystify the ways in which ideology alienates human consciousness by attributing the origin of value to some illusory absolute outside of the human. For humanity to return to itself and rediscover its own powers of making (*poiesis*), it must first debunk the pseudo-world of fetish images. Here again we meet with a hermeneutics of suspicion: a practice of interpreting (*hermeneuein*) discourse as "masked." Above all, this suspicion was directed to a specifically religious consciousness, considered by Marx and others as the most extreme example of human subservience and the most primordial expression of ideology.

Ricœur challenges such a reduction of the social imaginary to ideological distortion and argues instead for an affirmation of its utopian potentials (Ricœur 1986a, 1986b).[3] He acknowledges the legitimacy—even the necessity—of such a hermeneutics of suspicion. A genuine theistic hermeneutic should appropriate to itself the demystification of religion as "a mask of fear, a mask of domination, a mask of hate" (Ricœur 1978a: 219). But Ricœur then argues that the Marxist equation of the form of ideology with a specifically religious content, and its equation of the latter with the sole function of inversion and domination, leads to a reductive understanding of religion. While religion can serve the interests of class domination, it can also serve other interests, such as emancipation. Moreover, ideology is a broader and more extensive

phenomenon than Marx realized. With the demise of religion as the dominant superstructure of society, other discourses come to serve as the ideological means of justifying and integrating new orders of domination.

Ricœur thus proposes to go further than the masters of suspicion, arguing that critique must itself be subject to critique. He contends that the positivist claim to nonideological rationality is both naive and deceptive. Taking a cue from the Frankfurt School, he even suggests that such a claim itself constitutes a new form of ideology, for it justifies a new social order dominated by principles of disinterested objectivism that cover a system of technological manipulation. Many so-called Marxist societies, founded largely on the critique of ideology, often laid claim to a scientific materialism that becomes an ideology of domination in its own right. In short, the unchallenged cult of science can also become an opium of the people in the modern technological era.

Ideology, in the broad sense of social self-representation which Ricœur affords it, is in fact an unsurpassable phenomenon of sociohistorical existence. Social reality *always* presupposes some sort of symbolic constitution, and it frequently includes "an interpretation in images and representations of the social bond itself" (Ricœur 1981: 231). Ideology is an indispensable dimension of the hermeneutic circle in which our historically situated consciousness is obliged to operate. The best response to ideological imagination is not pure negation but a hermeneutic imagination capable of critical discrimination. Such a critical hermeneutic, Ricœur believes, would be able to operate within the social imaginary, while refusing any absolute standpoint of knowledge (Hegelian or positivist). Even the most scientific critique works within a hermeneutic circle.

Thus, while ideology is a creation of false consciousness, it is not only that. Once demystification has removed the masks of falsehood, there remains another task, that of a hermeneutics laboring to identify genuine symbols of liberation. This is the utopian function of hermeneutic understanding, which Ricœur sees as indispensable for a proper appreciation of our social imaginary. Symbolizations of utopia pertain to the futural dimension of our social imaginary. The hermeneutics of affirmation focuses not on the origin behind such symbols but on the end (*utopos*) in front of them, that is, on the horizon of aspiration opened up by symbols. In this way, it is possible to rescue social symbolizations from the distorting strategies of reactionary politics. The symbolizations from the distorting strategies of reactionary politics. The social imaginary can thus be divested of its deluding function and reinterpreted in terms of a genuine symbolic anticipation of liberty, truth, or justice.

Thus, the critical moment of demystification is not a desymbolization. Instead of reducing symbols to some putatively literal content, hermeneutic reason exposes the perversion of symbols in order to recover their genuine value. To the extent that certain social symbols play the role of ideological domination, they have already abandoned their "exploratory" role as

disclosures of possible worlds. Indeed, the abuse of the social imaginary usually occurs when such symbols are interpreted as literal facts rather than figurative intentions—for example, when a church declares that it is the kingdom or when a state declares that it is utopia (the sole possessor of freedom or equality). This, for Ricœur, is ideology at its worst—the misrepresentation of a utopian project as a literal possession. This is the language of ideological closure. The critical function of hermeneutic understanding is not therefore to dispense with the social imaginary, but rather to debunk the alienations of the social imaginary in order to restore its genuinely utopian projects of liberty (Ricœur 1984b).

Here, it is a question of the social imaginary taking the form of a projection whereby a community expresses aspirations for a better world. If one can say, therefore, that without the backward look a culture is deprived of its memory, without the forward look it is deprived of its dreams. And it needs both, for besides the authentic utopia of liberating rupture there can also exist a dangerously schizophrenic discourse that projects a static future cut off from the present and the past—a mere alibi for the consolidation of the repressive powers that be. In short, ideology as a symbolic confirmation of the past and utopia as a symbolic opening toward the future are complementary. If cut off from each other, they can lead to political pathology (Ricœur 1984a).

