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Invention and Imagination

Edited by
Nuno Miguel Proença

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INVENTION AND IMAGINATION

Edited by
Nuno Miguel Proença

NUNO MIGUEL PROENÇA¹

SOME GENERAL NOTES ON INVENTION, IMAGINATION... AND FICTION

«The power of imagination (in other words) is either inventive (productive) or merely recollective (reproductive). But the power of imagination is nevertheless not exactly creative, for it is not capable of producing a sense representation that was never given in our faculty of sense...»²

«Sans l'aide des poètes, que pourrait faire un philosophe qui s'obstine à parler d'imagination?»³

Abstract

The purpose of these notes is to present in a very general way the problematic in which the texts gathered for this edition of the *Revista de Filosofia da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto* are located. To this end, the notions of invention, imagination and fiction are briefly presented, mainly based on the reflections of Fernando Gil and Paul Ricoeur, which allow us to broaden the initial questions that motivated the call for articles. Thus, at first, with a Kantian inspiration, the enigma of imagination

¹ Investigador. Colaborador do CHAM - Centro de Humanidades, Universidade Nova de Lisboa.

² Kant, *Anthropology from a pragmatic point of view*, translated and edited by Robert Louden, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 2006, p. 61.

³ G. Bachelard, *Poétique de la rêverie*, PUF, Paris 1960, p. 23.

is approached from the point of view of the relationship between invention and the problems existing in various fields of enquiry (scientific, philosophical and artistic). Then, starting from the philosophical ambivalence towards imagination and the spontaneity of mental images, some ethical, aesthetic and political questions are formulated, thanks to which ontological tensions inherited from Plato are analysed. If, on the one hand, poetic images and imagination are simulacra and shadows, on the other, they also allow for the vision and inspiration that reveal enthusiasm and are indispensable to poetic creation. The third part, dedicated to the notion of fiction as creative imagination expressed in works, brings together arguments to get away from the Platonic condemnations of mimesis. It emphasises the intrinsic relationship between the creativity of the imagination and the creativity of language, pointing to the semantic innovation characteristic of poetry, the arts and the scientific discovery.

Keywords: invention, imagination, research, inspiration, human creativity.

Algumas notas gerais sobre invenção, imaginação... e ficção

Resumo

O intuito destas notas é o de apresentar de forma muito geral a problemática na qual se situam os textos reunidos para esta edição da Revista de Filosofia da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto. Para isso, são resumidamente apresentadas as noções de invenção, imaginação e ficção a partir das reflexões de Fernando Gil e Paul Ricoeur, as quais permitem alargar as questões iniciais que motivaram a chamada de artigos. Assim, num primeiro momento, de inspiração kantiana, o enigma da imaginação é aproximado a partir da relação entre a invenção e os problemas existentes em vários domínios de investigação (científica, filosófica e artística). Depois, a partir da ambivalência filosófica em relação à imaginação e à espontaneidade das imagens mentais, são formuladas algumas questões éticas, estéticas e políticas graças à quais se percorrem algumas tensões ontológicas, herdadas de Platão. Se, por um lado, as imagens poéticas e a imaginação são simulacro e sombra, por outro elas também permitem a visão e a inspiração reveladoras de um entusiasmo e indispensáveis à criação poética. A terceira parte, dedicada à noção de ficção como imaginação criadora expressa em obras, reúne argumentos para sair da condenações platónicas da mimesis. Sublinha a relação intrínseca entre a criatividade da imaginação e a criatividade da linguagem, apontando para a inovação semântica característica da poesia, das artes e da descoberta científica.

Palavras-chave: invenção, imaginação, investigação, inspiração, criatividade humana.

In the sciences as in techniques, in the arts as in literature, invention seems to be inseparable from the possibility of making self-evident new connections, images, knowledge or procedures through an original combination of available means for a determined end. There is invention when previously unknown combinations are led to the identity of a defined and desired project, which usually allows the resolution of problems. In this sense, if we can easily admit that invention supposes the discovery of newly isolated data interpreted from the point of view of already available knowledge, models or practices, it is equally simple to accept that a new discovery (whether scientific, technical, technological, artistic or cultural) supposes

the invention of forms that allow the perception of data that had not been noticed beforehand or whose potentialities had not been discovered or imagined. Invention thus seems to be inseparable from imagination. But how are images, imagination and invention related? What relation do they both have to novelty, progress, innovation, discovery and creation, but also with enigmas, problems and investigation? Furthermore, what is the role of chance, inspiration, reverie, spontaneous fantasies or dreams in the inventive processes? How essential are invention and imagination to the very dynamism of the living subjects that we are individually and collectively? How are imagination and invention present in the cultural and political environment in which we live?

1. Invention and the enigma of imagination

If one can contend, as does Portuguese philosopher Fernando Gil when reflecting upon the relation between problems, research and invention, that «the transition from the old to the new, the possibility of unprecedented recombinations, partly means exploring the potential of heritage [...], it is true nonetheless that this still does not explain innovative ruptures (on the contrary, it makes them more difficult to understand), nor the dynamics of the processes that lead to them». In a very dense text⁴ where Paul Klee's writings on artistic creation are presented alongside a reading of the scientific works of Johannes Kepler and a presentation of Kant's philosophical texts leading to the conceptual novelties of the *Transcendental Aesthetics*⁵, we can continue to read that

[t]he classic enigma of invention is well known: the opposition between recombination and emergence. The production of the new must involve a clearing away and reconstruction of elements from previous structures – but in this process, reconstruction engenders unexpected or unpredictable effects. Although some of the determining factors involved are known, we still do not fully understand the laws governing their operation. [...] To a large extent, imagination is still a black box⁶.

⁴ I will very succinctly summarise and quote what I consider to be Gil's essential arguments pertaining to the relation between invention and imagination.

⁵ F. Gil, «Invenção», in *Enciclopédia Einaudi- 41*. Conhecimento, Imprensa Nacional Casa da Moeda, Lisboa 2000, p. 215. The translation is ours.

⁶ F. Gil, «Invention», in *Enciclopédia Einaudi-41*, op. cit., p. 175. Fernando Gil's inspiration is largely Kantian. Despite being an essential component of knowledge, to the extent that the first version of the *Critique of Pure Reason* considers that sensibility and understanding both derive from imagination, little can be known about it except the objects of intuition and of the subjectivity whose formation and unity are allowed by transcendental imagination. «This much only we can assert: the image is a product of the empirical faculty of reproductive imagination; the schema of sensible concepts, such as of figures in space, is a product and, as it were, a monogram, of pure a priori imagination, through which, and in accordance with which, images themselves first become possible. In themselves they are never completely at one with the concept. On the other hand, the schema of a pure concept of understanding can never be reduced to any image whatsoever. It is simply the pure synthesis, determined by a rule of that unity, in accordance with concepts, to which the category gives expression. It is a transcendental product of imagination, a product which concerns the determination of inner sense in general according to conditions of its form (time), in

The reason for this statement relies mostly in the fact that, in its relationship with invention, the deep structure of the imagination remains an enigma, all the more that, invention «is based on the classicism of combinations and compilations, as well as on the romanticism of inspiration...»⁷. In fact, according to Gil⁸, «creative imagination is practically incomprehensible, because it cannot be isolated within the set of cognitive processes nor dissociated from its objects»⁹. As a consequence, if we do not want to be condemned to resort to introspection in order to analyse them, the processes of invention have to «be grasped in the process of [their] objectification and not by attempting to recover a once ineffable, pure imaginative act»¹⁰. In other words, we only know something more about imagination as the inner dynamic of these processes if we accept to proceed indirectly, having in mind that «imagination embraces problems, allowing itself to be guided in part by their texture, and in this perspective, it is like a *bricolage* that finds in problems both its origin and the terms of its exercise, as well as its limits»¹¹.

Furthermore, in its internal relationship to research, inventive imagination must be distinguished from spontaneous expressive play, although playing is a component and a condition of invention. While there are problems in research, there are no problems to be solved in playing. If, as part of investigative processes, imagination is engaged in the pursuit and in the invention of solutions, when playing, it is free from such conditioning. Playing can thus «be described as the creation of a repertoire of anticipated solutions and a disinterested practice of the combinatorial activities characteristic of invention – and, to that extent, it will represent a vicarious strategy of adaptation»¹². In research, all means are put at the service of an end, whereas in play, it is the means that become ends. Although it is a form of adaptation of the living (and thus aims towards continuity and stability), invention «is also a factor of rupture (and genius, that is to say, supremely achieved creativity, borders on delirium)»¹³. We can thus understand that invention explores after having captured and mobilized curiosity, but in view of problem solving, according to several modalities and in defined circumstances: «There are two opposite movements in the process of invention. One, looking forward, seeks to discover new solutions. The other aspires to rest, to the reduction of tensions, to homeostasis: invention applies

respect of all representations, so far as these representations are to be connected a priori in one concept in conformity with the unity of apperception». Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, translated by Norman Kemp Smith, Mac Millan and Co., London, 1929, A142, p. 183. «This schematism of our understanding, in its application to appearances and their mere form, is an art concealed in the depths of the human soul, whose real modes of activity nature is hardly likely ever to allow us to discover, and to have open to our gaze» Kant, *Critique of Pure Reason*, op. cit., A 141/B 181, p.182.

⁷ *Ibidem*, p.183.

⁸ F. Gil's reflections, alongside Simondon's, Bachelard's and Ricœur's have motivated the theme for the 2023 *Lisbon International Conference on Invention and Imagination* that gathered eighty junior and senior scholars and artists from around the world. The program of this conference can be consulted in the following page: <https://cham.fcsh.unl.pt/en/activities-detail.php?p=2425>.

⁹ F. Gil, «Invention», in *Enciclopedia Einaudi*-41, op. cit., p.181.

¹⁰ *Ibidem*, p.207.

¹¹ *Ibidem*, p.176.

¹² *Ibidem*, p. 181

¹³ *Ibidem*, p. 183

to problems that need to be solved; it is in the nature of creation to find an end»¹⁴. As objectified by inventions, imagination thus «manifests itself through the anticipation and simulation of objective, external behaviours: it is vicarious in relation to them and simultaneously unveils them in their real becoming»¹⁵.

In this sense, as the articles in this number of the *Filosofia Journal* will show, the universality of invention and imagination in the processes of finding solutions to existing problems in any field of human activity (even in theoretical practices) makes it possible to identify, mainly by means of philosophical inquiry, some convergences between domains as different as theories of knowledge, both philosophical and psychological, biological evolution, poetical and artistic creation, linguistic realities, speculative theology, technical and technological developments, artificial intelligence, social organisations or innovative practices in education. Indirectly, these texts also concern psychological inquiry, psychoanalysis and theories of dreaming, which are far from being without interest to philosophical and epistemological reflexions, as much of the twentieth century has shown, and engage us in a debate about the relationship between imagining, creating, inventing and discovering in the sciences and in the arts that has been present in philosophical thought almost since the beginning of the Western tradition, as a result of the tensions between Plato's and Aristotle's understanding of the soul in its relation to images, *mimesis* and *poiesis*.

In his article «De l'imagination à la découverte: le rôle de la métaphore», psychiatrist, writer and philosopher António Bracinha Vieira addresses the relationship between the capacity to imagine and the acquisition of knowledge in every domain, from science to metaphysics, from art to religion and myths through the paradigm of metaphors. To do so, Bracinha Vieira proposes a descriptive phenomenology while questioning the hermeneutic capacities and the heuristic developments that result from it, as they can go from hypothesis to the possibility of knowledge. The fundamental link between imagination and language is also present in Dewi Trebaul's reflexion on Wilhelm von Humboldt's conception of the role it plays in poetical creation and in the formation of languages. The article «Quel rôle pour l'imagination dans la formation des langues ? La conception de Wilhelm von Humboldt» offers an original perspective on the evolution of W. von Humboldt's thought on poetic imagination, in particular in relation to Kant's conception of the imagination as a synthetic power, but also for the understanding of the specificity of the Indo-European and Chinese languages. In turn, Philip Mills' inquiry «Poetic *Bricolages*. Invention, Intervention, *Poiesis*» argues that a strand in contemporary poetics conceives poetry as a form of *bricolage*, highlighting its transformative nature. The notion of *bricolage* finds its conceptual roots in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Derrida and, if it is not a radical departure from the etymology of *poiesis*, it shifts the focus from creation to fabrication, from invention to intervention. In these «poetic documents» or «poetic *dispositifs*», imagination seems inseparable from the procedures operated upon the materials themselves and from the semantic innovations which result from such manipulations.

Jean-Hugues Barthélémy's article, «Invention and Imagination in the Work of

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p.183

¹⁵ *Ibidem.*, p.183.

Gilbert Simondon» – drawing on several decades of research on the works of the author of *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information* and *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* presents these two key notions as they were developed by one of the greatest philosophers of technology in the 20th century. After a presentation of Simondon's account of techn(olog)ical invention, the article gives a detailed description of the «image cycle», which rethinks imagination through the notion of the image, proposing a genetic theory of the image where the theme of imagination takes precedence over that of invention. In turn, «Gilbert Simondon and the Imaginal Dimension of Technical Objects: Towards an Inventive Phenomenology» by Andrea Zoppis, proposes to outline the inventive structure of phenomenology through a reinterpretation of Simondon's philosophy, particularly drawing on the lecture series *Imagination and Invention*. In doing so, the article aims to reconceive the phenomenological gesture as a dynamic and inventive response to the transformations brought about by technical innovation. Exploring invention as a relational process between the organism and its associated milieu, it reconstructs the ontogenetic features of images showing how they function as quasi-organic mediators between perception, action, and memory.

In her study «El arte como tecnología del yo en personas con discapacidad visual: el papel de la imaginación en sus experiencias», Marta Ratón Berlanga explores how art can function as a «technology of the self» in people with visual impairment and the role that imagination plays in their artistic experiences. Drawing from Foucault's theory of the care for oneself and from semi-structured interviews conducted with six visually impaired people, the author indicates that the most prominent function of art is emotional regulation, followed by self-knowledge and the construction of personal identity. Her work highlights the functional reorganizational capacity of biological and cognitive systems and the need to reconsider the role of imagination in the creation of aesthetic experiences in non-visual contexts. Gabriel Asís-Sagrado explores the relationship between dreams and the realms of aesthetics, creativity and the arts in his article «Across the Aesthetics of Dreams: From Auto-Creation to Proto-Art». In order to advance the philosophical understanding of oneiric experience, the author examines how the philosophies and the psychological researches of dreaming and creativity intertwine, in view of demonstrating how dreams parallel various art forms – from painting and literature to film, with examples of artistic representations and interpretation of dreams. While offering a comprehensive overview of the aesthetic dimensions of dreams, stressing their potential to enrich creative practices, Asís-Sagrado's investigation positions dreams as both a form of proto-art and a root of aesthetic inspiration.

In a brief and acute reflection titled «La recherche, affaire occulte», nourished both by philosophy and from the history and the sociology of art, Maxime Coulombe asks a simple but determinant question about the recipients of our writings as researchers. Who do we imagine they are? His question leads him to the workshop of the Canadian artist Irene F. Whittome, after she left her career as a University Professor of Painting, to discover many practices of imagination which are grounded in trends of mystical philosophy and are essential for the painter's work. Daniel Proulx's «Imagination in Henry Corbin's Thought: An Intellectual

History Inquiry» gives us a very detailed and contextualised account of the French philosopher's notions of imagination, *Imaginatio vera*, the imaginal, the *Mundus Imaginalis* and the *Geographia Imaginalis*. Specialised in Arabic and Iranian thought, Corbin was also a very attentive reader and interpreter of German philosophy, be it that of Heidegger, whose initial works he translated into French, or that of earlier mystics and alchemists whom he discovered through a strong relation with Alexander Koyré, Jung and the Eranos Circle – which included other thinkers of the symbolic imagination such as Gilbert Durand or Gershom Scholem. Proulx' article, in which we find some of the philosophical trends referred to in the description of Coulombe's visit to Irene F. Whittome's studio, gives us an account of a post-kantian inquiry into the importance of images to redefine our cosmic and metaphysical status as humans. Being simultaneously philosophical and theological, it presents us the intellectual history of a singular thinker who created strong conditions for a true dialogue between Western and Middle Eastern spiritual traditions by means of an original understanding of ecstatic imagination.

Dario Galvão's reflection, «Inventing Society: Animality and Imagination in Hume», brings us back to our earthly, embodied and inter-dependent existence, from a pre-kantian perspective. While examining how Hume engages with the notions of animality and imagination in his account of the origin of human society, the author argues that, although the Scottish empiricist treats the formation of society as a development specific to the human species, he grounds it in principles shared with other animals such as need and self-preservation. Yet, human beings surpass other species and assert their dominance over nature thanks to imagination, as it enables human beings to adapt means to ends in response to necessity and to invent society. It is not Reason that elevates humanity, but rather imagination: an animal faculty we share with other species and which Hume conceives as the cornerstone of knowledge. From a very different perspective, Valeria Ascheri's article on «Scientific Discovery: the role of Imagination raising Invention according to Michael Polanyi's theory of knowledge» also insists in the importance of imagination as a fundamental and indispensable methodological tool in the development of knowledge, especially in the development of scientific knowledge. Knowing is an integrated human act, wherein imagination plays a crucial role. While not irrational, this act of cognition is inherently linked to the capacity to generate creative intuition, a faculty that endows human intelligence with its unique and exceptional qualities. The personal component, the singularity of each researcher, thus influences the cognitive process in a distinctive and decisive manner, as the author *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* contends. Ultimately, scientific hypotheses in their novelty, as formulated by each innovative scientist, are shaped by both prior knowledge and by a singular individual worldview that offers a new perspective on a common scientific background.

In contrast, Nathaniel Gan's article on «Imagination-based artificial intelligence» highlights this particular type of artificial intelligence as a new and promising approach to AI. But this class of AI systems also raises philosophically interesting issues regarding the possibility of imagination in artificial systems: as the author explains, systems incorporating the imagination-based approach have attained

comparable performance levels to deep-learning-based models while having lower data requirements and greater explainability. Furthermore, for a less informed reader on this topics, this very specialised paper also allows to wonder if such form of machine intelligence will also have for consequence a decrease in the importance of the very same capability which, according to Hume, allows for a human specificity among other animals or for the personal knowledge which, according to Polanyi, is essential for the development of sciences and for scientific discovery. To address these questions, the works of Gilbert Simondon and of his humanism inclusive of technological development will certainly be of great importance, once again. But so will be education, when we are confronted with so many transformations in our technological and working environments and with the immense possibilities they open (for better or for worse), as David J. Rosner's article enables us to understand. Rosner's reflection explores philosopher Ernst Bloch's conception of «the not-yet» as applied to the specific context of teaching and learning. «Can We Educate for The Not-Yet? Philosophies of Open-Ended-ness and the Recovery of Student Curiosity» discusses how this future-oriented and process-based perspective can be seen to encourage curiosity, open-mindedness and the creative envisioning of new ways of thinking and problem solving. Rosner's presentation discusses how Bloch's concept involves a philosophy of open-endedness relevant to decisive goals in educational contexts such as understanding the tentative nature of scientific findings and human knowledge, perceiving conceptualizing learning as an unfinished and open project, developing open-mindedness, thus following arguments where they lead, approaching teaching and learning with a spirit of intellectual humility and appreciating the essential mystery and wonder of the world as the fundamental starting point of education and inquiry. All these goals require and allow for imagination and inventiveness.

2. Distrust and trust in the spontaneity of imagination

Why, then, does imagination still retain some of the distrust and of the reject it has raised among philosophers for centuries? After all, to phrase it like Richard Kearney, is it not obvious what imagining is and are we not doing it every day, every night, every time we dream, pretend, play, fantasize, invent, lapse into reverie, remember times past or project better times to come?¹⁶ Why is it not self-evident for subjects as ourselves whose freedom and whose spontaneity of understating it reveals? Why does it still raise so many doubts and questions, especially after Kant has taught us that the dynamics of imagination play a fundamental role in rational knowledge, in practical reason, in the sciences of nature and in artistic creation? Perhaps because, contrary to reason, although imagination is constantly present in the life of the twenty-four hour humanity, to use Bachelard's terms – images can be delusive, illusory and deceptive, as much as they can play an essential role in the sciences and in the arts. That is perhaps why, for several centuries now, much of the Western philosophical tradition has viewed the dynamisms of imagination with

¹⁶ R. Kearney, *Poetics of Imagining*, Fordham University Press, 1998, p.1.

some suspicion, expressing deep reservations about the limits that should be imposed on them. Despite significant exceptions that were often left out of the most common curricula, for centuries, and which seem to be somehow in tune with contemporary philosophical trends and research, the analysis of imagination was carried out mainly from the point of view of truth and, as such, it was often devalued, or even considered a fundamental cause of error and of mental derangement. Imagination was deemed to be unreliable, unpredictable and irreverent, juggling with distinctions between being and non-being, turning things into their opposites and making absent things present and impossibilities possible. Imagination was, and perhaps still is for some, a faculty of disquieting alteration. Furthermore, our fantasy and its spontaneous images can also express desires and tendencies which we are not willing to accept, especially when we take into account its embodied, intersubjective or trans-subjective dimensions, which phenomenology, after psychodynamics, has so much taught us about.

Such dual face of imagination – the simultaneous relationship between mental images and the representations of reality, on the one side and, on the other, hallucinations or fictional representations – is perhaps the reason why it still raises so many questions, be they philosophical, psychological or social. Images can express being and non-being, they reveal a tension between what is and something-other-than-what-is, processes and becoming, time as memory and time as openness, fictions of the past and anticipations of the future, retention and projections which require invention and transformations. As many of the articles gathered in this number of *Revista de Filosofia da Faculdade de Letras da Universidade do Porto* will show, imagination and invention can express a potentiality of life which exceeds subjectivities and their worldview, showing that the reality and those who continuously create it, at least at its human level, can be otherwise. Images put intentionality into question as much as they confirm it. They can be both intended, as in our projects, or involuntary, as in our reveries and visions, either articulated by language and the rules for dealing with symbols, or revealing, through hallucination, dreaming or fantasies, the unconscious, affective and emotional dimension of our minds and the unfathomable virtualities of what we take for granted and for real. Allowing for scientific models of reality or for artistic simulacra, be it visual or narrative, their ambiguity and their powers can still be disquieting. Despite our greater and greater habituation to them and to their capacity to signify, to project and to envision, is it possible, that, in a way or another we are still under the spell of a platonic theory of imagination, as Paul Ricœur asks in his *Lectures on Imagination*¹⁷? Or can we already think differently from Plato's legacy?

In most of Plato's works, the image (*eikon*) is associated with appearance, deception, and illusion. The relationship established there between an original and a copy is indeed one of the roots of European philosophy of the imagination. In *Phaedrus*, images in general, like writing, impoverish reality because they are themselves less than real, mere shadows in comparison with reality. Images bring together the obscure powers of non-being and are therefore at the opposite extreme

¹⁷ P. Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, Edited by George H. Taylor, Robert D. Sweeney, Jean-Luc Almaric & Patrick F. Crosby, Chicago University Press, Chicago 2024, p. 249.

of truth and science. They are thus defined in *Sophist*¹⁸ as a state or affection of the soul, a «mixture of sensation and opinion». The image designates what seems, not as it is but as it appears to each person.

Plato fears the alienation of the soul from the non-being of the imagination present in *poiesis*: the ‘unrealising’ life of the image and the simulacrum. The deep reservation towards *poiesis* extends the endeavour to submit the imagination to the order of reason and reflects the restlessness in the face of the irruption of images. Everything would be simple if there were only right opinions and true ideas. However, becoming implies disharmony, tension or the struggle between opposites, as well as the veil of illusion created by both poets and sophists. For this reason, the Platonic critique of art, that is, of *mimesis*, inaugurates the devaluation of the imaginary in favour of Reason, its ideas and logic. This condemnation of mimetic art, that of poetic and fictional invention, which is dedicated to the ludic usage of images and *simulacra*, is due to the ruin of the soul that it causes, the degradation of a soul that has no knowledge of what things really are. Art is therefore the very place of the image: everything in it concerns appearance, illusion, deception and shadows. Plato multiplies the vocabulary of unreality: appearance, phantom and mirage which are always less than what is. Ontologically, the work of art is an image, with no more consistency than that of a reflection or a shadow. In other words, the invention proper to works of art consists of imitating, pretending to be reality, producing the appearance of things, never producing essences. «What poets create are phantoms, not real beings»¹⁹. Therefore, to make art, to create images, is to do nothing, because to produce an appearance is to simulate a production that is already a copy of the essence. Artistic fiction consists of giving the appearance the effect of the reality of the thing of which it is an image, and can sometimes put itself in its place so perfectly that it replaces it and makes us forget it, disguising the difference between the imaginary and the real. This is where we find what is threatening about fiction and art, all the more so because art is capable not only of substituting itself for the absent model, but also of inventing what it is not. As such, it frees arbitrary fantasies, emancipates them from intangible canons and abandons us to the power of imagination. Artistic creation is seized by the same vertigo, the same becoming, in the form of innovative passion. Change, in Platonic terms, seems to be by far the most dangerous possibility. The art of the image can only exist through an incessant renewal that takes us away from ontological permanence. By itself, imagination, being intrinsically fictitious, imposes a negative dialectic that leads from the art of the copy (that of the craftsman who imitates the model of the bed created by the demiurge) to the art of the simulacrum (which is proper to poets, painters, other artists and sophists). Because of the power that images have over the soul, which is a power of seduction capable of fixing false beliefs and opinions, of alienating them to appearance, art presents itself as a counter-education. In the ideal city, it is tolerated on condition that there is strict control designed to put a brake on the imagination of artists. The critique of fiction and the images it is made of is the result of the ambiguity of a *mimesis* that drags people in, whether under the influence of passion,

¹⁸ Plato, *Sophist*, 264 a.

¹⁹ Plato, *Republic*, X, 599.

opinion or simulacra.

What value does the Platonic disquiet about simulacra still have in our Civilisation of Images? Photography, cinema, television, the internet, mobile phones, computer games and social networks (in addition to advertising posters and the more and more animated billboards of our cities), or even our wanderings among the urban shop windows (to put it like Walter Benjamin) are vehicles for a permanent flow of images from which our individual and social lives, beliefs, reveries and desires can be endlessly nourished. They are made of signs and are vehicles for meaning. Yet, paradoxically, they also seem to inhibit the spontaneity and creativity of our imagination, on the one side, and raise anew the questions pertaining to truth and illusion, on the other. Could it be that they compose our contemporary Cave? Since the first manipulation of photographs for political purposes and the later invention of special effects (with the possibility of their application in widescreen cinema and small screen TV news) aren't the old philosophical suspicions about the powers of images and imagination, along with their menace to our virtue, to our soul and to our City, once again at stake? Through the possibility of crafting visual narratives that, whether true or false, are taken for real, images fabricated by artificial intelligence can easily be adopted by our reproductive imagination and form part of our social and political imaginaries. The debates about post-truth, propaganda and their effects on democratic life, the philosophical reflections on the many forms of AI and on their effects on innumerable human activities (from teaching and scientific research to artistic and literary creation) are not just about error and simulacra, they are also debates on the value of invention and imagination. These debates are reflections on what can be seductive and unsettling about the immediacy and self-evidence of images that are almost as convincing, striking and self-evident as those of our dreams... And such discussions leads us to ethical grounds.

Such challenges are partially present in Richard Kearney's philosophical works (partly inspired by Ricœur) whose main endeavour consists in a genealogy of imagination²⁰. According to their author, these researches are pieces of a philosophical puzzle which is inseparable from the recreation of imagining in a cultural era of trauma and transition suspended between the extremes of instrumental rationalism and apocalyptic irrationalism. This ethical stance, which is concerned with the value of values after what Hegel and Nietzsche have called "the death of God", may be said to comprise a poetics in the sense of an exploration of the human powers to make (*poiesis*) a world in which we may dwell while maintaining our capacity to create within the limits of an embodied life. As such, *Poétique du Possible* formulates a conception of creativity, understood as figuration, capable of overcoming the dualisms that oppose *the imaginary and the real*, on the one hand, and *being and non-being* on the other as it acknowledges that our power to create is not limited to imagination but encompasses all our intentional acts. It is a comprehensive creativity, both aesthetic and practical, that leads to a fundamental hermeneutics of the possible which poetically involves the finite horizon of our lived world and

²⁰ *Poétique du possible - Phénoménologie Herméneutique de la Figuration*, Editions Beauchesne, Paris 1984; *The Wake of Imagination*, Routledge, New York and London, 2002 and also *Poetics of Modernity: Toward an Hermeneutic of Imagination*, Humanity Books, New York 1999.

a transcendent horizon of the world derived from our aspirations. Somewhere between transcendental subjectivity and the logics of the simulacrum, post-modern imagination will become human again, Kearney contends, after having traversed the nothingness of its freedom, by giving rise to hopeful alternative forms of cultural and political practices from within the darkness of a labyrinth of mirrors. Even when it announces its own disappearing (as in Beckett's motto *Imagination Dead Imagine*, that recurrently appears in the philosopher's writings), imagination continues to create and recreate, playfully. So, instead of Foucault's idea of the possible disappearance of the conditions that allowed for the invention of mankind as a theme and an object of knowledge, leading to its effacing, «comme à la limite de la mer un visage de sable», Kearney rather offers us the metaphor of the perpetual wake of imagination as a child making such traces at the edge of the sea, in its perpetual and innocent inventiveness, beyond (or before) good and evil. And that is perhaps why the question of values is so important for us, once again. If the abstention of accredited meaning is testified by anguish, alienation, nothingness or the sense of absurdity and boredom as they are expressed in modern philosophy, art and literature, imagination promises to present absent values in the immediate here and now, as it encourages consciousness to defy the historical postponement of meaning, by resolving to create its own meaning, out of nothing, even if it has to invent unreal worlds or that which is yet unreal in our common world, in order to do so. As it fosters vision, initiative and empathy, imagination, and particularly narrative imagination, accords a sense beyond what is immediately graspable and increases the responsibility of self for others. It proposes us a variety of figures that constitute "thought experiments" by which the ethical aspects of human conduct are linked with happiness and misfortune. Such imaginary experiments are utterly characteristic of fiction.

Although philosophical traditions have largely retained from the author of *The Republic* the idea that the mimetic relationship is harmful and that imitative activities in general, and artistic activities in particular, such as theatre, poetry and painting, should be banned to prevent the contagion of such imitation of unrealistic and reprehensible playful behaviour from taking hold of citizens, Plato encourages the invention and the use of myths not only as an illustration of the arguments of the characters in his dialogues, but also as a way of justifying realities that could be different. This is only possible thanks to imagination. The social hierarchy of the three classes in the ideal City, for example, must be legitimised by an aetiological narrative, a fictional story of origins, which needs to be told to the younger generations at very early stages of their lives, precisely because fictions, disseminated by what we would call social imaginaries, act through a form of affective and mimetic contagion that produces particularly acute forms of belief impossible to achieve by reason. The moving images produced by myths give rise to real mimetic practices before they can be subjected to any reflexive criticism. A serious 'mythomimetic' operation therefore requires that children become imbued with such narratives as early as possible and before the imaginary they give rise to can be questioned. Even if they are false, such narratives are useful to the status quo of the common good, as they engender appropriate behaviour that emotions and the social imaginary ensure. Thanks to mimicry, the unreal events that these narratives account for become real

everyday practices. Reality, therefore, imitates the evidence of the images conveyed by language, as a consequence of the seductive power they have over the soul, a power capable of fixing beliefs, opinions and behaviours. If fictional narratives, such as myths, alienate our epistemic attitudes towards appearances, they can nevertheless become an appropriate form of education that makes use of affective contamination. We could thus ask, extending Plato's reasoning, whether ordinary life, with its habits, customs and other unjustified mimetic practices, necessary for the conservation of institutions, could be possible without such collective fictions of which our imagination is also composed. In contemporary terms, in addition to the issues we have already mentioned regarding illusion and truth these Platonic considerations also offer perspectives on the social imaginary as ideology, made up of rigidified images, they also allow for reflections on common life as utopia, that is to say, as an imaginary aspiration towards an unreality that allows the images of collective life to be renewed.

Adding to this, in order to understand how the imagination came to be valued by currents of thought, which saw it as the human faculty that makes invention and creation possible thanks to inspiration, we can also take into account another series of Platonic texts (such as those found in *Timaeus*²¹, *Phaedrus*²² and also in *Ion*²³) and even some Aristotelian texts²⁴, in which images, such as those of dreams, allowing for *poiesis*, are given an entirely different value. Such images can be visionary or ecstatic and bear witness to the enthusiastic descent of the divine into humanity, authorising union with it. Such imagination, which is not necessarily visual, is beyond wisdom and above reason. Julia Ustinova's *Divine Mania, Alteration of Consciousness in Ancient Greece* is in part dedicated to the reading and interpretation of these texts, comparing them to what modern artists have written on their creative processes²⁵. The idea that the image is not just an effect or a function of the unreal, but that it is a cause capable of magical effects of metamorphosis, of healing, the assumption of a god, might seem incongruous and absurd to us today. Contrary to what we find in mystical and

²¹ *Timaeus*, 71 a

²² *Phaedrus*, 245 a, 250 and sq.

²³ *Ion*, 533e-534e. «For all the good epic poets utter all those fine poems not from art, but as inspired and possessed, and the good lyric poets likewise; just as the Corybantic worshippers do not dance when in their senses, so the lyric poets do not indite those fine songs in their senses, but when they have started on the melody and rhythm they begin to be frantic, and it is under possession.[...] For the poets tell us, I believe, that the song they bring us are the sweets they cull from honey-drooping fountains in certain gardens and glades of the Muses - like the bees, and winging in the air as these do. [...] For a poet is a light and winged and sacred thing, and is unable ever to indite until he has been inspired and out of his senses, and the mind is no longer in him: every man, whilst he retains possession of that, is powerless to indite a verse or chant on oracle... These fine poems are not human or the works of men, but divine and the works of gods; and that the poets are merely interpreters of the gods, according as each is possessed by one of the heavenly powers». English translation by WRM. Lamb (Loeb Classical Library), slightly modified by Julia Ustinova in her *Divine Mania: Alteration of Consciousness in Ancient Greece*, Routledge, London and New York 2018, p. 268-269.

²⁴ *Parva Naturalia* (chapter «On Prophesying by Dreams»), but also in *Rhetorics*, 1408b («there is divine inspiration in poetry») or in *Poetics*, 1455 a32-34: «So far as possible, one should also work out the plot in gestures, since a natural affinity makes those in the grip of emotions the most convincing, and the truest distress or anger in conveyed by one who actually feels these things. Hence poetry is the work of a gifted person or of a maniac (*manikos*), and of these types, the former imagine, while the latter are ecstatic (*ekstatikos*)».

²⁵ Y. Ustinova. *Divine Mania, Alteration of Consciousness in Ancient Greece*, Routledge, 2018.

especially magical doctrines, human subjectivity – after the Kantian critiques – lost the illusion of being at the source of that which only a creating god is capable of, as neither thought nor imagination generate the phenomenal matter, the *Urstoff*. Yet, despite the strangeness they may arouse, we still find the legacy of neo-Platonism, mysticism, esotericism and alchemy (or even of the mysteries of Antiquity) in the remains of romanticism and surrealism, or even in some forms of psychoanalysis, despite Freud's efforts to situate his methods of investigation and his argumentation about dreams, imagination, literary or artistic creation and their relationship with the unconscious, within what was acceptable for the medical and psychological science of his time²⁶. We also find them in other forms of poetry, music or dance, as Garcia Lorca contends²⁷. If Samuel Taylor Coleridge refers to the imagination as the repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation of the infinite (*Biografia Literaria*, XIII)²⁸, Fichte tells us that all reality is brought forth solely by imagination, this act that forms the basis for the possibility of our consciousness, our life²⁹ and Schelling states that imagination is an unconscious poetry of being³⁰. According

²⁶ G. J. MacCullough's doctoral thesis *Jacob Boehme and the Spiritual Roots of Psychodynamic Therapy: Dreams Ecstasy and Wisdom* presents many arguments for other sources of influence on Freud's theses, as they would be further elaborated by Jung and by his method of active imagination: <https://utoronto.scholaris.ca/server/api/core/bitstreams/f7dcd895-fb5f-41dd-92fe-0d5ce5c3a33b/content>. Another source of inquiry into the roots of Sigmund Freud's theories can be found in the classical study by David Bakan, *Sigmund Freud and the Jewish Mystical Tradition*, Princeton, D. Van Nostrand Company, 1958 and also in Paul-Laurent Assoun's *Freud, la philosophie et les philosophes*, Presses Universitaires de France, 1976.

²⁷ Is it surprising, then, that almost twenty five centuries later the platonic questions about inspiration remain the same for a poet like Lorca, when reflecting upon a very specific kind of artistic inspiration in his *Juego y Teoría del Duende*: «El duende de que hablo, obscuro y estremecido, es descendiente de aquel alegrísimo demonio de Sócrates, mármol y sal, que lo arañó indignado el día en que tomó cicuta [...]» (F. García Lorca, *Juego y Teoría del Duende*, Estudio y edición crítica anotada de José Javier León, Athenaica, Sevilla 2018, p.136). «Todo hombre, todo artista, llámese Nietzsche o Cézanne, cada escala que sobe en la torre de su perfección es a costa de la lucha que sostiene con su duende no con su ángel, como se ha dicho, ni con su musa» (*Ibidem*). «Este "poder misterioso que todos sienten y que ningún filósofo explica" [Lorca is quoting from Eckerman's *Conversations with Goethe*, where the author recalls Goethe's understanding of the universal and vital unnamable enigma found in artists, especially in musicians as they play, as being the *daimonic*] es, en suma, el espíritu de la Tierra, el mismo duende que abrazó el corazón de Nietzsche, que lo buscaba en sus formas exteriores sobre el puente Rialto o en la música de Bizet, sin encontrarlo y sin saber que el duende que él perseguía había saltado de los misterios griegos a las bailarinas de Cádiz o al dionisiaco grito degollado de la siguiyria de Silverio» (*Ibidem*).

²⁸ «The Imagination then I consider either as primary, or secondary. The primary Imagination I hold to be the living power and prime agent of all human perception, and as a repetition in the finite mind of the eternal act of creation in the infinite I AM. The secondary Imagination I consider as an echo of the former, co-existing with the conscious will, yet still as identical with the primary in the kind of its agency, and differing only in degree, and in the mode of its operation. It dissolves, diffuses, dissipates, in order to recreate: or where this process is rendered impossible, yet still at all events it struggles to idealize and to unify. It is essentially vital, even as all objects (as objects) are essentially fixed and dead. FANCY, on the contrary, has no other counters to play with, but fixities and definites. The fancy is indeed no other than a mode of memory emancipated from the order of time and space; while it is blended with, and modified by that empirical phaenomenon of the will, which we express by the word Choice. But equally with the ordinary memory the Fancy must receive all its materials ready made from the law of association». Coleridge's work can be read at <https://www.gutenberg.org/files/6081/6081-h/6081-h.htm#link2HCH0013> [updated in 2023].

²⁹ On imagination according to Fichte, we can read George J. Seidel's «The Imagination in Kant and Fichte, and Some Reflections on Heidegger's Interpretation», in *Forum Philosophicum* 21 (2016) no. 2, 213–223.

³⁰ On Schelling's understanding of imagination, we can read Jason M. Wirth's *Schelling's Practice of the Wild*:

to christian mystic Jacob Böhme, whom Hegel considered to be the first German philosopher³¹, and whose influence in the philosophy of Schelling³², Schopenhauer³³ or even Nietzsche³⁴ is presently acknowledged, the faculty of forming images, of imagining, is creative in the sense that it extends the formative force of divinity itself. Man can really generate what he imagines. The ability to create is the fruit of humanity's union with the divine, through imagination. By imagining, the essence is created and the image possesses a force capable of acting on the outside world, transforming it or leading us to transform it. Imagination (*Einbildung*), which is a force of the soul residing between thinking and willing, is the magical power par excellence. A strong imagination produces the imagined object: the realisation of the image is effective and the faculty of forming an image becomes creative imagination³⁵.

According to other traditions of mystical philosophy, mainly islamic, so extensively studied by Henry Corbin, the visionary image is understood as a manifestation of the entirely transcendent deity. In this sense, imagination is a theophany. In his various philosophical readings of the jewish mystical texts, Elliot Wolfson uses Corbin's notion of *mundus imaginalis* to describe the processes by which the adepts of such philosophical and theosophical currents aspire to see the invisible, transgressing the ban on visual representations of the ineffable divine name, thus giving a finite form to the infinite by concentrating it in imaginal figures³⁶.

In turn, how are these conceptions of the *imaginatio vera* present in invention and in the development of technics and technology? Was there not also a technical

Time, Art, Imagination, SUNY Press, 2015 and on Schelling and the *Naturphilosophie* we can also read both Devin Zane Shaw's *Freedom and Nature in Schelling's Philosophy of Art*, Continuum, 2010 and George Gusdorf's *Le Romantisme II - L'homme et la nature*, Payot, Paris 1984.

³¹ In a letter to his friend Van Ghert of Amsterdam, Hegel writes the following: «Böhme's Theosophy always seems to me one of the most notable attempts, on the part of a profound yet uncultivated man, to grasp the inmost nature of absolute existence. For Germany he possesses the peculiar interest of being the first really German philosopher. Considering the capabilities of his time and the small degree of training he possessed in abstract thought, he makes the supremest effort to bring the deep speculative element which rested in his imagination into the form of the conception, and so to work upon the ordinary conception as to allow the speculative element to be therein expressed». Quoted by Elisabeth N. Haldane, in her «Jacob Böhme and his relation to Hegel», *The Philosophical Review*, Vol. 6, No. 2 (Mar., 1897), pp. 146-161.

³² See, for example, *The Later Philosophy of Schelling: The Influence of Böhme on the Works of 1809-1815*, (1977) by Robert F. Brown or, more recently, S.J. Mc Grath's *The Dark Ground of Spirit, Schelling and the Unconscious* (Routledge, 2012), in which the author also refers the influence of Böhme.