Thus, while ideologies are gaps or discordances in relation to the real course of things, the death of ideologies would be the most sterile of lucidities. For a social group without ideology and utopia would be without a plan, without a distance from itself, without a self-representation. It would be a society without a project, consigned to a history fragmented into events that are all equal and insignificant (Ricœur 1981). In other words, if the gap between the historical and the ideal becomes too rigid, the ideological function regresses to sterile conservatism or an escapism that denies reality altogether. In both instances, ideology functions as alienation and precludes the possibility of authentic historical action. Ideology can be considered retrievable, therefore, only when it knows itself to be ideology, a figurative-symbolic representation rather than a literal fact, and only when it ensures that the ideal is kept in close and creative relationship with the real, thereby motivating social action. Action is impossible when the disparity between the real and the ideal precludes the adaptation of our hermeneutic imagination to a historical reality constantly in flux.

In the final analysis, critical hermeneutics provides a satisfactory basis for a dialectical rapport between imagination and reason. The hermeneutic circle includes both our belonging to the traditional representations of history and our critical distance from them. The phenomenon of belonging involves the recognition that our understanding always presupposes a historically situated preunderstanding; it rules out the possibility of reaching some nonideological

vantage point where scientific reason could assume absolute knowledge. Of course, precisely because of this belonging, we are also subject to the alienating possibilities of the ideological imaginary, hence the need for critical "distantiation." We need, concludes Ricœur, a hermeneutic imagination of nontotalization that requires both ideology and utopia while avoiding the twin extremes of dogmatic detachment and attachment. For when reason pretends to surmount all ideological mediation, it becomes a new ideological function in its own right. The critique of ideology is therefore a task that "must always be begun but which in principle can never be completed" (Ricœur, 1981: 245). And so, as we have seen throughout this chapter, Ricœur's ultimate wager is a hermeneutics of creative imagination—in which creativity is ever-active and never-ending.

Notes

1. Edited by Sarah Horton. Material from this chapter previously appeared in "Between Imagination and Language" and "Between Ideology and Utopia" in Richard Kearney, *On Paul Ricœur: The Owl of Minerva* (Burlington, VT: Ashgate, 2004). This essay was completed before the publication of Ricœur's *Lectures on Imagination*, edited by George H. Taylor, Patrick Crosby, and Robert D. Sweeney (Ricœur 2018), which systematically summarizes and expands on many of his earlier fragmented theories of images and imagining.

2. But to say that a symbol is always a sign is not to say that every sign is a symbol. The sign always stands for something, but a symbol aims at two or more meanings at the same time. Thus, to take Ricœur's example from *Symbolism of Evil*, the biblical image of defilement refers both to the literal function of this image as a sign of physical uncleanliness and to its symbolic allusion to man's impure or deviant relationship to the sacred. Because there is no *direct* discourse for the confession of evil, symbolism becomes the privileged means of expression. Ricœur concludes that symbolic images are donative in that a primary meaning gives rise to a secondary one that surpasses the first in its semantic range and reference. And a symbol is not an allegory: while an allegory relates one meaning directly and unambiguously to another, a symbol works by enigmatic suggestion or evocation, designating a surplus of meaning that exceeds the obvious one. Allegories have one meaning, symbols two or more.

3. See Section III, "Idéologie, utopie et politique" of Ricœur 1986a, and especially "L'idéologie et l'utopie: deux expressions de l'imaginaire social," 379–93.

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Chapter 11

Social Imagery in Nonlinguistic Thinking about Social Topics

On the Strength of Fantasy in Thinking about Social Conflicts

Dieter Lohmar

We know little about the really functioning methods of thinking. We tend to believe that we are using exclusively language-based methods of thinking. But based on a phenomenological investigation, we might also arrive at a completely different view. In my view, we are extensively using sequences of scenes in fantasy mode (phantasmatic scenes) to imagine and think effectively about our most important social issues. You might object that this is just not true; our thinking takes the form of propositions that are connected by the rules of logic! It is difficult to find an answer in this controversy.[1] In this contribution, I would like to provide some evidence based on phenomenological analyses about the occurrences of scenic phantasma in our everyday thinking. We are using fantasy images and scenes to imagine other persons, their attitudes, their evaluations, and their possible future actions. My thesis will be that many fantasies concern complex problems in social surroundings represented by scenic phantasma (or "social imagery") and thereby reveal to be a prominent mode of nonlinguistic thinking.

First, I am going to shortly characterize the nonlinguistic mode of thinking that is to be found with phenomenological means in everyday human thinking. It strongly depends on the use of phantasma to get an idea of and to consider complex social themes. After this, I will discuss some shortcomings of linguistic processing of social topics and establish some of the most important methodological requirements that enable us to think through social topics and decisions on this basis. A third part is dedicated to examples of the representation of social conflicts in scenic phantasmatic ways of nonlinguistic thinking. In the end, I will shortly delineate a characteristic slow mode of nonlinguistic thinking about very complex social topics, which is still working in the nonlinguistic thinking in our consciousness.