³³ Especially on Schopenhauer's doctrine of the Will in nature. See, for example, Paul Tillich's foreword to John Yost Stoudt's *Jacob Boehme: His Life and Thought, Wipf and Stock*, 2002, pp.7-8.

³⁴ We find such relationship in Bruce Janz', «Why Boehme Matters Today», in Apterei and Ariel Hessayon eds. *An Introduction to Jacob Boehme: Four Centuries of Thought and Reception*. Routledge Press, 2013: 279-293 or Thomas R. Nevin's, *Nietzsche's Protestant Fathers*, Routledge, 2020, pp.78-139.

³⁵ As Alexandre Koyré contends in his *La Philosophie de Jacob Boehme*, Paris, Vrin, 1971 (2^e ed.): «L'Imagination est une puissance plastique qui coule l'homme dans une «forme» imaginée par lui. Elle le transforme en cette image qu'elle lui fait imiter». [«Imagination is a plastic power that casts man in a «form» imagined by him. It transforms him into this image and makes him imitate it»]

³⁶ See, for example, *Through a Speculum that Shines: Vision and Imagination in Medieval Jewish Mysticism* (Princeton University Press, 1994); *A Dream Interpreted Within a Dream: Oneiropoiesis and the Prism of Imagination* (Zone Books, 2011); *Apophysis and Envisioning the Invisible: Unveiling Veils of Infinity* (Brill, 2026). On the relations between E. Wolfson and Corbin, see G. Perron, *Open Secret: Henry Corbin, Elliot Wolfson, and the Mystical Poetics of Deification*, Rice University, Texas 2020.

enthusiasm, that combined mystical vision and practical inventions stemming from a common magical source? We can find some answers to these questions in Gilbert Simondon's philosophy of technological objects, but also in Bachelard's philosophy of the cosmological elements and in his phenomenology of reverie. Taking into account that the alchemical endeavours were not only a philosophical and spiritual research in which images and their symbolism lead to artistic developments, but also a pursuit of knowledge through the transformations of matter and of the subjects participation in the process of objective becoming that allowed for the development of experimental sciences and technologies, be they chemical, physical, biological, metallurgic or hiatrochemical as much as psychotherapeutic, perhaps there was, until recently, a perpetuation of a common root to art, technics, science and spiritualities in these strange practices of alchemy³⁷, which were not unfamiliar to some main scientists and philosophers of early modernity³⁸.

3. Creative imagination as fiction

We can now take into account an analysis of the creative and fictional dimension of productive imagination. In general, the term fiction is understood as simulation to hide the truth; the act or effect of pretending, but also, in another sense, as a creation of the imagination. We could say that fiction is a fabulous or artificial invention. The verb from which it derives (*fingere*) means to model in the mind, but also to imagine (and imagine oneself), to suppose, but also to forge, mask or even lie. Fiction is an invented description, a narrative or representative sequence that deals with events that didn't really happen, but where there is not necessarily any sign of their pretence. We find such fictions, with a narrative form, in myths, legends, epics, drama, novels, cinema or television series (but also in our social life, as Plato reminds us). Because of the creative aspect of the imagination they stem from, they are opposed to forms of narration that claim to be truthful (although productive imagination is also required for the fixation of beliefs about past historical events, especially for those who did not witnessed them). Like poetry, fiction originates in productive imagination and could be said to be a form of *poiesis*.

As Ricœur reminds us in his *Lectures on Imagination*, whose main arguments on fiction I wish to summarise, there is something irreducible about the novelty of this form of imagination³⁹. Furthermore, one of the specificities of fiction – that distinguishes it from dreams, reveries, fantasies, visions or hallucination – is that it stems from a productive imagination that expresses itself in works and therefore takes on the character of what can be shared, while at the same time offering possibilities for

³⁷ On Simondon's understanding of alchemy, see, for example, «The Birth of Technology from the Spirit of Alchemy», in *Platform: Journal of Media and Communication* (Special Issue – *Situating Simondon: Media and Technics*, eds. Scott Wark & Tom Sutherland), volume 6 (2015) 108-116.

³⁸ G. MacDonald Ross, «Leibniz and Alchemy», *Studia Leibnitiana*, Sonderheft 7, *Magia naturalis und die Entstehung der modernen Naturwissenschaften* (1975) 166–177; Westfall, R.S. and Vickers, B. «Newton and alchemy», in *Occult Scientific Mentalities*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1984, pp. 315–336.

³⁹ A general survey of Ricœur's *Lectures*, which were originally delivered in 1975 at the University of Chicago, but were only published for the first time in 2024, can be found in George H. Taylor's article «Ricœur's Philosophy of Imagination», in the *Journal of French Philosophy* Volume 16, Numbers 1 and 2 (Spring-Fall 2006) 93-104.

altering the shared reality⁴⁰. There is a positive ontology of images and imagination which allows us to understand their dimension *qua* fiction as necessary components of our reality, and consequently to affirm the possibility of deviating from Plato's condemnation. It is thus important to point out the difference from any depreciative philosophical warning against them.

«When we start from reproductive imagination, there is already an original, and therefore the main thrust of the analysis is on the negative side. I retreat from the original; all the spontaneity of imagination is exhausted in producing this nothingness alongside reality, in the margin of reality. This imaginary life is more or less described as a flight, as an escape. By contrast, if we start with an image without an original, then we may discover a kind of second ontology that is not the ontology of the original, but the ontology displayed by the image itself, because it has no original»⁴¹.

Fiction does not reproduce the previous reality, as photography does, but opens up a new reality under the guise of literature, theatre, cinema, art, architecture and utopias, but also of technological and scientific discoveries⁴². Therefore, it is only when we start from fiction that a new kind of reference may be opened thanks to the absence of an original. That seems to be all the more paradoxical that fiction seems to be non-referential in the sense that it has no object. It's the genius of productive imagination – of the fictional – to open and change reality. Whereas reproductive images are marginal as regards reality, productive imagination may change and even create new worldviews, new types of looking at things, and finally may change even our way of being in the world. This is excluded in reproductive imagination, which appears spontaneous only in reflection. It is a kind of reflective spontaneity and not a creative spontaneity⁴³.

⁴⁰ «Through the notion of a work, we introduce some specific categories that don't belong in the first instance to language but to the category of *technè*, production. Language, too, has to be produced as a work and therefore according to certain *technè*, certain techniques». P. Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, edited by George H. Taylor, Robert D. Sweeney, Jean-Luc Almaric & Patrick F. Crosby, Chicago University Press, 2024 p. 251.

⁴¹ P. Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, op.cit., p.231.

⁴² P. Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, op.cit., p. 276. «Writing and painting have in common the delivery of the creative process to an external bearer, to what I called external marks. The adventure of imagination is here linked to the construction of a material medium that carries the message of fiction. This is already the end of the imagination as shadow, because the exteriorization of the imaginative process places a thought outside itself. The promotion of reality linked to this exteriorisation starts from the externalisation of creativity itself. We have to break with the tradition of the image as a shadow. To a certain extent we even have to break with the tradition of reminiscence, which says that it's only by a process of interiorization of memory that we get within the mind, because it's also by receiving meaning from external works that we increase our capacity of reminiscence. There is a detour by means of exteriority» (*Lectures on Imagination*, p. 251).

⁴³ P. Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, op.cit., 220. A recent presentation of Ricœur's text, and especially of creative imagination as fiction, can be found in Stéphane Massonet's article «L'imagination philosophique et la fiction comme création» [«Philosophical imagination and fiction as creation»], in the Journal *Fabula, La Recherche en littérature*, Septembre 2025 (Volume 26. Numéro 8). Besides the introductions to the *Lectures* by their English editors (G.H. Taylor, Editor's Introduction, in *Lectures on Imagination*, op. cit. XI-XL) and their French editor (J.-L. Almaric, «Préface à l'édition française», in *L'imagination*, traduit de l'anglais par J.-L. Almaric, Éditions du Seuil, 2024), we can read four articles on the *Lectures* in the edition on «Paul Ricœur: les Pouvoirs de l'imagination» in

The author of the *Lectures on Imagination* thus devotes the final chapters to fiction. The introduction of the book presents a map of several conceptions of imagination, broken down into two orthogonal axes that intersect at the level of the mental image, which allows to understand the specificity of fiction. The horizontal axis covers the difference between reproductive imagination and productive imagination and goes from the highest degree of presence to the highest level of absence. The vertical axis encompasses the differences that go from fascination to critical distance, capturing the epistemic variations that separate belief typical of dreams, trance or hallucination, from the disbelief typical of critical distance, near which photography and painting are situated as images, but also literary, cinematographic or theatrical fictions. After a general presentation to this last part of his work, one chapter is dedicated to metaphors, another to painting, a third to scientific models and a final one to poetic language. Starting with poetic imagination and poetic images, i.e. the images in a poem, Ricœur shows that there is also an epistemological imagination, which is no less productive, before going on to discuss poetic language. In Ricœur's theory of fiction, the negative element is the key to its referential power. Consequently, fiction is not just absence but, thanks to its negativity, it reveals new dimensions of reality. It is this capacity to transfigure experience and, through experience, to transfigure reality itself that Ricœur tries to develop through a number of approaches to different aspects of experience – literary, artistic and scientific. The analysis starts with the poetic imagination, for two reasons. Firstly, it is the best way to show that images flourish when they are awakened by certain specific uses of language. Imagination on its own is nothing, it is only productive in conjunction with a particular use of language. The verbal and the visual must be placed in a dialectical situation. Imagination is creative only when language is creative. There is a mutual promotion between the creativity of language and the creativity of imagination. This argument is based on Bachelard's description of the poetic imagination. Diction and vision come together and move together⁴⁴. It is in and through language that the imagination can become creative. It is to the extent that the process of imagination is involved in a creative process of thought and language that the imagination itself is productive.

The danger to avoid is to assume that the poetic plunges us into the irrationality of creativity, creation, etc. In Ricœur's view, the creative use of language can be described and analysed, and there is absolutely nothing mysterious about it. Even if there are no rules for writing good poetry (just as there seem to be no rules for any free play of the imagination, according to Kant, although genius has to search for them), there are at least rules for reading. A theory of reading can, in a sense, fill this gap. To support this second claim, that we can analyse the creative procedures of language to some extent, Ricœur uses the contemporary theory of metaphor, taking the opportunity to draw consequences for the theory of imagination from his own interpretation of metaphor. This interaction between productive language

the edition of May 2024 of the journal *Esprit*, namely «Paul Ricœur : les pouvoirs de l'imagination, introduction», by Azadeh Thiriez-Arjangi; « Un plaidoyer pour la fiction *Le Cours sur l'imagination* (1975) de Paul Ricœur » by Jean-Luc Amalric, «*Homo imaginans*» by Jérôme Porée, «Imaginer pour vouloir ? Éthique de l'imagination» by Jean-Philippe Pierron and «Les aventures de l'imagination by Olivier Abel, Michaël Foessel, Olivier Mongin».

⁴⁴ P. Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, op.cit. p.226.

and productive imagination provides him with the transition to an epistemological theory of imagination, during which he moves from the theory of metaphors to the theory of models⁴⁵.

By affirming the unity of the productive and creative imagination, one of the aims of the *Lectures* – in a very bachelardian way – is to invalidate the opposition between poetry and science, as if creativity were only poetic, monopolised by poetic activity⁴⁶. He shows us that in scientific thought there is a situation parallel to poetry that belongs to the logic of discovery. To this end, he reminds us that the theory of models and analogies in science bears witness to the role of imagination in poetic thought. The kinship between metaphor and model subsequently provides Ricœur with the continuity between the two uses of imagination. There is a unity in the functioning of thought in both poetic language and scientific knowledge⁴⁷. Another field that raises the same question of creativity is social action, which also has its images and its fictions, its images as ideologies and its fictions as utopias. There is therefore a unity in the problem of semantic innovation, in knowing, acting, inventing, etc. This is one possible approach to the problem of creativity and transformations as they are collective⁴⁸. Such questions are also present in Ricœur's dialogue with Cornelius Castoriadis around the possibility of novelty in political and institutional life⁴⁹.

If Bachelard is one of Ricœur's main references to understand the creative and transformative power of imagination, we also find important considerations on the originality of Aristotle's reflection on poetics as they lead us towards a new understanding of *mimesis* which might help us step away from our Platonic heritage.

For Aristotle *mimesis* was not at all a way of copying a thing. It was a creative reconstruction of reality, as when the tragedy expresses the truth about human action

⁴⁵ P. Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, op. cit., p. 227.

⁴⁶ After an initial reflexion on images as epistemological obstacles, inherent to the act of knowing itself, as we find it in *La Formation de l'Esprit Scientifique* or in *The Psychoanalysis of Fire* (both from 1938), and also after a series of books in which material and creative imagination is inseparable from the cosmogonic elements – in *L'Eau et les Rêves* (1942), *L'Air et les Songes* (1943), *La Terre et les rêveries de la volonté* (1945), *La Terre et les rêveries du repos* (1948) – Bachelard develops a series of reflections that lead to a form of cosmic imagination producing source-images, or *princeps*-images, which we find in *Poetics of Space* (1957) and *Poetics of Reverie* (1960). Ricœur's reading draws mainly from these two works. Starting, in 1938, from a psychoanalysis of imagination, so as to liberate science from the images of its own unconscious that persist in the analogies and metaphors of the natural language with which research is carried through, Bachelard thus reaches a phenomenology of imagination capable of giving an account of the source images originated in the cosmic imagination present in dreams and reveries. These images are inseparable from language and from its semantic virtualities. The relationship between these original images and poetry can be understood if we have in mind that the vital interest of daydreaming, of reverie, consists precisely in the possibility of liberating us from the function of the real, without subtracting us from the world, so that we can intimately inhabit all its unfathomable dimensions. But the distractions of reverie, and its vital function of the unreal, are required by the possibility of thinking itself, they do not nourish poetry, literature and the arts solely. When entwined with the principle of reality, they are also indispensable to invention, be it technical, technological, scientific or even political.

⁴⁷ *Ibidem*, p.275

⁴⁸ *Ibidem*. Cf. on this question, Ricœur's *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, also delivered in 1975 and published in 1986 by Columbia University.

⁴⁹ C. Castoriadis and P. Ricœur, *Dialogue sur l'histoire et l'imaginaire social*, Paris, Editions de l'Ecole des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 2016. The English translation is entitled *Ricœur and Castoriadis in Discussion: On Human Creation, Historical Novelty and Social Imaginary*. It was edited by Suzi Adams, Rowman & Littlefield Publishers, 2017.

because it is a *muthos*, a plot, a flabelo. This notion of creative mimesis seems to have been completely lost, because in the tradition of imitation, imitation has been understood not as an imitation of nature, in this creative sense, but as imitation of previous models by other artists. Imitation becomes a concept of conformity in a tradition, not a creative reconstruction of what is. The aesthetics of genius in the eighteenth century replaced this dying aesthetics of imitation⁵⁰.

Is this conception of *mimesis* derived from the Aristotelian theory of imagination or is it something else, properly ricœurian? For Aristotle, the question of *phantasia*, particularly in the treatise *On the Soul*, is that of the passage from sensation to thought. Imagination is like an intermediate faculty between the two. Imagination is initially seen as an elaboration of sensation. There is no imagination without sensation, since imagination is nothing more than the movement produced by sensation in act. This approach is even radicalised when Aristotle identifies the imaginative faculty (*to phantastikon*) with the sensitive part (*to aisthetikon*), although the being and definition of each differs, which limits the function of the imagination and gives it a secondary role. In this sense, it is a reproduction of what was at the origin of sensation⁵¹, the image of what was perceived by the senses is its mental representation. Images are like sensations for the thinking soul, and so one cannot think without imagination⁵². But *phantasia* is also the support of abstract thought and even already a kind of intelligibility. Its inaugural definition as «movement generated by the sensation in act», which will be used by philosophy and psychology, is enlarged by the suggestion that in imagination there is an unsuspected power difficult to conceive. In addition to a second imagination, the faculty of representation in the absence of objects, there also seems to be a first imagination, totally different from the previous one, with a power that consists of producing images (*phantasmata*) that are either the first concepts (*noemata*) or are what these concepts would not be formed without⁵³. In both cases, imagination is a connecting faculty, which performs a synthetic function in which desire and movement are involved: there is no movement without desire, nor is there desire without imagination. This aspect, equally present in the deliberative use of the imagination and in its calculative aspect, will be essential for understanding the role of fiction in transforming our passions.

Even if imagination has a certain legitimacy as an aid to practical reason (by recalling past experiences and anticipating future ones, it can mobilize our present behaviour in a particular direction), the Stagirite seems reluctant to permit

⁵⁰ P. Ricœur, *op. cit.*, p. 246. Further in the *Lectures*, we can also read that «[i]n Plato, painting is an image of an image, a shadow of shadows, since the originals of painting are themselves shadows of the pure models, which are Ideas. And even the ideas are, if not shadows, at least less than the origin, which is light, the sun, the Idea of the Good, and so on. [...] the concept of mimesis, in Aristotle was already directed against this notion of shadow (1954, 112-13, 215). There is no trace in Aristotle of the notion that the *muthos* of the tragedy is the shadow of human life. On the contrary, the *muthos* has a power of disclosure concerning reality that is the contrary of shadow. Whatever may be the case in the relation between Aristotle and Plato, the predominant tradition relating original and copy is the fundamental obstacle behind even the subjectivism of Kant». P. Ricœur, *op. cit.*, p.251

⁵¹ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 429 a.

⁵² Aristotle, *De Anima*, 432a.

⁵³ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 427b.

imagination any freedom in its own right⁵⁴. Nonetheless, contrary to Plato (who only admits truthful imitation limited to noble themes), Aristotle gives poetry, and the imagination it requires, the task of imitating what is possible and opens the field to a definition of art as fiction, in the sense that, through imagination that accompanies it, there is verisimilitude in its products⁵⁵. Contrary to historians, who narrate what happened, poets narrate what could happen. Fictional *poiesis* has an ethical value. But can its capacity to simulate what is possible also have an epistemological value, or at least a value for heuristic practices? We grasp the essence of human action in tragedy precisely because it is fictionally constructed. By allowing us to simulate human need, desire, pleasure, misfortune or happiness, the imagination proper to literary, theatrical or cinematographic fiction thus acquires an ethical dimension. What is unreal about it, however fanciful, constantly brings us back to shareable reality and offers us new possibilities for being affected and to affect, for thinking and acting. The constructed fiction tells the truth. This is what Ricœur calls productive reference, which together with the mimetic function, lets us understand the notion of the mimetic as productive.

The author of the Lectures also reminds us that it is «easy to show that fictional narratives have a certain denotative function – a function of description and re-description – because the narrative structure of drama has a certain homogeneity with structures of existence. The narrative structure has an immediate denotative function because of its isomorphism with life. He then adds that, concerning fictional imagination, «it is clear that this isomorphism has to be invented in order to be discovered, and we discover it insofar as we invent it, but the narrative structure lies between the scale models and theoretical models. We can transfer drama to life because the narrative structure functions as a model for reading everyday life»⁵⁶. Finally, in a way that reminds us of Fernando Gil's analyses of the difference between game and invention, Ricœur emphasises that «nothing is more serious than play, if play is also an exploration of reality through the imagination»⁵⁷. Now, there is exemplarity in play, «when play is more fictional than pictorial, since it outlines some hidden or unused possibilities of reality, show[ing] the potential of human life»⁵⁸.

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⁵⁴ Aristotle, *De Anima*, 428-9.

⁵⁵ Aristotle, *Poetics*, 1451 b.

⁵⁶ P. Ricœur, *Lectures on Imagination*, op.cit., p. 281.

⁵⁷ *Ibidem*.

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ANTÓNIO BRACINHA VIEIRA¹
**DE L'IMAGINATION À LA DÉCOUVERTE, LE RÔLE DE LA
MÉTAPHORE**

Résumé

Dans cet exposé nous étudions les rapports entre la capacité d'imaginer et l'acquisition du savoir dans tous les domaines de la connaissance humaine – science, métaphysique, art, religion, mythes – ayant pour paradigme la métaphore. Pour ce faire nous entreprendrons une phénoménologie de l'imagination, en questionnant ses capacités herméneutiques et les développements heuristiques qui en découlent, tant qu'ils pourront conduire de l'hypothèse à la possibilité de connaissance.

Mots-clé. Science, métaphysique, connaissance, métaphore, analogie, raison, évidence.

From Imagination to Discovery: the Role of Metaphor

Abstract

In this paper we study the relationship between the capacity to imagine and the acquisition of knowledge in all areas of human knowledge - science, metaphysics, art, religion, myths - using metaphor as a paradigm. To do so, we will undertake a phenomenology of the imagination, questioning its hermeneutic capacities and the heuristic developments that result from them, insofar as they may lead from hypothesis to the possibility of knowledge.

Key words. Science, metaphysics, knowledge, metaphor, analogy, reason, evidence.

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I. *Bios*

L'imagination: tout le monde en parle, quelques-uns l'exercent, mais presque personne ne cherche à préciser ce qu'elle est vraiment ni ce qu'elle signifie. – Qu'est-ce donc qu'imaginer? – Il s'agit d'une de ces fonctions secrètes de l'esprit, qui se déroule dans notre for intérieur: le Moi éveillé, dans le silence de la réflexion, envoie des faisceaux de lumière à travers la pénombre de la conscience, à la recherche d'éclaircissement pour un tel problème qui rôde.

Cette lumière se promène, comme celle d'un phare dans la nuit, sur des objets, des idées, des phénomènes, des souvenirs, des images empruntées à la nature ou à la mémoire. Elle tourne autour de sa cible jusqu'au moment où épointe la solution, qui nous apportera quelque sorte de connaissance et nous procurera l'apaisement.

Il s'agit donc d'une quête intérieure menée en toute solitude, même si elle peut s'adresser au monde extérieur, auquel elle accède par les fenêtres sensorielles et sous l'empire de la perception. Et quoique l'on puisse discuter ensemble de la solution d'un tel ou tel problème, l'imagination travaille dans l'espace privé de la conscience.

La mémoire et l'imagination sont d'une commune substance, qui est celle de l'expérience intérieure. Elles bouillonnent dans une même 'boule de psychisme' et appartiennent toutes les deux à ce grand nuage qui nous habite et qu'on appelle la conscience.

Si la brise souffle vers le passé, le nuage se fait anamnèse et remémoration; mais dès qu'elle souffle dans la direction incertaine de l'avenir, elle devient aussitôt imagination. Pourtant, cette faculté d'imaginer cherche toujours de l'appui dans la mémoire, qui est le socle même de l'identité, où se déposent les sédiments du vécu. Pour sa part, la mémoire subit l'action transformatrice de la fantaisie, qui est un des ingrédients de l'imagination.

Cet échange à double sens se passe à tous les niveaux et dans toutes les couches de notre conscience, depuis l'état vigile jusqu'aux états oniriques. Comment refuser que le travail du rêve, malgré le sommeil qui le sous-tend – et remarquons que, pour les Grecs des grands siècles, *Hypnos* était le frère cadet de *Thanatos* – est doué d'une capacité littéraire prodigieuse et peut mener à des découvertes étonnantes dès que le rêveur s'éveille?

Il suffira d'évoquer quelques exemples saisissants: la découverte, en 1865, par le grand chimiste allemand Friedrich August Kekulé, de la structure hexagonale du noyau benzénique, qu'il avait entrevue en rêve; et, dans le domaine de la littérature, quelques nouvelles stupéfiantes de Kafka, transcrites presque directement de ses cauchemars.

À la limite on peut se demander si le prisonnier de la caverne platonique, plongé dans la pénombre plus ou moins profonde de son rêve, en exerçant ses facultés imaginatives en ébauche, aurait pu accéder à l'expérience du *cogito*. – Quelque chose comme: *Je rêve, donc je suis!*

Il y a dans l'imagination une part de préméditation et une part de jeu. Et, pour exercer l'esprit imaginaire, on n'a pas besoin du langage. On sait, d'ailleurs, que l'évolution de celui-ci a été indépendante, quoique interactive, de celle de l'intelligence. Déjà dans les lointaines années 60 du XX^e siècle les primatologues japonais, en observant une population de macaques japonais (*Macaca fuscata*) dans l'île Koshima,

ont constaté que ces singes, en jouant pour ainsi dire avec la matière, sont parvenus à des inventions utiles à leur économie et à leur confort.

Une jeune femelle, Ymo (tous les singes étudiés avaient reçu des noms), a découvert que les grains de maïs jetés à l'eau surnageaient et de ce fait se séparaient du sable de la grève; puis, que les ignames plongés dans l'eau de mer devenaient salés et plus appétissants².

Tout cela s'opérait donc à un niveau non humain: mais l'imagination et la découverte y étaient déjà à l'œuvre, indéniablement, et les acquis s'étant répandus dans toute la population étudiée formèrent l'ébauche d'une culture matérielle.

Les découvertes d'Ymo se sont d'abord propagées parmi ses jeunes compagnes de jeux; puis, à la génération suivante, ont été adoptées par tout le groupe; par contre, si un mâle dominant découvrait quelque chose d'avantageux, ses trouvailles se propageaient sans entraves en quelques heures.

Donc, chez ces primates, le rôle joué par l'imagination est individuel et, s'il conduit à un comportement qui est reconnu utile, la caution à son adoption dépend du statut du découvreur. Des observations similaires ont été faites par la suite chez beaucoup d'autres mammifères, et aussi d'oiseaux grégaires, voire des psittacidés et des corvidés.

La capacité d'inventer, d'imaginer des inventions et, par ce biais, d'agir sur le milieu, est assignée elle-même par la sélection naturelle. La presque totalité des espèces d'animaux sont douées, d'après l'expression de Ernst Mayr, grand théoricien de l'évolution, de «programmes fermés»³. C'est-à-dire, presque tout leur comportement est inscrit dans le programme génétique, et les individus ne peuvent pas s'en départir.

C'est «l'ouverture du programme» qui mène à l'invention et à l'intervention sur l'environnement. Les primates ont un programme beaucoup plus ouvert que les insectivores, leurs ancêtres; et les espèces à haute grégarité subissent encore une plus large ouverture, qui atteint l'apogée, il va sans dire, chez les primates doués d'industrie et de langage. Car, derechef, les inventions deviendront cumulatives.

Ces innovations, transmises par voie culturelle, d'un individu à l'autre et d'une génération à l'autre, annulent un certain nombre de pressions évolutives et en suscitent d'autres.

À la limite, l'ouverture extrême du programme renferme des risques pour les populations, dès que la technique change de fond en comble le milieu (Lamarck aurait dit: «les circonstances»). Ce qu'illustrent les conséquences redoutables des techniques planétaires à l'heure actuelle, sur l'ordre d'un primate parlant que Carl von Linné, dans un élan débonnaire, a appelé *Homo sapiens*.

D'ailleurs, les premiers outils taillés intentionnellement ont été inventés dans la lignée des hominiens primitifs, au Paléolithique inférieur d'Afrique, avant l'arrivée du genre *Homo*. En fait, il y a plus de trois millions d'années, des anthropoïdes non humains, probablement des australopithèques, se sont mis à tailler des galets de pierres clastiques (surtout le silex et le quartzite).

Ils percutaient les noyaux lithiques, en dégageaient des lames dites 'de débitage',

² S. Kawamura. «The process of sub-cultural propagation among Japanese macaques» in Southwick, C.H. (dir.), *Primate Social Behavior*, van Nostrand, New York 1963. M. Kawai, «Newly acquired pre-cultural behavior of the natural troop of Japanese monkeys on Koshima island», in *Primates*, 1965, 6, pp. 1-30.

³ E. Mayr, «Behavior Programs and Evolutionary Strategies», *American Scientist*, 1972, 62, pp.650-659.

et obtenaient des ‘coups de poing’ plus ou moins étalonnés, avec des tranchants actifs. Ces premiers outils façonnés d’après un paradigme ont changé radicalement la relation de ces hominiens avec le milieu et ont fait remanier la structure sociale des groupes, c’est-à-dire leur ‘biologie sociale’.

L’imagination s’exerce dans la technique de la taille (dont les gestes techniques deviendront finalement automatiques), autant que dans leur emploi. Car tailler un de ces galets signifie en fait «placer une idée dans une pierre», selon le mot de Gowlett⁴.

Or, de même que les individus d’une espèce donnée, les outils aménagés sont tous légèrement dissemblables, et par leur forme et par leur taille – et c’est encore l’imagination qui, scrutant leur configuration et leurs proportions, va en séparer les haches, les grattoirs, les racloirs, les poinçons, les bèches, etc., pour qu’on s’en serve adéquatement.

Je trouve exemplaires les données sur la dérive de l’imagination vers l’invention chez ces populations paléolithiques pré humaines, puisqu’il s’agit de l’origine même de la *techné* et de l’industrie dans la lignée des hominiens. L’avenir du progrès technique, de l’innovation et du langage y trouve sa source lointaine, et l’aventure humaine, dans sa complexité, s’y ébauche et y prend son élan premier.

J’ai proposé ailleurs que les premières industries lithiques recelaient une composante grammaticale et syntactique implicite, et le cerveau instrumental était du même ‘champ sémantique’ du cerveau linguistique, qui survint plus tard et s’est éventuellement organisé à partir de structures préalables liées à l’outillage⁵. Pour sa part, le langage est façonné comme une panoplie d’outils, dont la combinatoire permet d’obtenir un certain degré de connaissance des objets et la mainmise sur la matière.

II. *Mythos*

Les avancées des scientifiques vers la vérité dernière des choses – qu’ils ne parviendront jamais à saisir – sont assez bien illustrées par le mythe de Tantale, dont le héros, assoiffé et affamé, alors même qu’il se trouve près de toucher les sources d’eau et de nourriture, n’arrive point à s’en emparer. En fait, les mythes ont une valeur métaphorique, qui tient à expliquer des situations exemplaires: mais, incapables d’en trouver la solution authentique, ils en donnent des explications analogiques.

En tout cas, la reprise des efforts qui conduiront vers l’*alétheia*, la vérité grecque, est vouée à l’échec. Maxime de Tyr nous raconte qu’Épiménide de Crète, pendant le très long sommeil qu’il a enduré dans une caverne, aurait été visité en rêve par quelques dieux et par *Alétheia* elle-même!⁶ Mais de son entretien avec celle-ci il ne nous a rien dit: et, s’il l’avait dit, comment le croire, puisque, d’après son aveu, «tous les Crétois sont des menteurs»?

⁴ J.A.J. Gowlett, «Tools, the palaeolithic record», in Jones, Martin & Pilbeam (dir.), *The Cambridge Encyclopedia of Human Evolution*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1998, pp. 350-360.

⁵ A. Vieira, «Grammatical equivalents of palaeolithic tools: a hypothesis», in *Theory in Biosciences*, 2010, 129, pp. 203-210. *Ibid.* «Des pierres à la parole. Une théorie sur l’origine et l’évolution du langage», in *Sigila / CAIRN*, Paris (2023), 51, pp. 21-334.

⁶ G. Colli, *La sagesse grecque*, L’Éclat, Paris 1991, vol. II, p. 67.

Nous pouvons constater que, dans le processus d'acheminement vers la connaissance, la métaphore joue partout un rôle majeur. Elle est du ressort de l'imagination pure: à travers elle on scrute les ressemblances de quelque chose qu'on interroge à quelque chose que l'on suppose connaître. Et cette comparaison tient à charmer le lecteur (ou l'auditeur) qui, par son entremise, saisit, ou croit saisir, des sens cachés dans l'objet problématique. Et, pour citer Condillac, «dès qu'il y a comparaison il y a jugement».⁷

La métaphore s'impose partout, dans tous les continents de la connaissance humaine – science, métaphysique, art, religion et, il va sans dire, littérature – ce qui prouve l'insuffisance du jugement critique pour atteindre la vérité ultime: le triomphe de la métaphore exprime, sans aucun doute, notre incapacité à atteindre un savoir accompli.

Dans l'ensemble des savoirs fondés sur l'analogie, la connaissance finale nous est refusée. – Proust, dans les dernières pages de *Le temps retrouvé*, en comparant son roman au plan d'une cathédrale: «Combien de grandes cathédrales restent inachevées! (Leur plan), on le nourrit, on fortifie ses parties faibles, on le préserve, mais ensuite c'est lui qui grandit, qui désigne notre tombe.»⁸

L'imagination devra en tout cas se mettre à l'oeuvre pour nous guider vers la connaissance. Elle se lève comme une brise à l'intérieur de notre conscience et s'exerce tantôt sur les objets proposés par la mémoire, tantôt sur les objets du monde extérieur dont s'approprie la perception. Elle interroge ces objets, qu'ils soient perçus ou remémorés, dans un état d'inassouvissement, comme en se frayant la route vers des réponses en suspens.

De par sa nature même, l'imagination est aux aguets. C'est comme un souffle sur les braises, d'où jaillit l'étincelle. Elle confine avec la soif de questionnement, avec l'interrogation des inconnues qui rôdent et nous assiègent de toutes parts. – «L'interrogation – écrit Merleau-Ponty dans *Le visible et l'invisible* – comme rapport ultime à l'Être et comme organe ontologique.»⁹ – Or l'ontologie précède et annonce la connaissance, dont elle représente la première borne.

En fait, l'imagination peut poursuivre d'autres buts, notamment à caractère ludique: on s'imagine la trame d'un récit, ou bien la composition d'un tableau. Mais il y a dans l'acte d'imaginer, comme implicite, un projet de résolution (ou de composition) d'un puzzle, d'atteinte d'un objectif dont on se propose de défaire le nœud gordien, ce qui nous procurera quelque degré d'apaisement. (On peut aussi couper net le nœud gordien, d'un seul coup, comme l'a fait Alexandre le Grand à Gordion, et renoncer au savoir en vue d'accéder immédiatement au pouvoir.)

Pour les Grecs antiques la force de l'invention semblait si prodigieuse que, «à l'intérieur, ce n'est pas le Moi que je trouve, mais un *daimon* qui s'est établi en moi».¹⁰ Socrate se disait possédé par son *daimon*; et longtemps après lui, de grands poètes, tels Hölderlin et Rilke, se croyaient visités par 'le dieu', qui leur apportait la clef de leurs

⁷ E.B. Condillac, «Extrait raisonné du traité des sensations», in *Oeuvres complètes de Condillac*, Dufart, Paris 1803, vol. IV.

⁸ M. Proust, *À la recherche du temps perdu VII, Le temps retrouvé*, NRF Gallimard, Paris 1992, p. 317.

⁹ M. Merleau-Ponty, *Le visible et l'invisible*, Gallimard, Paris 1964, p. 160.

¹⁰ G. Aubry, F. Ildefonse, *Le moi et l'intériorité*, Vrin, Paris 2008, p.13.

poèmes.

Dès qu'on abandonne l'état de contemplation pure et simple du monde extérieur et qu'on est saisi d'une inquiétude qui porte sur les objets du dehors, dès lors on est en train d'imaginer, et on se pose des questions destinées à éclaircir des problèmes, à déchiffrer des énigmes ou à surmonter des imbroglios. C'est dans ce jeu que la métaphore peut nous guider. L'histoire des idées grouille de métaphores.

Le mythe, forme première de littérature orale, vise à combler le gouffre menaçant du temps primordial et de celui de l'avenir, chez les sociétés sans écriture qui l'inventent et y croient. L'imagination des 'faiseurs de mythes' doit chercher les mythèmes, ces noyaux thématiques finalement insérés dans le texte des récits. – Comment s'est formé l'univers? D'où vient-on? Où va-t-on? À quoi bon sommes-nous ici-bas?

Qui sont ces 'faiseurs de mythes'? – Dans les religions chamaniques il s'agit d'initiés qui, par l'entremise de quelques hallucinogènes ou de l'effet d'une musique monotone, subissent une dissolution de la conscience jusqu'à la transe, descendent au sous-sol ou montent au-dessus des nuages, s'entretiennent avec les animaux sacrés et redescendent vers leur peuple, en apportant de nouveaux éléments mythopoïétiques¹¹.

L'imagination reprend ce que les Grecs appelaient la *métis*, c'est-à-dire l'astuce, la ruse. Pourquoi *métis*? Parce qu'après avoir séduit la déesse maritime Métis, qui possédait l'art suprême des métamorphoses, Zeus, inquiet de ses pouvoirs, l'a avalée, et de ces noces cannibalesques est née Athéna, la déesse rusée par excellence, patronne de la science et de la technique.

Pour ces Grecs de la fin de l'Archaïsme, qui croyaient toujours aux dieux et aux mythes, *póros* (le contraire d'*aporia*) c'était le chemin à chercher, et *tekmon* l'idée qui leur procurerait l'issue. Je me rapporte au livre de Marcel Detienne et Jean-Pierre Vernant, *Les ruses de l'intelligence*¹².

Ces mots étaient liés à la navigation en haute mer, quand on avait perdu tous les repères et qu'il fallait poursuivre. Dès que *tekmon* permettait de franchir l'obstacle, *póros* guidait la navigation et on pouvait arriver à bon port. Et on saurait transposer ces beaux concepts, métaphoriquement, à la science, à la formulation d'hypothèses, à l'herméneutique et, finalement, à l'heuristique.

L'exemple limite d'un mythe dans l'espace de la science est, à mon avis, la soi-disant théorie du *big bang*. Malgré le sérieux de tous les arguments apportés à l'appui d'une telle construction, il s'agit évidemment d'un mythe merveilleux que l'on peut comparer à 'l'œuf cosmogonique' de la religion orphico-pythagorique, l'œuf qui époinçait soudain dans le ciel de la Nuit pour vomir littéralement tout l'univers. Et il faut l'avouer: cette construction se range plutôt du côté des religions monothéistes que de la pensée raisonnée.

Il y a des scientifiques qui se bornent à accepter le côté visible de l'Être, ou ce qui pourrait devenir visible et être mesuré, daté, expliqué et réduit à la condition de phénomène. Les voilà, ces «sourds et aveugles d'essences» dont parlait Husserl: ils n'entrevoient même pas la portée du vers célèbre du poème de Parménide, où l'Eléate

¹¹ C. Lévi-Strauss, «Les champignons dans la culture», in *Anthropologie structurale deux*, Plon, Paris 1973, pp. 263-279. - Lewis-Williams, J.D., Dowson, T.A. (1988) – The Signs of all Times, *Current Anthropology*, 29, 202-245.

¹² M. Detienne, J.P. Vernant, « La métis orphique et la seiche de Téthys », in *Les ruses de l'intelligence: la métis des Grecs*, Paris, 2018 (Flammarion).

constate que, du fait de signaler l'Être, il prouve son ubiquité dans ce qu'on nomme l'espace-temps, et toute possibilité de commencement s'efface.

Opacité originaire du monde. – Prenons comme exemple la perception d'aspects de la nature (la même nature où nous siégeons) reçus à travers les yeux d'un insecte, disons d'une libellule ou d'un *Calopteryx*. Voilà ce qui restera à tout jamais inaccessible aux démarches et aux limites de la science objective. On peut en proposer des modèles et en donner des simulacres de plus en plus complexes: mais ce sera toujours *le dehors*: jamais on ne verra *du dedans*, comme la libellule ou le *Calopteryx*.

Il y a pourtant des gens qui refusent ces limites et s'accrochent à la «cécité d'essences». – Jean Paulhan raconte que, face à une toile de Georges Braque, quelqu'un a demandé au peintre: «Mais cet éclairage n'est pas dans la nature. – Et moi, alors, je ne suis pas de la nature ? – Mais cette lumière encore, d'où vient-elle ? – Ah, c'est d'une autre toile, que vous ne connaissez pas.»¹³

C'est pourquoi ils ignorent le caractère d'aporie du modèle du *big bang*. Et comme des données fortuites et des calculs ingénieux viennent à l'appui de leur point de vue, qui tient à merveille dans le cadre des idéologies religieuses prépondérantes, ils prennent le nuage pour Héra, et enseignent à qui voudra les écouter un mythe déguisé en modèle scientifique, voire en théorie que l'on pourrait mettre à l'épreuve et réfuter.

On peut évoquer ici l'anecdote que l'on raconte à propos d'un disciple de Saint Augustin, qui lui aurait demandé: «Maître, que faisait Dieu avant d'avoir créé le monde ?» – Et Augustin, gêné par la question: «Il cherchait un bâton pour te frapper!» – Le non-sens d'obtenir quelque chose à partir du néant est aussi mythique que l'idée de prolonger la présence de la conscience du Moi après la mort, en faisant appel au temps métaphysique de l'éternité.

III. Logos

Dans le cadre de la science, telle qu'on la conçoit aujourd'hui, ce qui découle du dialogue et de l'emboîtement entre imagination et invention c'est le processus même qui mène à la découverte: l'idée imaginée est posée comme hypothèse qu'il s'agit de confirmer ou de réfuter: le jeu de l'imagination se prolonge dans la nécessité d'une explication.

Archimède se baigne. Il plonge dans l'eau, littéralement: son corps est dans la matière fluide, mais c'est son esprit qui flotte et doit trouver la clef, en fait le principe qui porte son nom. Tout d'un coup il s'aperçoit que son corps pèse moins – son poids perçu, son poids 'vécu'. Tout le monde avant lui avait éprouvé cette impression: mais, lui, il la trouve singulière. La conscience d'une telle perception convoque l'étonnement, qui fait place à la réflexion et à l'imagination: il s'agit de scruter un secret caché dans l'intimité des fluides.

Le Syracusain fait, dans un sens, la 'phénoménologie' de la matière liquide: il se met à la place de l'eau, et se rend compte alors que l'eau 'revendique ses droits' et exerce sur lui une force d'impulsion qui égale le volume que l'immersion de son

¹³ J. Beaufret, «Préface», in Heidegger, M., *Essais et conférences*, NRF Gallimard, Paris 1957, p. VII.

corps a déplacé, qu'il a 'volé', pour ainsi dire, à l'eau. C'est le moment de l'*Eureka*. La découverte trouve son aboutissement et son apothéose.

Cependant, il y a dans tout élan de l'imagination une composante émotionnelle: l'imagination prend son essor et la conscience est saisie d'un frisson semblable à l'*enthousiasmos* de la sibylle qui prophétise. — Or — écrit Sartre — «la conscience qui s'émeut ressemble assez à la conscience qui s'endort».¹⁴ Il faut donc que cet excès d'énergie qui accompagne l'envol imaginatif ne trouble pas la réflexion, et il faudra trouver un mécanisme de surveillance.

Nos critères de vérité concernant les phénomènes agissent à l'interface de la conscience éveillée et du *dehors*. Franz Brentano et Wilhelm Dilthey ont les premiers signalé cette circonstance. Et dans le but d'écarter toute équivoque, cette frontière aurait besoin d'analyse et de clarification. Car les enjeux sont asymétriques, le Moi qui juge étant plongé d'emblée dans le monde, qui le précède et l'englobe (*das Umgreifendes*, de Jaspers¹⁵).

D'un côté, il y a ce que l'on peut nommer les *sciences froides*, la logique et les mathématiques, qui jaillissent intuitivement des premiers fondements de notre raison, comme un *a priori* indéniable; de l'autre côté, il y a la nature. Or ces *sciences froides* se passent des contingences de la matière. Elles découlent d'une cogitation pure, *sine materia*. Elles ignorent le monde. Et la confrontation de ce savoir *froid* avec les phénomènes *chauds* de la nature apporte des repères sur lesquels se fondent les sciences naturelles depuis longtemps.

Il y a des circonstances où l'imagination se consacre d'abord à la *téchne*, en vue de parvenir ensuite à l'*epistémè*, cherchant en un premier temps à obtenir des dispositifs qui dans un deuxième temps lui permettront de scruter au-delà. Les exemples paradigmatiques de ces percées de l'imagination sont la lunette astronomique de Galilée et le microscope de Leeuwenhoek.

L'histoire de l'optique à l'Âge classique est jalonnée de découvertes qui illustrent l'imagination en acte, stimulée par le désir de voir plus loin dans l'épaisseur de la matière. Les opticiens combinent alors des lentilles, ou bien des lentilles et des miroirs convexes et concaves, cherchant les foyers optiques et les proportions propices, et réussissent à voir au-delà de ce que permettait l'œil nu.

On s'imagine l'émoi de regarder pour une première fois à travers ces objets prodigieux qui rendent visible ce qui était jusque-là caché. Puis, par la médiation de ces outils redoutables, on met au point (au sens optique même de l'expression) les problèmes suscités par cette plongée dans l'intimité obscure de la 'chair du monde', pour emprunter ce terme si cher à Merleau-Ponty.

L'effort de voir plus net et plus loin se poursuit sans relâche, et les techniciens se basent aujourd'hui sur une analogie avec un groupe de neurones du cerveau humain pour «utiliser un miroir (d'un grand télescope) dont la surface est déformable grâce à des milliers d'actionneurs, afin de compenser les turbulences de l'atmosphère qui rendent floues les images.»¹⁶

¹⁴ J.-P. Sartre, *Esquisse d'une théorie des émotions*, Hermann, Paris 1995, p. 99.

¹⁵ K. Jaspers, *Initiation à la méthode philosophique*, Payot, Paris 1964.

¹⁶ D. Larousserie, «L'intelligence artificielle (IA) pour corriger l'optique des super-télescopes», *Le Monde*, 15 novembre 2023, p. 9.

Il y aura donc une phase d'invention technique, préluant à une phase de découverte et d'interprétation des nouvelles données. Dans son inassouvissement, l'imagination se métamorphose et ses nouveaux avatars s'ouvrent à de nouveaux espaces.

La recherche de connaissance, guidée par la logique des faits, invente des *méchanai* et les dirige vers le point obscur que l'imagination à l'oeuvre place dans son collimateur. Toute nouvelle donnée éveille le jugement critique, suscite encore l'imagination, fait appel aux arguments de la preuve et les soumet à l'évidence.

Qu'est-ce donc que l'évidence? – C'est le critère de vérité que nous acceptons au fond de nous-même et au bout de notre jugement critique. Et il faut constater qu'il y a des degrés différents d'évidence. Dans le cadre des *sciences froides*, logico-mathématiques, le refus de l'évidence anéantirait toute possibilité de connaissance; mais, pour les savoirs acquis sur la nature, le critère d'évidence ne repose pas sur ce socle intangible.

Personne n'ose douter que la somme des angles internes d'un triangle est égale à deux droits. Mais la conscience de la mort, par exemple? Quel est le degré d'évidence qui soutien l'idée même de la mort, cette certitude que *je* mourrai? – Peut-être que, pour un moment, le penseur solipsiste se doutera du fait établi qu'il devra mourir; et il y a une forme de délire de négation universel, que la psychopathologie classique surnommait le délire de Cotard, où le délirant est saisi de la croyance d'immortalité¹⁷.

N'oublions pas que le critère d'évidence et l'assentiment à la démonstration, même si les arguments qui les soutiennent peuvent être discutés et évalués objectivement, en dernier ressort sont du domaine de l'expérience intérieure, et en cela ressemblent au vécu du *cogito* cartésien. Car c'est au fond de nous-même que nous dirons finalement: "Voilà, c'est indéniable!" – C'est pourquoi on a comparé le choix d'un nouveau 'paradigme scientifique' à une conversion religieuse¹⁸.

De son côté, la logique interviendra pour soumettre les hypothèses à la raison critique, c'est-à-dire pour surveiller l'imagination en acte et en valider les capacités heuristiques.

Sur ce point, je tiens à évoquer ici la personne et l'oeuvre de Fernando Gil, qui, puisant autant dans les philosophies classiques que dans les philosophies analytiques, a consacré l'essentiel de son travail à étudier l'évidence et le dispositif critique qui la sous-tend.

Il y a un aspect singulier de son itinéraire: il est arrivé à la philosophie par un biais peu usuel. En fait il a étudié le droit, et après sa formation de base il a continué à s'intéresser aux lois (non plus juridiques, mais scientifiques) et à chercher des preuves (non pas tellement celles qui désignent le *corpus delicti*, mais celles qui nous procurent l'évidence et nous guident vers la certitude)¹⁹.

Dans un monde où il y a trop de philosophes – les philosophes en vogue, les 'philosophes' des réseaux sociaux, les soi-disant 'philosophes' à la télévision, etc. etc. – il faut avouer que Fernando Gil, par la profondeur, l'unité, la singularité et la cohérence de son oeuvre, a été *le* philosophe portugais du XX siècle.

Prenons comme exemple de cohérence scientifique accomplie l'élucidation de la

¹⁷ Cf. p. ex.: H. Ey, *Traité des hallucinations*, tome I, Masson et Cie, Paris 1973, pp. 301-302.

¹⁸ T. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, The Univ. of Chicago Press, Chicago 1970.

¹⁹ F. Gil, *Traité de l'évidence*, Jérôme Millon, Grenoble 1993.

grande énigme qu'a été le mécanisme de la circulation du sang chez les vertébrés. La recherche dans ce domaine illustre à merveille l'alternance entre l'observation des faits et l'imagination à l'oeuvre, conduisant la raison vers la découverte.

Les médecins et naturalistes de l'Antiquité croyaient que le cœur renvoyait le sang vers les organes et les tissus périphériques et le recevait en retour. Pourtant, le médecin portugais Amatus Lusitanus (1511-1568), qui a quitté son pays d'origine en fuyant l'Inquisition, découvrit l'existence des valvules veineuses. Il n'y aurait donc pas un seul type de vaisseaux sanguins, mais deux, les centrifuges et les centripètes.

Cette découverte permit à William Harvey (1578-1657) de prouver le mécanisme véritable de la circulation et d'abandonner la métaphore ancienne d'une pompe ardente, le cœur, refroidie par le souffle intermittent des poumons. En fait, le sang est propulsé par la systole du ventricule gauche, suit dans une direction centrifuge à travers les artères et revient par les veines à l'oreillette droite: entre-temps, la 'petite circulation' ramène le sang aux poumons, d'où il revient, oxygéné, à l'oreillette gauche.

Avec l'aide d'un de ses microscopes, Anton van Leeuwenhoek (1632-1721) a réussi à voir, dans les marges de la queue de têtards, les globules rouges qui faisaient le tour de la hanse capillaire et retournaient par les veinules.

Juste après, Marcello Malpighi (1628-1694) a complété la démonstration du modèle circulatoire: il découvrit, par ses observations microscopiques menées sur la grenouille, en 1661, l'existence des alvéoles pulmonaires et des capillaires qui y puisent l'oxygène.

On prouvait donc que la circulation chez les vertébrés se fait en vase clos, contre l'opinion des antiques, qui supposaient le sang déversé dans l'intimité des tissus périphériques. Il ne va pas sans dire que Descartes a participé à des recherches anatomiques et des querelles et controverses à propos du mécanisme de la circulation du sang.

En même temps – et puisque ces travaux avaient été entrepris sur des vertébrés non humains – l'hypothèse épointait à l'horizon d'un plan morphologique commun, et finalement d'une origine commune à tous les animaux à vertèbres. L'homme ne serait pas seul dans la nature.

Les idées de Harvey ne devraient, ou plutôt, ne pourraient se répandre qu'au siècle suivant, l'Âge classique étant trop imprégné de religion et d'intolérance. – Mais, après lui, les sciences médicales, en venant à bout de cette grande découverte, sont entrées dans l'Âge moderne. Fini une fois pour toutes les médecins de Molière...

Pourtant, avant l'arrivée de preuves irréfutables l'imagination interprétative est parfois filtrée par le dispositif soi-disant spirituel du savant, qui tantôt introduit le préjugé dans sa faculté de juger, tantôt s'en affranchit.

Cuvier, on le sait, en étudiant comparativement des squelettes d'animaux actuels et éteints y trouva un équilibre infailible, illustration de 'l'harmonie pré-établie' de Leibniz, qui le séduisait; tandis que Darwin, débarrassé de ces idées essentialistes, a vu dans les 'organes résiduels', aujourd'hui dépourvus de fonction, la preuve du bricolage de l'évolution (comme François Jacob devrait l'appeler plus d'un siècle plus tard²⁰). Et voilà encore une belle métaphore, qui nous aide à comprendre les règles du jeu évolutif:

²⁰ F. Jacob, *Le jeu des possibles. Essai sur la diversité du vivant*, Fayard, Paris 1981, p. 70.

l'évolution des espèces guidée non pas par le génie prévoyant d'un architecte sublime, mais par la main opportuniste d'un bricoleur.

IV. *Epistémè*

Qu'en est-il du rôle de l'imagination dans la découverte en métaphysique? – Condillac mène son enquête sur la portée des capacités perceptives et cognitives des humains. Pour ce faire, il s'imagine une statue nue dépourvue de sensations préalables mais douée de toutes les possibilités cognitives d'un philosophe. Dans un sens, il la fait avancer à sa place, comme les *prodromoi* des armées grecques, qui précédaient le corps de la phalange.

Cette idée, fruit de la pure imagination, lui a été suggérée, avoue-t-il, par Mademoiselle Ferrand²¹, la jeune femme dont on peut voir le portrait dans un tableau de Quentin de la Tour (exposé aujourd'hui à la Pinacothèque de Munich): elle tient dans sa main un traité de Newton – savant dont elle a été la traductrice en français – qu'elle est en train de lire et dont elle vient de lever les yeux, saisie d'une émotion lumineuse qui exprime sa compréhension soudaine d'une quelconque démonstration contenue dans le texte.

Or, la 'statue nue' de Condillac est comme une boussole qui signale le cours du raisonnement tout au long du *Traité des sensations*. Voilà comment l'imagination peut créer de toutes pièces un décor et un personnage propices au discours philosophique.

D'autre part, la métaphore est partout dans le discours métaphysique. Pour apporter un exemple assez classique, souvenons-nous que Kant, dans une de ses fameuses notes en bas de page, dans sa préface à la deuxième édition de la *Critique de la raison pure*, compare sa nouvelle perspective de la subjectivité à la mutation copernicienne du mouvement des astres: «le changement de méthode que j'expose dans la *Critique* est analogue à cette hypothèse de Copernic».²²

De même dans l'espace théorique de la science: Darwin, compare l'arbre de l'évolution à un corail dont les branches se ramifient vers le haut, tandis que se bases se pétrifient (par analogie avec les fossiles).

À l'extrême bout du concept de métaphore considérons la place des mathématiques, qui nous rendent possible un *analogon* essentialiste du monde. Le rôle de la métaphore étant d'enrichir la connaissance d'un objet en le comparant à un autre censé être mieux connu que lui, la mathématique devient la métaphore épurée par excellence.

Or, du même fonds dont on compare le plan d'un grand roman à celui d'une cathédrale, comme l'a fait Proust (*cf. supra*), on peut comparer des aspects cycliques d'un phénomène donné de la nature à une *méchané* empruntée aux mathématiques.

Certes, considérer la mathématique comme une métaphore peut sembler trop osé, sinon déconcertant. Mais, face à la 'chair du monde' qu'il s'agit d'apprivoiser, de plier à notre connaissance et à nos besoins, la mathématique représente comme un échafaudage rigoureux, dont on connaît les règles, et qui, juxtaposé aux phénomènes du monde extérieur, doit apporter aux sciences naturelles l'exactitude, l'opérationnalité et l'efficacité qu'on envisage.

²¹ E.B. Condillac, *op. cit.*, pp. 48-54. .

²² Kant, *Critique de la raison pure*, traduction française de Trenesaygues, A. et Pacaud, B., PUF, Paris 1967, p. 21.

Là-dessus, l'imagination doit choisir la structure mathématique qui conviendra le mieux à l'éclaircissement de tel ou tel problème. Entre-temps, la confrontation des *sciences froides* avec la matière *chaude* du monde réel signale le dualisme qui a jalonné toute la métaphysique en occident, depuis Platon, ensemble avec l'optimisme inhérent à une connaissance qu'on prend pour du savoir.

Mais en fait il s'agit d'aboutir non pas tellement à un savoir accompli qu'à des formes de puissance acquises sur le monde. – Nietzsche avait écrit dans des notes qui deviendraient les *Fragments posthumes de 1888*: «Volonté de puissance comme connaissance: non pas tellement connaître, mais schématiser, imposer au chaos autant de régularités et de formes dont on aura besoin pour satisfaire à nos intérêts pratiques»²³.

Et puisque la nature cherche les solutions les plus économiques, qui tendent vers celles que la géométrie dessine à l'état pur, on peut interroger la matière sur cette base mathématique, en extrapolant les régularités et prévisions sans faille de celle-ci à l'évolution des phénomènes. L'imagination peut alors poser au calcul et à la géométrie des questions qu'elle n'oserait pas proposer directement à la 'chair du monde' qu'il s'agit d'étudier.

Les formes géométriques représentent ce dont l'univers est un simulacre, car les rugosités, les plis, les irrégularités de la 'chair du monde' n'obéissent qu'approximativement aux prévisions mathématiques. Et, dans ce livre mystérieux et laissé inachevé qu'est *Le visible et l'invisible*, Merleau-Ponty nomme *chaosmos* le mélange inextricable d'ordre et de désordre dans la *Physis*.

La mathématique n'est pas dans la matrice de l'univers: les quelques images du télescope James Webb qui nous parviennent et sont censées montrer des aspects de l'origine de l'univers et du commencement du temps, ne se présentent pas comme des géométries pures, mais comme des éclats de chaos.

En tout cas, et malgré la dichotomie établie entre sciences de la conscience et sciences du dehors, la science n'est qu'une, et son unité répond à l'unité grandiose de la nature. – Comment pourrions-nous nous en douter? Et je vous apporte un exemple saisissant de cette unité: on a découvert récemment qu'un coléoptère, le *Scarabaeus satyrus*, proche du scarabée sacré de l'Égypte ancienne, en roulant sa boule de bouse vers son nid s'oriente, dans les nuits sans lune, par la Voie Lactée, qui, pour lui, devient un 'stimulus-signal'²⁴.

Finalement, la métaphore joue un rôle pédagogique et d'illustration, et dans ce cadre Einstein a proposé un modèle mécanique ingénue, pour aider les non initiés à concevoir, ou du moins à entrevoir, certains aspects de sa relativité.

Dans tous les domaines on peut se procurer des dispositifs ingénieux destinés à soumettre l'insaisissable à une règle, à une grille de référence. Le temps n'est pas visible, ni audible, il promène sur les objets sa lanterne magique. Pour l'appivoiser tant soit peu on aura besoin de l'imagination.

La partition musicale, qui a permis l'essor de la musique théorique en occident, joua ce rôle. Elle-même a évolué à partir du contrepoint, le *punctus contra punctus*, d'après des points que les fidèles, pendant la messe et pour mémoriser la hauteur du

²³ F. Nietzsche, *Fragments posthumes de 1888*, 13, 333.

²⁴ M. Dake et col., *Current Biology* (2013), 23 (4), p 149-150.

chant à plusieurs voix, inscrivaient sur leurs missels. C'est dans ce cadre que Beethoven s'adressa à Johan Nepomuk Mälzel, un ingénieur horloger connu pour son astuce (il avait inventé un automate frauduleux qui jouait aux échecs), et lui demanda de mettre au point un dispositif susceptible de battre la mesure de chaque temps musical. Sur ses instructions Mälzel a inventé le métronome, ce petit objet qui, de son tic-tac, scande les mesures musicales.

*

L'histoire des idées s'est frayée sa route jusqu'au temps présent, moment où la dégradation extrême du langage et la rébellion de la technique contre la sagesse poussent les humains à déléguer dans des machines leur soif ancienne de questionnement.

Sur ce point, il faut reconnaître que la science est l'unique continent du savoir qui convoque un procédé supra individuel de surveillance, l'épistémologie, qui est garant de sa légitimité, de sa probité. Ce fait lui confère une limpidité et un caractère démocratique indéniables: elle s'étend à toute la *demos*, c'est-à-dire à la 'communauté scientifique', dont le pouvoir s'exerce par un dialogue ininterrompu entre les savants de plusieurs contrées et de générations successives, et dont tout ceux qui souscrivent à ses conditions peuvent participer.

Descartes, dans la sixième partie du *Discours de la méthode*, propose de «convier les bons esprits à tacher de passer plus outre, en contribuant, chacun selon son inclination et son pouvoir, aux expériences qu'il faudrait faire, et communiquant aussi au public toutes les choses qu'ils apprendraient, afin que les derniers commençant où les précédents auraient achevé, et ainsi, joignant les vies et les travaux de plusieurs, nous allussions tous ensemble beaucoup plus loin que chacun en particulier ne saurait faire»²⁵.

Mais déjà au Moyen Âge, et d'après l'image désormais classique attribuée à Bernard de Chartres, ce moine nous parlait de pygmées qui, dans l'espace de la science, montent sur les épaules des géants et voient *plus loin* qu'eux. Tandis qu'en philosophie, il faut l'avouer, les pygmées se perchent sur les épaules des géants mais voient *moins loin* qu'eux.

Dans le domaine des religions, des géants renversent tous ceux, géants ou pygmées, qui les ont précédés ou sont à leur côté (ou bien s'accouplent avec eux et engendrent des chimères incroyables et paradoxalement vivaces). En art, finalement, géants et pygmées se côtoient, parfois se bousculent, et chacun voit les mêmes objets, quoique différemment.

Voilà, pour le moment. Je vous remercie.

(Conférence donnée à l'Universidade Nova de Lisboa, le 15 décembre 2023)

²⁵ R. Descartes, *Discours de la méthode*, in *Œuvres philosophiques*, tome I, p. 635, Classiques Garnier, Paris 1963.

DEWI TREBAUL¹

QUEL RÔLE POUR L'IMAGINATION DANS LA FORMATION DES LANGUES ? LA CONCEPTION DE WILHELM VON HUMBOLDT

Résumé

Résumé : L'objet de cet article est d'éclairer la pensée du philosophe et linguiste Wilhelm von Humboldt à travers l'usage qu'il fait de la notion d'imagination. Cette faculté, loin d'être secondaire, joue le rôle d'un critère de distinction entre les langues. Elle produit la grammaire dans sa dimension matérielle, à la fois sonore et symbolique. Nous montrons le cheminement de la pensée de Humboldt : dans un premier temps, il restreint le rôle de l'imagination à la création poétique. Il reconceptualise dans un second temps le rôle des facultés humaines, intégrant l'imagination, en complémentarité avec l'entendement, dans la constitution des langues. La langue chinoise, sur laquelle il échange avec le sinologue Rémusat, et qu'il oppose aux langues classiques européennes, lui donne l'occasion de penser à nouveaux frais les places respectives de ces facultés. Nous analysons dans le détail la manière originale dont Humboldt, dans cette correspondance, pense le rapport entre grammaire et imagination pour faire droit à des manières radicalement différentes de «faire langue. »

Mots-clés : imagination / grammaire / histoire de la linguistique/ Wilhelm von Humboldt / Abel Rémusat

What role does imagination play in the formation of languages ? Wilhelm von

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Humboldt's understanding

Abstract

The aim of this article is to shed light on the thought of the philosopher and linguist Wilhelm von Humboldt through his use of the concept of imagination. Far from being secondary, this faculty serves as a criterion for distinguishing between languages. It gives rise to grammar in its material dimension, which is both sound-based and symbolic. We trace the development of Humboldt's thought: initially, he restricts the role of imagination to poetic creation. He subsequently reconceptualizes the role of human faculties, integrating imagination, in complementarity with understanding, into the constitution of languages. The Chinese language, on which he corresponds with the sinologist Rémusat, and which he contrasts with classical European languages, provides him with an opportunity to rethink the respective roles of these faculties. We analyse in detail the original way in which Humboldt, in this correspondence, conceives the relationship between grammar and imagination in order to do justice to radically different ways of 'making language'.

Keywords: imagination / grammar / history of linguistics / Wilhelm von Humboldt / Abel Rémusat

Le rôle que fait jouer Humboldt à l'imagination, dans la création poétique tout d'abord, puis dans la formation des langues, est le thème de cet article. Nous souhaiterions ainsi éclairer d'une manière nouvelle l'évolution de sa pensée. Plusieurs commentateurs ont souligné la continuité de la pensée de Humboldt dans la transition de considérations esthétiques à des considérations linguistiques. Jean Quillien, dans *L'anthropologie philosophique de Guillaume de Humboldt*, souligne que la réflexion sur le langage est déjà présente dans les *Essais esthétiques sur Hermann et Dorothee de Goethe*— même si le langage, en tant qu'il renvoie à des concepts généraux, y est opposé à l'art qui, via l'imagination, a affaire à des individualités.

La notion d'imagination est dans un premier temps employée par Humboldt pour rendre compte de la création poétique. Il retient la qualification kantienne de l'imagination comme pouvoir de synthèse pour décrire son rôle dans la production de l'objet d'art, visant l'idéal, et parle à cet effet d'« imagination poétique ».

Dans les écrits linguistiques, la notion d'imagination apparaît en retrait. Néanmoins, dans un texte important, la *Lettre* à Rémusat sur la langue chinoise, elle réapparaît pour rendre compte de la manière dont une langue manifeste les relations grammaticales au sein d'une phrase. L'approche de Humboldt est à la fois synchronique et diachronique : il s'intéresse à la fois à l'état des langues à un moment donné de leur histoire, et à la manière dont elles ont évolué pour aboutir à ce qu'elles sont au moment où il écrit. Rendre explicite les catégories grammaticales des mots d'une langue relève d'une activité de l'imagination : à l'aide d'une représentation sensible (une désinence, un affixe), une idée grammaticale est associée à une unité linguistique. Ce phénomène relève de ce que Humboldt nomme la « part imaginative des langues ». Cette part imaginative a pour part complémentaire une part intellectuelle, qui n'a pas de matérialisation concrète : elle fait appel au travail de l'esprit pour mettre en rapport les différentes unités du donné linguistique, sans s'incarner en sons ou en signes.

Nous chercherons ici à souligner l'évolution de la pensée de Humboldt relative à la place de l'imagination. Sans prétendre à un parcours exhaustif, nous chercherons à montrer le rôle

crucial que continue à jouer cette notion malgré le déplacement de l'enquête humboldtienne de l'esthétique vers l'étude du langage. Loin de jouer alors un rôle mineur, elle se voit redéfinie et caractérisée de manière extrêmement originale.

1. L'imagination dans la création artistique

Penchons-nous dans un premier temps sur la conception de l'art qui est présentée dans les *Essais esthétiques sur Hermann et Dorothee de Goethe*, publiés en 1798, et sur le rôle que Humboldt y attribue à l'imagination. Humboldt développe à partir du poème *Hermann et Dorothea* de Goethe des considérations générales sur la création poétique, qui débouchent sur une typologie des genres littéraires, avant de scruter dans le détail le travail du poète. L'art y est décrit comme relevant entièrement de la « sphère de l'imagination »². Humboldt distingue trois états d'âme fondamentaux : le premier accompagne la vie pratique, le deuxième l'activité théorique. C'est dans le troisième que se déploie l'imagination. Müller-Vollmer écrit à ce propos : « Dans le troisième état l'imagination domine toutes les autres facultés. Lui correspond par conséquent le domaine d'objets spécifique de l'art. Car ce n'est que relativement à un pur produit de l'imagination que cette faculté est véritablement dominatrice »³. Ce troisième état d'âme implique d'autres facultés que l'imagination, mais elles lui sont alors subordonnées.

L'art, visant l'idéal en partant de la nature, consiste en la transposition d'un objet naturel dans la sphère de l'imagination. Celle-ci a un rôle non seulement réceptif, mais véritablement productif. Humboldt s'inscrit ici dans la perspective kantienne selon laquelle il y a une imagination reproductive, qui redouble le divers de l'intuition, mais également une imagination productive, qui est créatrice de formes. C'est l'imagination productive qui s'exerce pleinement dans l'œuvre d'art. Humboldt détermine dans un premier temps la tâche de l'art en général, à travers deux caractérisations qui donnent à l'imagination une place centrale. L'art est d'abord caractérisé comme « l'habileté (*Fertigkeit*) à rendre l'imagination productive selon des lois »⁴. Humboldt inclut la notion de nature dans une deuxième caractérisation de l'art : « la présentation de la nature par l'imagination »⁵. Si l'artiste s'inspire de la nature, il ne se contente pas de la reproduire : en devenant un objet pour l'imagination, la nature subit une transformation. La nature n'étant pas d'emblée un objet pour l'imagination, cette présentation implique « une métamorphose de la nature, puisqu'elle la transplante dans une autre sphère »⁶. Borsche voit dans cette double caractérisation une prise en compte du point de vue objectif et du point de vue subjectif : « A partir de la distinction de l'art d'après son unité objective et son opposition subjective à la nature, Humboldt parvient à une double formulation de

² Wilhem von Humboldt, *Essais esthétiques sur Hermann et Dorothee de Goethe*, édité et traduit par Christophe Losfeld, Presses universitaires du Septentrion, Toulouse 1999, p. 146.

³ K. Müller-Vollmer, *Poesie und Einbildungskraft*, Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Stuttgart 1967, p.44.

⁴ W. von Humboldt, *Essais esthétiques sur Hermann et Dorothee de Goethe*, op. cit., p.127.

⁵ *Ibidem.*, p.133.

⁶ *Ibid.*

la définition de son concept »⁷.

A la suite de ces caractérisations générales, Humboldt s'attache à exposer sa conception de l'activité poétique. Celle-ci requiert la position privilégiée, voire exclusive, de l'imagination parmi les différentes facultés de l'esprit : « Quand le poète a réussi, d'une part, à réprimer en nous ce qui nous prédispose à connaître la réalité, et, d'autre part, à soumettre toutes les forces habituellement en action à notre seule imagination, il est parvenu à son but. Dès lors, l'imagination règne en maîtresse ; dès lors elle rassemble en une unité tout ce en quoi elle découvre une force autonome et un principe vital propre »⁸. La capacité de rassembler en une unité renvoie à l'imagination comme pouvoir de synthèse. La connaissance de la nature relève d'une visée différente de la production poétique et doit par conséquent être mise à l'écart ; elle est caractérisée, si l'on suit la position kantienne, par la subordination de l'imagination à l'entendement. Ici, dans la création poétique, le rapport entre les facultés s'inverse : l'imagination apparaît comme faculté dominante.

Une fois l'imagination dans un rôle dominant, elle peut viser la production d'un objet idéal à partir de la matière fournie par la nature : « Toute la matière que lui offre, en effet, l'observation, il [le poète] l'organise en une forme idéale pour l'imagination (...) »⁹. Il s'agit ici de produire, à partir de l'individuel donné dans la nature, une forme idéale qui se définit par la totalité et l'unité. La tâche du poète consiste ainsi « à se lier aussi étroitement que possible au monde extérieur, à l'accueillir en un premier temps comme un objet étranger, puis à le restituer en tant qu'objet libre et spontanément organisé et à le réaliser de façon originale grâce aux moyens dont il dispose »¹⁰. Créer poétiquement suppose ainsi une réceptivité initiale, à laquelle s'applique une activité transformatrice, en vue d'une représentation idéale.

2. Poésie et langue

À la différence des arts plastiques, la poésie recourt de manière essentielle à la langue : « La poésie est l'art médiatisé par la langue. (...) c'est la langue et, par conséquent, la pensée qui médiatisent ses effets »¹¹. Cette spécificité de la poésie est soulignée par Mueller-Vollmer : « Dans l'art poétique, le lecteur doit produire l'objet entier dans son esprit. La particularité de cet art réside en ce que son matériau n'est pas la pierre, la toile et la couleur, mais le mot parlé ou le signe linguistique écrit, c'est-à-dire le langage. Dans l'art poétique, la production de l'objet par le medium du langage est en même temps la production de l'oeuvre d'art elle-même dans sa parfaite idéalité »¹². En quoi cela affecte-t-il la transposition du réel à l'idéal effectuée par l'art ? La conjonction de l'art et de la langue apparaît tout d'abord comme problématique : « L'art vit seulement

⁷ Borsche, *Sprachansichten. Der Begriff der menschlichen Rede in der Sprachphilosophie W. von Humboldt's*, Klett-Cotta, Stuttgart 1981, p. 186.

⁸ W. von Humboldt, *Essais esthétiques sur Hermann et Dorothee de Goethe*, op.cit., p.136-7

⁹ *Ibidem*, p. 142

¹⁰ *Ibid.*

¹¹ *Ibid.*, p.159

¹² K. Mueller-Vollmer, *Poesie und Einbildungskraft*, Metzlersche Verlagsbuchhandlung, Stuttgart 1967, p.54

dans l'imagination et n'accepte que l'individuel ; il se trouve donc en contradiction avec la langue, qui n'est là que pour l'entendement et métamorphose tout en des concepts généraux »¹³. L'opposition entre art et langue provient de celle entre les facultés dont chacun dépend, imagination d'un côté, entendement de l'autre. Afin de surmonter la contradiction, la langue doit subir un travail, être remodelée afin de servir aux fins spécifiques de la poésie : « c'est la langue qui la véhicule, c'est-à-dire un moyen destiné initialement à l'entendement et qu'il faut par conséquent retravailler, afin de lui assurer l'accès à l'imagination »¹⁴. La langue se prête à plusieurs usages, d'où la nécessité de son adaptation aux fins propres de la poésie. Le risque est qu'elle en fasse un usage qui n'est pas adapté : « Sinon, elle s'égare aisément dans le champ de la philosophie, et touche immédiatement l'esprit et le coeur, quand elle devrait agir uniquement sur l'imagination »¹⁵. Par la conjonction du langage et de l'art, la poésie s'ouvre à deux objets très différents : au monde, à travers l'art ; à l'homme, à travers le langage. En effet : « Le langage est l'organe de l'homme, l'art, le miroir le plus naturel qui reflète le monde qui l'entoure, car l'imagination, à la suite des arts, parvient avec le plus de facilité à restituer des figures extérieures »¹⁶. Quand le poète se tourne vers l'homme et son intériorité, « la langue lui découvre tout ce qu'elle recèle de moyens inédits, et jusqu'alors inconnus. La langue, alors, s'avère la seule clef permettant d'accéder à l'objet tandis que l'imagination, qui, généralement, suit les sens, doit s'unir désormais à la raison »¹⁷. L'instrument qu'est ici le langage, et le choix de l'objet par le poète, modifient l'équilibre entre les facultés : quand l'art vise la représentation des formes extérieures de la réalité, l'imagination s'unit à la sensibilité, tandis qu'elle s'unit à la raison, lorsqu'il vise à la représentation des formes intérieures à l'homme. On observe ici la mobilité de l'imagination qui permet à cette faculté de jouer un rôle essentiel de médiation.

Selon le choix corrélatif que le poète opère en faveur de l'homme ou du monde, il « sera tenté, en conséquence, de mettre en valeur ou la nature individuelle de la langue au profit de l'art, ou celle de l'art grâce à la langue ; il tendra ou à communiquer vie et forme à des pensées mortes, ou à présenter à l'imagination la réalité vivante, mais sous une forme figurative et intuitive »¹⁸. Lorsque Humboldt, écrivant à Rémusat, évaluera la part imaginative des langues, on retrouvera une alternative analogue, entre les langues qui s'attachent à l'expression directe de la pensée, en restreignant l'effet que peut avoir sur elles le langage, des langues qui, au contraire, renforcent les nuances et les colorations que la langue apporte à la pensée. On peut voir une analogie entre les deux manières de pratiquer la poésie, selon qu'est mis en valeur l'art ou bien la langue, et les deux manières pour une langue d'être en rapport avec la pensée. Aussi, si la réflexion de Humboldt dans ce premier écrit ne vise pas la langue pour elle-même, il ébauche des distinctions qu'il élaborera à nouveaux frais dans la suite de ses réflexions.

¹³ W. von Humboldt, *Essais esthétiques sur Hermann et Dorothee de Goethe*, op.cit., p.159

¹⁴ *Ibidem*, p.143-144

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.* p.159

¹⁷ *Ibid.*

¹⁸ *Ibid.*, p.160

3. Une première réhabilitation de l'imagination

Un moment décisif dans l'évolution de la pensée de Humboldt a lieu au cours de ses voyages au pays basque entre 1797 et 1799, lors desquels il prend conscience de la place de l'imagination dans le phénomène linguistique. Jürgen Trabant décrit en ces termes ce moment charnière : « Dans l'oeuvre esthétique de ses débuts, Humboldt opposait encore à l'art, de manière tout à fait traditionnelle, la langue, en tant que capacité humaine de production de signes arbitraires, entièrement dépendante de l'entendement. C'est seulement en s'orientant vers l'étude de la langue [*Sprachkunde*] à l'époque de ses voyages au pays basque que Humboldt prend conscience que la langue est également une forme de l'imagination poétique »¹⁹. Ce voyage joue un rôle déclencheur et oriente définitivement la réflexion de Humboldt vers le phénomène linguistique. L'imagination ne sera cependant théorisée en tant que telle que bien plus tard, dans la correspondance avec Rémusat et la publication qui s'ensuit.

Quel rôle joue l'imagination dans la formation des langues ? La lettre à Abel Rémusat marque un véritable tournant dans la réflexion humboldtienne, en ce qu'elle mobilise cette faculté et lui confère une place centrale, tandis qu'elle était jusqu'alors exclue des considérations proprement linguistiques. Dans les *Essais esthétiques sur Hermann et Dorothee de Goethe*, Humboldt opposait le langage à la poésie, le plaçant sous la juridiction exclusive de l'entendement. Si l'on admet qu'Humboldt adhère à la conception kantienne d'une triple visée fondamentale de l'existence humaine : connaître, agir moralement, produire le beau, le langage dépendait dans cette oeuvre de la visée de connaissance, et non de la visée esthétique.

Une première intégration de l'imagination au sein des considérations linguistiques a lieu avec l'*Essai sur les langues du Nouveau Continent*, texte rédigé en 1810 et publié de manière posthume. Humboldt y considère tour à tour la langue selon le point de vue de son apprentissage par un individu et selon la considération de son développement au cours de l'histoire. L'imagination élabore les impressions reçues des objets par les sens. En tant que faculté de combiner, de relier, elle joue un rôle crucial dans l'apprentissage des langues ; cependant ce rôle ne peut être entièrement livré à l'analyse, ni explicité. Au cours d'un tel apprentissage, se produisent des « transitions des idées », des « combinaisons de l'imagination »²⁰ qui échappent au raisonnement et à l'observation. En tant qu'elle fait partie intégrante de la constitution de l'esprit humain, l'imagination participe de la manière dont se forment les langues et dont elles se développent au sein d'une communauté linguistique.

Les langues ne relèvent ainsi plus exclusivement de l'entendement, mais sont en partie l'oeuvre de l'imagination. Dans cet essai, Humboldt va même jusqu'à les rapprocher des oeuvres d'art, dont le propre est d'exprimer une beauté idéale : « L'organisation des langues n'est pas purement mécanique, et quoiqu'il y ait en effet des règles et des lois certaines pour déterminer sous quelques rapports le degré de

¹⁹ T. Jürgen, *Traditionen Humboldts*, Suhrkamp, Frankfurt am Main 1990, p. 155 (nous soulignons et traduisons).

²⁰ W. von Humboldt, *Le prodige de l'origine des langues – Essai sur les langues du Nouveau Continent*, Éditions Manucius, Paris 2018, p.83

leur perfection, il y en a d'autres, et des plus intéressants qui ne peuvent être jugés que par l'imagination et le sentiment. Tout ce qui tient à leur caractère, est surtout de cette nature. Elles ressemblent en ceci aux ouvrages de l'art, et sont susceptibles d'une beauté idéale que plusieurs parmi elles pourraient posséder, que quelques-unes possèdent réellement, et qui pourrait devenir l'apanage de toutes, sans qu'elles perdissent en rien de leur caractère distinctif »²¹. Plusieurs éléments sont ici à relever : tout d'abord, le rapprochement entre les langues et les oeuvres d'art. Alors qu'il opposait auparavant ces deux manifestations de l'esprit humain, Humboldt souligne désormais leur parenté, qui réside dans la même tendance vers une « beauté idéale » ; celle-ci n'est pas présentée comme un modèle unique pour toutes les langues, mais comme admettant une pluralité de réalisations ; le « caractère distinctif » des langues est ainsi préservé. Le second élément important est d'ordre méthodologique : pour comprendre l'organisation des langues, « l'imagination et le sentiment » doivent être mobilisés. Enfin, l'imagination est mise en lien avec ce qu'Humboldt nomme le « caractère » d'une langue, qui l'individualise et la distingue de toutes les autres.

Outre son caractère, une langue se définit également par sa structure. Par son cheminement à travers la diversité des langues, et en particulier par la rencontre avec la langue chinoise, Humboldt va devoir renouveler son approche, ce qui l'amènera à conférer à l'imagination un nouveau rôle, non plus seulement en lien avec le caractère des langues, mais bien avec leur structure.

4. La langue chinoise et la grammaire sous-entendue

Élucider le rapport de la pensée au langage, tout en fournissant un critère fécond de description des langues, à même de déployer un contraste entre elles, voilà ce que permet la notion d'imagination, précisée et enrichie, qu'expose Humboldt tout au long de la *Lettre à M. Abel Rémusat – Sur la nature des formes grammaticales en général*, et sur le génie de la langue chinoise en particulier. Cette lettre, publiée en 1827, fût précédée d'un exposé présenté à l'Académie prussienne en 1826, publié sous le titre *Ueber den grammatischen Bau der Chinesischen Sprache*, qui, sous une forme condensée, en annonce les idées principales.

Humboldt échange avec Rémusat, sinologue reconnu de son époque, pour lui faire part de sa réflexion sur la langue chinoise, qui est également l'occasion de remarques plus générales sur le fonctionnement des langues. La spécificité de la langue chinoise représente un défi pour Humboldt, fortement marqué par le modèle des langues classiques (sanskrit, grec, latin). L'étude qu'il en fait entraînera un remaniement de sa typologie des familles de langues, qui considérait alors uniquement les langues flexionnelles (dont font partie les langues classiques) comme langues parfaitement accomplies. La langue chinoise pose un véritable problème théorique concernant la place de la grammaire dans la compréhension d'une langue, et au-delà quant à une caractérisation universelle des faits grammaticaux. Rendre compte du fonctionnement de la langue chinoise va obliger Humboldt à revenir

²¹ *Ibid.*, p. 116

en partie sur des positions antérieures et à affiner sa compréhension même des langues classiques, qu'il pose au début de la lettre comme point de comparaison : « Je m'arrêterai d'abord, pour avoir un point fixe de comparaison, surtout aux langues classiques ; j'aurai principalement en vue ces dernières, lorsque je parlerai du chinois en opposition avec les autres langues »²². S'il considère les langues classiques à bien des égards comme supérieures à la langue chinoise, il parvient néanmoins à faire droit à l'altérité de celle-ci et à ses mérites propres.

Quelle méthode adopte Humboldt dans cet essai ? Il alterne, en un jeu fluide et complexe, le point de vue du locuteur (« Que doit savoir de sa langue celui qui la parle ? ») et celui du théoricien adoptant un point de vue réflexif (« Comment cette langue marque-t-elle les rapports des mots à l'unité de la phrase ? »). En tant que théoricien, il a le souci permanent d'être au plus proche de son objet et de ne pas lui appliquer des catégories qui lui soient extérieures ; il souligne ainsi que les catégories grammaticales du latin ne sont pas toutes pertinentes pour rendre compte des langues amérindiennes ou de la langue chinoise. Il est extrêmement conscient de l'interprétation qui se produit lorsqu'on applique à une langue le cadre descriptif adapté à une autre langue. Dans l'exposé présenté à l'Académie prussienne des sciences, on peut lire ceci : « on doit soigneusement distinguer la grammaire que l'on projette dans une langue à des fins d'explication de la grammaire qui réside naturellement dans cette langue »²³. Sans se prétendre sinologue, qualité qui est celle de Rémusat, son destinataire, il s'efforce de rendre compte de la langue chinoise dans sa spécificité. Il ne peut néanmoins pas renoncer totalement aux catégories grammaticales comme celles de verbe ou de nom, indispensables à une première approche de la langue chinoise.

Humboldt part d'une constatation fondamentale : les langues diffèrent dans leur manière d'indiquer les rapports grammaticaux. La question qui intéresse Humboldt au premier plan est donc la présence de la grammaire en chinois. Peut-on l'observer, se manifeste-t-elle dans certains caractères ? Comment un locuteur parvient-il à constituer des phrases à partir de caractères isolés ? En un mot, où réside et comment se manifeste la grammaire du chinois ? La compréhension d'une phrase chinoise dépend principalement d'une connaissance lexicale, préalable à l'appréhension de l'enchaînement des unités de sens. Le caractère original de cette langue conduit Humboldt à un élargissement de son concept de grammaire, afin d'inclure la possibilité d'une grammaire implicite, non manifeste dans les signes de la langue, mais présente dans l'esprit de ses locuteurs. Afin de pouvoir situer la présence d'éléments grammaticaux en chinois, il énumère les différents modes selon lesquels il peut y avoir « grammaire » :

La véritable grammaire d'une langue s'y présente d'une manière reconnaissable à des marques inhérentes aux mots, ou à des termes grammaticaux, ou à la position fixée d'après des lois constantes, ou enfin elle

²² W. von Humboldt, *De l'origine des formes grammaticales suivi de Lettre à M. Abel Rémusat*, Ducros, Bordeaux 1969, pp. 61-62

²³ W. von Humboldt, (1985), *Über die Sprache – Ausgewählte Schriften*, p. 91

existe, sous-entendue, dans l'esprit de ceux qui la parlent, mais se manifestant par la coupe et la tournure des phrases²⁴.

Le chinois fait bien appel à la position des mots pour marquer les rapports grammaticaux. La position des caractères indique le rapport entre déterminant et déterminé : la langue chinoise « borne sa grammaire à bien distinguer l'idée déterminante de l'idée déterminée »²⁵. La position sert à restreindre l'extension d'un concept, ou à indiquer quel concept dépend d'un autre concept. Les rapports entre noms et adjectifs, ainsi qu'entre verbes et compléments (pour autant qu'on puisse y distinguer ces catégories de signes) suivent cette règle. Cependant, la majeure partie de la grammaire chinoise demeure implicite et dépendante de la compréhension du sens ; elle est avant tout présente dans l'esprit de ses locuteurs. Humboldt est ainsi amené à distinguer entre une grammaire *explicite* et une grammaire *implicite* ou « sous-entendue » :

Dans toutes les langues, une partie de la grammaire est explicite, marquée par des signes ou par des règles grammaticales, et une autre sous-entendue, est supposée conçue sans ce secours.

Dans la langue chinoise, la grammaire explicite est dans un rapport infiniment petit, comparativement à la grammaire sous-entendue²⁶.

Il est ici question de degrés : chaque langue possède une grammaire explicite et une grammaire implicite, bien que dans des proportions différentes ; ces différences de proportions peuvent avoir de grandes conséquences.

L'idée de grammaire implicite ou sous-entendue, si elle élargit le concept de grammaire, demeure dans l'horizon d'une caractérisation de la langue chinoise par ce dont elle ne dispose pas. Humboldt entend compléter cette caractérisation négative en dégageant trois traits positifs, que nous allons passer en revue.

Tout d'abord, il apporte des précisions sur la dimension intellectuelle de la grammaire implicite. Comme toute grammaire, elle est bien saisie de rapports. Relativement à l'isolement manifeste des caractères chinois, il écrit ainsi :

Les termes chinois reçoivent (...) précisément un plus grand poids par cet isolement, et on est forcé de s'y arrêter davantage pour en saisir tous les rapports. La langue chinoise abandonne au lecteur le soin de suppléer un grand nombre d'idées intermédiaires et impose par là un travail plus considérable à l'esprit. Chaque mot paraît, dans une phrase chinoise, placé là pour qu'on le pèse, et qu'on le considère sous tous ses différents rapports avant que de passer au suivant. Comme la liaison des idées naît de ces rapports, *ce travail purement méditatif supplée à une partie de la grammaire*²⁷.

Des idées intermédiaires, qui ne s'incarnent pas concrètement dans des signes,

²⁴ W. von Humboldt, *De l'origine des formes grammaticales suivi de Lettre à M. Abel Rémusat*, op.cit., p. 69

²⁵ *Ibid.*, p.91

²⁶ *Ibid.*, p.102

²⁷ *Ibid.*, p.104 (nous soulignons, ainsi que dans les citations qui suivent du même texte)

sont requises pour mettre en lien les caractères selon leur sens. Elles relèvent de la partie implicite de la grammaire chinoise.

En un second temps, il souligne que le chinois dispose bien d'un système grammatical:

C'est (...) par la netteté et la pureté qu'elle met dans l'application de *son* système grammatical, que la langue chinoise se place absolument à l'égal et au rang des langues classiques, c'est-à-dire, des plus parfaites parmi celles que nous connaissons, mais avec *un système non pas seulement différent, mais opposé*, autant que la nature générale des langues le permet ²⁸.

Ce système grammatical n'est pas simplement un système autre que celui des langues classiques, il est avec celui-ci dans un rapport d'opposition ; cette possibilité manifeste des potentialités linguistiques nouvelles.

Troisièmement, en renonçant aux avantages procurés par la manifestation des formes grammaticales à même les mots, le chinois développe un rapport original aux facultés humaines. Renonçant en partie à des effets sensibles, elle produit des effets qu'on peut qualifier d'*intellectuels* : En dédaignant, autant que la nature du langage le permet (...), *les couleurs et les nuances que l'expression ajoute à la pensée*, elle fait ressortir les idées, et son art consiste à les ranger immédiatement l'une à côté de l'autre, de manière que leurs conformités et leurs oppositions ne sont pas seulement senties et aperçues, comme dans toutes les autres langues, mais qu'elles frappent l'esprit avec une force nouvelle, et le poussent à poursuivre et à se rendre présents leurs rapports mutuels ²⁹.

Humboldt reconnaît aux caractères chinois la qualité d'exprimer chacun une idée entière et unique. Leur juxtaposition est la source d'un plaisir *sui generis* pour le locuteur :

Il naît de là un plaisir évidemment indépendant du fond même du raisonnement, et qu'on peut nommer purement intellectuel, puisqu'il ne tient qu'à la forme et à l'ordonnance des idées ; et si l'on analyse les causes de ce sentiment, il provient surtout de la manière rapide et isolée dont les mots, tous expressifs d'une idée entière, sont rapprochés l'un de l'autre, et de la hardiesse avec laquelle tout ce qui ne leur sert que de liaison, en a été enlevé ³⁰.

La langue chinoise se caractérise, aux yeux d'un lecteur tel qu'Humboldt, dont les modèles résident dans l'héritage gréco-latin, par une part imaginative peu développée ; l'imagination qui forme les langues s'est peu matérialisée au cours de l'histoire de la langue chinoise. Sa part intellectuelle est quant à elle beaucoup plus développée que dans les langues classiques. Elle ne manque en outre ni de système grammatical, ni de style.

²⁸ *Ibid.*, p.108

²⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 116

³⁰ *Ibid.*

Humboldt, par son approche contrastive, dégage des traits propres à la langue chinoise, et constate l'absence de traits fréquemment observés dans les langues qu'il connaît le mieux, c'est-à-dire, les langues classiques. Qu'en est-il de ces dernières, que Humboldt qualifie de langues aux « formes grammaticales développées » ? Par contraste avec la langue chinoise, les langues dites classiques – le sanscrit, le latin et le grec – marquent de manière précise les catégories grammaticales des mots. Humboldt rapporte ce phénomène au travail de l'imagination. Le couple conceptuel imaginatif / intellectuel va ainsi lui permettre de structurer l'opposition entre la langue chinoise et les langues classiques, et enrichir sa typologie des langues.

5. L'imagination comme critère de distinction entre les langues

Ce dont Humboldt constate l'absence dans la langue chinoise, à savoir la classification des mots et leur marquage selon les catégories grammaticales, est à l'inverse poussé de manière approfondie dans les langues dites classiques. Humboldt nous offre une *généalogie* de cet état de fait, en cherchant à rendre compte au niveau de l'esprit humain de ce qu'il constate empiriquement dans les langues qu'il étudie ; on peut ainsi qualifier sa démarche de *transcendantale*. Son enquête va révéler le rôle central de l'imagination, pouvoir de synthèse d'éléments hétérogènes.

Humboldt distingue deux chemins que peuvent emprunter les langues lorsqu'elles se forment au sein d'une communauté linguistique : soit elles s'attachent à l'expression des idées, sans attention particulière pour la langue elle-même ; soit elles cultivent la langue en développant ce qu'elle apporte à l'expression de la pensée. Les langues qui suivent ce deuxième chemin se distinguent par leur partie imaginative prépondérante : elles deviendront des langues aux « formes grammaticales développées ». Dans ce processus, elle se fondent sur « l'analogie qui existe entre le langage et le monde réel »³¹.

Humboldt nous propose donc une *généalogie transcendantale* du classement des mots selon leurs formes grammaticales. Cette approche est explicitement qualifiée comme relevant de l'imagination : « Cette tendance naîtra surtout du *travail de l'imagination, appliquée au langage*, et, dans les langues qui se distinguent par une grammaire riche et variée, ce travail paraît avoir développé l'instinct intellectuel dont j'ai parlé plus haut »³². En quoi consiste cette tendance, explicitement qualifiée comme relevant de l'imagination ? Il s'agit d'« *une tendance à regarder la langue qu'elle parle comme un monde à part, mais analogue au monde réel* ; à voir dans chaque mot un individu, et à ne pas souffrir qu'il y en ait un seul qu'on ne puisse assigner à une classe quelconque »³³. En quoi consiste cette analogie ? A prêter aux mots eux-mêmes des qualités que possèdent les objets qu'ils désignent. Humboldt nous donne comme exemple la distinction en genres grammaticaux, qui procéderait de la différence des genres parmi les êtres vivants : « *La distinction des genres de mots,*

³¹ *Ibid.*, p.65

³² *Ibid.*, p.67

³³ *Ibid.*, p.67

propre aux langues classiques, mais négligée par un grand nombre d'autres idiomes, (...) *appartient entièrement à la partie imaginative des langues*. L'examen de la pensée et de ses rapports intellectuels ne saurait y conduire (...). Mais dès que l'imagination jeune et active d'une nation vivifie tous les mots, assimile entièrement la langue au monde réel, en achève la prosopopée, en faisant de chaque période un tableau où l'arrangement des parties et les nuances appartiennent plus à l'expression de la pensée qu'à la pensée même, alors les mots doivent avoir des genres, comme les êtres vivants appartiennent à un sexe »³⁴.

Une distinction grammaticale est ici reconduite à une différence observable parmi les êtres naturels. Humboldt en déduit que le monde de la langue s'élabore par analogie avec le monde réel. Il développe cette analogie en assimilant le langage à une prosopopée : au monde réel s'ajouterait un monde idéal, créé dans et par le langage. Le terme de prosopopée désigne le procédé littéraire par lequel on prête le sentiment et la parole à des êtres inanimés. Humboldt déclare ainsi : « Si l'on examine l'opération que l'homme, souvent sans s'en apercevoir, fait en parlant, on y voit une prosopopée continuelle »³⁵. Tout locuteur opérerait ainsi, de manière continue, une figure de style ; le langage serait lui-même une gigantesque figure de style.

Par ailleurs, l'imagination se manifeste ici par une synthèse à l'œuvre dans le jugement. Dans la conception humboldtienne, un jugement est une action de l'esprit unissant deux idées d'une manière synthétique. La synthèse est portée par le verbe, ce qui exige que cette catégorie grammaticale soit déjà distinguée dans la langue. Dans le jugement, les langues donnent une forme à la pensée « en unissant les deux idées d'une manière synthétique, c'est-à-dire en y ajoutant l'idée de l'existence. Elles se servent pour cet effet du verbe fléchi, qui est la réalisation de l'idée verbale, et qui ne se trouve que dans la pensée parvenue au comble de la précision et de la clarté que comporte le langage »³⁶. La synthèse qu'opère le jugement entre deux idées a pour condition que le verbe ait été distingué grammaticalement. Cela a lieu de manière éminente dans les langues classiques, dont, aux yeux de Humboldt, les formes grammaticales sont les plus accomplies.

Si le recours à l'imagination a lieu dans toutes les langues, il est susceptible de différents degrés :

Cette partie des langues pour ainsi dire imaginative se trouve nécessairement et invariablement dans tout parler. Seulement tandis qu'une nation en fait un usage extensif, une autre en fait un usage moindre. Les langues classiques élaborent cette partie au plus haut degré, les chinois en prennent uniquement ce qui en est indispensable pour le parler et la compréhension³⁷.

³⁴ *Ibid.*, p.70-71

³⁵ *Ibid.*, p.70.

³⁶ *Ibid.*, p.69

³⁷ W. von Humboldt, *Über die Sprache – Ausgewählte Schriften*, p. 92

6. L'imagination dans le rapport entre pensée et langage

Humboldt poursuit donc, dans la lettre à Rémusat, la réhabilitation de l'imagination, à laquelle il attribue désormais un rôle central dans sa réflexion sur le langage. Cela est dû à plusieurs raisons : tout d'abord, l'importance capitale qu'il accorde à la dimension *sonore* du langage. La langue est avant tout combinaison de sons, associés à des idées ; le rapport étroit qu'entretient l'imagination avec la sensibilité en fait la médiatrice idéale entre les sens et l'esprit ; celui-ci ne peut atteindre à la précision dans l'expression de la pensée qu'à travers le lien tissé avec une dimension sensible, la dimension sonore. L'imagination compte parmi ses opérations celle d'associer sons et idées. Deux sphères hétérogènes entrent ainsi en rapport lors de la formation d'une langue, deux mondes, le monde des sons et celui des idées. En effet, l'imagination est « cette faculté qui revêt les idées de sons pour les placer au-dehors de l'homme, pour les faire revenir à son oreille proférées comme paroles, par la bouche d'êtres organisés ainsi que lui, et pour les faire agir ensuite de nouveau en lui-même comme des idées fixées par le langage »³⁸. Elle lie ainsi des éléments hétérogènes, les sons et les idées, qui appartiennent à des sphères différentes, celle de la pensée et celle de l'espace sonore, accomplissant ainsi une synthèse productive, qui détermine l'échange linguistique prenant la forme d'un dialogue.

L'association des sons aux idées va conférer aux idées de nouvelles propriétés : les idées ayant trouvé une expression linguistique s'en trouvent par là même modifiées, gagnant en précision et en nuance. L'incarnation des idées par des sons les modifie et les enrichit de nuances, dont font partie les marques des formes grammaticales. Humboldt évoque un effet rétroactif (*Zurückwirkung*) de la langue sur la pensée, à travers la désignation complète des formes, effet dont la source est bien l'imagination : « la force de l'âme (*Seelenkraft*) à laquelle cet effet appartient est la variété de l'imagination qui pousse à la désignation des pensées par des sons. Les langues dotées d'une désignation des formes achevée doivent leur existence à l'activité accrue de cette force et agissent en retour sur elle avec plus de vigueur »³⁹. Au terme de ce processus apparaissent désinences, mots purement grammaticaux, ou encore des règles fixant la position des mots dans la phrase. Ce processus rend la grammaire visible à même la langue. On a alors affaire à des « idées fixées par le langage »⁴⁰, qui vont agir sur l'esprit. Lorsque les mots sont dotés d'une valeur grammaticale, celle-ci va ainsi exercer une influence sur la pensée, et la rendre plus précise. Les idées, devenues paroles énoncées, réagissent sur les idées initiales. Pensée et langue, en une interaction permanente, vont s'enrichir mutuellement.

Par la synthèse que l'imagination opère entre des sons et des idées, on a affaire à une schématisation d'un caractère original. Le terme de schématisation est employé par Kant dans la *Critique de la Raison pure* pour décrire le rôle de médiation joué par l'imagination dans la constitution de la connaissance : les schèmes qu'elle produit permettent l'application de concepts a priori, issus de l'entendement, à des intuitions, fournies par la sensibilité. Dans la formation du langage, l'imagination *op. cit.* joue un

³⁸ W. von Humboldt, *De l'origine des formes grammaticales* suivi de *Lettre à M. Abel Rémusat*, *op. cit.* p. 119

³⁹ W. von Humboldt, *Über die Sprache – Ausgewählte Schriften*, *op. cit.* p.102

⁴⁰ W. von Humboldt, *De l'origine des formes grammaticales* suivi de *Lettre à M. Abel Rémusat*, *op. cit.* p.119

rôle analogue : il ne s'agit plus alors d'élaborer une connaissance, mais de rendre le discours possible, de désigner des objets et leurs relations.

En quoi le nouveau rôle conféré à l'imagination par Humboldt permet-il de repenser les caractéristiques des langues et leur diversité ? On peut attribuer un double rôle à l'imagination. Tout d'abord, l'imagination a un rôle constitutif pour tout langage, par la synthèse du son et de l'idée qu'elle opère. Cela vaut pour tout langage et en est une condition de possibilité ; cette synthèse revêt ainsi une dimension transcendante. L'imagination joue en outre un rôle d'enrichissement et d'accroissement de précision au cours du développement d'une langue. Cette dimension, empirique et historique, se manifeste dans la créativité inhérente au langage, aussi bien lors de son apparition, de sa formation, que dans le développement de chaque langue. Le langage n'est pas uniquement un instrument de catégorisation à l'aide de concepts généraux. Il possède des traits que Humboldt réservait dans ses premiers écrits à la poésie : opérer une synthèse entre deux mondes étrangers.

L'imagination peut ainsi servir de critère typologique afin de distinguer les langues, selon l'usage qu'elles font de l'imagination. Trois ensembles de langues se dégagent. Dans les langues à formes grammaticales complètes, l'influence de la langue sur la pensée est maximale. Il s'agit des langues dites classiques, dans lesquelles la part imaginative est déterminante. L'importance de la part imaginative dans une langue se traduit par une forte influence de la langue sur la pensée. Il n'en est pas de même lorsque la part intellectuelle domine.

Lorsque l'influence de la langue sur la pensée est minimale, on a affaire à des langues « isolantes ». Dans ces langues, dont fait partie la langue chinoise, le rôle des facultés est distribué différemment : la part intellectuelle est plus importante que la part imaginative. La pensée se maintient à l'écart des particularités de la langue.

Un troisième groupe de langues représente une situation intermédiaire, où l'on trouve des formes grammaticales explicites, mais qui ne sont pas conduites à leur achèvement.

La vaste enquête linguistique entreprise par Humboldt implique une ouverture qui met à l'épreuve l'inventivité et l'imagination du penseur : elle mènera Humboldt à intégrer la langue chinoise parmi les plus achevées. L'élargissement du rôle de l'imagination, auquel on assiste dans la lettre à Rémusat, va ainsi de pair avec celui de l'horizon linguistique que devient à même d'embrasser son auteur.

Jusqu'au bout de son cheminement intellectuel, les langues classiques ou flexionnelles joueront un rôle primordial dans la pensée de Humboldt, comme en témoigne ce passage de l'introduction à la langue Kavi : « Parmi toutes les langues connues, le chinois et le sanskrit se trouvent dans l'opposition la plus franche, car la première renvoie toute forme grammaticale au travail de l'esprit, tandis que la seconde cherche à l'incorporer jusque dans les plus fines nuances du son »⁴¹. En plaçant les langues flexionnelles comme l'aboutissement du processus de formation du langage, Humboldt célèbre dans le même temps le rôle insigne de l'imagination, qui s'avère décisif non seulement dans la production artistique, mais également dans le développement linguistique lui-même.

⁴¹ Humboldt, Wilhelm von (1903-1936), *Gesammelte Schriften*, 17 vol., (éds. Albert Leitzmann *et al.*), Behr, Berlin, (réimpression, de Gruyter, Berlin, 1967), VII, p. 271

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PHILIP MILLS¹

POETIC *BRICOLAGES*. INVENTION, INTERVENTION, *POIESIS*

Abstract

What happens to the notion of *poiesis* in the 21st century? In this essay, I argue that a strand in contemporary poetics conceives poetry as a form of *bricolage*, highlighting its transformative nature. This conception is not a radical departure from the etymology of *poiesis*, making or creating, but shifts the focus from creation to fabrication, from invention to intervention. The notion of *bricolage* finds its conceptual roots in the works of Claude Lévi-Strauss and Jacques Derrida, and has been translated in French contemporary poetics as «poetic documents» or «poetic *dispositifs*». In such works, poets highlight saliences that they find in the original material to transform it into something poetic; they rearrange pre-existing texts to produce a new discourse. Building on my reading of Frank Smith *Syrie, l'invention de la guerre*, I show how poetic *bricolages* create a space of generation of significance, which is not only poetic, but also political as this space is the place where poetry encounters the everyday.

Keywords: Bricolage; Contemporary Poetry; Poetics.

Bricolagens poéticas. Invenção, intervenção, poiesis

Resumo

O que acontece à noção de *poiesis* no século XXI? Neste ensaio, argumento que uma vertente da poética contemporânea concebe a poesia como uma forma de *bricolage*,

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salientando a sua natureza transformadora. Esta concepção não é um afastamento radical da etimologia de *poiesis*, fazer ou criar, mas muda o foco da criação para a fabricação, da invenção para a intervenção. A noção de *bricolage* tem as suas raízes conceptuais nos trabalhos de Claude Lévi-Strauss e Jaques Derrida, e foi traduzida para a poética francesa contemporânea como «documentos poéticos» ou «dispositivos poéticos». Nestes trabalhos, os poetas sublinham saliências que encontram no material original para o transformarem em algo ético; re-arranjam textos pré-existentes para produzir um novo discurso. A partir da minha leitura de *Syrie, l'invention de la guerre* de Frank Smith, mostro como os bricolages poéticos criam um espaço de geração de significado, que não é só poético, mas também político já que este espaço é o lugar onde a poesia encontra o dia-a-dia.

Palavras-chave: Bricolage; Poesia Contemporânea; Poética.

What happens to the notion of *poiesis* in the 21st century? In this essay, I argue that a strand in contemporary poetics conceives poetry as a form of *bricolage*, highlighting its transformative nature. This conception is not a radical departure from the etymology of *poiesis*, making or creating, but shifts the focus from creation to fabrication, from invention to intervention. In contemporary French literary theory, poetic *bricolages* have been described as «poetic documents»² or «poetic *dispositifs*»³ because they rearrange pre-existing texts to produce a new discourse. This notion of *bricolage* originates in Claude Lévi-Strauss's opposition between the work of the *bricoleur* (handyman or handywoman) and that of the engineer, a distinction that Jacques Derrida challenges by considering that some kind of *bricolage* is always operating in our dealings with the world⁴. Pursuing this line of investigation, I explore the poetics of *bricolage* in the 21st century to emphasise the transformative dimension of *poiesis*. In such works, poets highlight saliences that they find in the original material to transform it into something poetic. As I will argue, poetic *bricolages* create a space of generation of significance, which is not only poetic, but also political as this space is the place where poetry encounters the everyday.

In the first part of this essay, I investigate the relations between *bricolage* and invention, to show how some contemporary poetic practices can be described as *bricolages*. In the second part, I explore what these poetic *bricolages* do, namely creating a space in which hidden aspects of the world are made visible and silenced voices can be heard. In the third and final part, I focus on Frank Smith *Syrie, l'invention de la guerre* to show the political dimension of poetic *bricolages*.

1. The Invention of *Bricolage*

In an interview with Martine Reid, Michel Butor considers himself to be «a *bricoleur* only metaphorically»⁵. This metaphorical level—in opposition to the everyday practical level of the notion—is, Butor continues, «the invention of

² F. Leibovici, *des documents poétiques*, Al Dante//Questions théoriques, Marseille 2007; F. Leibovici, *Des opérations d'écriture qui ne disent pas leur nom*, Questions théoriques, Paris 2020.

³ Ch. Hanna, *Poésie action directe* Al Dante, Romainville 2003; Ch. Hanna, *Nos dispositifs poétiques*, Questions théoriques, Paris 2010.

⁴ Cl. Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, Plon, Paris 1962; J. Derrida, *L'écriture et la différence*, Seuil, Paris 1967.

⁵ M. Butor, «Bricolage: An Interview With Michel Butor», trans. Noah Guynn, *Yale French Studies*, n° 84 (1994): p. 26, <https://doi.org/10.2307/2930177>.

material. This is what I would like to call the gathering of significant objects, the recovery of what has been eliminated, thrown out»⁶. In other words, the process of *bricolage* is the discovery of the significance of elements that had been thrown out. In this process, *bricolage* gives value to something that has apparently none. This metaphorical level of *bricolage* describes Butor's literary work: it is his task as a writer to find and gather material of various origins to put them together in a significant manner. He is a *bricoleur* of words who aims at generating significance and value. In contemporary poetry, this value lies in the capacity to breach the social order through language, as Abigail Lang argues:

Because the limits of language draw a limit to experience, it is up to poetry to open breaches in the social order: either by decontextualizing/recontextualizing the watchwords to make them appear as such, or by intensifying the experience of reading. The value of poetry lies in this singular experience, which is worthless in the eyes of the market because it is nontransferable and cannot be generalized⁷.

There is an opposition between the value of poetry *qua* revealing or intensifying force and the exchange value of poetry on the capitalist market. Franco Berardi argues something similar in his book on poetry and finance: «Poetry is language's excess: poetry is what in language cannot be reduced to information, and is not exchangeable, but gives way to a new common ground of understanding, of shared meaning: the creation of a new world»⁸. The irreducibility of poetry makes it valueless for the market, but its value lies in its capacity to create a new world. How does this creation occur?

Whereas Butor considers *bricolage* as a metaphor, it has become, according to Christopher Johnson, a general concept applicable to many fields of study⁹. The origin of this concept is to be found in Lévi-Strauss's distinction between the *bricoleur* and the engineer in *La Pensée sauvage*: the engineer has a project and uses its resources to realise it while the *bricoleur* plays with the various elements in their hands until they can make something out of them¹⁰. The *bricoleur* is thus the «savage mind» who uses whatever material they have at their disposal to invent or fabricate something, whereas the engineer is the «scientific mind» who plans in advance what they need to complete their project. For Lévi-Strauss, mythological thought operates on the grounds of *bricolage*, and we could relate this «savage mind» to poetry and the arts, insofar as they are opposed to the «scientific mind».

However, Derrida elaborates on this notion and questions Lévi-Strauss's distinction by relating it to the idea of play. For him, the engineer is a myth and there are only *bricoleurs*: «If one calls *bricolage* the necessity of borrowing one's concepts

⁶ Butor, art. cit., p. 26.

⁷ A. Lang, «Bail Out Poetry», *Boundary 2* 48 (2021): p. 133.

⁸ F. Berardi, *The uprising: on poetry and finance*, Semiotext(e), Los Angeles 2012, p. 147.

⁹ Ch. Johnson, «Bricoleur and Bricolage: From Metaphor to Universal Concept», *Paragraph* 35, n° 3 (2012): pp. 355-72.

¹⁰ Lévi-Strauss, *La pensée sauvage*, op. cit., pp. 30-36.

from the text of a heritage which is more or less coherent or ruined, it must be said that every discourse is *bricoleur*¹¹. Following Derrida, if every discourse is a *bricolage*, we can understand poetry as a specific kind of *bricolage* with language, one in which play is of central significance. This play is what allows the *bricoleur* to create and invent something new¹². The inventive and innovative dimension of *bricolage* is what makes it a notion relevant to poetics¹³.

As Anne Mélice argues: «Bricolage leaves space for innovation, but invention is based on a preexisting structure. Invention must not be confused with the spontaneity of the engineer's project. It remains bound to an inheritance that it either accepts or rejects, and that prevents it, unlike the project that defines the engineer, from being recognised as an original creation»¹⁴. Mélice points out that invention through *bricolage* occurs only on a preexisting background. Invention is thus not a creation *ex nihilo* but a fabrication with whatever is ready at hand. In contrast to the engineer—and even though we have seen with Derrida that the engineer is an ideal concept that never exists—the *bricoleur* inherits from a tradition with which they dialogue. We can see how this conception of *bricolage* is powerful to conceptualise poetic and artistic inventions: they inherit from a tradition (forms, subjects, contexts, etc.) and react to it, often by rejecting it at least in part.

In contemporary poetic theory, Christophe Hanna uses this notion of *bricolage* to describe poetic *dispositifs*: «Let us observe at first that the notion of *bricolage* places the emphasis less on mechanisms of historical subjectivation and domination than on traditional and collective processes destined to respond locally to punctual needs»¹⁵. Against the notion of *dispositif* that has a strategic dimension (following Michel Foucault), the notion of *bricolage* insists on specific needs¹⁶. Poetic documents, of which we will explore examples in the next sections, are kinds of *dispositifs* that reveal this dimension of *bricolage* by explicitly working with pre-existing linguistic elements¹⁷.

¹¹ J. Derrida, *Writing and Difference*, trans. Alan Bass, Routledge, London 2001, p. 360.

¹² In *Playing and Reality*, D. W. Winnicott relates culture to the nurturing of the child's play. This continuity between creative play and culture thus highlights how a *bricolage* is a form of play, and how the child's *bricolage* relates to a poetic one, see D. W. Winnicott, *Playing and Reality*, Routledge, London 2005 [1971].

¹³ Rob Hope presents creativity as a form of recycling rather than a creation *ex nihilo*. We can thus understand *bricolage* as a creative endeavour that connects to poetic (*qua* creative) practices. See R. Hope, *Creativity. Theory, History, Practice*, Routledge, London 2005.

¹⁴ A. Mélice, «Un concept lévi-straussien déconstruit: le «bricolage», *Les temps modernes* 64, n° 656 (2009): p. 91. My translation: «Le bricolage fait droit à l'innovation; mais c'est sur le fond d'une structure préexistante que procède l'invention. Celle-ci ne se confond pas avec la spontanéité du projet de l'ingénieur. Elle reste prise dans un héritage qu'elle accepte, ou qu'elle refuse, et qui interdit de lui reconnaître, à la différence du projet qui définit l'ingénieur, le caractère originaire d'une création.»

¹⁵ Hanna, *Nos dispositifs poétiques*, op. cit., p. 174. My translation: «Observons d'abord que la notion de *bricolage* met moins l'accent sur des mécanismes de subjectivation et de domination historiques que sur des procédures traditionnelles et collectives destinées à répondre localement à des besoins ponctuels.»

¹⁶ The vocabulary of *dispositif* adds a supplementary layer of interpretation by connecting poetry to Michel Foucault's reflections on power structures and their *dispositif*, as he describes them in *Discipline and Punish* for instance. For Foucault, a *dispositif* consists in «strategies of relations of forces supporting, and supported by, types of knowledge» (M. Foucault, *Power/Knowledge. Selected Interviews and Other Writings 1972-77*, Pantheon Books, New York 1980, p. 196).

¹⁷ More broadly speaking, such poetic *bricolages* can be related to other forms of so-called «uncreative writing.»

The poetic document *qua bricolage* therefore leaves the domain of poetic creation to insist on a more pragmatic dimension according to which poets generate significance and value from pre-existing documents. If, following Derrida, everything is *bricolage* insofar as everything comes from an inheritance and that the notion of origin is problematic, poets can be seen as lyrical *bricoleurs* whose work aims to articulate their subjective experience to more general aspects of the world. The notion of poetic *dispositif* thus moves away from Foucault's strategic dimension and towards a more affective one, which we can find in Jean-François Lyotard's libidinal definition of the *dispositif* as «the positive and affirmative formation of the distribution of libidinal intensities that however always disrupts them up to dysfunction»¹⁸. The inventive dimension of poetic documents resides in the subjective and sometimes lyrical intervention of the poet on the original material.

2. Poetic Bricolages

We have seen that the notion of *bricolage* highlights the conception of invention at play in some contemporary poetic practices. What happens to poetry in this shift towards *bricolage*? *Bricolage* is a process of invention that is important for many contemporary poets as it allows them to create a space in which they can interact with the everyday. This space has political implications as a conception of poetry as *bricolage* means that the world is always already present in the poem, that the poem cannot abstract and detach itself from the mundane affairs of everyday world. Following Butor, poetry and art create new worlds through *bricolage*. Timothy Matthew Lee Sutton's poem «Between» highlights this creative and inventive dimension. Its subtitle, «A Bricolage Poem»¹⁹, makes explicit this DIY dimension. Sutton borrows oppositions between two terms from various scientific sources, such as «between ethics and aesthetics», or «between possibility and potentiality», to provide a different perspective on these oppositions. Rather than repeating the binary oppositions, Sutton highlights the spaces between.

A poetic *bricolage* is thus the invention of a space where traditional categories of thought can be questioned. In this sense, as David Crouch argues, «Spacing is creative and political»²⁰. Poetry becomes the invention of a space from which we can rethink our categories and make visible what is usually left hidden in these spaces

(K. Goldsmith, *Uncreative Writing: Managing Language in the Digital Age*, Columbia University Press, New York 2011; M. Perloff, *Unoriginal Genius: Poetry by Other Means in the New Century*, The University of Chicago Press, Chicago and London 2010). Such uses of pre-existing text can be related to practices of misappropriation (*détournement*) or ready-made (N. Dupont et E. Trudel (eds.), *Pratiques et enjeux du détournement dans le discours littéraire des XXe et XXIe siècles*, Presses de l'Université du Québec, Québec 2012; G. Théval, *Poésies ready-made: XXe-XXIe SIÈCLE*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2015).

¹⁸ J.-F. Lyotard, *Des dispositifs pulsionnels*, Éditions Galilée, Paris 1994, p. 160. My translation: «formation toute positive, affirmative, de la distribution des intensités libidinales, mais les détraquant toujours jusqu'au dysfonctionnement.»

¹⁹ T. Matthew Lee Sutton, «Between: A Bricolage Poem», *Qualitative Inquiry* 29, n° 10 (2023): pp. 1091-93, <https://doi.org/10.1177/10778004221123959>.

²⁰ D. Crouch, «Bricolage, Poetics, Spacing», *Humanities* 6, n° 4 (2017): 5, <https://doi.org/10.3390/h6040095>.

between. Following Jacques Rancière, both art and politics aim to draft maps of the visible through a «distribution of the sensible» that works towards a redefinition of what is common and of the ways of acting within this common²¹. A distribution of the sensible determines roles and functions, «parts and positions», for the subjects in language. Poetic *bricolages* are attempts to operate such a distribution of the sensible, to make us aware of spaces of visibility and invisibility. As we will see in the next section, one way to do so is by working on documents and highlighting what these documents show and what they hide, what kind of distribution of the sensible they operate and how poetry can operate a redistribution of the sensible.

Through *bricolage* and its creation of common ways of being in the world, this (re)distribution of the sensible reveals the political dimension of poetry: as Décio Pignatari argues «Pragmatism of *bricolage* leads to the political dimension»²². Applied to poetry, this statement suggests that a pragmatic understanding of poetry reveals its political dimension. By operating a redistribution of the sensible, by creating a space of visibility, poetry allows for what is usually hidden to become apparent. What is hidden is however not a secret core that art needs to disclose in a Romantic sense. It is rather that, following Ludwig Wittgenstein: «The aspects of things that are most important for us are hidden because of their simplicity and familiarity. (One is unable to notice something-because it is always before one's eyes.)»²³. The redistribution of the sensible is thus a redistribution of attention that aims to bring the readers to see what they usually overlook.

The notion of attention has come to play a central role in contemporary poetics, as Jeff Barda argues:

In the case of contemporary French poets, we could also add that they neither seek to decrypt the world nor to aestheticize it, but to create new forms of attention. Through the repurposing of textual residues, they do not intend to suspend communicative patterns by placing the reader in temporary isolation. Instead, what is at stake is direct contact with our mediated attention through the insertion of sudden bifurcations, short-circuits in the flow²⁴.

A poetic document or *dispositif* becomes a way of redirecting attention, of intentionally redirecting the reader's attention in order to show them something they usually overlook. Through this notion of attention, we can thus find a notion of intention that seems to disappear with uncreative writing. As Lucy Alford argues, there are at least two kinds of attention. A first one, «Active, or endogenous, attention is characterized by an intentional work of attention in which the subject

²¹ J. Rancière, *The Politics of Aesthetics: The Distribution of the Sensible*, trans. G. Rockhill, Continuum, London and New York 2004, p. 7.

²² D. Pignatari, «Montage, Collage, Bricolage or: Mixture is the Spirit», trans. K. M. Benson Mundy, *Dispositio* 6, n° 17-18 (1981): p. 44.

²³ L. Wittgenstein, *Philosophical Investigations*, trans. G. E. M. Anscombe, P. M. S. Hacker, et J. Schulte, Wiley-Blackwell, Malden, MA and Oxford 2009, paragr. 129.

²⁴ J. Barda, *Experimentation and the Lyric in Contemporary French Poetry*, Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke 2020, p. 311.

deliberately and purposefully focuses his or her attention on the object at hand»²⁵. This active attention involves intentionality: we intentionally focus our attention on something rather than something else. But there is a second form of attention, Alford pursues: «In passive, or exogenous, attention, the subject's attention is caught and held by changes or movement in the environment, or by the sheer arresting nature of the object itself»²⁶. Passive attention seems to not involve intention. To the contrary as our intentional attention might be distracted by something and our attention caught by something else. However, this second form of attention—which is a form of distraction—can be the first step in shifting towards the first, active form of attention²⁷.

This interplay of active and passive attention relates to Jean-Christophe Bailly's conception of a poetic receptivity: «Receptivity would therefore be nothing else than the action of the poem, than the maintenance of language in its state of agitation»²⁸. This receptivity involves a form of attention, as Bailly pursues: «What is found by the ways of the most abrupt and simple modernity is the idea of an attention, of an attentive and worried listening; it is the necessity of a relation to things that is not that of enjoyment or profit and rejection, but that of regard, consideration, and wonder»²⁹. Poetic documents or *dispositifs* are built around this interplay of intention and attention: the author's attention is caught by a text or a situation that brings them to direct their attention actively or intentionally towards this specific text or situation. In a second step they present this text to readers, with varying degrees of intervention. The active attention of readers is thus redirected towards a text that would normally not catch their attention.

A poetic *bricolage* such as Sutton's poem is what Hanna calls a «poetic *dispositif*» that redirects our attention and trains our eye to see what we usually overlook: «Through its power of reexposition, any *dispositif* possesses a reflexive, projective, and critical dimension. [...] The creation of a *dispositif* is a political action in the sense that it makes manifest what usually remains invisible in the "order of things"—*banalised*, in the police sense of the term, that by which this order holds»³⁰. Poetic

²⁵ L. Alford, *Forms of Poetic Attention*, Columbia University Press, New York 2020.

²⁶ *Idem*

²⁷ Attention studies is a growing field in contemporary research (<https://attentionstudies.org/>) and a recent volume explores close reading in relation to attention, see M. Thain — E. Jones (eds.), *Close Reading as Attentional Practice*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh 2025. From a different perspective, Yves Citton also explores the ecology and economy of attention, see Y. Citton, *Pour une écologie de l'attention*, Seuil, Paris 2014, and Y. Citton (ed.), *L'économie de l'attention. Nouvel horizon du capitalisme ?*, La découverte, Paris 2014.

²⁸ J.-C. Bailly, *L'élargissement du poème*, Christian Bourgois éditeur, Paris 2015, pp. 71-72. My translation: «[L]a réceptivité, ce ne serait donc rien d'autre que l'action du poème, que le maintien du langage dans son état d'agitation».

²⁹ Bailly, *L'élargissement du poème*, op. cit., p. 201. My translation: «Et ce qui est retrouvé par là, par les voies de la modernité la plus abrupte et la plus simple, c'est l'idée d'une attention, d'une écoute attentive, inquiète, c'est la nécessité d'un mouvement envers les choses qui ne soit plus celui de la jouissance ou du profit et du rejet, mais celui de l'égard, de la considération, de l'étonnement».

³⁰ Hanna, *Nos dispositifs poétiques*, op. cit., pp. 19-20. My translation: «Par sa puissance de réexposition, tout dispositif possède une dimension réflexive, projective, et critique. [...] La création d'un dispositif est une action politique, dans la mesure où elle manifeste ce qui demeure couramment invisible dans "l'ordre des choses"—*banalisé*, au sens policier du terme—, ce, donc, par quoi cet ordre tient».

documents—or poetic *dispositifs* to use Hanna’s vocabulary—train our attention to see what is banalised in the «order of things». The poetic work aims to highlight aspects of our uses of language that are usually hidden. Not because these aspects are in need of a metaphysical or romantic disclosure, but because they are embedded in the very fabric of our ordinary world. In Sutton’s case, it is customary for many kinds of discourses to use oppositions between two terms, but we fail to notice the space between these terms. The binary opposition highlights its poles and hides the space between them. Through the repetition of binary oppositions, Sutton redirects our attention from the poles to the spaces between and thus produces a new public discourse. Leibovici considers this making public to be a central aspect as a poetic document «produces, like maps, new *representations* of *public* problems (in john dewey’s sense) and aims to be used, taken back and spread by anyone»³¹. This representation moves away from the factuality of the report and towards the experience of the value of poetry, thus replaying the old philosophical opposition between fact and value.

Poetry creates a space of visibility that amounts, in political terms, to having a voice. How does the voice of the poem become a political voice? How can the poem give a voice to those who are silenced and invisible? Rancière argues that there is a tension between the voice of normativity and the voice of the voiceless. He calls the normative voice the police. Not in the sense of the «petty police» *qua* state apparatus, but as a force that distributes places and roles, as «an order of the visible and the sayable that sees that a particular activity is visible and another is not, that this speech is understood as discourse and another as noise»³². This police *qua* normative force distinguishes between discourse and noise, between visible and invisible, between heard and unheard. In society, this police becomes a law that attributes roles and tasks. The oppressed are those who are not given a role in the political system, those whose voice is considered as noise. If politics as a form of experience is determined by the distribution of the sensible, of the visible and the invisible, of speech and noise, it is a process of inclusion and exclusion, of determining who can speak and who cannot. There is therefore, in the political realm, an exclusion of the voiceless that poetry aims to reintegrate.

3. Frank Smith’s *Syrie, l’invention de la guerre*

Syrie, l’invention de la guerre (2023) pursues the investigations of social and political violence that Frank Smith undertook in *Guantanamo* (2010) and *Gaza d’ici-là* (2013) among other works. Smith’s source text for *Syria* is the *Report of the Independent International Commission of Inquiry on the Syrian Arab Republic* that focuses on the events that happened in Syria in 2013. The work is divided in two

³¹ Leibovici, *des documents poétiques*, op. cit., p. 79. My translation: «un document poétique [] engendre, à l’instar des cartes, de nouvelles *représentations* de problèmes *publiques* (au sens où l’entend john dewey) et vise à être utilisé, repris et diffusé par tout un chacun». I follow Leibovici’s aesthetic and poetic choice not to use capital letters throughout his works.

³² J. Rancière, *Disagreement: Politics and Philosophy*, trans. Julie Rose, University of Minnesota Press 2008, p. 29.

parts, one on the violations outside of combat and one on the violations within combat, that are each divided in chapters focusing on specific themes. What is striking in Smith's reconstruction of the report is the depersonalisation that is at play in the report itself. By using a passive voice and an impersonal pronoun, Smith highlights the distance that is created in the language of the report itself. The two parts of the work is preceded by an «Envoi» which will be the focus of my analysis as it presents the poetic perspective of the work.

From the outset, Wittgenstein's influence is made explicit with an epigraph from the *Tractatus*: «6.4321 — The facts all belong only to the task and not to its performance». This proposition applies to most poetic documents, in the sense that they build on facts to offer new ways of seeing. These new ways of seeing are necessary to approach the facts, and the problem of seeing is precisely at the heart of the «Envoi». It begins and ends on similar questions: «Il s'est passé quelque chose / mais quoi»³³ «Qu'est-ce qui / s'est passé? / Que va-t-il / se passer / à présent ? / Qu'est-ce qui / s'est passé / pour qu'on en arrive là?»³⁴. These questions raise the issue of the transformation of facts into events. How does a fact become an event? Through a poetic reading of the document, Smith suggests a new way of seeing facts and events: «Ce n'est pas tant le fait lui-même / qu'il importe / que ce qui est affirmé / revendiqué ou prétendu par lui»³⁵. The fact in itself has less importance than what the fact reveals of the event. And so the framing of the fact becomes of central significance. What happens to the facts in the framing of the report? Such is the question that Smith aims to investigate and to overturn by reframing the report. How can facts become visible in the archive?

Like the report, *Syrie* is written from an impersonal perspective, on which the «Envoi» insists by repeating the impersonal pronoun «on»: «on dit», «dit-on», «on demande», «on est», «on crie», etc. This insistence aims to show that the voices are silenced in the report, that the screams become mute: «Quels sont les voix les corps / qui passent / dans ces questions?»³⁶, «on crie muets»³⁷, «Quelle existence / pour la parole — / on dit — / qui ne dispose plus de la parole?»³⁸. How can poetry bring the voice back to the body? How can poetry bring the voice back to the voices themselves? «Comment rendre / aux mots / à la parole / leur valeur de lutte?»³⁹. The work on the report is a process that gives this force back to voices that have been silenced in the archive. The poetic dimension of *Syrie* lies in this process rather than the product. It is not to be found in a so-called «poetic language» but in what we do with language. In this sense, and as Hanna suggests, the distinction between ordinary and poetic uses of language is no longer determinable *a priori*:

We do not presuppose the existence of a poetic language that causes a

³³ F. Smith, *Syrie, l'invention de la guerre*, Lanskine, Corcoué-sur-Logne 2023, p. 15.

³⁴ Smith, op. cit., p. 20.

³⁵ Smith, op. cit., p. 16.

³⁶ Smith, op. cit., p. 17.

³⁷ Smith, op. cit., p. 18.

³⁸ Smith, op. cit., p. 20.

³⁹ Smith, op. cit., p. 17.

poetic experience, but we consider any experience declared as «poetic» to be an experience of particularly intense interactions, «integrating» (in the electric sense of the word) various language-games and social practices.⁴⁰

We must no longer look at formal properties to distinguish between ordinary and poetic language, but look at what the language is doing, following a pragmatic conception of poetics.

Poetic documents move from an essentialist poetics to a performative one in which, as Henri Meschonnic argues, «the poem does something. It does something to language and to poetry. It does something to the subject. To the subject that composes it, to the subject that reads it»⁴¹. Against the idea that poetry is remote from the ordinary world, the doing of poetry suggests that it is involved in our everyday life. It affects language (and our related worldviews) and the subject. Poetry creates a subjectivity that can be shared through language. It makes visible some aspects of the world that we usually overlook.

By presenting the report in a new poetic light, Smith aims to create a space in which this voice can be brought back to hearing level. The insistence on the impersonal in the «Envoi» aims to create a distance, to show the reader the distance that is created in the report. Even though the report is supposedly a way of preserving voices, the very process of the becoming archive renders these voices voiceless. The voices that can be heard do not lead to anything new, as the «Envoi» continues with a series resolutions reduced to single verbs all ending variations on «Décide de se saisir de la question». However, this decision leads to nothing but a new resolution with the same ending. This reduction of the resolutions to their verbs aims to highlight the decisions reached and actions to take. These decisions, despite their appearance, are not actions: they do not lead to change. The performativity of the language of the reports runs idle, like metaphysical language for Wittgenstein. Can poetry bring the change that the report fails to reach? Can the voices become voiceful again through the poetic process?

Following this reading, Smith's *Syrie* is an attempt at drafting a map of the visible through the archive. In the report, language is neutralised in such ways that the experience of the oppressed can never be heard. Even though people can express themselves in such reports, there is a form of silencing that makes their voices voiceless. The transcription makes them lose their individuality, and hence prevents any empathy from the reader, producing a form of soul-blindness⁴². The neutralisation of language places these voices at such a distance that they become

⁴⁰ Hanna, *Nos dispositifs poétiques*, op. cit., p. 47. My translation: «Ce qui revient à dire qu'on ne présuppose pas l'existence d'un langage poétique comme cause d'une expérience poétique, mais qu'on envisage toute expérience déclarée "poétique" comme une expérience d'interactions particulièrement intense, "intégrant" (au sens électrique du terme) divers jeux de langage ou de pratiques sociales».

⁴¹ H. Meschonnic, *Célébration de la poésie*, Verdier, Lagrasse 2001, p. 43. My translation: «le poème fait quelque chose. Il fait quelque chose au langage, et à la poésie. Il fait quelque chose au sujet. Au sujet qui le compose, au sujet qui le lit.».

⁴² Jonathan Havercroft and David Owen argue that the exclusion of the voiceless is a form of soul-blindness in our «failure to see their suffering as suffering of the same kind as our own». (J. Havercroft et D. Owen, «Soul-Blindness, Police Orders and Black Lives Matter: Wittgenstein, Cavell, and Rancière », *Political Theory* 44, n° 6 (2016): p. 744.)

silent. In his work, Smith creates a new space in which their voices can be heard, a space that reveals the linguistic oppression and aims to overturn it. It is interesting that Smith reaches such an effect by reinforcing the neutral character of language, thus bringing the reader's attention to the process of neutralisation and silencing. By making this process visible and graspable, Smith aims to overturn the silencing.

By drafting maps of the visible, poetic documents are *bricolages* that aim at inventing something new. Hence the second part of the title of *Syrie, l'invention de la guerre*. By exploring documents in a poetic way, Smith aims to reveal how war is invented in the language of the report. Against the language of the engineer that we can find in the reports, a language that has been stripped of all subjectivity, a poetic reading aims to bring this subjectivity back. By transforming a report into a poetic document, Smith creates a space of visibility and aims to give a voice back to the voiceless. As Leibovici argues, «the aim of a poetic document is not to *make believe* nor to *pretend* that it is a simple document, but to the contrary to establish a space with specific properties to uncover implicit mediations and offer remediations».⁴³ Smith creates such a space with specific linguistic properties and thus uncovers what is hidden under the language of reports. By creating a space of visibility, poetic documents give a voice to the voiceless, to those whose voice has been silenced by linguistic oppression. In this doing, poetry encounters politics, invention becomes intervention.

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⁴³ Leibovici, *des documents poétiques*, op. cit., p. 50. My translation: «il ne s'agit donc pas, pour le document poétique, de *faire croire* qu'il est un simple document, ni de *faire illusion*, mais, au contraire, de constituer un espace aux propriétés spécifiques pour mettre au jour des médiations implicites et proposer des remédiations».

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JEAN-HUGUES BARTHÉLÉMY¹

INVENTION AND IMAGINATION IN THE WORK OF GILBERT SIMONDON

Abstract

The aim of this essay is to introduce the dual themes of invention and imagination in the work of Gilbert Simondon. In the first part, I discuss Simondon's account of techn(olog)ical invention, as it appears in his course «L'invention et le développement des techniques» and in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. This latter book is the one that posthumously established him as the greatest philosopher of technology in the 20th century, and as the only thinker capable of truly «entering the engine», as an engineer might. He is also unique among major philosophers in having developed a thinking that is both deeply technophilic and compatible with ecological commitment. In the second part, I turn to his 1965–1966 course «Imagination et invention», the full version of which was first published in 2008. Here, the theme of imagination takes precedence over that of invention. Simondon rethinks imagination through the notion

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of the image, proposing a genetic theory of it : the theory of the «image cycle». As this theory and this course are far less well known than his major work on technology, I provide a more detailed account, including even more substantial quotations, in order to shed light on a particularly original dimension of Simondon's thought.

Keywords: concretization, image, imagination, invention, Simondon

Resumo

O objetivo deste ensaio é apresentar os temas duplos da invenção e da imaginação na obra de Gilbert Simondon. Na primeira parte, abordo a visão de Simondon sobre a invenção tecn(ol)ógica, tal como se apresenta no seu curso «L'invention et le développement des techniques» e na obra «Sobre o modo de existência dos objetos técnicos». Este último livro foi o que o consagrou postumamente como o maior filósofo da tecnologia do século XX e como o único pensador capaz de verdadeiramente «entrar no motor», tal como um engenheiro o faria. Ele é também único entre os principais filósofos por ter desenvolvido um pensamento que é simultaneamente profundamente tecnófilo e compatível com o compromisso ecológico. Na segunda parte, dedico-me ao seu curso de 1965—1966 «Imagination et invention», cuja versão completa foi publicada pela primeira vez em 2008. Aqui, o tema da imaginação prevalece sobre o da invenção. Simondon repensa a imaginação através da noção de imagem, propondo uma teoria genética da mesma: a teoria do «ciclo da imagem». Uma vez que esta teoria e este curso são muito menos conhecidos do que a sua obra principal sobre tecnologia, apresento uma descrição mais detalhada, incluindo citações ainda mais substanciais, a fim de esclarecer uma dimensão particularmente original do pensamento de Simondon.

Palavras-chave: concretização, imagem, imaginação, invenção, Simondon

Introduction

The aim of this essay is to introduce the dual themes of invention and imagination in the work of the French philosopher Gilbert Simondon (1924–1989), a body of thought that I explored in my doctoral thesis (2000–2003), followed by several monographs, as well as through the publication of the *Cahiers Simondon* from 2009 to 2015². Simondon's oeuvre, both profoundly original and challenging, remained largely overlooked until his death in 1989. Since then, however, it has undergone a gradual (re)discovery, a trajectory retraced by Italian specialist Giovanni Carrozzini in his excellent 2018 article, «Gilbert Simondon : brève histoire d'une

² For a general introduction to Simondon's work, see my book *Simondon* (Paris : Les Belles Lettres, 2014 ; reprinted in 2016 and 2025). For a more detailed and in-depth exploration of his two major works — *Individuation in the Light of Notions of Form and Information* and *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* —, see the two volumes that stemmed from my doctoral thesis : *Penser l'individuation : Simondon et la philosophie de la nature* and *Penser la connaissance et la technique après Simondon* (Paris : L'Harmattan, 2005). The six issues of the *Cahiers Simondon* facilitated the formation of the first international collective dedicated to the study of Simondon's work, alongside the Centre international des études simondoniennes (CIDES), which I directed at the Maison des Sciences de l'Homme Paris-Nord, and which ceased to operate in June 2019.

réception difficile»³. Today, most of Simondon's writings have been translated into Spanish, and his two doctoral theses of 1958 — also his two major works — are now available in English. Graduate students around the world are currently engaging with Simondon's thought. Nonetheless, the process of international reception remains ongoing. It is for this reason that I shall allow myself, in what follows, to cite and comment upon extensive passages that I consider central to understanding the aspects of Simondon's thought under discussion, in the interest of addressing readers who may not yet be familiar with his work.

In the first part, I will discuss Simondon's account of techn(olog)ical invention, as it appears in his course «L'invention et le développement des techniques» and in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*⁴. This later book, i.e. his complementary thesis *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, is Simondon's best-known work — the one that posthumously established him as the greatest philosopher of technology in the 20th century and as the only thinker capable of truly «entering the engine», as an engineer might. He is also unique among major philosophers in having developed a thinking that is both deeply technophilic and compatible with ecological commitment⁵.

In the second part, I will turn to his 1965–1966 course «Imagination et invention», the full version of which was first published in 2008⁶. Here, the theme of imagination takes precedence over that of invention. Simondon rethinks imagination through the notion of the image, proposing a genetic theory of the image — genetic in the sense of genesis — namely, the theory of the «image cycle». As this theory and this course are far less well known than his major work on technology, I will provide a more detailed account, including even more substantial quotations, in order to shed light on a particularly original dimension of Simondon's thought.

1. Techn(olog)ical invention in the course «L'invention et le développement des techniques» and in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*

At first glance, Simondon appears to distinguish artistic creation, scientific discovery, and technical invention in two different ways, depending on the question he sets out to answer :

- On the one hand, if science is understood as a form of knowledge, then it is subject to the objective necessity imposed by that which it seeks to know.

³ <https://www.implications-philosophiques.org/gilbert-simondon-breve-histoire-dune-reception-difficile/>

⁴ The references used will be «L'invention et le développement des techniques», in Gilbert Simondon, *L'invention dans les techniques. Cours et conférences* (Paris : Seuil, 2005), and *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques* (Paris : Aubier, 1958). Although an English translation of this latter work exists, the quotations I will provide are based on my own translations from the original French.

⁵ On this question, see the collective volume *Écologie et technologie : redéfinir le progrès après Simondon*, which Ludovic Duhem and I co-edited for Éditions Matériologiques in 2022.

⁶ G. Simondon, *Imagination et invention (1965-1966)*, Chatou : éditions de la Transparence, 2008. All quotations from this text will be translated from the French by myself.

Art, by contrast, appears as a free activity — an activity belonging to the subject rather than to the object, since imagination reigns within it. Here, the distinction between discovery and creation takes on its full meaning, and Simondon introduces the idea that technical invention serves as a mediation between the two, insofar as it constitutes a problem-solving activity that is at once constrained and free : constrained, because the functioning of the technical object obeys laws ; but free, because its use is a human creation.

- On the other hand, in his course «L'invention et le développement des techniques», Simondon sketches a schema in which what he calls the «extreme terms» are, on one side, science, where «the subject dominates the limited object», and, on the other, «existence», where «the unlimited object dominates the subject». In between these two extremes, art and technology are both described as «intermediate situations of subject-object equivalence»⁷.

In truth, the tension between these two classificatory schemes is only apparent, since the underlying principle of distribution differs in each case. And in the schema that yields the second classification, technics remains the site of invention properly speaking — even if it merely shares with art, and also with what Simondon calls the «clinic», that «intermediate situation» in which neither the subject nor the object holds dominion. But a real problem emerges when Simondon writes, just prior to his diagram : «In the clinic, the object pre-exists the subject ; in technics, the subject pre-exists the object, because he invents it ; in art, there is a meeting and a mutual accord of correspondence»⁸. According to the first classification, one would expect that the statuses assigned here to technics and art — on the basis of the criterion of whether the subject or object comes first — would be reversed. It is therefore necessary to return to the essential framework through which Simondon conceptualizes technical invention according to its different types, which likely goes beyond any hasty principle of distribution among art, technics, and science — even though, in the end, the question may well re-emerge of how different types of technical invention help to define scientific invention and artistic invention as limit-cases or boundary concepts (i.e., discovery and creation).

Techn(olog)ical invention, then, is first presented in Simondon's major work *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* as part of a process of «concretization», synonymous with a progress in organicity. This process presents different aspects depending on whether one considers the level of «technical elements» or that of «techn(olog)ical individuals» — machines, which themselves are inscribed in a third level, that of «techn(olog)ical ensembles», now called «networks» in the information age. At the level of elements, concretization is not only a gain in organicity whereby each component of the techn(olog)ical object comes to have a necessary form. It also manifests in developments such as the «convergence of functions» or «plurifunctionality» of certain components within the techn(olog)ical object — for example, when the cooling fins of an internal combustion engine's cylinder head acquire a second function, beyond heat dissipation : a mechanical function, no

⁷ G. Simondon, *L'invention dans les techniques*, op. cit., p. 157.

⁸ *Ibid.*

longer thermal, which consists in preventing deformation of the cylinder head under gas pressure⁹. At the level of «techn(olog)ical individuals», concretization, Simondon says, is «a process that conditions the birth of a milieu, rather than being conditioned by a milieu already given»¹⁰. The paradigmatic example he gives is the «Guimbal turbine», a turbogenerator made possible because the generator — previously too large to be housed within the conduit containing the turbine — becomes associated with a new plurifunctional milieu that allows it to be smaller:

The method used to solve the problems of water-tightness and electrical insulation makes it possible to introduce the generator into the conduit by providing excellent cooling through the dual mediation of oil and water. [...] One could say that concretizing invention creates a techno-geographical milieu (here, oil and water in turbulence), which is a condition of possibility for the functioning of the technical object. *The technical object is thus the condition of possibility for itself, as the condition of existence of this mixed, both technical and geographical, milieu.*¹¹

Simondon calls «individualization» [*individualisation*, and not *individuation*, in French] this machinic process of concretization insofar as it establishes a «recurrence of causality» between the techn(olog)ical object and its «associated milieu»¹². He regards this as «the condition of techn(olog)ical progress». And he adds:

Only those techn(olog)ical objects that require an associated milieu in order to be viable are properly speaking invented ; they cannot in fact be formed piece by piece over successive phases of evolution, for they can exist only in their entirety or not at all. Techn(olog)ical objects that, in their connection to the natural world, essentially involve a recurrent causality cannot be progressively constituted, but must be invented, because they are the cause of their own conditions of functioning. These objects are viable only if the problem is solved — i.e., only if they exist together with their associated milieu.¹³

The first sentence of this passage does not reserve the concept of invention solely for machines, since simple tools are also invented and already possess an associated milieu. But it is true that machines of the industrial age, such as the Guimbal turbine, require a techno-geographical milieu that contributes to their functioning through a recurrent causality — one that also exists among the machine's internal elements as its organicity increases. The internal combustion engine, for instance, defines within its organicity a «techn(olog)ical essence» invented in the strong sense of the term. It thereby inaugurates a «techn(olog)ical lineage» analogous to the phylogenetic

⁹ See *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, op. cit., pp. 22-23.

¹⁰ G. Simondon, *Du mode d'existence des objets techniques*, op. cit., p. 55.

¹¹ *Ibid.* (emphasis in the original).

¹² *Ibid.*, pp. 57 and 56.

¹³ *Ibid.*, p. 57.

lineages found in living organisms.

Simondon thus affirms the existence of «discontinuity in the history of techn(olog)ical objects, with absolute origins», because the techn(olog)ical essence that has been invented defines a new mode of functioning. At this point, Simondon introduces another type of analogy — distinct from the one already mentioned between techn(olog)ical and biological lineages :

The elements that materially constitute the techn(olog)ical object — and which are initially separate, lacking an associated milieu before the techn(olog)ical object is constituted — must be organized in relation to each other based on the circular causality that will exist once the object has been constructed ; this is thus a case of the present being conditioned by the future, by what does not yet exist. [...] Mental schemes interact with one another during the process of invention just as the various dynamics of the techn(olog)ical object will interact with one another in its material functioning.¹⁴

The final sentence of this passage implies an analogy between the functioning of inventive thought and the functioning of the invented object. Simondon therefore concludes that the invention of a concretized techn(olog)ical object — that is, one in a relation of recurrent causality with its associated milieu — is only possible for a living and thinking being that is itself self-conditioned : « It is because the living being is an individual that carries with itself its associated milieu that it is capable of invention : this capacity to self-condition is the very basis of the capacity to produce objects that self-condition »¹⁵. It should be clarified here that, for Simondon, analogy — understood as identity of relations and not resemblance between things — by no means permits us to reduce, for example, the functioning of the living-thinking brain to that of a computer. It is only the schemes conceived by the brain that «interact with one another» as the «various dynamics» of the computer will interact in its material functioning. And because the brain is irreducible to the schemes it conceives, it can invent a multitude of different material modes of functioning.

What, then, distinguishes techn(olog)ical invention from the inventive discovery proper to science ? While the analogy that enables techn(olog)ical invention is, as we have seen, an analogy of functioning between inventive thought and invented object, the analogy that sometimes lies at the origin of scientific discovery is an analogy of operations, posited by thought between two objects of knowledge. This is not the place for a full exploration of the heuristic role of analogy in the sciences, but it was necessary at least to briefly recall the difference, in Simondon, between the role of analogy in techn(olog)ical invention and its role in scientific discovery¹⁶.

¹⁴ *Ibid.*, pp. 57-58.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 58.

¹⁶ On the heuristic role of analogy in the sciences, I would refer the reader to Chapter 2 : «Philosophie de l'analogie» in my book *La philosophie du paradoxe: Prolégomènes à la Relativité philosophique* (Paris : Éditions Matériologiques, 2024).

2. Imagination revisited in the name of the image in *Imagination et invention* (1965–1966)

The course *Imagination et invention* offers a genetic theory of images in their various forms. What precedes perception, according to Simondon, is the motricity of the living being, and this is conceived as the birth of an «image cycle», which continues into perception itself in the form of «intra-perceptive images», and then extends beyond perception through «memory-images» that eventually become «symbols», leading to the «concretization» of imagination in the form of invention — thus founding a «new cycle of relation with the real»¹⁷. Before explicating this new thesis, a parenthetical note is needed regarding an opposition — largely implicit in the course — between Simondon and Sartre.

Due to the allusive nature of the course's initial philosophical positioning with respect to contemporary theories of imagination, Simondon does not explicitly state in what way his theory constitutes a direct reversal of Sartre's account of imagination, nor how it simultaneously subverts the very opposition Sartre drew with the philosophical tradition he criticized. Sartre had reproached that tradition for treating the difference between perception and imagination as merely one of degree rather than of kind. For Sartre, perception and imagination are two mutually exclusive modalities of consciousness : imagination is a function of «unrealization», whereas perception is a givenness of presence. Against this, Simondon proposes what in fact amounts to a third way, although explicitly anti-Sartrean : in the living being, the image takes shape from the outset within motricity, and thus possesses a pre-perceptive modality, then an intra-perceptive one — that is, it is non-conscious before becoming conscious. In Sartre, by contrast, the focus is always on the «conscious subject».

I shall now explicate the new thesis mentioned above, starting from a passage — the conclusion of the third part of the course — that, on the one hand, explicitly addresses the transition from the image-symbol (the third phase of the «image cycle») to invention, and on the other hand, links this discussion to *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*, particularly in its treatment of invention as distinct from magic and art. It is the complementarity between this general thesis and the decisive passage that allows both to become intelligible, and thereby illuminates the deeper meaning of Simondon's course. The passage reads :

The world of symbols is a kind of pandemonium suspended between the condition of object and that of subject, interposed between the living being and the milieu. In mental illness, symbols may be taken for objective reality, or they may inhabit the subject, who then feels possessed and loses freedom and initiative in action. The arts perform a kind of exorcism, which, instead of allowing the symbolic universe to drift between the world of objects and the subject, anchors it by representing it, ritualizing it, and inserting it into the objective world and into social regularity. Magic draws on the imaginary to evoke or influence, by materializing symbols it re-individualizes, naming them, shaping them to

¹⁷ *Imagination et invention*, op. cit., p. 138.

resemble living beings, in order to use them in acts of invocation or enchantment. The *voult* is an analogon of the being to be enchanted, but it is shaped by the imaginary, constructed with as many symbol-objects as possible borrowed from the real being. All these uses of the symbolic imaginary are naïve to some extent, for they re-activate a content that has already been formalized — the symbol — by attempting to render it concrete again without continuing the cycle of the image that was formalized into a symbol by losing its ties to dated and personal memory. But the cycle of the image cannot be reversed ; it is not from within, and without a constructive, productive, creative, or structural-modifying operation, that re-insertion into the universe can be achieved once formalization has occurred. The symbol is a hybrid of subject and object, with instrumental value for invention. In magic, dream, or fantasy, it can only degrade and illusorily construct a false concreteness — a fabricated world of appearances¹⁸.

As this passage explains, the «uses of the symbolic imaginary» in art and magic are naïve «to some extent» — a qualification that is not minor, given that the extreme of such naïveté is mental illness itself — because the symbol is already the result of a becoming of the image that Simondon here calls «formalization». This process can only culminate in an externalization of universal value, of which the symbol is merely a preparatory form still too closely tied to the subject. To understand this, we must first recall the initial phases of this becoming of the image that ultimately results in the symbol:

- First, as the general thesis already suggested, there is the infra-perceptive image linked to the motricity of the animal organism. The brief first part of the course is devoted to this. This image is an «endogenous anticipation originating in the organism»¹⁹, but as infra-perceptive, it is by definition outside the realm of the «conscious subject». By comparison, we may already note that the invention which concludes the image cycle will also involve anticipation and exteriority with respect to the subject, but this time the anticipation will be that of the conscious subject, and the exteriority will take the form of «concretization» or objective existence of the «image-object».
- Next comes the intra-perceptive image, treated in the second part of the course. Its Introduction had already described the intra-perceptive image as involving «a more specialized participation of the nervous system ; instead of engaging the organism directly in each situation of relation to the milieu, it develops a mental analog of this primary relation. Anticipation, rather than being the awakening of an instinctive activity, appears as motivation and

¹⁸ *Imagination et invention, op. cit.*, pp. 137-138. The final lines, as one might surmise, lead to a justification — original in its own right but also limited and therefore nuanced — of the Platonic condemnation of the arts : «the Platonic critique of the arts as purveyors of illusion applies essentially to those arts that seek to reconstitute an existence from symbols, thereby reversing a process of becoming whose fulfillment can only lie in invention» (*Ibid.*, p. 138).

¹⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 30. Simondon had already stated in the Introduction : «The primary level may be called biological or vital : it is the level that involves the participation of the entire organism as a means of actualization, and that engages this organism in situations according to categories such as the relation to predator, to prey, to partner ; anticipation is in this sense a pre-existence of the hereditary coordinations of instinctive acts such as aggression and flight, involving the participation of the whole organism» (*Ibid.*, pp. 21-22).

conscious anticipation, as desire, as a felt state of need, as a plan of action, with a sequence of images that prepare for the encounter with the object»²⁰. These final words should not obscure the fact that «the image here serves as an instrument of adaptation to the object ; it presupposes the existence of an object, not merely a situation»²¹. For this reason, Simondon calls this level «experience».

- The third level, addressed in the third part titled, is the one at which «it is the affective-emotive effect, the resonance, that takes precedence; the image then becomes the salient point that is preserved when the situation no longer exists. One might say that this a posteriori image is a memory [...]. But it should be noted that not all memories are images. A memory becomes a true a posteriori image when it appears with a salience and intensity that confer upon it an organizing power»²².

At this point, we encounter the level at which the «world of symbols» can arise, as described in the key passage above, resulting from a process of «formalization». Indeed, accumulated memory-images can give rise to contradictions that only the transition to the symbolic can redefine as complementary and compatible aspects:

Thus, for a memory-image to evolve to the point of becoming a symbol, it must condense an intense, heightened experience that energetically binds the living being to the milieu, and it must develop through a series of successive impressions that are qualitatively different and irreducible to one another. It is the heterogeneity of the impressions linked to the same source that gives the symbol its internal tension, distinguishing it from any composite portrait. [...] The memory-image becomes a symbol when the orientation — the specific direction of its manifestation — loses its original univocity in the face of possible dual orientations. The memory of a weapon held by the subject, just like that of a weapon threateningly held by another, yields only images. But these images together form a symbol when the weapon is grasped simultaneously as something that can threaten the subject and be wielded by the subject to threaten others.²³

This «formalization», by which the symbol emerges, thus consists in a detachment from the contradictory experience of the subject in favor of a newly coherent and collectively shareable form. This is why the earlier quoted passage stated that the «world of symbols» is only accessible by «losing the ties to dated and personal memory». Magic errs in trying to «re-individualize» the symbol, whereas art seeks to «insert it into the objective world», and in this sense displays a stronger affinity with invention proper as the culmination of the image cycle — an affinity that explains the treatment of the «aesthetic object» alongside technical invention in the fourth part of the course. But the symbol itself cannot be the object of concretization

²⁰ *Ibid.*, p. 22.

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*, p. 20 (emphasis in the original).

²³ *Ibid.*, pp. 125 et 136.

: invention must instead be an externalization that carries formalization forward into the universal. Hence, invention inaugurates a new cycle of relation to the real and represents a «change of level» resulting from the oversaturation of the world of symbols:

This universe, where movements — linked to exogenous structures — have become suspended forces and energies in a potential state, is an analogical organization of symbols ; it is when this universe becomes saturated, unable to accommodate new experience, that the subject must modify its structure to find broader, more «powerful» dimensions of organization, capable of overcoming experienced incompatibilities. The failure to restructure the symbolic universe manifests in pathological forms when invention, as a change of level, cannot take place and launch a new cycle.²⁴

Here, we return to the earlier opposition between invention and mental pathology as the two extreme outcomes, with magic and art occupying intermediary roles as misguided attempts to bring the irreversible image cycle to completion and initiate a new cycle of relation to the real. It is worth noting that this situation of failure and pathological manifestation may also be relevant to current diagnoses of globalization and Americanization, both of which have failed to invent a new industrial and economic model — something now irreversibly necessary. The gravity of today's crisis signals the irreversibility of this necessity, though not its inevitability, since it remains up to human beings to determine their fate.

Simondon, for his part, arrives at a broadened redefinition of imagination, particularly in a passage on the rediscovery of meaning in inherited «image-objects», which may serve as «supports» for new inventions:

The study of imagination must seek the meaning of image-objects, because imagination is not only the activity of producing or evoking images, but also the mode of receiving concretized images in objects — the discovery of their meaning, that is, their potential for a new existence. Image-objects — artworks, garments, machines — fall into obsolescence and become larval memories, ghosts of the past that fade with the remnants of vanished civilizations. Aesthetic analysis and technical analysis move in the direction of invention, for they rediscover the meaning of these image-objects by perceiving them as organisms, reviving their full imaginal richness as invented and produced realities. [...] It is a philosophical, psychological, and social task to save phenomena by reinstalling them in becoming, by reactivating invention through a deepening of the image they contain.²⁵

What emerges here, in truth, is the outline of a theory that Simondon never fully developed but only began to sketch — one that concerns how «image-objects» abolish the opposition between external world and internal subject, and come to nourish the very human spirit that produced them. For this reason, I cannot conclude the discussion of

²⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 21.

²⁵ *Ibid.*, pp. 13-14 (emphasis in the original).

Imagination et invention without quoting and commenting on the single passage where Simondon most radically opens toward a thesis that would later be developed by Bernard Stiegler:

Everything that serves as an intermediary between subject and object can take on the value of an image and play the role of a prosthesis — both adaptive and restrictive. [...] The image, as an intermediate reality between the abstract and the concrete, between the self and the world, is not purely mental : it becomes material, becomes institution, product, wealth, is disseminated as much by commercial networks as by the mass media that broadcast information. Its intermediate character — partly consciousness, partly object — grants it a remarkable capacity for propagation; images permeate civilizations and charge them with their force. In one sense, images express social and economic facts (for example, the use of plastics in clothing), but once they are materialized and objectified, they also constitute a burden and introduce a tension that partially determines social becoming. [...] *Circular causality, which moves from the mental to the objective real through cumulative social processes, also moves from the objective real to the mental. Every image is capable of being integrated into a materializing or idealizing recursive process. Deposited in fashion, art, monuments, or technical objects, the image becomes a source of complex perceptions that awaken movement, cognitive representation, affects, and emotions.* Nearly all objects produced by humans are to some extent image-objects ; they carry latent meanings — not only cognitive, but also conative and affective-emotive. Image-objects are almost organisms, or at the very least, germs capable of coming back to life and developing within the subject.²⁶

This passage is extraordinary, for it is here that the genetic process Simondon earlier called the «image cycle» becomes fully circular : it is now affirmed that the image-object — «deposited» in artifacts and referred to here as «latent meaning» — acts in turn upon psychic life, beginning from motricity itself. In other words, by interrogating that aspect of the image which is neither purely subjective nor purely objective, but rather an objective «prosthesis»²⁷ of the subject, Simondon revisits the Kantian theme of that «hidden art in the depths of nature» that was the schematism of the imagination. Yet he does so in a perspective already intuitively aligned with what Bernard Stiegler would later show in the third volume of his major work *Technics and Time* : namely, that the schematism of imagination is grounded in a «prosthetic» exteriorization of memory.

Conclusion

This introduction to the two themes of invention and imagination in Simondon's work had no other ambition than to offer a framework for understanding, aimed at those

²⁶ *Ibid.*, pp. 12-13 (my emphasis).

²⁷ It should be noted that the term «prosthesis», which here refers to a «crutch for the mind», as Stiegler would put it, does not have the same meaning as what Simondon, in the Fourth Part of his course, calls a «prosthesis» — understood as an extension of the «human organism» (*Ibid.*, p. 165).

who wish to begin engaging with his thought. To define such a framework is to guard against certain misinterpretations that remain all too present in current «Simondonian studies». This is the case, for example, when one attempts to align Simondon's thought with post-humanism or even trans-humanism — despite the fact that his critique of the «intemperate technicism» of the cyberneticians of his time made clear that his technophilia and analogical mode of thinking are in no way in service of any form of technicist reductionism. On the contrary, Simondon is first and foremost a major forerunner of what would later be called «complexity thought», and this is why, for instance, his notion of an analogy between the interplay of the mental schemes of the inventor and the functioning of the invented object does not in any way imply a reduction of brain functioning to a technological mechanism.

His theory of imagination, for its part, confirms that Simondon is, above all, a thinker of the living. For him, only living beings are capable of giving rise to consciousness — which, in Simondon's view, is always bound up with affectivity — as well as to the «image cycle» that ultimately culminates in invention as a «new cycle of relation to the real». The human being who invents is a living being that has become psycho-social, and *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* adds that the invented object serves as both the «support» and the «symbol» of the «transindividual» or psycho-social relation.

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GILBERT SIMONDON AND THE IMAGINAL DIMENSION OF TECHNICAL OBJECTS: TOWARDS AN INVENTIVE PHENOMENOLOGY

Abstract

This article proposes to outline the inventive structure of phenomenology through a reinterpretation of Gilbert Simondon's philosophy, particularly drawing on Simondon's lecture series *Imagination and Invention* and integrating perspectives from Mikel Dufrenne and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. After contextualizing the present operation, the first section explores invention as a relational process between the organism and its associated milieu, emphasizing its ontogenetic and symbolic grounding. The second reconstructs the same ontogenetic features of images in *Imagination and Invention*, showing how they function as quasi-organic mediators between perception, action, and memory, as well as between subjects and the world. The third section examines the imaginal overabundance of being in technical objects, demonstrating how technicity and sacrality must be understood isomorphically. The final section proposes a reevaluation of phenomenology as an inventive, embodied, and symbolic gesture grounded technically and aesthetically in experience. In doing so, the paper aims to reconceive the phenomenological gesture as a dynamic and inventive response to the transformations brought about by technical innovation.

Keywords: imaginary, technical object, phenomenology, invention, gesture.

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Gilbert Simondon e a dimensão imaginária dos objetos técnicos: rumo a uma fenomenologia inventiva

Resumo

Este artigo propõe fazer um esboço da estrutura inventiva da fenomenologia através da re-interpretação da filosofia de Gilbert Simondon, sobretudo a partir da série de aulas *Imagination et Invention* e integrando perspectivas de Mikel Dufrenne e de Maurice Merleau-Ponty. Depois de contextualizar a presente operação, a primeira secção explora a invenção como um processo relacional entre o organismo e o seu meio associado, dando ênfase ao seu enraizamento simbólico. O segundo reconstrói os mesmos elementos ontogenéticos da imagem em *Invention et Imagination*, mostrando a forma como eles funcionam como mediadores quase-orgânicos entre percepção, acção e memória, tanto quanto entre sujeitos e o mundo. A terceira secção examina a sobre-abundância do ser nos objectos técnicos, demonstrando a forma como a tecnicidade e a sacralidade devem ser entendidas de forma isomórfica. A secção final propõe reavaliar a fenomenologia como um gesto inventivo, encarnado e simbólico tecnicamente e esteticamente enraizado na experiência. Dessa forma, o trabalho tem por fito voltar a conceber o gesto fenomenológico como uma resposta dinâmica e inventiva às transformações acarretadas pela inovação técnica.

Palavras-chave: imaginário, objecto técnico, fenomenologia, invenção, gesto.

*La manière dont on imagine est souvent
plus instructive que ce qu'on imagine*
Bachelard, *La psychanalyse du feu*

Although new technologies have long sought to meet the vital, psychic, and collective needs of human beings—improving individual well-being and social coexistence, and helping to shape what may be called the human «techno-system»²—cultures are not always prepared to embrace them without resistance. This is one of Gilbert Simondon's key insights in *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*³, where he critiques modern culture's failure to integrate technical objects into its symbolic and conceptual frameworks. Unlike aesthetic objects, which are theorised and celebrated, technical objects are relegated to the margins of cultural life and excluded from serious philosophical reflection⁴.

This marginalisation produces a broader alienation, extending from technical objects to the subjects who use them and operatively inhabit their techno-geographical

² D. Ihde, *Technology and the Lifeworld: From Garden to Earth*, Indiana University Press, Bloomington–Indianapolis 1990, p. 3.

³ «Culture has constituted itself as a defense system against technics [...] [it] must incorporate technical beings in the form of knowledge and in the form of a sense of values», G. Simondon, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects* [MEOT], trans. C. Malaspina and J. Rogove, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2017, p. 15.

⁴ As Stiegler points out, «philosophy has repressed technics as an object of thought. Technics is the unthought» (*Technics and Time, 1: The Fault of Epimetheus*, trans. R. Beardsworth and G. Collins, Stanford University Press, Stanford 1998, p. ix). In this sense, his project deeply resonates with Simondon's attempt to reinsert technical objects into cultural and symbolic life.

milieux⁵. While Simondon's critique was directed at his own time, it remains relevant today in subtler forms. Contemporary technical objects are increasingly «aestheticized», their technicity obscured by consumer rituals and social-symbolic overdeterminations⁶. As Yuk Hui observes, this corresponds to a process of «desymbolization», in which «the symbols of rituals and the cosmos are replaced by new types of symbols in consumerist society»⁷—a dynamic that amplifies the alienation Simondon had already identified.

To address this theme, I propose to reconsider the phenomenological method, especially insofar as Simondon's reflections can enrich it. Far from being a fixed doctrine, phenomenology continually reinvents itself in response to historical contingencies—an invariant unfolding and modifying its status through its historical variations. As Husserl writes: «We have an open infinity of universal world truths before us. [...] No individual determination can be final [...] to improve human organisation through technical means and thereby uncover a new, wider world»⁸. This openness, rather than weakening phenomenology, defines its variational essence as a discipline responsive to transformations of experience.

As Don Ihde has argued, Husserl opened the notion that instruments and technical objects mediate meaning structures⁹. Yet he did not address the ontogenesis of technical objects, namely, the multilayered inventive processes that institute them. From our perspective, this limitation does not require abandoning phenomenology in favour of post-phenomenology, instead reorienting it ontogenetically¹⁰. As Carlo Sini

⁵ «The workers alienation is translated by the break between technical knowledge and the exercise of the conditions of use», *MEOT*, p. 255. For a detailed discussion on the techno-geographical nature of the associated milieu of technical object, see S. Lindberg, «Being with Technique – Technique as Being-With: The Technological Communities of Gilbert Simondon», *Continental Philosophy Review*, 52 (2019) 195–211.

⁶ «Such *technophanies*, once recognized and culturalized, are the way through which the technical object regains a place within a culture that ostracizes it: the object reenters the citadel of culture by means of a *ritualization*, rich in images and symbols», (Simondon, G., *Sur la technique*, Éditions PUF, Paris 2014, p. 39. All translations of quotations from texts not available in English are provided by the author). For a deep study on the Simondonian notion of *technophany*, see Y. Hui, «Apropos Technophany», *Technophany: A Journal for Philosophy and Technology*, 1 (2024) 1–13.

⁷ Y. Hui, «On a Possible Passing from the Digital to the Symbolic», in *2 or 3 Tigers Exhibition Publication*, ed. A. Franke – H. Kim, Haus der Kulturen der Welt, Berlin 2017, p. 3. «Desymbolization in this case means detachment of technological activities from the cosmos, the figure from the ground», p. 5. As Mircea Eliade emphasizes in one of the texts recommended by Simondon to the participants of the course *Imagination and Invention*: «the life of modern man is swarming with half-forgotten myths, decaying hierophanies and secularised symbols» (*Images and Symbols: Studies in Religious Symbolism*, trans. P. Mairet, Sheed and Ward, New York 1969, p. 22).

⁸ E. Husserl, *Die Lebenswelt. Auslegungen der vorgegebenen Welt und ihrer Konstitution. Texte aus dem Nachlass (1916–1937)*, ed. R. Sowa, Husserliana 39, Springer, Dordrecht 2008, B I 14/21, quoted in D. Ihde, *Husserl's Missing Technologies*, Fordham University Press, New York 2016, p. 32, trans. F. Bottenberg.

⁹ See D. Ihde, *Husserl's Missing Technologies*, op. cit., p. 54. The perspective of an inventive phenomenology differs from post-phenomenology insofar as it grounds technicity not only in mediation but in the imaginal and ontogenetic dynamics of invention. While post-phenomenology emphasizes the analysis of mediation, Simondon's framework reconfigures the transcendental through invention and individuation, situating the subject within a broader genetic process that exceeds instrumentality.

¹⁰ Before proceeding, it is necessary to clarify our positioning with respect to Heidegger's philosophy of technology. As Ihde notes, for Heidegger: «Technology [...] is a metaphysical perspective. It is a paradigmatic view of the whole of nature that determines the essence of Technology» (*Heidegger's Technologies*, Fordham University Press, New York 2010, p. 18); «in its mode of disclosure, technologies [...] are subsumed under the same analysis» (p. 21). Technology thus appears as a mode of disclosure of Being, tied to truth as *alētheia*. While Simondon also adopts

notes, phenomenology cannot be conceived in a purely static guise: Husserl himself recognised the insufficiency of a description that «assumes the phenomenon directly, describing its givenness as it gives itself»¹¹. Phenomenology must continually reopen itself in its genetic dimension, since «its beginning is never simply given, but always in the course of genetic constitution»¹². From this perspective, invention offers a privileged lens for rethinking phenomenology in its radical contingency and universality.

In this light, the aim of this article is not merely to reconstruct Simondon's account of imagination and invention, but to use it as a lens to rethink phenomenology itself. The choice of phenomenology as the backbone of this investigation is justified not only by Simondon's proximity to this tradition—*Individuation* was dedicated to the memory of Merleau-Ponty, while Mikel Dufrenne was a close colleague and was the subject of a friendly acknowledgment at the beginning of *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*—but also by thematic and methodological continuity. Together, these philosophers articulate what has been described as a «difficult humanism»¹³, distinct from both classical transcendentalism and the structuralist turn toward anti-humanism¹⁴. In this light, reading Simondon phenomenologically highlights the irreducibility of the human subject: no longer a transcendental ego nor merely a product of subjectivation, but always «more than an individual»¹⁵, retaining a dimension of excess relative to its individuated form.

As Barthélémy has argued, Simondon's thought invites us to consider the transcendental in a «problematic» sense¹⁶. Ontogenesis does not abolish the transcendental horizon, but somewhat complicates it, situating it in the dynamic tension between the subject and the world. In this sense, Simondon prolongs phenomenology

a metaphysical stance, his approach diverges mainly on two points: (1) technicity is systematically and genetically related to religion, aesthetics, science, and ethics, and cannot be reduced to a univocal horizon; (2) technical objects are treated as concretizations of technical essences, endowed with a transcendental function retroacting upon subjectivity. Heidegger's analysis, essentially *epochal*, offers few tools for a «phenomenology of the technical object» (MEOT, p. 250). By contrast, here I examine human–technical relations through processes of inventive insertion, without presupposing a fixed technological epoch.

¹¹ C. Sini, *Prefazione to Metodo fenomenologico statico e genetico*, ed. M. Vergani, Il Saggiatore, Milan 2003, p. 12.

¹² *Ibid.*, p. 13.

¹³ J.-H. Barthélémy, *Penser l'individuation. Simondon et la philosophie de la nature*, L'Harmattan, Paris 2005, p. 226. On the relation between Simondon and Dufrenne see G. Carrozzini, *Gilbert Simondon filosofo della mentalité technique*, Mimesis, Milano-Udine 2011, pp. 215–265. For studies on Merleau-Ponty's influence on Simondon, see X. Guchet, «Théorie du lien social, technologie et philosophie : Simondon lecteur de Merleau-Ponty», *Les Études philosophiques*, 57 (2) (2001), 219–237; D. Viana, «On Gilbert Simondon's Inheritance from Merleau-Ponty», *Epoché*, 27 (2) (2023), 247–271.

¹⁴ An illuminating text for this humanist critique of the structuralist and anti-humanist drift of the Sixties and Seventies is Mikel Dufrenne's preface *Pour une philosophie non théologique* to the second edition of *Le poétique* (PUF, Paris 1973, pp. 7–57).

¹⁵ G. Simondon, *Individuation in Light of Notions of Form and Information*, trans. T. Adkins, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2020, p. 344.

¹⁶ See J.-H. Barthélémy, *Penser l'individuation*, op. cit., pp. 48–59. Andrea Bardin critiques Barthélémy's phenomenological reading, arguing that «ontogenesis cannot be considered a phenomenology», while nonetheless noting its proximity to Merleau-Ponty's courses on Nature (*Epistemology and Political Philosophy in Gilbert Simondon*, Springer, 2015, p. 48). In our view, Merleau-Ponty's notion of institution (*Stiftung*) offers a better key for reading *Individuation* in the light of an inventive phenomenology, capturing phenomenology's unfinished character as a constant «new beginning» (*Institution and Passivity*, Northwestern University Press, 2010). A fuller confrontation should be reserved for future work.

precisely where it *betrays* its canonical and historicized structure, radicalising the correlation of subject and object as a process of individuation and invention.

Following Husserl's call to return «to the things themselves» (*zu den Sachen selbst*)¹⁷, I propose a phenomenological reflection on technical objects beginning with the process of invention—a phenomenology rooted in the comprehension of the imaginal dimension of technical objects as described by Simondon. Through a focused reading of Simondon's *Imagination and Invention* introduction, I argue that imagination and the imaginary play a generative role in the invention of technical objects, constituting a key axis for a phenomenological understanding of technically mediated experience. Simondon's account thus enables a rethinking of the transcendental in genetic terms, laying the groundwork for what can be called an *inventive phenomenology*: not a contemplative description of essences, but the developing of a predisposition to *feel*, through a bodily *sense-awareness*, our sensible, imaginal, and affective involvement—and so the genesis of images and symbols—within technical operations. In this sense, phenomenology itself must be conceived in its *technicity* and operationality, embodied in the organism–milieu relation, or—as Merleau-Ponty would say—as a «technique of the body»¹⁸.

To pursue this perspective, the first section examines Simondon's reflections on invention, especially the dynamic between organism and environment. The second focuses on mental images, understood as core operators of invention and mediators between subject and object, perception and invention. The third turns to the objective dimension of images, drawing on Simondon's notion of an «overabundance of being» to highlight the ontogenetic excess of technical objects. The conclusion outlines the features of an inventive phenomenology, conceived not as a mere contemplative attitude but as the subjects' corporeal resonance with the affective genesis of symbols within technical operations.

1. Invention as Imaginal Mediation Between Organism and Its Milieu

As an entry point to the course I mainly examine in this article, it is useful to briefly revisit some of Simondon's reflections in his complementary thesis, *On the Mode of Existence of Technical Objects*. In particular, it helps to situate the notion of mental images—discussed in section two—within the broader context of Simondon's philosophical engagement with invention. Since the elaboration of his complementary

¹⁷ E. Husserl, *Ideas Pertaining to a Pure Phenomenology and to a Phenomenological Philosophy. First Book: General Introduction to a Pure Phenomenology*, trans. F. Kersten, Martinus Nijhoff, The Hague 1983, p. 35. Simondon explicitly recommended *Ideen I* for his 1964–1965 course *Imagination and Invention*. My reading follows Mikel Dufrenne's interpretation: «We understand phenomenology in the sense in which Sartre and Merleau-Ponty have acclimated this term in France» (*The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, trans. E. S. Casey, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1973, p. xlviii). In this regard, Merleau-Ponty's «ontological rehabilitation of the sensible» («The Philosopher and His Shadow», in *Signs*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1964, p. 167) is particularly significant, since it considers the subject–object relation from the standpoint of the ontological irreducibility of the sensible, and thus of the imaginative element.

¹⁸ M. Merleau-Ponty, «Eye and Mind», in *The Merleau-Ponty Aesthetics Reader: Philosophy and Painting*, ed. G. A. Johnson, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1993, p. 129.

thesis, invention has remained a central concern in his thinking¹⁹. In one key section, *Technical Invention: Ground and Form in the Living and Inventive Thought*, Simondon presents a gestalt-oriented reading of invention, rooted in the dynamic relationship between the living organism and its associated milieu.

The technical object, as the outcome of invention, is conceived as *analogous* to a living organism—characterised by a gestalt relationship between figure and ground that determines both its genesis and structural coherence. As Simondon writes, «the dynamism of thought is the same as that of technical objects; mental schemas react upon each other during invention in the same way the diverse dynamisms of the technical object will react upon each other in their material functioning»²⁰. As Yuk Hui points out, Simondon's writings consistently portray technical objects «not [as] dead labour but rather [...] like *living beings*», requiring a relation of maintenance and attention that recalls «taking care of a soul»²¹. Just as a living organism is genetically structured as an individual that carries its associated milieu within its life, so too do technical objects give rise to a technical and natural milieu which, through a process of recurring causality, both conditions and is conditioned by them.

Therefore, the principle of technical invention lies in the organism's very capacity for self-conditioning: «The reason the living being can invent is because it is an individual being that carries its associated milieu with it; this capacity for conditioning itself lies at the root of the capacity to produce objects that condition themselves»²². As Emanuele Clarizio notes, inventors possess a capacity for technical schematisation precisely insofar as they are living beings—since life itself demands that they modulate their biological normativity in response to environmental constraints and needs. In this regard, recalling how Kant's notion of genius is grounded in nature, one might say that «technical schematism is a true biological function»²³.

In this respect, being rooted in a ground [*fond*] of virtualities situated between life and conscious thought, technical invention unfolds *temporally* according to a logic of circular causality and directing the activity of the organism: it is «a conditioning of the present by the future, by that which is not yet»:

Such a futural function is only rarely the work of chance; it requires putting into play a capacity to organize the elements according to certain requirements which act as an ensemble, as a directive value, and play the role of symbols representing the future ensemble that does not yet exist. The unity of the future associated milieu, within which the causal relations will be deployed that will enable the functioning of the new technical object, is *represented*, it is *played* or acted out as much as a role can be played in the absence of the true character, by

¹⁹ The courses collected in G. Simondon, *L'invention dans les techniques. Cours et conférences*, Seuil, Paris 2005, are also fundamental. For this introductory discussion of mental images and invention, however, references to *MEOT* seemed sufficient.

²⁰ *MEOT*, op.cit, p. 60.

²¹ Y. Hui, «On the Soul of Technical Objects: Commentary on Simondon's «Technics and Eschatology»», *Theory, Culture & Society*, 35 (7–8) (2018), pp. 4–5.

²² *Ibid.*

²³ E. Clarizio, *La vita tecnica. Una filosofia biologica della tecnica*, Mimesis Edizioni, Milano-Udine 2024, p. 151.

way of the schemes of the creative imagination²⁴.

In technical invention—as in biological evolution—imaginative and partially directed processes unfold according to what Simondon calls «limited finalities»²⁵, that is, a form of germinal and situated teleology. This teleology is not determined in advance nor fixed at the moment of the technical object's concretisation. Instead, it emerges locally through the *virtualities* implicit in the concrete and material relation between subject, object, and milieu. In this respect, imagination becomes crucial to the inventive process, necessitating a careful understanding of its functioning to comprehend the nature of the invention process.

Furthermore, in this text, Simondon critiques Gestalt psychology, particularly regarding the reduction of the function of totality to the force of forms and patterns alone, in their isolation, and neglecting the role of the dynamic *ground* on which those forms combine and come into play. As he writes: «a deeper analysis of the inventive process would no doubt show that what is determinant and plays an energetic role are not forms but that which carries the forms, which is to say their ground, [...] the system of all forms or rather the common reservoir of the forms' tendencies»²⁶. Images are linked to their ground through a relationship that transcends their punctual and isolated appearance. This figure–ground relation enables us to comprehend the imaginative genetic structure of invention beyond its *present* manifestation—revealing a specific influence of the future on the present, of the virtual on the actual.

As Simondon explains:

Invention is the taking charge of the system of actuality through the system of virtualities, the creation of a unique system on the basis of these two systems. Forms are passive in so far as they represent actuality; they become active when they organize in relation to this ground, thereby bringing prior virtualities into actuality²⁷.

It becomes clear that imagination structures the inventive process by stretching forms toward possible futures, activating the present through their insertion into an indeterminate ground of virtualities—always on the threshold of attention. Thus, imagination, far from being conceived in the Sartrean sense as «the great 'irrealizing' function of consciousness»²⁸, is understood by Simondon as primordially embedded in the perceptual fabric of experience, closer to the Merleau-Pontian and Dufrennian

²⁴ MEOT, op.cit., p. 60.

²⁵ MEOT, op.cit., p. 169.

²⁶ MEOT, pp. 60–61. For further reading on Simondon's rethinking of the notion of form in light of the notion of information, see A. Bardin, «Reforming the Concepts of Form and Information», in *Epistemology and Political Philosophy in Gilbert Simondon*, Springer, Dordrecht 2015, pp. 21–34; and G. Menegalle, «Simondon's Heterodox Naturalism: Form, Information and Self-Organization in Imagination and Invention», *Paragraph*, 47 (3) (2024) 341–358.

²⁷ MEOT, op.cit., p. 61.

²⁸ Sartre, J.-P., *The Imaginary: A Phenomenological Psychology of the Imagination*, Routledge, London–New York 2004, p. 3.

understanding of imagination²⁹. It operates at the intersection between the organism and its associated milieu, and likewise between their respective actualities and virtualities: «The capacity to perceive is not far removed from the power of imagination [...]. The image is, first and foremost, the vivid detail that brings together the whole of the perceptual picture. Images exist in perceived reality; they constitute an ‘epiphany’ of implicit meanings»³⁰. «An image by itself is as obscure as a perception lacking the support of the image»³¹.

Imagination, as an operative force within the futural function of invention, plays a structural and central role in the production of technical objects, as well as in the more general operations of technicity. In this sense, and in resonance with the conceptions of imagination of Merleau-Ponty and Dufrenne, imagination is understood as the counterpart of perception—fundamentally co-implicated with it—and as a mediator between organism and environment. Images must therefore be grasped in their sensible density [*prégnance sensible*], that is, through their insertion into the concreteness of perceptual and embodied experience.

2. The Ontogenetic Structure of Images

Let us now turn to the introduction of the course *Imagination and Invention*. As previously noted, this article does not aim to provide an exhaustive account of the text's structure and internal articulations. Rather, by focusing on key elements from the opening section of *Imagination and Invention*, I seek to show how Simondon's concept of the image can inform a renewed reflection on the status of phenomenology today. As Simondon writes: «consciousness is not enough since organisms do not only have a knowable structure, they have tendencies and develop. It is a philosophical, psychological and social task to *save the phenomena* by re-installing them in becoming, relocating them in inventions, by deepening the images they harbor»³². Images, as an intermediate reality between subject and object, irreducible to fixed categories, call for an analysis that is properly «phenomenological» since, as Simondon notes, «this type of reality has the aim of manifesting itself and imposing its image character»³³. It is therefore essential to consider how these images—structuring the inventive process—can be grasped in their complete genesis, allowing us to perceive their *organismicity* and recover the correlative imaginal fullness embedded in invented objects. However, it is crucial to recall, as Andrea Bardin notes, that by defining such an approach

²⁹ Mikel Dufrenne's *Le Poétique* is cited in the bibliography of Simondon's lecture series *Imagination and Invention*. As for Merleau-Ponty, though not expressly mentioned, strong affinities can be traced—especially if we recall his view that «perception and imagination go hand in hand and the challenge is to think their intertwining along with the latter's radical ontological nature [...] without erasing the phenomenological difference between perception and imagination as two fundamental types of experience» (A. Dufourcq, *Merleau-Ponty: An Ontology of the Imaginary*, trans. B. Smyth, Springer, Cham 2024, p. vi).

³⁰ G. Simondon, *Cours sur la perception (1964–1965)*, Presses Universitaires de France, Paris 2013, p. 229.

³¹ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, trans. J. Hughes e C. Wall-Romana, University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis 2023, p. 79.

³² G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op.cit., p. 14.

³³ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op.cit. p. 15.

‘phenomenological’, Simondon neither intends to refer to any consciousness nor to an original intersubjective cogito, he «is simply pursuing the mixed study of structures and operations seemingly authorised by the form Merleau-Ponty’s thought had assumed since *La structure du comportement* (1942)»³⁴.

In this respect, to grasp the phenomenological scope of this lecture series, it is necessary to first consider key passages from the dense preamble to the text. What Simondon is introducing is properly a theory in which «the aspects of the mental image [...] do not correspond to different types of reality, but to different stages of a single activity undergoing a developmental process»³⁵—a «local endogenous activity» that operates as *perception* in the presence of the object, as *anticipation* before experience, and as *memory-symbol* after it. Mental images are thus structured according to a cyclical, genetic process, in which conscious experience is merely «an almost exceptional surfacing connected to a continuous framework».

To clarify the integral structure of the genetic cycle of images outlined by Simondon, it is worth quoting a key passage from the preamble that summarises it:

A mental image is a relatively independent subset within the living being qua subject [*être vivant sujet*]; at its birth, an image is a sheaf of motor tendencies, a long-term anticipation of the experience of an object; during the interaction between the organism and its milieu, it becomes a receptor system for incoming signals, and it allows the perceptual-motor activity to exercise itself in a progressive mode. Finally, when the subject is again separated from the object, the image—enhanced by cognitive contributions and integrating the affective-emotional resonance of the experience—becomes a symbol. From the internally organized universe of symbols, which tends towards saturation, there may then spring an invention, which consists in putting into motion a more powerful, dimensional system capable of integrating more complete images according to a mode of synergetic compatibility. After invention—the fourth phase in the becoming of images—the cycle starts again with a new anticipation of the encounter with the object—which may well be its production³⁶.

This cyclical model aims, on the one hand, to describe the embodied and biological dimension of invention as a continuation and concretisation of the imaginative process. On the other hand, it offers a comprehensive conception of mental images, which—depending on the phase in which they emerge (as symbol, perception, or desire)—take on distinct characteristics. Crucially, however, a continuous framework specific to the image persists across all these phases, and it is precisely this aspect I wish to emphasise here.

A Primordial Exteriority Within the Subject

In this respect, it is essential to recognise that mental images are not merely «internal» to the subject—as if they were byproducts of an imaging consciousness, in

³⁴ A. Bardin, *Epistemology and Political Philosophy in Gilbert Simondon*, op. cit., p. 148.

³⁵ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op. cit., p. 3.

³⁶ *Ibid.*

line with the Sartrean model mentioned earlier. As Daniela Voss remarks, «Sartre denies the existence of an unconscious», and treats the image solely as «the consciousness of the subject's relation to an object»³⁷. In Simondon, by contrast, images emerge from a more complex ontogenetic logic and function as pre-subjective, quasi-organic structures. In this respect, Simondon invites us to consider «the hypothesis of a primordial exteriority of images in relation to the subject»³⁸. For our purpose, it is essential to note that this idea echoes Mikel Dufrenne's claim that imagination, considered as an «internal» human function, must be distinguished from a more originary «imagination of Nature» that primitively inspires poetic creation and fundamentally conditions human imagination³⁹. Neither strictly subjective nor objective, images constitute a «third reality» between the poles of experience, providing Simondon's theory of imagination with an epistemological grounding in the dynamic relationship between organism and associated milieu.

Because of this in-between status, mental images are conceived as «quasi-organisms» almost independent from the subject: «Displaying, to a degree, will, appetite and motion, images almost seem to be secondary organisms within the thinking being»⁴⁰. As Cécile Malaspina observes, mental images function as structural and functional subsets of psychic activity, whose genesis follows stages of growth «analogous to that of organs»⁴¹. They inhabit the organism, lodge within it like parasites or surplus energies, and sometimes even detach and develop elsewhere. For this reason, they cannot be understood according to the clear and distinct model of concepts: «they do not follow the mind's activity with the same flexibility; they can only be governed indirectly; they maintain a certain opacity, like a foreign population in the midst of an orderly state»⁴². Conceived in this simultaneously subjective and objective character, images bear witness to a latent and trans-subjective form of sociality already active within the organism's latent structures and operations.

The Force and Weight of Images

Unlike concepts or simple perceptions, images possess a specific force and efficacy, stemming from their hybrid nature as mediators between abstraction and concreteness. Their semi-concrete character reflects their origin as partial samples of life—fragments that remain abstract precisely because of their fragmentary and selective nature. As Simondon puts it, «the image, as an intermediary between the concrete and the abstract, synthesizes, in a few features, motor, cognitive, and affective charges; this is why it allows for a choice, because each image has a *weight*, a certain *force*—and we can weigh and compare images, not concepts or perceptions»⁴³.

³⁷ D. Voss, «A New Notion of the Image: Gilbert Simondon, Imagination and Invention», *Parrhesia*, 39 (2024) p. 157.

³⁸ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op.cit., p. 7.

³⁹ See M. Dufrenne, *Le Poétique*, op. cit., p. 194.

⁴⁰ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op.cit., p. 9.

⁴¹ C. Malaspina, «Invention and Metamorphosis: Intelligence, Automated Optimization (AO) and the Prospect of Synthetic Intelligence with Simondon and Denizhan», *I castelli di Yale online. Annali di filosofia*, XII (2) (2024), p. 99.

⁴² G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op.cit., p. 9.

⁴³ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op.cit., p. 10, my italics.

In this respect, images possess a kind of expressive intensity that is irreducible to conceptual or perceptual schemas. Their signifying power arises not from pre-existing structures, but from their ambiguous and emergent position within psychic and affective life. As Dufrenne observes in his reflections on the poetic image, images are endowed with a «silent force, [...] their word is their appearance»⁴⁴.

In this respect, only the image performs a genuinely regulatory function within experience. Abstract thought, on the one hand, acts as a braking mechanism: it introduces complexity, forecasts, and possible consequences. Perception, on the other hand, is absorbed entirely by the immediacy of the present. The image, by virtue of its ambiguous status, mediates between these extremes—enabling a pre- and trans-cognitive orientation in both space and time. As Simondon writes, «only the image is truly regulative, for it is sufficiently abstract to disengage the subject from intense [*prégnantes*] situations, yet concrete enough to provide a sample likely to reflect them»⁴⁵. The image thus opens up a lived distance, allowing subjects to navigate their relationship within the world without being overwhelmed by it. This imaginal third reality, rooted in the organism's perceptual, motor and affective experience, serves as the locus through which subjects orient themselves within the world—both spatially and temporally.

However, because of its intermediary status, images are clearly not confined to the interiority of subjects: they also take shape in exterior forms, materialising in produced objects. This dynamic explains why Simondon approaches invention through the cycle of imagination. Inventive processes—and the objects they generate—are always already saturated with images. As I will explore more fully in the next section, «the image as an intermediary reality between abstract and concrete, between self and world, is not merely mental: it materializes to become an institution, a product, wealth»⁴⁶. The image thus acts as a bridge, enabling silent yet efficient communication between subjects and objects, between the individual's interior life and the shared collective world. Its materialisation in concrete objects highlights the image's social and quasi-organismic function—making visible, and therefore participable, the ontogenetic role of the imaginary at the heart of every social structure.

As a third reality, images operate in both directions of the subject-world relation. On the one hand, they become embedded in objects of use—both technical and artistic. On the other hand, they address subjects, inhabiting them anonymously and functioning as agents of social and cultural transformation. As Simondon writes: «the image is a resultant, but it is also a seed: it can become the trigger for concepts and doctrines. The circular causality that goes from the mind to objective reality through social processes of cumulative causality also goes from objective reality to the mind»⁴⁷. In this sense, any produced, represented, or conceptualised object may become an image-object: a bearer of latent meanings that are not only cognitive, but also conative and affective. In this surplus—this overabundance of meaning and autonomy—the social and germinal dimension of images is revealed. As Simondon adds, images are

⁴⁴ M. Dufrenne, *Le Poétique*, op. cit., p. 236.

⁴⁵ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op. cit., p. 10.

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 13.

⁴⁷ *Idem.*

«seeds capable of being reborn and developing in the subject. Even outside of the subject, they multiply through group exchanges and activities»⁴⁸.

In this sense, the images on which the technical structure of a society is based influence the mental and emotional structures of human subjects as surreptitiously as they do intensely. This makes it crucial, from our perspective, to develop a phenomenology that takes into account the impact of technology and invention on individuals through images.

Temporality and Rationalisation

Before turning, in the following paragraph, to the notion of an «overabundance of being» proper to object-images, it is useful—especially for clarifying the historical stakes of an inventive phenomenology—to briefly consider a final pair of temporal categories that shape the status of the image: past and future. As already shown, images are neither reducible to perception nor fully conceptualizable; they possess a temporal structure expressed through the different directions they embody. According to their genetic cycle, images function as anticipatory agents, as mediators of perceptual engagement in the present, and as vehicles of memory and recollection. Imagination, in this sense, possesses a dynamic and genetic structure that accounts for the orienting function of images with respect to both concepts and perceptions, also in their temporal articulation. It is thanks to their participation in an imaginal structure that concepts and perceptions retain their own temporality. As Simondon suggests in *MEOT*, images occupy an intermediary position between past and future, and through their quasi-autonomy, they shape present experience as a dynamic field of transformation. It is precisely this temporal plasticity that renders them constitutive elements of the inventive process.

Attending to the temporal dimension of images becomes even more crucial in light of a modern tendency described by Simondon:

The necessities of long-term forecasts [*prévision*] for action have introduced rationalisation into the dimension of the future and have driven out mythical thinking. [...] Time begins to be organised like space; the future is annexed to knowledge and no longer the privileged field of the optative, of desire, or of volition⁴⁹.

Echoing Henry Bergson, Simondon describes how time becomes spatialised, reduced to a domain of calculation and control. He also resonates with Mircea Eliade's critique of modernity, according to which: «The progressive de-sacralisation of modern man has altered the content of his spiritual life without breaking the matrices of his imagination: a quantity of mythological litter still lingers in the ill-controlled zones of the mind»⁵⁰. These rationalisations, Simondon warns, should not be mistaken for

⁴⁸ *Ibid.*

⁴⁹ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op.cit., p. 17.

⁵⁰ M. Eliade, *Images and Symbols*, op. cit., p. 18. Later he writes: «To have imagination is to be able to see the world in its totality, for the power and the mission of the Images is to show all that remains refractory to the concept: hence the disfavour and failure of the man «without imagination»; he is cut off from the deeper reality of life and

true inventions. They are rather extrapolations from a deeper, irreducible imaginal-temporal flow. For this reason, an inventive phenomenology must seek to recover the complex and originary role of the image in the experience of time. Precisely because images cannot be entirely rationalised, they preserve a «density and force which carries it towards the anticipation of the collective future, beside and beyond the prospective rationalisations»⁵¹.

In this view, the capacity to genuinely predict is not reducible to scientific modelling or observation; it is a form of living and inventing. As Simondon insists, genuine foresight is *praxis*—taking root in the continuity of an action already in progress, in which we are involved. And once again, it is the image that ensures this continuity, operating as a unifying and transductive force. Thanks to their intrinsic volitional, affective, and motivational dimensions, images inject a proactive tension into our relation to the future.

Conceiving the image in its genesis and therefore, phenomenologically, in its own expressive power and conceptual irreducibility, thus becomes a fundamental task in reactivating the profound meaning of invention. It is precisely this regulatory and temporal status of images—their capacity to orient perception, sustain anticipation, and project the subject toward possible futures—that provides the ground for an inventive phenomenology. Images, in their hybrid and quasi-organismic nature, do not only mediate between subject and object; they also disclose the very conditions under which phenomenological inquiry must reinvent itself. In this sense, the imaginal dimension is not a secondary theme but the constitutive basis of phenomenology understood as an inventive practice.

3. The «Overabundance of Being» in Produced Objects

Now, before outlining the main features of an inventive phenomenology, it is necessary to consider the objective dimension of images briefly. As Dufrenne remarks—commenting on key passages of the Simondonian course—«do not think that reality will contradict this [subjective] imaginary; the real too contains an imaginary, insofar as it appears charged with the possible, which gives it meaning—at least as long as objectifying thought does not reduce it to being merely what it is»⁵². In this light, invented, created, or manufactured objects cannot be reduced to mere subjective representations or conceptual descriptions. They carry within themselves a specific imaginal charge: their concrete actuality remains imbued with the virtual dimension of the images that inhabit them. As Simondon puts it succinctly: «an object is clothed in images»⁵³.

from his own soul» (p. 20). The influence of Eliade on Simondon remains a topic for future research.

⁵¹ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op.cit. , p. 17.

⁵² M. Dufrenne, *L'inventaire des a priori. Recherche de l'originare*, Presses universitaires de Caen, Caen 2021, p. 257. In his works on the notion of the *a priori*, Dufrenne develops a reconceptualization of the transcendental from the standpoint of the object, through what he calls an «empiricism of the transcendental» (*The Notion of A Priori*, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1966, p. 46). This rethinking of the mode of existence of objects constitutes a crucial point of convergence between Dufrenne's phenomenological project and the Simondonian approach.

⁵³ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op.cit. , p. 12.

Given their imaginal *halo*, technical objects possess a certain expressive autonomy, grounded in their genetic scope. In this respect, a genuinely invented object is marked by a *functional surplus*: a plurivocity and plurifunctionality proper to its images that resonates with the sacred dimension of experience—that indeterminate depth of the *ground* against which every formal and inventive act takes shape. As Simondon writes: «The resolution of the problem through formalisation creates an artificial object endowed with properties that exceed the problem. Genuine invention transcends its own end»⁵⁴. Through the study of image-objects, the aesthetic and symbolic insertion of technical objects into the world can be grasped—an insertion that reveals their reticular affinity with the sacred and cosmic dimensions of experience:

In order to be fully organized, the created object must be more complex and polyvalent than the strict project of problem resolution presupposed; it then displays new properties enabling it to solve, through an overabundance of being [*surabondance d'être*], other problems. [...] This increase is comparable to a *functional surplus-value* caused by the work of natural realities incorporated in the created object so that it can be entirely compatible with itself⁵⁵.

Understood in their imaginal virtuality—or better, in their structural overabundance of being—technical objects incorporate ever more «wild» effects. They gain a relative autonomy from their inventor, initiating what Simondon calls «a free adventure, involving as many chances of survival and transmission through the ages as dangers of reduction to slavery»⁵⁶. This free adventure exposes the object to the contingencies of life, and calls for a phenomenology capable of attending to its ontological overabundance—its unpredictable symbolic resonance and expressive density. As inserted into the lifeworld, the invented object remains open to continually integrating images and meanings that surpass any strictly representational framework.

As Simondon further suggests, the essence of technical objects—their *technicity*—must be investigated through their isomorphic relationship with the symbolic dimension of the sacred:

Beyond the usefulness that would make these objects utensils [...], beyond an easy and superficial symbolism of belonging to a caste or a place, we must strive to discover a sense of technicity, just as Mircea Eliade seeks to discover, beneath images and symbols, a sense of sacredness⁵⁷.

Technicity and sacredness are both irreducible to univocal and definitive meanings. As well as the images with which they are imbued, they are structured by a plurivocal logic that resists any merely representational reduction. In this respect, following Dufrenne's phenomenology, since technical objects are inherently imbued with images, they must be conceived as *quasi-subjects*, endowed with a peculiar expressive and pervasive force,

⁵⁴ *Idem*, p. 172.

⁵⁵ G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op.cit., p. 174.

⁵⁶ G. Simondon, *Sur la technique*, op. cit., p. 13.

⁵⁷ Ivi, p. 31. The work Simondon refers to here is M. Eliade's *Images and Symbols*, op. cit.

as well as with a certain autonomy in their capacity to generate a world⁵⁸. As Simondon further notes: «An image or symbol that is reduced to a single objective meaning is desacralised. Similarly, an *abstract* technical object, a materialised concept, is not a true technical object, but only an educational or scientific montage»⁵⁹. This means that technical objects cannot be fully understood in terms of function or utility alone. Their depth requires a supplementary form of knowledge—one attuned to their symbolic, imaginative, and aesthetic dimensions. Reducing them to functional schemas erases their social and cosmological meaning, obscuring the nature of the inventive process that presides over their concretization. For this reason, following Simondon's theory of imagination and invention, it becomes necessary to *save the phenomenon* at the core of technical invention, and to develop a phenomenology capable of doing justice to this generative imaginative process as well as to the complete status of technical objects—beyond the static and dogmatic confines of traditional subject–object correlation.

4. Towards an Inventive Phenomenology

The study of invention and the ontogenetic status of images presented in this article leads to a reevaluation of the role of the imaginary in social and personal experience, as well as to a reexamination of phenomenological methods in an inventive key. Such a perspective does not involve a juxtaposition between a subjective philosophical gesture and an already given technical object, as in the post-phenomenological framework. Instead, it challenges the dichotomy between subject and object, revealing the expressive and imaginal agency inherent to technical objects – traditionally considered the passive side of the correlation⁶⁰.

By *inventive phenomenology*, I do not mean a «new phenomenology» in a doctrinal sense. Instead, it points to the phenomenology's constitutive *inventivity*: its rethinking of experience, always begun anew in relation to the techno-imaginal contexts in which it is inserted. In this respect, a presumed *pure phenomenology* can be only an historical regulative ideal; what really distinguishes it from other philosophical practices are its imaginal-inventive operations, allowing it to interrogate subject–object and subject–world relations as structures to be discovered through ever-changing contingent variations. Simondon's reflections on the genetic status of images thus enrich this task, not as a simple rupture but as a *problematic* inheritance, *betraying* and continuing the phenomenological tradition, which—as Sini reminds us—can only ever begin anew⁶¹.

⁵⁸ See M. Dufrenne, *The Phenomenology of Aesthetic Experience*, op. cit., p. 229: «Space and time are so well integrated into the aesthetic object that they seem to proceed from it. Spatiality and temporality become the dimensions of the world internal to the object, the forms which the object, far from receiving, invents for its own world». For a reflection on Dufrenne's notion of quasi-subject applied to screens as technical objects, see: Carbone, M., *Philosophy-Screens: From Cinema to the Digital Revolution*, trans. M. Nijhuis, State University of New York Press, Albany 2019, pp. 81-86.

⁵⁹ G. Simondon, *Sur la technique*, op. cit., p. 32.

⁶⁰ See M. Carbone – G. Lingua, *Toward an Anthropology of Screens: Showing and Hiding, Exposing and Protecting*, Palgrave Macmillan / Springer Nature, Cham–New York 2023, p. 143.

⁶¹ Simondon, in developing his philosophy of individuation, thus seems to respond to a crystallization of the phenomenological school. As Merleau-Ponty remarks, «establishing a tradition means forgetting its origins, the

Phenomenological inventivity is thus grounded in the body-organism as a system of action, namely, in its genetic relation with the milieu, the living matrix from which invention itself emerges. The organism's behavioral schemas define its fundamental mode of existence: «these are sequences whose program a living being possesses in itself the way it possesses its own body»⁶². The body schema, inseparable from motor anticipations, provides the primordial source of the organism *a priori*, orienting perception and irradiating motor images that anticipate possible actions. As Simondon remarks, «[t]o have a concrete intuition of an object's movement means, to some extent, putting oneself in its place and situation, as if our body were that very object»⁶³. Here lies the corporeal root of inventive phenomenology: its power does not derive from abstract formalisation but from the imaginal capacity of the body to project and select gestures of invention. As Merleau-Ponty reminds us, there is no *kosmotheoros*⁶⁴, no pure observer outside the world: even the most rigorous thought begins from its corporeal and affective bond with the milieu.

This corporeal grounding also distincts inventive phenomenology from post-phenomenology. Thinkers such as Don Ihde have shown how technics mediate human-world relations and how artifacts embody normative dimensions. However, post-phenomenology often restricts itself to empirical analysis, avoiding transcendental questions⁶⁵. Inventive phenomenology, by contrast, emphasizes the ontogenetic dimension: the role of images, motor anticipations, and corporeal schemas in generating both technical inventions and symbolic meanings. In this way, it complements post-phenomenology while extending phenomenology beyond its historicised limits.

To imagine phenomenology in this inventive mode is thus to leave open the space of the virtual and the potential, of action and technicity, within philosophical method itself. It is to develop a form of thought, an attitude capable of responding to the mythological and imaginal phenomena that arise in the wake of ongoing technical transformations—phenomena too often rendered invisible by dogmatic rationalizing modern perspectives, yet increasingly active even within established cultural institutions. What has been outlined here is the sketch of such an interpretation: one that entails a dynamic, critical, and symbolic rearticulation of phenomenology's very foundations as both a technical and aesthetic mode of access to experience. Here, this

aging Husserl used to say» («The Philosopher and His Shadow», op. cit., 159).

⁶² G. Simondon, *Imagination and Invention*, op. cit., p. 32.

⁶³ *Id.*, p. 40. Simondon's account of intuition clarifies this corporeal rooting as an expression of «transduction» (*Individuation*, p. 15). Intuition is not a punctual perception but a progressive multisensory integration: «a mode of multisensorial compatibility» (*Invention and Imagination*, op. cit., p. 146), containing «a reserve of solutions for concrete invention, in the same way a roadmap is an always-ready reserve of itineraries» (*Idem*). Intuition thus operates as the corporeal schema's active dimension, irradiating motor anticipations that ground inventive action. Broader implications of this notion must be left aside here.

⁶⁴ As Merleau-Ponty writes: «It is necessary to suppress the causal thought which is always: view of the world from without, from the point of view of a *Kosmotheoros*», (*The Visible and the Invisible*, trans. A. Lingis, Northwestern University Press, Evanston 1968, p. 227).

⁶⁵ As Van Den Eede affirms, «postphenomenology does not like the transcendental», *Thing-Transcendentality: Navigating the Interval of «technology» and «Technology»*, in *Foundations of Science*, 27 (1) (2022), p. 227. As Agostino Cera suggests, the rejection of the ontological questions leads postphenomenology—and, more generally, the entire so-called *empirical turn*—to take shape as an «ontophobic turn», «Beyond the Empirical Turn: Elements for an Ontology of Engineering», *Információs Társadalom*, 20 (4) (2020).

rethinking has been pursued along three axes: first, invention as a relational process between organism and milieu; second, images as quasi-organisms, temporal operators that orient perception and sustain anticipation; and third, technical objects as carriers of imaginal meaning that consistently exceed rational design.

Inventive phenomenology must therefore be recognized as what phenomenology has always tried to be: a practice and a philosophical posture rooted in inter-corporeality, acting inventively toward and through the world, capable of resonating with the symbolic and techno-scientific challenges of its time.

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MARTA RATÓN BERLANGA¹

EL ARTE COMO TECNOLOGÍA DEL YO EN PERSONAS CON DISCAPACIDAD VISUAL: EL PAPEL DE LA IMAGINACIÓN EN SUS EXPERIENCIAS

Abstract

Art as a Technology of the Self in People with Visual Impairment: the role of imagination in their experience.

This study explores how art can function as a «technology of the self» in people with visual impairment, as conceptualized by Foucault, and the role that imagination plays in their artistic experiences. For this purpose, semi-structured interviews were conducted with six people with visual impairment. The data was qualitatively analyzed using thematic content analysis. The findings indicate that the most prominent function of art is emotional regulation, followed by self-knowledge and the construction of personal identity. Participants emphasize the importance of mediations such as audiobooks, image recognition technology, and social mediation to form mental representations and build an artistic experience, especially when visual limitations prevent direct access to traditional stimuli. The work highlights the functional reorganizational capacity of biological and cognitive systems and the need to reconsider the role of imagination in the creation of aesthetic experiences in non-visual contexts.

Keywords: art, visual impairment, imagination, technology of the self.

A arte como tecnologia do eu em pessoas com deficiência visual: o papel da

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imaginação em suas experiências.**Resumo**

Este estudo explora como a arte pode funcionar como uma “tecnologia de si” em pessoas com deficiência visual, conforme conceituado por Foucault, e o papel que a imaginação desempenha em suas experiências artísticas. Para isso, foram realizadas entrevistas semiestruturadas com seis pessoas com deficiência visual. Os dados foram analisados qualitativamente por meio de análise de conteúdo temática. Os resultados indicam que a função mais proeminente da arte é a regulação emocional, seguida do autoconhecimento e da construção da identidade pessoal. Os participantes enfatizam a importância de mediações como audiolivros, tecnologia de reconhecimento de imagens e mediação social para formar representações mentais e construir uma experiência artística, especialmente quando as limitações visuais impedem o acesso direto a estímulos tradicionais. O trabalho destaca a capacidade de reorganização funcional dos sistemas biológicos e cognitivos e a necessidade de reconsiderar o papel da imaginação na criação de experiências estéticas em contextos não visuais.

Palavras-chave: arte, deficiência visual, imaginação, tecnologia de si.

El objetivo de este estudio es explorar, desde una perspectiva foucaultiana, el modo en que el arte, entendido como una tecnología del yo, media las relaciones consigo mismas de las personas con discapacidad visual, tanto en términos afectivos como cognitivos, y las formas de organización de la experiencia subjetiva a la que da lugar.

Conviene recordar aquí que Foucault añade las tecnologías del yo a la triada de técnicas propuesta por Habermas: técnicas de producción, de significación y de dominación². Históricamente, las tecnologías del yo se utilizaban para hacer referencia a los “procedimientos mediante los cuales las personas se transforman a sí mismas con el fin de alcanzar objetivos morales, religiosos o éticos”³, algunos ejemplos serían las prácticas ascéticas o las de la confesión cristiana. Además, los intereses principales de estas tecnologías eran las prácticas de subjetivación (procedimientos que desencadenaban formas de ser sujeto en un momento histórico determinado) y la formación de la individualidad moderna (la manera de entendernos a nosotros mismos). Sin embargo, desde el siglo XIX estos objetivos se han intercambiado por los de la psicoterapia moderna, en la que la preocupación principal es el bienestar, la salud y la felicidad, además de sustituir la filosofía o la religión por la autoridad científica. Actualmente las tecnologías del yo están inmersas en teorías y aplicaciones distribuidas por expertos insertadas dentro de un amplio conjunto de técnicas de subjetivación⁴.

En nuestro estudio entenderemos que el arte puede actuar como una tecnología del yo y transformar a los individuos de distintas formas, por lo que queremos explorar

² Florentino Blanco Trejo y María de los Ángeles Cohen, «Esclavos de la libertad: La organización interna de los ejercicios espirituales en el estoicismo clásico», *Revista de Historia de la Psicología*, 2015, pp. 13-52.

³ Michel Foucault, Miguel Morey, y Mercedes Allendesalazar, «Tecnologías del yo y otros textos afines», (*No Title*), 1990, <https://cir.nii.ac.jp/crid/1130000797413659776>.

⁴ sehp, «Monográfico RHP sobre “Tecnologías del yo” | Sociedad Española de Historia de la Psicología», 12 de marzo de 2015, <http://sehp.org/wordpress/?p=1208>.

las posibilidades de transformación que tiene el arte en las personas con discapacidad visual y cómo estas se entienden a sí mismas a través de su propio discurso. Todo ello teniendo en cuenta el marco histórico en el que se encuentran.

Concepción del arte en las personas con discapacidad visual

Hasta ahora las investigaciones realizadas sobre arte en personas con discapacidad visual se han centrado en buscar alternativas para que estas personas pudieran experimentar las artes plásticas a través de otros sentidos distintos a la visión. El tacto ha sido uno de los sentidos más estudiados en este tipo de trabajos, ya que permite un contacto más directo con las obras. De esta manera, muchas de estas investigaciones han tratado de averiguar si las personas con discapacidad visual pueden construir representaciones mentales del espacio a partir de la percepción táctil. Esto es todavía un debate polémico entre los investigadores, ya que muchos defienden que las personas ciegas de nacimiento tienen deficiencias en las concepciones del espacio⁵, mientras que otros rechazan completamente esta idea⁶. Estos últimos afirman que el área que se encarga de reconocer los contornos percibidos por la vista y por el tacto en el cerebro es la misma, lo que hace posible que las personas sin visión puedan utilizar gráficos táctiles^{7,8,9,10}.

Por otro lado, algunos estudios combinan el uso de adaptaciones táctiles con audioguías para comprobar si es posible provocar una experiencia estética en estas personas¹¹. También se han llevado a cabo investigaciones que analizan las preferencias por estos dos sistemas de acceso a la información estética, concluyendo que la preferencia depende en gran medida del momento de origen de la ceguera^{12,13}.

Sin embargo, estos estudios no tenían en cuenta la experiencia personal de las personas con discapacidad visual, ni la repercusión del arte en sus vidas. Es decir, el objetivo parecía más bien trasladar la experiencia que los videntes pueden tener con las artes plásticas a las personas con discapacidad visual y hacer generalizaciones sobre

⁵ Catherine Thinus-Blanc y Florence Gaunet, «Representation of space in blind persons: vision as a spatial sense?», *Psychological bulletin* 121, n.º 1 (1997), p. 20.

⁶ John M. Kennedy, «How the blind draw», *Scientific American* 16, n.º 3 (2006), pp. 44-51.

⁷ Vladimir Stančić, *Oštećenja vida-biopsihosocijalni aspekti* (Školska knjiga, 1991).

⁸ David Dulin y Yvette Harwell, «The Effects of Visual Experience and Training in Raised-Line Materials on the Mental Spatial Imagery of Blind Persons», *Journal of Visual Impairment & Blindness* 100, n.º 7 (julio de 2006), pp. 414-24.

⁹ Morton A. Heller, Melissa McCarthy, y Ashley Clark, «Pattern perception and pictures for the blind», *Psicologica* 26, n.º 1 (2005), pp.161-71.

¹⁰ Ž Bosnar Salihagić, «Relacije taktilne percepcije i funkcioniranja i nekih čimbenika u djece oštećena vida», *Magistarski rad. Edukacijski rehabilitacijski fakultet Sveučilišta u Zagrebu*, 2011.

¹¹ Dennis A. Martillano, «The perceived aesthetic experience in the context of tactile art among visually impaired individuals in the Philippines», *Proceedings of the RSU International Research Conference*, 2019, pp. 543-53.

¹² Jorge Eduardo Zarur Cortés, «La inclusión de las personas con discapacidad visual al arte pictórico», en *DIS*, 2018, pp. 31-40.

¹³ Franklin Mingzhe Li et al., «Understanding Visual Arts Experiences of Blind People», en *Proceedings of the 2023 CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems* (CHI '23: CHI Conference on Human Factors in Computing Systems, Hamburg Germany: ACM, 2023), pp. 1-21.

estos hallazgos. Considerábamos que este enfoque no profundizaba suficiente, ya que no se preocupaba por conocer cuál es el papel del arte en las personas con discapacidad visual, sino que optaba por intervenir directa y artificialmente su experiencia, desde un punto de vista visuocéntrico. Nos gustaría por tanto adoptar una perspectiva que enfatice el papel activo del sujeto en la organización de su experiencia con el arte.

El arte como medio transformador del individuo

Nuestro objetivo es explorar las funciones que para los sujetos tiene el arte en su día a día y cómo estas funciones se pueden desarrollar. De modo que no asumimos que haya una sola forma de relacionarse con el arte. Hay de hecho, como veremos, infinitas formas. Nos gustaría, además, profundizar en el papel que tiene la imaginación en estas personas y en el modo en que la discapacidad visual condiciona las formas de evocación. Por último, entendemos que el arte no es una actividad meramente recreativa, sino que tiene una función transformadora del individuo. En ese sentido el arte se entendería como una tecnología del yo, capaz de transformar a los sujetos, tanto en términos experienciales como cognitivos.

Este enfoque toma en consideración la idea del humano como un ser que se construye a sí mismo y que es capaz de modular sus acciones en favor de los objetivos que quiere alcanzar. Es decir, es el sujeto quién decide la funcionalidad de sus acciones y no debe ser considerado nunca una víctima de sus limitaciones físicas. Se entiende por tanto que la experiencia de estas y de todas las personas está mediada culturalmente y que es imposible entender el modo en que esta experiencia se organiza sin atender a los interfaces que se ponen en juego. Con ello queremos poner en duda una concepción naturalista e individualista de lo humano, en la que las funciones del individuo están biológicamente restringidas. Nos gustaría entender que los interfaces culturales son capaces de remediar esas limitaciones.

Siguiendo con este argumento nos gustaría también defender la idea de que el sujeto no vive aislado, sino que sus acciones se hacen posibles a través de mediadores que canalizan su conducta y sus experiencias. De modo que cada sujeto es quién es gracias a todos los elementos que modulan sus acciones y que hacen posible su desarrollo. Solo si conocemos el funcionamiento de las mediaciones, podemos también comprender el alcance funcional del sujeto.

Enfoque metodológico

Desde esta sensibilidad antropológica, y para entender mejor la riqueza y la diversidad de su relación con el arte llevamos a cabo entrevistas abiertas y semiestructuradas a 6 personas con discapacidad visual. El reclutamiento de los participantes se llevó a cabo en bola de nieve e intencionalmente, a partir de dos personas conocidas de la investigadora, ya que de esta manera se facilitó el acceso a este colectivo.

La entrevista se abría con una pregunta muy general sobre el significado y el lugar del arte en sus vidas. La idea era abrir la posibilidad de que la persona entrevistada pudiese organizar con cierta libertad su discurso sobre la experiencia artística;

después realizábamos preguntas relacionadas con las funciones que tenía el arte en sus vidas; posteriormente indagábamos en sus hábitos de consumo y creación artística; continuábamos preguntando por su experiencia personal, fenomenológica, con el arte, y, por último, les pedíamos que nos contasen de qué manera la discapacidad visual condicionaba su relación con las artes.

Para llevar a cabo el análisis de las entrevistas se realizó un análisis de contenido temático, mediante el programa ATLAS. Ti., en el que se generaron categorías que determinamos en base a las respuestas que nos dieron los participantes, desde una sensibilidad cercana a la teoría fundamentada.

Funciones del arte

En primer lugar, resumiremos algunos de los hallazgos más interesantes en relación con estas cuestiones generales que acabamos de mencionar, para, en su segundo momento, profundizar en la cuestión de los usos de la imaginación en la canalización de la experiencia artística en las personas que hemos entrevistado.

Como seguramente era previsible, y en relación con las funciones del arte, encontramos que la mayor parte de las personas entrevistadas decían usar el arte como una forma de regulación de sus estados emocionales, es decir, el arte se utilizaba para legitimar, modificar o modular la intensidad de sus emociones. Esta función estaba muy presente en todos los tipos de arte, la música, el cine o la literatura, y tanto en la producción artística como en la recepción. Además, muchas veces esta función de regulación emocional se expresaba a través de términos como «entretenimiento», «evasión», «inspiración» o «relajación»:

Cambia el género dependiendo de cómo me siento. Pues igual el rap lo escucho más cuando me siento más incomprendida o más sola.

Por otro lado, encontramos que otra de las funciones más frecuente mencionadas, aunque en menor medida, estaba relacionada con el conocimiento del mundo y el conocimiento de uno mismo. Los participantes concebían el arte como un medio para el aprendizaje cultural y de la historia, sobre todo en el caso de la literatura, en las artes plásticas y en la escritura. La posibilidad de pensar el arte como una forma de autoconocimiento aparecía vinculada a los procesos de creación artística, como la escritura, la fotografía y el baile. En este caso el arte servía como autodescubrimiento, identificación, refuerzo de ideas e incluso superación de retos:

¿Qué me aportan los libros? Tranquilidad, me aportan esos mensajes que ya yo, antiguamente los he visto, me refuerzan lo que yo siento y lo que yo quiero hacer.

Poniendo esto en relación con nuestro propósito inicial, es decir, observar de qué manera las personas con discapacidad visual median su relación con el arte, cabe preguntarse qué acciones concretas ponen en práctica para relacionarse con el arte y qué tipo de mediadores están interviniendo en la experiencia personal de cada uno y en sus estrategias de evocación e imaginación. Para ello vamos a desgarnar las experiencias concretas de los participantes. Sin embargo,¹⁴ antes nos gustaría aclarar las diferencias entre tres conceptos que desarrolla Leontiev¹⁴ en su teoría de la actividad, y que son de suma relevancia para explicar nuestro enfoque: actividad, acción y

¹⁴ Alexei Leontiev, «Actividad conciencia y personalidad./N. A Leontiev», *Editorial Pueblo y Educación*, La Habana 1981.

operación.

Actividad, acción y operación

En primer lugar, el concepto de actividad hace referencia a la asimilación individual de la práctica social. Es decir, el grupo realizaría prácticas sociales y el sujeto se incorpora a estas a través de la realización de actividades concretas. En este caso la actividad estaría vinculada a un motivo concreto. Este motivo en muchos casos forma parte de la organización social y por lo tanto es un motivo común al de otras muchas personas. De manera que para que un sujeto lleve a cabo una actividad debe tener claros los motivos sociales que guían la realización de dicha actividad.

En segundo lugar, la acción se refiere a las distintas fases de realización de las conductas individuales, concretas, que se llevan a cabo para conseguir realizar la actividad. En este sentido, las acciones serían la especificación funcional de una actividad. Esta acción se dirige a su vez a conseguir una serie de metas que serán distintas según el motivo principal. Es decir, mientras que las actividades están guiadas u orientadas por motivos básicos y genéricos (alimentación, educación, reproducción etc.), las acciones están orientadas a metas, sirven a propósito de carácter individual.

Por último, las operaciones serían las condiciones concretas de la ejecución de la acción en el contexto específico en el que se realizan. En otras palabras, lo que un sujeto hace con unos instrumentos concretos en una situación concreta. Una misma acción podría realizarse de maneras muy distintas si se llevara a cabo en situaciones diferentes o por sujetos distintos. En este nivel de análisis se encuentran por tanto los instrumentos de mediación que se van a analizar en este trabajo. Por ejemplo, la acción de leer implica formas de mediación distintas en videntes y en personas con discapacidad visual.

De esta manera las funciones que hemos visto anteriormente harían referencia a los motivos por los que el grupo de personas con discapacidad visual se relaciona con el arte, es decir al nivel de análisis más amplio. Sin embargo, ahora vamos a analizar las operaciones concretas que se implementan para llevar a cabo acciones específicas orientadas por los motivos y funciones que hemos nombrado.

Mediadores instrumentales de la experiencia

En primer lugar, nos encontramos con diferentes mediadores instrumentales que intervienen en la experiencia que estas personas tienen con el arte. Por un lado, nos encontramos, por ejemplo, con el hecho de que la mayoría de estas personas utilizan audiolibros para acercarse a la literatura. Para ellos es más cómodo que utilizar braille, puesto que requiere menos esfuerzo por su parte. Además, comentan que los libros en braille son demasiado aparatosos, difíciles de manejar y transportar. Algunos de ellos también utilizan el audiolibro porque no les impide hacer otras actividades al mismo tiempo, como limpiar la casa o hacer ejercicio.

A pesar de que la mayoría de ellos utilizan audiolibros, cada uno nos narra sus experiencias particulares con respecto a ello. Uno de los participantes destaca sobre todo la relevancia que tienen para él las cualidades de la voz de los audiolibros en su experiencia imaginativa. Algunos de ellos señalan que las cualidades de la voz influyen en gran medida en la elección de sus lecturas. De hecho, en algunos casos el

desagrado que les producen ciertos tipos de voz les llevan a abandonar la lectura. Es decir, parece que los procesos de evocación imaginativa del contenido de los textos pueden estar profundamente condicionados por elementos aparentemente triviales y extrínsecos al contenido y a los recursos propiamente literarios de los textos.

En relación con esta idea, otro de los participantes nos comenta la relevancia que tienen para él los elementos relacionados con la narración en algunos géneros literarios, como el teatro o la poesía. Sobre todo, destaca que los audiolibros usan siempre la misma entonación independientemente de los géneros, tonos afectivos, géneros de los personajes, si los hubiera, lo que hace que se pierda todos los elementos paralingüísticos decisivos que se activarían, de algún modo, al menos inferencialmente, cuando leemos de manera activa. Se pone de manifiesto, por tanto, la importancia de este aspecto para determinados géneros literarios. Además, consideramos que la poesía es probablemente el género literario más personal de todos, por lo que se hace necesario que el oyente encuentre una voz y una manera de recitar que conecte con su sensibilidad.

Con respecto a la literatura, uno de las participantes nos comentaba que prefería utilizar un lector de pantalla, que use voces sintéticas, antes que audiolibro, puesto que con este podía aumentar la velocidad de escucha. Refería que esto se debía a que en su vida cotidiana estaba acostumbrado a escuchar voces sintéticas a gran velocidad, por lo que para él resultaba más cómodo y menos molesto poder modular la velocidad también cuando lee:

El problema es que si la voz no es sintética y la pones más rápido suena rara. Y no se entiende bien muchas veces. Mientras que la voz sintética es justo sintética para eso. Para que puedas regular como quieras la velocidad del tono y lo que quieras.

Podríamos considerar que la velocidad de escucha podría cambiar en gran medida la experiencia de estas personas con este tipo de arte, sin embargo, creemos que debido a la manera en que se relacionan con el arte y las funciones que cumple en su vida diaria, sobre todo en lo que se refiere a la modulación de su vida afectiva, no habría grandes diferencias. Es decir, lo que la gran mayoría comenta es que consumen sobre todo novelas con intriga y de fácil digestión, como thrillers, géneros policíacos o romances, por lo que parece que están más interesados en la trama y no tanto en los detalles concretos de la narración y de su propuesta estética. El hecho de que algunos de ellos prefieran aumentar la velocidad de la narración nos permite entender en buena medida el objetivo que se quiere conseguir, y los valores que orientan su relación con el arte y seguramente su vida.

Por otro lado, en relación con el cine la mayoría de los participantes comentan que necesitan utilizar audiodescripciones para poder evocar o imaginar más adecuadamente el referente del relato, sobre todo en lo que se refiere a los aspectos relacionados con el entorno y la caracterización de los personajes. Con respecto a ello cabe plantearse qué criterio de selección se utiliza para decidir qué aspectos se añaden a la audiodescripción, quién decide esos criterios y en base a qué, ¿cambian dependiendo de la plataforma?, ¿son diferentes en distintas culturas? Todo ello nos parece de suma relevancia, puesto que los elementos que se utilicen en esta descripción están canalizando en gran medida la experiencia imaginativa de las personas con discapacidad visual.

Resulta también interesante la manera en la que uno de los participantes nos comentaba que se relacionaba con el cine. Señalaba que no le interesaba imaginarse el ambiente y el entorno en el que sucediera la trama, sino que se fijaba en las emociones que le transmitían los personajes:

Pues al final, lo que lo diferencia de los libros es que tú puedes escuchar a los personajes y lo que te transmite... Como que es más fácil empatizar porque realmente el diálogo hace mucho. ¿Sabes? Al final, no solo estás leyendo lo que les pasa, sino que te lo están contando ellos mismos, ¿sabes?

En este caso la forma de suplir la carencia visual es atender los diálogos entre los personajes, de forma que le evoque algún tipo de emoción. De nuevo se vuelve a observar la primacía de la función de regulación emocional que los participantes quieren obtener con el arte.

En este caso esta persona señalaba también que los motivos que justifican estas preferencias son a menudo de índole personal. Él se definía como no excesivamente curioso en su día a día, por lo que no le importaba demasiado construir una representación precisa de su entorno:

Yo no mucho, porque es como que no me llama mucho la atención. Ya tengo asumido que no veo y eso, y no me paro mucho a pensar en cómo son las cosas visualmente. No sé, es como que no me llama tanto la atención. Pero eso es algo totalmente subjetivo.

Curiosamente, este participante era ciego de nacimiento, carecía de restos visuales y no tenía por tanto la capacidad de representarse el mundo a través de imágenes visuales. Lo que este testimonio pone de manifiesto es que los límites de la evocación interna de nuestra experiencia, se sostenga o no sobre imágenes, se definen en virtud de su alcance funcional. Es decir, este participante solo necesita reconstruir aquello que juzga como funcionalmente relevante en relación con sus fines, metas o valores.

Por otro lado, otro mediador instrumental que se utiliza como apoyo a las limitaciones visuales es la tecnología. Por ejemplo, varios participantes que fotografiaban nos comentaban la importancia de la tecnología para poder tener más claro lo que estaban fotografiando e imaginarse de forma más completa las características del entorno:

Porque además ahora los móviles te aportan información. Porque, por ejemplo, el móvil te dice rostro, derecha o izquierda. Y en redes, pues, por ejemplo, las imágenes, los gráficos para un lector de pantalla son inaccesibles. Pero ahora ya afortunadamente Facebook, Instagram, todas tienen identificadores de imágenes que te escanean la imagen.

Mediadores sociales de la experiencia

Otro tipo de mediación que se encuentra de manera transversal en diferentes tipos de arte es la mediación social. En el grupo de participantes se observa que personas cercanas a ellos, sobre todo sus parejas, hacen de soporte a la hora de explicar los elementos visuales del arte que están consumiendo. De hecho, relacionado con lo que se ha mencionado sobre el cine, en muchos casos cuando no hay audiodescripción son estas personas las que hacen de narradores de los aspectos visuales para que su

pareja pueda seguir la trama. Así, en una cita de un participante este nos decía:

Hay veces que suena solo música y yo no sé qué está sucediendo, hasta que me dice, Pablo, que se están besando.

En relación con esto, uno de los relatos que más nos sorprendió fue el de uno de los participantes que explicaba que él disfrutaba de las artes plásticas a través de las emociones que las obras le generaban a su pareja. De modo que prefería escuchar la experiencia de esta y no tanto utilizar audioguías, puesto que lo que le importaba era sintonizar con la obra confiando en la reacción emocional de la persona que le acompañaba. El valor de la experiencia artística descansaba para él la posibilidad de poder compartir emociones y situaciones con su pareja:

A mí me gusta tener la información, sí, histórica o de contexto, pero a mí me gusta la persona que tengo al lado. Entonces, el elemento emocional de lo que te transmite a mí me llega más, seguramente.

Parece claro, salvo que la anécdota que acabamos de contar nos parezca trivial, que no hay una vía regia para encauzar las relaciones del ser humano con los acontecimientos artísticos, y, eventualmente, para experimentar estética la vida. La mediación social, que resulta seguramente más evidente en la situación que acabamos de describir está siempre, es esencial para entender y explicar el alcance funcional de las acciones humanas, independientemente de nuestro estatuto perceptivo o de nuestras capacidades.

En relación con este tipo de mediadores nos gustaría destacar también la forma en la que una de las participantes se relacionaba con la fotografía. Esta participante tenía un resto de visión amplio que le permitía distinguir figuras y colores. Sin embargo, estos colores no serían los mismos que ve una persona vidente, ya que en su caso muchas veces están mezclados o tienen un tono diferente. De esta manera decía que intentaba que sus fotos tuvieran mucho contraste entre colores para que a una persona vidente no le resultase raro. Esto nos está señalando la forma en la que en su imaginación tiene en cuenta las posibles capacidades, opiniones y gustos de las personas videntes, incluso cuando ellos no están presentes.

Yo mucho blanco y negro, gris, pero porque me parece un color fácil de combinar, en general. ¿Sabes? Como que va a quedar bien, como que es algo seguro y me parece cómodo y fácil para que no quede raro en una vista norma [...]Y me parece que de cara a los demás, si yo me pongo a jugar con otros colores, igual yo qué sé, puedo meter cosas que no combinen nada.

Mediadores biológicos de la experiencia

Por otro lado, existen otros mediadores que han estado presentes implícitamente en nuestro discurso, pero de los que no hemos hablado directamente. Estos serían los mediadores biológicos, parte de lo que Vygotsky¹⁵ denominaba sistemas naturales, que tienen una importancia decisiva en las personas sin visión, y cuya reorganización funcional a partir de la mediación social es fundamental para el ajuste funcional de estas personas a las demandas de su entorno. De esta manera, como hemos podido ya intuir, los sujetos aprenden a relacionarse con el mundo a través de otros marcos

¹⁵ L. S. Vygotskii, *El desarrollo de los procesos psicológicos superiores*, Primera edición en Austral, Austral humanidades 762, Barcelona 2012.

sensoriales y perceptuales, que hacen funcionalmente viables a partir de la mediación social (educación especial, integración educativa etc.)

Como hemos visto, algunos participantes se sirven de otras modalidades sensoriales para mediar, o remediar, su experiencia con el arte. Por ejemplo, nos hablan del tacto, el olor, el oído etc. como formas de conseguir otras experiencias alternativas en su relación con las artes plásticas. Con respecto al oído uno de los participantes nos comenta que ha desarrollado un oído panorámico, es decir, ha desarrollado un uso de su capacidad auditiva que le permite construir un espacio sonoro de 360 grados. En este sentido puede construir una imagen mental de las esculturas o de la arquitectura a partir de la resonancia de los sonidos en el ambiente. El participante nos lo explicaba de esta manera:

Se genera una construcción cerebral del sonido panorámico, ya no centrado en la visión, sino panorámico, casi 360 grados. Entonces, yo, cuando estoy en un sitio, pues puedo estar escuchándote a ti, pero a su vez estoy escuchando sonidos mucho más lejanos.

Este mismo participante nos comenta también la importancia del olor en su relación con la arquitectura, ya que este le aporta mucha información que también se convierte en figuras mentales:

El olor, el olor también es muy importante, evidentemente, el olor, en el arte arquitectónico te aporta información, por ejemplo, en una catedral o en una iglesia, siempre me viene a la cabeza el olor a polvo, el olor a polvo de las catedrales, o de la piedra, entonces, toda esa información unida se construye en figuras mentales.

De la misma manera el tacto se convierte en otro catalizador de la experiencia, de modo que ya no solo contribuye a generar representaciones mentales, sino que las propias sensaciones interoceptivas proporcionan también mucha información. En consecuencia, las texturas, la rugosidad, la temperatura contribuyen a alcanzar una experiencia más o menos agradable.

No, normalmente lo que percibes son si la sensación que te aporta el tocar esa superficie te resulta agradable o no. Y, por ejemplo, dependiendo de si está fría, caliente, dependiendo de texturas, dependiendo de materiales, puede perfectamente resultarte más agradable o puedes pensar que tiene una estética más estética o menos estética.

Todo ello pone de manifiesto la capacidad reorganizativa del ser humano, la plasticidad, la capacidad de intervenir a sí mismo y recomponerse funcionalmente, de manera que la práctica, social o semióticamente mediada, que estas personas hagan sobre otros sentidos contribuye al reajuste funcional de los mismos.

Actitud personal hacia la discapacidad visual

En este sentido cabe tener en consideración otro aspecto que hasta ahora no se ha mencionado y que sin embargo resulta decisivo para motivar este proceso de reorganización funcional. Nos referimos aquí a la actitud que tienen las personas sin visión con respecto a su discapacidad. Es decir, si ellos mismos consideran que la discapacidad es un impedimento o si por el contrario buscan otras alternativas para afrontar la deficiencia visual. De hecho, hemos observado grandes diferencias entre los participantes que consideran que su experiencia con el arte no puede ser

completa debido a la discapacidad visual, y, por tanto, se cierran a la posibilidad de experimentar el mundo que queda fuera de su alcance, y otros que por el contrario intentan buscar otras formas de canalizar su experiencia.

Uno de los participantes nos comentaba que para él las artes plásticas no tenían demasiado interés, puesto que debido a su discapacidad visual estaba muy limitado:

Pero al final es eso, o sea, tú te pagas la entrada a una catedral o a un museo o a una exposición o algo de esto y dices, bueno, ¿y para qué si no la veo, sabes? No lo haces.

Sin embargo, otro utilizaba la fotografía para poder autoafirmarse a sí mismo y como una manera de superar retos:

No, hombre, para mí todo lo que hago son retos. Entonces superar retos para mí es muy satisfactorio, para cualquier persona que no sea conformista en la vida [...] Y que te lo demuestres a ti mismo, ¿no? Entonces pues básicamente es para lo que nos sirve. Para seguir autoafirmándome. Para seguir autoafirmándome que no yo, sino que una persona ciega no tiene por qué ponerse límites.

Reconsiderando la imaginación

Con todo ello, podemos presentar algunas reflexiones finales que han surgido a lo largo del desarrollo de este estudio:

El análisis de la experiencia de las personas con discapacidad visual nos permite ser más conscientes del hecho de que no hay una sola forma de relacionarse con los acontecimientos artísticos.

La variedad casi infinita de estas formas de relacionarnos con el arte, está en función de la variedad, casi infinita, de formas de mediación social, sociotécnica, y de reorganización funcional de nuestros sistemas naturales.

Estos ensamblajes entre sistemas naturales y artificiales están social e institucionalmente orientados y, en la medida en que dan lugar a formas concretas e individuales de actuar, dirigidos a metas y orientados por valores.

La constatación de la importancia radical de la mediación social en la posibilidad de que las personas ciegas accedan a ciertas experiencias artísticas consigue hacer más visible nuestra dependencia funcional de los otros. La autonomía funcional es solo una aspiración, o un sueño, bajo este prisma, seguramente banal.

Aunque seguramente resulta demasiado aventurado afirmar que las experiencias que acabamos de relatar exijan revisar críticamente el alcance del visuocentrismo en la filosofía y en las ciencias humanas y sociales, sí creemos que, al menos, nos deberían animar a revisar todo lo que las filosofías o las psicologías de la imaginación dan por supuesto.

Cabe preguntarse si el término imaginación debería ser revisado a la luz de algunas de estas experiencias. Cabe también preguntarse si este concepto, en su acepción visuocéntrica habitual, puede ser aplicado a las personas ciegas. Si cabe, entonces ¿no habría que buscar otro término más amplio? Si no cabe, y los ciegos carecen de imaginación, ¿es entonces la imaginación un proceso, una disposición o una facultad clave en la definición de lo humano?

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ACROSS THE AESTHETICS OF DREAMS: FROM AUTO- CREATION TO PROTO-ART

Abstract

This paper explores the relationship between dreams and the realms of aesthetics, creativity and the arts. It examines how the philosophies of dreaming and creativity intertwine, demonstrating how dreams parallel various art forms—from painting and literature to film. Analysing dreams and nightmares as narrative creations of the mind, this study highlights their influence on fantasy and horror genres. A threefold categorization of how artists have historically interpreted and represented dreams is proposed, illustrated through key examples from their oeuvres. These artistic engagements, combined with the aesthetic appreciation of actually experienced auto-creative dreams, significantly advance the philosophical understanding of oneiric experience. Ultimately, this study positions dreams as both a form of proto-art and a root of aesthetic inspiration, introducing «natural surrealism» as a framework to conceptualize their creative nature. This investigation thus offers a comprehensive overview of the aesthetic dimensions of dreams, stressing their potential to enrich creative practices.

Keywords: dreaming, sleep, aesthetics, art, creativity.

Uma viagem pela estética dos sonhos: da autocriação à protoarte

Resumo

Este artigo explora a relação entre os sonhos e os domínios da estética, criatividade

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e artes. Examina como as filosofias do sonho e da criatividade se entrelaçam, demonstrando como os sonhos se equiparam a diversas formas artísticas—da pintura e literatura ao cinema. Ao analisar os sonhos e pesadelos enquanto criações narrativas da mente, este estudo destaca a sua influência nos géneros da fantasia e do horror. Propõe-se uma categorização tripartida de como os artistas têm historicamente interpretado e representado os sonhos, ilustrada através de exemplos-chave das suas obras. Estes engajamentos artísticos, combinados com a apreciação estética de sonhos auto-criativos vivenciados, avançam significativamente o entendimento filosófico da experiência onírica. Por fim, este estudo posiciona os sonhos tanto como uma forma de proto-arte como uma raiz de inspiração estética, introduzindo o «surrealismo natural» como enquadramento para conceptualizar a sua natureza criativa. Esta investigação oferece assim uma visão abrangente das dimensões estéticas dos sonhos, salientando o seu potencial para enriquecer as práticas criativas.

Palavras-chave: sonho, sono, estética, arte, criatividade.

Introduction

For long, dreams have influenced human life and shaped endeavours across various domains of culture and existence. An ostensible aspect of this footprint appears within art and creativity, the primary focus of this article. Both the philosophies of dreaming and creativity exhibit enduring traditions that have persisted since Antiquity, through Modernity, up until the present day. The relationship between dreams and creations of all sorts, most notably in the domain of artistry, underscores the need, and calls for, a strong dialogue between these two philosophical spheres.

Throughout this type of investigation, it becomes evident that an interdisciplinary attitude is necessary. While the methodology adopted is primarily grounded in contemporary philosophy, as well as in the neuroscience and cognitive psychology of sleep and creativity, it does not presuppose any substantial distinction between approaches from «analytical» and «continental» philosophy, nor between the empirical sciences and the humanities. The resources of this proposal are eclectic in nature and therefore require an intersectional position with respect to the debate on the two traditions—or «two cultures», as established by C.P. Snow's famous 1959 lecture. Only then can we do justice to the «inherently interdisciplinary nature of studies of dreams and dreaming throughout history»². Certainly, given that both scientific literature and the humanistic canon are directly involved in our global understanding of dream processes, «an interdisciplinary perspective is called for, as no single discipline alone could succeed in illuminating the multifaceted experience of dreaming»³.

The first section of this article encompasses some key points of both the philosophy of dreaming and the philosophy of creativity, now required to make

² G. Morgese, «A Vast Ocean of Neglected Dream Studies», in G. Morgese, G. P. Lombardo & H. Vande Kemp (eds.), *Histories of Dreams and Dreaming: An Interdisciplinary Perspective*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2019, pp. 1-15, p. 5.

³ M. Schrage-Früh, *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination*, Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2016, p. 9.

a connection by the fact that creativity stands out as a distinctive function of the dream state. The second section explores notable analogies and links between dreams and art, and double-checks the unverifiable hypothesis of dreaming as a source of narrativity or even creativity, considering the parallel evolutionary benefits attributed to both dreaming and fictional imagination. The third section, after proposing a threefold categorization of how artists incorporate dreams into their enterprises, presents examples of dreamlike works by renowned artists of different eras, in order to illustrate how dreaming has historically affected artistic expression. The fourth and last section synthesises these themes into a theory of dreams as a form of proto-art. At this point, I set out to coin a term aimed at the conceptualization of dreams in respect of its connection with artistic creation, namely, «natural surrealism». Finally, the conclusion integrates and summarises the study's findings.

1. Dreaming Creatively

The philosophy of dreaming has a long and fascinating history⁴. It can be traced back to Antiquity, taking, for example, the case of Aristotle's *Parva Naturalia*. Later on, Diogenes Laertius and Sextus Empiricus did not hesitate to invoke the figure of dreams in their embrace of scepticism, and a little later, we find the moral reflections of Saint Augustine in his *Confessions*. Its modern climax is often located in Descartes' *Meditations on First Philosophy*. Nietzsche later attributed the origin of metaphysical dualism between the earthly and the divine to dreams. Beyond Freudian and Jungian research, common indications of a contemporary approach can be found in the works of Malcolm⁵ and Dennett⁶, who suggest that dreams cannot be proved to be conscious experiences but rather derive their conceptualization from mere *post hoc* waking descriptions. Despite scepticism from these early thinkers, several empirical tests have confirmed dreams as a conscious experience⁷, leading to questions about the ontological and functional status of dreams. Various answers have been proposed, with dreams understood as hallucinations⁸, illusions⁹, imaginations¹⁰, or deliriums¹¹. In turn, Rosen¹² adopts a pluralistic framework by considering the abundant ways dreams are conceptualised, presenting different facets that are not mutually exclusive but rather aspects of a multi-faceted phenomenon. This pluralism also overlaps with

⁴ See J. Windt, «Dreams and Dreaming», in E. N. Zalta (ed.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2021), Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2021.

⁵ N. Malcolm, «Dreaming and Skepticism», *The Philosophical Review*, 65(1) (1956) 14-37.

⁶ D. Dennett, «Are Dreams Experiences?», *The Philosophical Review*, 85(2) (1976) 151-171.

⁷ Windt, «Dreams and Dreaming», art. cit.

⁸ See A. Revonsuo, *Inner Presence: Consciousness as a Biological Phenomenon*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2006.

⁹ See J. Windt, «The immersive spatiotemporal hallucination model of dreaming», *Phenomenology and the Cognitive Sciences*, 9(2) (2010) 295-316.

¹⁰ See J. Ichikawa, «Dreaming and Imagination», *Mind & Language*, 24(1) (2009) 103-121.

¹¹ See J. A. Hobson, *Dreaming as Delirium: How the Brain Goes Out of Its Mind*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 1999.

¹² M. G. Rosen, *Dream Pluralism: A Philosophy of the Dreaming Mind* [Doctoral dissertation], Macquarie University, Sydney 2013.

the discussion regarding the continuity or discontinuity hypotheses between aspects of wakefulness and dreaming^{13,14}. However, the outlined pluralistic approach is not exempt from questioning: if dreams are as varied as waking mental states, it remains unclear how conceptually distinct the dream state is compared to wakefulness; hence, the continuity-discontinuity debate becomes relevant. On the other hand, the answers to the question of the evolutionary functionality of dreams are also diverse and numerous, although it is true that sometimes dreams are considered as epiphenomena with no adaptive significance, or as spandrels with cultural utility^{15,16}. For instance, Blagrove and Lockheart¹⁷ have distinguished theories of dreaming categorising them as functional or non-functional, and as either eliciting or not eliciting insight.

Regarding the functions attributed to dreams, the relationship between dreams and creativity is notable. It is estimated that 8% of our dreams stimulate creativity¹⁸; to be fair, the math may add up to approximately 100 creative dreams per year (considering that 3 to 5 is the average quantity of dreams per night¹⁹). Dreams in humans are linked to the expression of new relationships between concepts, barely hinted at during wakefulness: thus, an idea may finally emerge into consciousness as a retained dream²⁰. In this sense, following Barrett²¹, dreams are thoughts in a different biochemical state, focused on the same issues that concern us while awake. However, there is an important difference between dreaming and wakefulness: brain areas related to logical and familiar thinking are less active in REM sleep, and precisely this disinhibition is a crucial component of creative thinking, capable of generating inspiration and providing answers to significant matters in the dreamer's life²². The dreaming brain is freed from intentional and directed thinking and therefore optimised for exploring connections and associations that are normally overlooked, making REM sleep a period of unbridled creativity²³. Schredl and Erlacher²⁴, for example, distinguish four categories of relationships between dreaming and wakefulness: dream images used for art, work, or similar areas; dreams that solved a

¹³ See M. G. Rosen, «How bizarre? A pluralist approach to dream content», *Consciousness and Cognition*, 62 (2018) 148-162.

¹⁴ See M. Schredl, «Continuity in studying the continuity hypothesis of dreaming is needed», *International Journal of Dream Research*, 5(1) (2012) 1-8.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*, p. 4.

¹⁶ See D. Barrett, «An Evolutionary Theory of Dreams and Problem-Solving», in D. Barrett & P. McNamara (Eds.), *The New Science of Dreaming: Vol. 3. Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives*, Praeger Publishers, Westport, CT 2007, pp. 133-153.

¹⁷ M. Blagrove – J. Lockheart, *The Science and Art of Dreaming*, Routledge, London 2023, pp. 138-139.

¹⁸ See M. Schredl – D. Erlacher, «Self-Reported Effects of Dreams on Waking-Life Creativity: An Empirical Study», *The Journal of Psychology*, 141(1) (2007) 35-46.

¹⁹ See J. M. Hereford, «Dreams», in J. M. Hereford (ed.), *Sleep and Rehabilitation*, Routledge, New York 2024, pp. 77-84.

²⁰ See P. Mazzeello, «What dreams may come?», *Nature*, 408 (2000) 523.

²¹ D. Barrett, «Answers in Your Dreams», *Scientific American Mind*, 22(5) (2011) 33-41, p. 34.

²² *Ibid.*, p. 37.

²³ See R. Stickgold, «Creativity of the Dream and Sleep State», in S. Nalbantian & P. M. Matthews (eds.), *Secrets of Creativity*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2019, pp. 124-149.

²⁴ Schredl – Erlacher, «Self-Reported Effects of Dreams...», art. cit., pp. 42-43.

problem; dreams that provided the impulse to do something difficult or challenging; and dreams that contained emotional revelations.

Now, turning to the other aspect of the matter, the study of creativity has a long and rich philosophical history, too—marked by numerous metaphysical dimensions, such as the attribution of divine or supernatural origins to inspiration—yet it often lacks both systematic support and empirical grounding^{25,26}. In fact, the term *creativity* did not appear until the 19th century²⁷. However, in contrast to the curious philosophical indifference of the past, the investigation of creativity is a novel and rapidly growing field in today's philosophy and science. There are exclusively philosophical questions surrounding the concept of creativity, involving both the arts and the sciences²⁸. Depending on the explanatory project, the *explanandum* in a theory of creativity can refer to acts, mental processes, ideas, people, and artefacts²⁹. Artistic creativity could be understood as a spatiotemporal process package culminating in the creation of an artwork³⁰. There has been considerable progress in the scientific understanding of the neural basis underlying (artistic) creativity over the last few decades. Based on neuroaesthetic research conducted by Vartanian³¹, the neural bases of artistic creativity seem to share many similarities with the neural bases of creativity in other domains, and there are both domain-general (e.g., attention, memory) as well as domain-specific (e.g., imagery, motor control) structures that support artistic creativity.

It is worth noting that, in his 1926 *The Art of Thought*, Wallas³² divides the creative process into four stages: preparation, incubation—also called «implicit cognition»³³—illumination, and verification or elaboration; this ideal framework has persisted in creativity theories, although the unconscious nature of creativity as a form of incubated cognition has alarmed naturalists³⁴. In any case, while considering the importance of dream incubation as a creativity enhancer and an aid for problem-solving³⁵, we cannot help but privilege sleep when addressing standard incubation—meaning detachment from a problem—as an inseparable cornerstone of creativity³⁶.

²⁵ C. R. Hausman, «Philosophy of Creativity», *Ultimate Reality and Meaning*, 2(2) (1979) 143-162, p. 143.

²⁶ D. Stokes, «A Metaphysics of Creativity», in K. Stock & K. Thomson Jones (eds.), *New Waves in Aesthetics*, Palgrave Macmillan, New York 2008, pp. 105-124, pp. 105-106.

²⁷ E. S. Paul – D. Stokes «Creativity», in E. N. Zalta & U. Nodelman (eds.), *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Spring 2023), Metaphysics Research Lab, Stanford University, 2023.

²⁸ See D. Dutton – M. Krausz, *The Concept of Creativity in Science and Art*, Springer, New York 2012.

²⁹ B. Nanay, «An Experiential Account of Creativity», in E. S. Paul & S. B. Kaufman (eds.), *The Philosophy of Creativity: New Essays*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp. 17-35, p. 17.

³⁰ Stokes, «A Metaphysics of Creativity», art. cit., p. 115.

³¹ O. Vartanian, «Neuroscience of artistic creativity», in M. Skov & M. Nadal (eds.), *The Routledge International Handbook of Neuroaesthetics*, Routledge, London 2023, pp. 507-525, p. 518.

³² G. Wallas, *The Art of Thought*, J. Cape, London 1926.

³³ D. Stokes, «The Role of Imagination in Creativity», in E. S. Paul & S. B. Kaufman (eds.), *The Philosophy of Creativity: New Essays*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2014, pp. 157-184, p. 168.

³⁴ D. Stokes, «Incubated Cognition and Creativity», *Journal of Consciousness Studies*, 14(3) (2007) 83-100, p. 83.

³⁵ See D. Barrett, *The committee of sleep: How artists, scientists, and athletes use dreams for creative problem-solving-- and how you can, too*, Crown Publishers, New York 2001.

³⁶ See S. M. Ritter – A. Dijksterhuis, «Creativity—the unconscious foundations of the incubation period», *Frontiers in Human Neuroscience*, 8 (2014) 215.

Paradoxically, dream incubation, often devoted to creatively solving problems relevant to the dreamer, does not constitute the relaxing antithesis of the problem in question as intended by standard incubation theories, due to being directed at inducing or invoking such relevant issue. Apparently, the theme of incubation permeates the discussion about creativity; and the pairing between dream incubation and creativity is no exception. The notion of dream incubation has gained particular notoriety from recent research on *targeted dream incubation* conducted at the Massachusetts Institute of Technology, using auditory and olfactory methods to awaken creative impulses³⁷. This project, by way of a device called *Dormio*, aims to enhance creative powers during the hypnagogic state (the transitional state between sleep and wakefulness) by reducing inhibitory processes that restrict divergent thinking. In addition to promising results so far, certain anecdotal evidence supports increased creativity levels through dream incubation, as seen in the cases of famous individuals such as Thomas Edison and Salvador Dalí³⁸.

It is understandable why Malcolm rejected the idea of dreaming as a conscious experience, as he argued that dreaming is the opposite of consciousness, instead indicating an absence from the world and a temporary abandonment of life (*a petite mort* in its own right, we might say). If creativity relies on non-conscious processes—and perhaps non-computable ones—, how does dreaming and dream content relate to such mental disposition, and why have they not been more detailedly considered by creativity theories? Creativity in the philosophy of dreams has somewhat been studied, but philosophical studies of creativity rarely mention dreams.

Overall, a plausible claim is that creativity partly relies on sleep, among other states of mental and physical vulnerability, in which consciousness relaxes—or withdraws, or retreats—to the point of generating its own private world. Dreamscapes are the epitome of these made-up scenarios that seem to lay the groundwork for fiction in all its forms. From a straightforward cause-and-effect outlook, (at least at times) dreams cause creativity, that is, creativity becomes an effect of dreaming. But aren't dreams also created? Isn't creativity a cause of dreams as well? Unless, as Allan Hobson suggests, what truly occurs is that they are, in fact, auto-creative... Could it be, then, that dreams and creativity are ultimately one and the same?

2. The Art of Sleep

The analogy between dreams and art is not a surprise: the points of intersection between these extraordinary mental states and the various arts out there are abundant, as evidenced by the 2003 special issue of the niche journal *Dreaming*, titled «Dreaming and the Arts»³⁹; the connections between dreaming, on one hand, and fiction or surrealism, on the other, are in plain sight.

³⁷ See A. H. Haar Horowitz — K. Esfahany — T. V. Gálvez — P. Maes — R. Stickgold, «Targeted dream incubation at sleep onset increases post-sleep creative performance», *Scientific Reports*, 13(1) (2023) 7319.

³⁸ See A. H. Haar Horowitz — T. J. Cunningham — P. Maes — R. Stickgold, «Dormio: A Targeted Dream Incubation Device», *Consciousness and Cognition*, 83 (2020) 102938.

³⁹ See R. A. Russo, «Introduction», *Dreaming*, 13(1) (2003) 1-2.

States⁴⁰, in his analysis of the role dreams and fictions play in forming and maintaining our adaptive systems, treats dreaming as an extension of fiction's preoccupation with our daily concerns. By virtue of sharing structural features with fiction—considered, by the author, a synecdoche for art in general—, dreams become associated with narratives' cognitive capacity to help us enlarge and revise our perceptual and response systems. The creative freedom of mind afforded by the dream state, which allows to expand associational possibilities across sensory limits, perhaps make dreams, even if not unique in their function, at least an extremity in the spectrum of thought. The otherworldly abilities to mix and deform the mind achieves while dreaming seem to account for much of its creative capacity. Thus, dream distortion could be deemed a variety of pretend play capable of widening our associative potential beyond actual needs, therefore training flexibility toward unexpected emergencies.

On the other hand, Bulkeley⁴¹, in his examination of David Lynch's oneiric film narratives, makes a case for the unconventional types of narrations that are comparable to dreams. Rather than a failed attempt to convey a clear sense of place, or a tendency to mock viewers by the lack thereof, Lynch's films work like Hindu myths, where the confusion about the state of consciousness spectators find themselves in becomes the norm, due to deliberate devices put forward by the narrative in question. That is to say, when dreams and dreams within dreams proliferate, we, being the audience, *should* get confused. I think that in this sense we can approach a viable route to conceive the inherent story-like structure of dreams, as reported by Cipolli and Poli's experiments⁴².

Well, speaking of stories, dreams exceed the physical and logical laws the way fantasy does, so much that the products of filmmaking have been regarded as a first-rate analogy for dreaming. Federico Fellini himself once said, in an interview for *Rolling Stone*: «Talking about dreams is like talking about movies, since the cinema uses the language of dreams; years can pass in a second and you can hop from one place to another»⁴³. What strikes us first when analysing this matter is cinema's technical capabilities, so sophisticated and proper as regards bringing dreamscapes into audiovisual fulfilment. Burkhead's *Dreams in American Television Narratives: From Dallas to Buffy*, before sinking into television art and its inherently extensive narrative finesse, stresses film's groundbreaking suitability for crafting dreamlike optics⁴⁴. In truth, its unique technological privilege when it comes to surreal creation renders the seventh art a very special place amid the analogies between dreams and art. In point of fact, imitating subjective fantasy such as dreams is the main purpose behind Georges Méliès' pioneer developments in stop-motion, fades, superimposition, dissolves and fast motion: via special effects he was trying

⁴⁰ B. O. States, «Dreams, Art and Virtual Worldmaking», *Dreaming*, 13(1) (2003) 3-12.

⁴¹ K. Bulkeley, «Dreaming and the cinema of David Lynch», *Dreaming*, 13(1) (2003) 49-60, p. 52.

⁴² C. Cipolli – D. Poli, «Story Structure in Verbal Reports of Mental Sleep Experience After Awakening in REM Sleep», *Sleep*, 15(2) (1992) 133-142.

⁴³ J. Cott, «Fellini's Language of Dreams», *Rolling Stone*, (421) (1984).

⁴⁴ C. Burkhead, *Dreams in American television narratives: From Dallas to Buffy*, Bloomsbury, London 2014, p. 5.

to emulate some sort of mental magic⁴⁵. As Burkhead⁴⁶ recounts, the dreamlike experience lived by the spectator in real time during the length of a movie has been a debating affair at least since René Clair's 1926 *Reflections on Cinema*. The movie theatre's illusive atmosphere looks intrinsically fabricated to induce a fairly ethereal mental and sensorial state: the lowering of the lights into utter darkness around the screen and the viewer's nearly fetal sitting position are key points of this resemblance. She then evokes psychoanalyst Bertram Lewin's expansion of this analogy: the dream is viewed by the dreamer on a white dream screen. Semiotician Christian Metz thwarts this pervasive enthusiasm around the dream-film analogy by stating the main difference between oneiric and filmic experiences: while we dream (non-lucidly) we are unaware of the fact that we are dreaming, whereas film spectators are aware of themselves being at the movies. Ironically, what the dreamer and the spectator have in common is precisely what strengthens their dissimilarities. In concrete, there is a gap in both experiences, and these two gaps are opposites, exactly what the remainder minus the gap is in the other case. According to this view: for the dreamer, the gap is lucid dreaming, that is, gaining a formerly absent awareness; for the spectator, the gap is losing awareness of the film-viewing ritual in and of itself, thus momentarily forgetting being in front of a screen. Of course, Burkhead remarks an important distinction concerning cinema versus theatre and television: on one hand, theatre's more artificial production, where shifts between scenes entail an interval, and, on the other hand, television's livingroom-based bright setting and recurrent commercial breaks, do break the dream illusion.

It is true that another potent case among the dream-art analogies is literature, as proclaimed in Schrage-Früh's *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination*. The commonplace ideas of Hollywood as a dream factory and the sum of nocturnal dreams as a dream theatre, or Samuel Taylor Coleridge's view of poetry as a rationalised dream and Jean Paul's notion of dreaming as involuntary poetry, as well as Jorge Luis Borge's opinion that dreams might be the most ancient aesthetic expression, are a few among many references Schrage-Früh⁴⁷ consults when attesting the exceptional place literature occupies in the philosophical discussion about dreams and the arts. By reviewing how dreams can be a good metaphor for fiction, partly following Keith Oatley's *Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction*, in which both Shakespearean and Bardonian concepts of a modelled world are pivotal, Schrage-Früh reminds us of the outlandish occurrences we take for granted as real without blinking when asleep⁴⁸. The accordance between dreaming and waking imagination becomes relevant as she examines the seemingly parallel evolutionary functions of dreams and fiction, modestly summarised as rehearsing and enhancing scenarios via safe mental simulations, with various adaptive benefits shared across both ends of the

⁴⁵ Ibid., p. 7.

⁴⁶ Ibid., pp. 7-10.

⁴⁷ Schrage-Früh, *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination*, op. cit., pp. 1-2.

⁴⁸ Ibid., pp. 3-4.

spectrum^{49,50}. Following Cosmides and Tooby⁵¹, from an evolutionary standpoint, aesthetically driven behaviour—though seemingly non-utilitarian—may serve to enact adaptive changes in the subtle world of the mind and brain. Aesthetically driven behaviour such as dreaming⁵². In this respect, as per Mavromatis⁵³, dream activities during wakefulness—daydreaming, engaging in art or science, or being creative in general, and letting go without falling asleep (e.g., hypnagogizing)—may explain why humans sleep less than any other mammal; he claims that the evolutionary functions of dreaming are analogous to those of the creative activities of wakefulness.

Undeniably, dreams involve the generation and the contemplation of our own private fictions, and that is the main rationale underpinning Schrage-Früh's book: that we both create and consume dreams in unison, like readers spontaneously writing what they are at the same time reading. Authorship and audience coincide during a dream: they are identical, one and the same. That dreams can be simultaneously created and experienced, or, put in different words, that the dreamer can be regarded as simultaneous writer and reader of his or her dream, ultimately makes this thinker gravitate towards a literary approach rather than a filmic stance when it comes to the links between dreams and art, due to the evidence supporting the view of dreaming as an associational composition more accurately comparable to that of the fictional writer⁵⁴, free from those calculated externalities the percepts of cinema embrace. Borrowing terminology from Oatley⁵⁵, this philosophical path culminates in her view of dreams as a form of «writingandreading»⁵⁶, a neologism aimed at capturing a comprehensive sense of what creative writing means.

This intimate interaction between dreaming and the long-lasting activity of telling and contemplating stories is reinforced when we notice that the earliest documents of handwritten tales record and interpret the dreams of their authors⁵⁷. For example, the *Epic of Gilgamesh*, a Sumerian text dating back approximately 4000 years. The hypothesis about dreaming as the origin of all human creativity is difficult to prove, but there is evidence that dreams inspire creation^{58,59}. On a similar note, the distinction between appearance and reality may have been made possible thanks to lucid dreams⁶⁰. Moreover, dreams have been thought of as a source

⁴⁹ Ibid., p. 46.

⁵⁰ See K. Oatley, *Such Stuff as Dreams: The Psychology of Fiction*, Wiley-Blackwell, Oxford 2011, p. 162.

⁵¹ J. Tooby — L. Cosmides, «Does Beauty Build Adapted Minds? Toward an Evolutionary Theory of Aesthetics, Fiction, and the Arts», *SubStance*, 30 (1/2), 2001, pp. 6-27.

⁵² Schrage-Früh, *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination*, op. cit., pp. 54-55.

⁵³ A. Mavromatis, *Hypnagogia: The Unique State of Consciousness Between Wakefulness and Sleep*, Routledge, London 1991, pp. 276-277.

⁵⁴ Schrage-Früh, *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination*, op. cit., pp. 262-263.

⁵⁵ See K. Oatley, «Writingandreading: The Future of Cognitive Poetics», in G. J. Steen & J. Gavins (eds.), *Cognitive Poetics in Practice*, Routledge, London 2003, pp. 161-173.

⁵⁶ Schrage-Früh, *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination*, op. cit., p. 263.

⁵⁷ Ibid., pp. 55-56.

⁵⁸ See C. S. Rupprecht, «Dreaming, Language, Literature», in D. Barrett & P. McNamara (eds.), *The New Science of Dreaming: Vol. 3. Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives*, Praeger Perspectives, Westport 2007, pp. 133-153.

⁵⁹ See K. Bulkeley, «Dreaming as Inspiration: Evidence from Religion, Philosophy, Literature, and Film», in *International Review of Neurobiology*, 92 (2010) 31-46.

⁶⁰ J. M. Windt – T. Metzinger, «The Philosophy of Dreaming and Self-Consciousness: What Happens to the

of supernatural agent concepts⁶¹, which altogether makes a strong case for dream-fantasy relationalities. Similarly, Nietzsche⁶² sounded convincing when he described dreams as the origin of all metaphysics, meaning they are responsible for the partition of reality into two different realms, the material and the immaterial; his argument relies on the apparitions of otherworldly beings, spirits, gods, and the deceased, that are so frequent in dreams. For Twitchell⁶³, it is also possible that the horror genre may have been inspired by nightmares and night terrors; monsters do tend to arise not from the real world but from the realm of dreams. Thus, distortions of dreaming or hallucinations generated by sleep paralysis are the ones to blame; both monsters and nightmares resist categorization, and the monster in horror fiction is the uncanny epitome of otherness, the enemy within us in the form of something altern⁶⁴.

More recently, Koncz⁶⁵, in an article for the *International Journal of Dream Research*, tells us how she curated an exhibition about the interplay between art and dreams, presumably two sides of the same coin stemming from a shared origin: making art as a conscious creative process and dreaming as an unconscious action of creation. Yet her preference for the psychoanalytic interpretation of dreams, regardless of Freud's undeniable relevance in the advancement of dream studies, collides with more neuroscientifically informed findings. Granted, following Grosse⁶⁶ in Hahn's *The Art of Dreams*, Freud did complement the formal analysis of dreams as bodily acts with a content-based breakdown of dreams within a mental and emotional network, while aligning with neuroscience's removal of religious undertones from dream research. But by seizing the linguistic, he also, in Foucaultian terms, reduced everything, including image, into language, precisely contrary to phenomenology's mute rendering of the imagistic⁶⁷.

Besides, it was Freud who inspired perhaps the most recognizable art movement specialised in dreams: surrealism. A manifest landmark of the *avant-garde*, this school of thought, around one hundred years ago, sought to harness the political power of the dream world as a strategy to challenge the rational hegemony of bourgeois, capitalist lifestyles. Surrealists' unorthodox incorporation of psychoanalysis contributed to their search for social and psychic liberation by way of welcoming the revelatory ubiquity of desire they found in the dream state, an awe-inspiring, peculiar state not only helpful for artistic inspiration, but also necessary as an emancipatory tool for the transformation of human experience⁶⁸. According to this group of artists,

Experiential Subject During the Dream State?», in D. Barrett & P. McNamara (eds.), *The New Science of Dreaming: Vol. 3. Cultural and Theoretical Perspectives*, Praeger Perspectives, Westport 2007, pp. 193-248, p. 216.

⁶¹ See P. McNamara – K. Bulkeley, «Dreams as a Source of Supernatural Agent Concepts», *Frontiers in Psychology*, 6 (2015) 1-8.

⁶² F. Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human: A Book for Free Spirits*, trans. R. J. Hollingdale, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1996, p. 14.

⁶³ See J. B. Twitchell, *Dreadful Pleasures: An Anatomy of Modern Horror*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 1985.

⁶⁴ See Schrage-Früh, *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination*, op. cit., p. 192.

⁶⁵ L. Koncz, «Exhibition of Dreams», *International Journal of Dream Research*, 15(2) (2022) 271-278.

⁶⁶ P. Grosse, «Sensible Dreams: Irrationality and the Philosophy of the Mind in the Seventeenth and Eighteenth Centuries», in B. Hahn & M. Werner (eds.), *The Art of Dreams*, De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston 2016, pp. 25-44, pp. 26-27.

⁶⁷ B. Hahn, «The Art of Dreams: An Introduction», in B. Hahn & M. Werner (eds.), *The Art of Dreams*, De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston 2016, pp. 1-4, pp. 2-3.

⁶⁸ N. Lusty – H. Groth, *Dreams and Modernity: A Cultural History*, Routledge, London 2013, pp. 8-9.

surrealism is a word for what defines dreaming: psychic automatism⁶⁹—a position they later intended to enact in the form of automatic writing⁷⁰ (an experimental procedure of trance-like creation with words). It is safe to say that the 20th century was a century of dreams⁷¹.

In any case, following Schrage-Früh⁷², among contemporary researchers specialised in the science of dreams, distancing oneirology from the Freudian model is not rare. According to Bulkeley⁷³, who has studied the multidisciplinary contexture of oneiric inspiration⁷⁴, whereas Freud undervalued the creativity of dreaming, today most dream experts agree that creativity is essential in the dream formation process. Likewise, despite focusing a great deal on the physical origin of dream consciousness and failing at truly contemplating both NREM sleep dreaming and dreamless REM sleep, Hobson, a neurological hardliner, even acknowledges that dreaming is a creative act at heart: over an oneirological view that shrinks creativity into a performance of psychopathological tension, he would rather conceive dreams as prone to create rather than mask meaning, while drawing a parallel between dreams and visual arts such as painting^{75,76}. Said author advocates the auto-creative originality of the dream process⁷⁷. Thanks to our fundamentally artistic brain, «[e]ach of us is a surrealist at night during his or her dreams: each is a Picasso, a Dalí, a Fellini»⁷⁸. As of late, even Fosshage⁷⁹—though rooted in psychoanalytic research—while acknowledging that the meanings of dreams are far from readily apparent, and often elusive due to a variety of contextual factors, criticizes the classical Freudian distinction between manifest and latent content. This researcher sees it as an unnecessary translation of images that increases the analyst's influence when interpreting a patient's dream. Instead, Fosshage favours a phenomenological approach to dream content, which does not rely on defensive or disguising mechanisms, but rather disclose the dreamer's immediate concerns in alternative forms: imagistically (through affects, metaphors, and themes) rather than being linearly attached to words, as occurs in wakefulness. In this sense, dream studies once again appear to be more about what is revealed than what is concealed.

Hence, on the whole, we can claim that dreams are cerebral fantastic creations⁸⁰. Here, auto-creativity refers to the autonomy of the dream process, which results in

⁶⁹ See A. Breton, «Entrée des médiums», in *Littérature*, 2nd series, 6 (1922).

⁷⁰ See A. Breton, *Manifeste du surréalisme*, Éditions du Sagittaire, Paris 1924.

⁷¹ B. Hahn, «“Chaque époque rêve la suivante”: Or: How to Read a “Bilderatlas” of the Twentieth Century?», in B. Hahn & M. Werner (eds.), *The Art of Dreams*, De Gruyter, Berlin/Boston 2016, pp. 85-96, p. 85.

⁷² Schrage-Früh, *Philosophy, Dreaming...*, op. cit., pp. 49-50.

⁷³ K. Bulkeley, «Visions of the Night: Dreams, Religion, and Psychology», SUNY Press, New York 1999, p. 64.

⁷⁴ See Bulkeley, «Dreaming as Inspiration...», art. cit.

⁷⁵ Schrage-Früh, *Philosophy, Dreaming and the Literary Imagination*, op. cit., pp. 33-34.

⁷⁶ J. A. Hobson – H. Wohl, *From Angels to Neurons: Art and the New Science of Dreaming*, Mattioli, Parma 2005, pp. 14-16.

⁷⁷ J. A. Hobson, *The Dream Drugstore: Chemically Altered States of Consciousness*, MIT Press, Cambridge, MA 2001, p. 9.

⁷⁸ J. A. Hobson, *The Dreaming Brain*, Basic Books, New York 1988, p. 297.

⁷⁹ J. L. Fosshage, «Is Dreaming Thinking? Pivotal Issues in Understanding and Working with Dreams», *Psychoanalytic Inquiry*, 44(8) (2024) 816-826, pp. 820-821.

⁸⁰ Hobson, *The Dreaming Brain*, op. cit., p. 296.

automatic creations *of* the dreamer's brain *for* the dreamer's brain—with little to no direct conscious agency from the asleep person behind those dreamy fantasies (except in cases of lucid dreaming, but even in those cases we can still retain the auto-creative aspect of dreaming when we consider the unconstrained creative power of a sort of oneiric crafting that works as if it were something like brainy magic). This approach may certainly imply an alternative way of understanding the aforementioned «writingandreading» philosophy.

It seems that we have gathered considerable theoretical support in our analysis of dreams and art. Each piece of the puzzle we have built up constitutes a distinct angle to address this many-faceted topic. I hope I was able to show that, by all accounts, there are several means to access the aesthetics and artistic creativity of dreaming.

3. Oneiric Oeuvre

Now it is time to display the testament to the close but labyrinthine relationship between dreams and artistic creativity. How do dreams inspire dreamers? How might the act of dreaming be transplanted into a work of art? I have come up with an arguable yet useful way of categorising what an artist can do with dreams in mind. Needless to say, it is worth testing this categorisation with actual art made by real professionals throughout the ages.

Firstly, an artist can just decide to trace the essence of dreams through abstraction, so as to mimic dreaming, without pointing to a specific retained dream. This involves capturing a generalised phenomenological feel of dreams rather than recreating a concrete oneiric event. I refer to *non-dream-originated art that portrays dreams*. We can call this category *non-referential oneiric art*, or rather *undreamt depiction of dreams*.

Secondly, an artist can be motivated to make art thanks to an idea surfaced within a dream or a collection of dreams, without it having to say anything about dreaming itself, that is, even if the final work bears no thematic or stylistic markers of dreaming. I am speaking about *non-dream-themed art based on dreams*. We can name this category *dream-catalysed non-oneiric art*, or rather *undreamy inspiration from dreams*.

Lastly, an artist can engage in creating a work that directly represents one (or a few) of his or her dreams, or even someone else's (as is the case with famous dreams), namely, *a dream* (or *some dreams*), thus simulating dreaming in a way that can be traced back to a real oneiric experience, blending documentation and artistic reinterpretation. I allude to *both dream-originated and dream-themed art*. We can label this category *dream-catalysed or referential oneiric art*, or rather *depiction of dreams inspired by dreams*.

Wes Craven's *A Nightmare on Elm Street* (1984), David Lynch's *Mulholland Drive* (2001), Kim Ki-duk's *Dream* (2008), and Christopher Nolan's *Inception* (2010) are cinematic examples of the first category. Though they thematise the oneiric, there is no direct evidence that they are immediately based on someone's specific dream (however, Craven has admitted to being inspired by news of deadly

nightmares⁸¹ and Nolan has spoken of his own lucid dreams as an inspiration⁸², so these may fall closer to a grey area). In music, Blondie's «Dreaming» (1979) and The Cranberries' «Dreams» (1993) evoke the feeling of dreaming and fantasy through lyrics or soundscapes, without being direct representations of the artists' own dreams. Dreampop (well known to be a subgenre of rock which distinctly encapsulates the oneiric aura) naturally deserves a special mention at this point. Moving to literature, Pedro Calderón de la Barca's *La vida es sueño* (1635) explores the philosophical idea of life as a dream, making it a quintessential example of this category. Jorge Luis Borges' «Las ruinas circulares» (1940), which uses dream logic as a philosophical metaphor to explore creation and reality, and Neil Gaiman's *The Sandman* (1989-2015), a classic of the ninth art, could be considered contemporary cases.

Regarding the second category, Jasper Johns' *Flag* (1954-1955), depicting the American flag, is a visual example⁸³, where a dream catalysed the creative process without dictating the final form. In film, James Cameron's *The Terminator* (1984) was sparked by a fever dream⁸⁴, yet the film itself is a sci-fi action thriller without overt dream content. In music, The Beatles' *Yesterday* (1965) originated from Paul McCartney's dream of the melody⁸⁵ but remains a straightforward ballad. Mary Shelley's *Frankenstein* (1818) also fits here⁸⁶, as it was inspired by a dream but explores gothic themes rather than dreaming itself.

As for the third category, when looking into the history of the third art, one can easily notice an insistence in Jacob's faithful dream (as recounted in Genesis 28:12): Nicolas Dipre's *Le Songe de Jacob* (c. 1500); Ary de Vois' *Jacob's Dream* (c. 1660-1680); Jusepe de Ribera's *El sueño de Jacob* (1639); Raffaello Sanzio's *Il sogno di Giacobbe* (1518). Georges de la Tour's *Le Songe de Saint Joseph* (c. 1640) certainly adds up to this biblical equation. These artworks illustrate a specific dream from the Bible. While explicitly representing a dream scenario derived from a well-known religious narrative, they are grounded in a specific dream origin and thematise its elements. Giuseppe Tartini's *Il trillo del diavolo* (1824) also belongs here; the author had dreamt that the devil taught him a sonata⁸⁷. Luis Buñuel and Salvador Dalí's *Un chien andalou* (1929), Federico Fellini's *8½* (1963) if we consider certain scenes, Akira Kurosawa's *Dreams* (1990), and Richard Linklater's *Waking Life* (2001) all too directly engage with dreamscapes and oneiric logic while being based on identifiable oneiric origins^{88,89}.

All in all, in the first category we have dreaming not as an origin but as a theme; in the second category, we have dreaming only as an origin but not as a theme; in the third one, we have it both ways. In sum, at least one of these two items must

⁸¹ See S. Biodrowski, «Wes Craven on Dreaming Up Nightmares», *Cinefantastique* (2008).

⁸² See R. Hurd, «Inception and Mutual Lucid Dreaming», *Dream Studies Portal* (2010).

⁸³ See D. Barrett, *The committee of sleep...*, op. cit.

⁸⁴ See G. Bass, «The Terminator came to me in a dream: a new interview with James Cameron», *British Film Institute* (2021).

⁸⁵ See D. Barrett, *The committee of sleep...*, op. cit.

⁸⁶ Ibid.

⁸⁷ Ibid.

⁸⁸ Ibid.

⁸⁹ See R. Stone, *The Cinema of Richard Linklater: Walk, Don't Run*, Columbia University Press, New York 2013.

be present, either an oneiric theme or an oneiric origin, and they can be present together. If we neither have dreaming as an origin nor as a theme, then the discussion ends.

4. Natural Surrealism

In summary, Hartmann argues: «If we consider the artist as someone who can see things a bit more broadly or can make connections a bit more easily than most, we can see this as a developed form of an ability we all possess in dreams»⁹⁰. No wonder why Nietzsche also said that during dreams we use up too much of our artistic capacity⁹¹: looked at in this way, dreaming implies an engagement with artistic creativity all along. On top of that, in conformity with Cooke⁹², not only artistic objects have aesthetic value, but also mental objects like fantasies or dreams, which can thus possess narrative and fictional qualities and be experienced aesthetically.

Where does this whole dissertation lead? Building on Hobson's emphasis on the auto-creative aspect of dream experience, Peña Guzmán⁹³ describes dreams as mental works of art that the sleeping mind creates for itself. Following this line of thought, I propose that dreams can be understood as a natural prototype for the development of aesthetic or creative fitness. Even if some individuals do not recall their dreams, dreaming is virtually universal across animal life. From my perspective, art can be regarded as the result of a fundamental need for aesthetic creation—an idea that also sheds light on my discomfort with the art-science dualism (commonly referred to as the debate between the two cultures). Accordingly, art does not need to be ethical to qualify as art (just as politics or philosophy are not required to be ethical to be what they are). To reconcile this naturalistic view of art with the social factors of artistic practices as explored by scholars, I refer to dreams as *proto-art*. It is in this nocturnal intersection of nature and surreality that I find what can be termed *natural surrealism*. Dreams as proto-art is, precisely, what the notion of natural surrealism here seeks to name.

This angle implies a distinctive position as far as the ontological debate about the nature of dreams goes. We have briefly seen how many standpoints there are within this discussion. An aesthetic stance based on the auto-creativity of dreams is what is at stake here. In this sense, dreams *are* proto-art. Natural surrealism, in turn, highlights the inherent surreal quality of dreams. While the surrealist movement of the 20th century sought to aesthetically capture the irrational and the dreamlike, naturally, dreams achieve this without effort. They are a real manifestation of the surreal. This natural surrealism is not just a stylistic or philosophical choice, but an intrinsic, defining feature of the dreaming mind. If, following Hobson, the human

⁹⁰ E. Hartmann, *Dreams and Nightmares: The Origin and Meaning of Dreams*, Perseus, Cambridge, MA 1996, p. 164.

⁹¹ Nietzsche, *Human, All Too Human*..., op. cit., p. 358.

⁹² B. Cooke, «Research Methods and Problems in Aesthetics», in A. C. Ribeiro (ed.), *The Continuum Companion to Aesthetics*, Continuum, London/New York 2012, pp. 14-38, p. 16.

⁹³ D. M. Peña-Guzmán, *When Animals Dream: The Hidden World of Animal Consciousness*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, NJ 2022, p. 191.

brain is inherently artistic, dreams are a bona fide expression of this artistic capacity. The auto-creativity of dreams is what makes them a form of proto-art. They are not just a source of inspiration for art but a primeval form of artefact in themselves. The aesthetic experience of dreams is another key aspect of their proto-artistic nature. Their narrative quality, combined with an organically surreal imagery, creates a powerful aesthetic episode for the dreamer. Dreams can thus be seen as a form of mental proto-artistic experience. In outline, the use of the prefix in *proto-art* precisely indicates the limitations of the dream-art analogy; it is vital to temper such blend due to the obvious differences facing both realities: involuntary (automatic) versus voluntary (intentional) creation. By framing dreams as proto-art, I intend to argue that real art partly builds upon the foundational aesthetic expressions first realized in the biologically grounded—naturally surrealistic—dream experiences, which in turn enable the subsequent cultural and intersubjective dimension characteristic of the artistic universe.

Altogether, dreams qualify as proto-art because the dreaming mind creates autonomously. Proto-art is what natural surrealism, as a biological process, allows to be both auto-created and experienced. The natural surrealistic stance in dream ontology is: dreams are auto-creative works of proto-art. What begins as intimate oneiric fiction becomes its cultural continuation in wakefulness: the shared world of art.

Conclusion

I began working on this theory of dreams as proto-art precisely after a vivid, intense dream about San Carlos de Bariloche, a beautiful town in Argentine Patagonia, where my sister and her family are moving to. The dream consisted of a sequence of pictorial scenes depicting snowy mountains and freezing lakes. Such was the aesthetically pleasing astonishment I was subjected to by my own mind during that night, that I woke up feeling as though I had lived a robust aesthetic experience in its own right. I had done all the work undeliberately, but through and through nonetheless. Somehow it was my creation and I was the sole spectator. That was when I began thinking more carefully of the artistic undertones of dreams. We could even say this paper itself would be included in the third category, *referential oneiric art*.

This investigation gives rise to several philosophical questions. How to define creativity considering sleep? What is the impact of non-conscious implicit processes in this regard? What sets artistic creativity apart from other types of creativity, and is it really more dream-like than its counterparts? And, as such, how does dreaming happen auto-creatively? What is more, can the problem of oneiric creativity contribute to the continuity-discontinuity debate?

If dreaming is a creative act *par excellence*, does this suggest continuity or discontinuity? Continuity in the sense of: creativity as we know it in wakefulness also manifests in dreams. Discontinuity meaning: true creativity, from which all creativity derives, ultimately belongs to dreaming; wakeful creativity is merely an emanation of oneiric creativity. In the end, dreaming is as plural as wakefulness. Is the difference between these two so-called opposite states divergent thinking over

convergent thinking? Does continuity not inherently imply reductionism over the dream state? Or does creativity allow for continuity while also highlighting a critical difference? Moreover, can continuity be thought of in reverse? As a progression to the other end: from dreams to wakefulness. Is dreaming creative in action, while wakefulness is creative in potential? These debates are far from over. I have been merely trying to present an adequate overview of the state-of-the-art of the heated intersection between dream research, aesthetics, and creativity studies, stressing different problems and queries around it.

As we know thus far, there are researchers who highlight the aesthetic nature of dreaming as an auto-creative process carried out by a constitutionally artistic brain; dreaming, in particular, serves as an analogy for various arts such as painting, literature, and cinema, among others. Provided that not only artistic objects possess aesthetic qualities, but mental objects like fantasies or dreams do as well, then dreams can be experienced aesthetically. It can also be said that artists have further developed a skill we all have in dreams. Furthermore, the capacity to tell stories appears partly connected to the need to recount dreams: early written records document and interpret the dreams of their authors. Additionally, the seemingly inherent narrative quality of dreams, the adaptive benefits shared by dreams and fiction, the interconnectivity between dreaming and waking imaginations, and the influence of night terrors and nightmares on the horror genre also invite investigation. If not to explore the unprovable hypothesis of dreams as the origin of all human creativity, then at least to examine why dreams and artistic creation—so often considered analogous processes—have remained symbiotic throughout history.

In conclusion, dreams, capable of being conceptualised as natural surrealism, can arguably be understood as a form of proto-art. They are a raw, unfiltered expression of the mind's creative capacity, unburdened by the logical constraints of wakeful reality or conscious thought. Their auto-creative quality makes them a unique and impressive form of internal proto-artistic expression with undisputable aesthetic undertones. By ontologically addressing dreams in this way, we open up new avenues for exploring the relationship between creativity, aesthetics, and sleep. For example, a possible pathway for future research would be to measure neuroaesthetic differences between dream-inspired and wake-generated artworks through empirical studies.

It becomes clearer and clearer to me that inquiries into the aesthetics of dreaming ought to be complemented with an epistemology of dreaming. Let us continue to honour Breton's insistence on dreams' unexpected tools and answers to the fundamental questions of life. I sometimes fantasize about dreams so radically creative, so innovative and untimely, to the point of being capable of solving all of our major problems down here on Earth. Their existence may depend little on us. They might pop up when least expected—and just as easily be forgotten or misinterpreted. But they can occur again and again, in different minds and forms. Hopefully, some of them will endure, as so many others already have.

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LA RECHERCHE, AFFAIRE OCCULTE

Résumé

La recherche universitaire, animée par un « ronron » autoréférentiel (Lacan), tend à présumer de la valeur de tout objet d'étude tout en éludant une question critique : *pour qui écrit-on?* Cette interrogation sur le destinataire — plus urgente encore que celle du *pourquoi* — révèle, derrière l'apparente posture cynique de « l'écriture pour soi », l'ambition même de la recherche. Le parcours d'Irene F. Whittome illustre cette tension: après une carrière institutionnelle, son retrait à Ogden à la frontière américaine au début des années 2000, loin de marquer un déclin, a inauguré une période de création intense. Cette trajectoire invite à repenser l'ambition de la recherche artistique : peut-être que la création authentique exige une suspension des attentes — celles du public comme celles du champ disciplinaire — pour qu'advienne un geste véritablement inaugural, fondé sur un engagement à la recherche et tenant d'une forme d'éthique.

Mots-clé: Recherche création, ésotérisme, arts contemporains, philosophie de l'art, écriture.

Research: An Occult Affair

Abstract

Academic research, driven by a self-referential “purring” (Lacan), tends to take for granted the value of any subject of study while sidestepping a critical question: for whom are we writing? This inquiry into the audience, *for whom do we write?* – even

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more urgent than the question of *why we write* – reveals, behind the apparent cynical stance of “writing for oneself,” the very ambition of research. Irene F. Whittome’s path illustrates this tension: after an institutional career, her retreat to Ogden on the U.S. border in the early 2000s, far from marking a decline, ushered in a period of intense creativity. This trajectory invites us to rethink the ambition of artistic research: perhaps authentic creation requires a suspension of expectations—those of the public as well as those of the disciplinary field—so that a truly inaugural gesture may emerge, grounded in a commitment to research and rooted in a form of ethics.

Key words: Research-creation, esotericism, contemporary arts, philosophy of art, writing.

La mécanique de la recherche universitaire possède un mouvement propre, un « ronron » (Lacan), présumant de la valeur de toute recherche, de tout objet. À présumer de sa valeur, de son écho, elle fait souvent l’impasse sur une question pourtant critique : *pour qui* écrivons-nous ? Pour nos collègues ? Pour nos proches ? Pour les gens que nous admirons ? Pour nous ? Cette question du *pour qui* subsume, et possède quelque chose de plus urgent encore que celle du *pourquoi*. Elle l’implique.

Derrière la réponse en apparence la plus cynique – « on écrit pour soi » –, se joue peut-être l’ambition même de toute recherche.

*

L’artiste canadienne Irene F. Whittome, après une carrière de professeur en arts visuels à l’Université Concordia (Montréal) et de nombreuses distinctions et reconnaissance artistiques (ordre du Canada, prix Paul-Émile Borduas), s’est retirée à Ogden, au bord de la frontière américaine, au début des années 2000. Alors qu’on aurait pu s’attendre à ce que cet éloignement de la métropole et du réseau de l’art contemporain marque la fin de sa carrière d’artiste, sa « retraite » correspond plutôt à une période de création intense².

À Ogden, depuis vingt ans, tous les jours, elle crée. Puisant dans son quotidien, dans les références occultes qui l’accompagnent depuis ses années de formation, dans les écrits d’artistes qui prolongent ses propres questionnements, dans des savoirs anciens qu’elle réactive comme on redonnerait vie à un langage oublié, elle photographie, sculpte, peint. Tous les médiums sont bons pour poursuivre une création qui semble désormais faire l’économie de l’art contemporain, de ses passages obligés (expositions, critiques, publications, ventes, etc.) et de ses rituels (vernissages, visites d’atelier, mondanités).

Pourquoi, seule dans sa maison et son atelier, créer ? Ou encore une fois *pour qui* ?

Le quotidien de Whittome alterne entre moments de création et de lecture, entre tirages de tarot et longues promenades. À d’autres moments encore, elle aménage son terrain en y plaçant de larges blocs de granit tirés des mines environnantes.

Je me suis déplacé quelques fois pour la rencontrer, traversant des paysages à la

² Voir <https://irenefw.com/>

fois chtoniens et solaires, pour rejoindre l'étrange île déserte où elle semble avoir fait naufrage. Lorsqu'une fois assis à sa table, je lui demande où s'arrête le quotidien et où commence la création, question de cerner quelque chose comme un *moment* où l'art commence, elle me regarde d'un air interloqué. La création, le quotidien et la recherche, depuis trop longtemps, ne font plus qu'un.

La référence à l'île déserte n'est pas complètement innocente. Car le beau texte de Michel Tournier *Vendredi et les limbes du Pacifique*, cher à Whittome, nous met sur la piste d'un isolement opérant comme une refondation, où l'éloignement des autres se fait surtout le moyen d'un recentrement sur soi et sur le monde. Voilà bien pourquoi le Robinson de Tournier, contrairement à celui de Defoe, se croit capable de refonder la relation non seulement au monde, mais plus exactement aux forces qui l'organisent. Whittome fait de même et paraît retourner à la vieille ambition de l'art, celle de se faire une question de sens.

*

En 1463, Marcil Ficin est mandaté par Cosme de Médicis pour traduire du grec au latin une collection de 14 textes gnostiques et néoplatoniciens, le *Corpus Hermeticum*. Ces textes écrits quelque part entre le premier et le Ve siècle après JC sont signés du nom d'un seul auteur : Hermès Trimagestus.

Ces textes, déjà connus pendant tout le Moyen-Âge, d'Orient en Angleterre, marqueront tant la Renaissance que la modernité. Ils nourriront, directement ou indirectement, quasiment toutes les philosophies ésotériques, alchimiques et théosophiques des siècles qui suivront. Paracelse en prolongera les intuitions, adaptant ces propositions aux développements de la chimie et de la physique du XVe siècle. Newton en fera la quête sacrée de ses recherches sur la chimie et la physique. Les théories théosophiques du tournant du XXe siècle en sont nées, les mêmes théories qui auront passionné Mondrian et Kandinsky, puis Beuys.

Pour les discours ésotériques occidentaux, entre la couleur de l'or et le soleil, entre les lignes de nos mains et notre tempérament, entre la froide souveraineté des étoiles et notre destin résonne un écho. Reconnaître les motifs du monde, leur chiffre secret veut dire reconnaître ces signes, puis l'étrange résonance qu'ils contiennent. Il serait possible, par les rêves, par les rites, par l'imagination, d'apercevoir ces correspondances cachées, ces forces invisibles. D'où, dans les traditions hermétiques, les correspondances entre la recherche scientifique et artistique ; les deux champs étant mus par la même ambition : rechercher cette étrange harmonie qui nous relie au monde.

*

Giorgio Agamben, dans l'un de ses tout premiers ouvrages, attribuait encore à l'art du Moyen-Âge un tel pouvoir de révélation.

« [L]'homme du Moyen-Âge n'avait pas l'impression esthétique d'être en train d'observer une œuvre d'art, mais prenait la mesure pour lui la plus concrète des frontières de son monde. Le merveilleux n'était pas encore une tonalité sentimentale autonome ni l'effet propre de l'œuvre d'art, mais une présence indistincte de la grâce

qui accordait, dans l'œuvre, l'activité de l'homme au monde divin de la création, et maintenait ainsi toujours vivant un écho de ce que l'art avait été dans ses débuts en Grèce : le pouvoir miraculeux et inquiétant de faire apparaître, de produire l'être et le monde dans l'œuvre. »³

*

L'art contemporain ne prête plus vraiment de pouvoir à l'art contemporain, sinon celui de nous divertir ou de se faire *esthétique*. Nous avons baissé nos attentes et déplacé le centre de gravité de l'art de *l'œuvre* – et son pouvoir de révélation –, à *l'artiste* – comme personnalité singulière.

Nous ne prêtons plus un réel pouvoir *d'apparition* à la création. Elle n'est désormais qu'un exercice, plaisant ou provocant, fondé sur son innocuité. « L'art est à présent l'absolue liberté qui cherche en soi sa propre fin et son propre fondement, et n'a besoin – au sens substantiel – d'aucun contenu [...] »⁴.

Si, pour le spectateur, son attrait pour l'art contemporain est en quelque sorte – et pour reprendre la formule de Kant – « désintéressé », ce désintérêt ne fait tout simplement aucun sens pour tout créateur sérieux. Peut-on vraiment consacrer sa vie à une chose qui ne nous intéresse pas ? Peut-on vraiment investir sa vie dans une démarche si elle n'est pas portée par une recherche, et qui plus est, par une recherche *existentielle*?

*

On condamne les hypothèses les plus spectaculaires et les plus controversées de l'ésotérisme. On rit de la fascination pour ces textes anciens et obscurs, pour ces quêtes philosophales, pour cette croyance aux pouvoirs prophétiques des astres. Bien sûr.

Mais ces critiques font l'impasse sur ce qu'ont de révolutionnaire ces discours. Les croyances gnostiques soulignent ainsi que la divinité n'est pas quelque chose au-dessus de nous, mais quelque chose logé en nous, et dans le monde lui-même. Elles présument ainsi d'une communauté entre le monde et nous, d'une communauté entre nous.

*

Et il faut sans doute aller plus loin. Car ces échos entre le plus grand et le plus petit, cette capacité à lire son destin dans les étoiles, cette croyance voulant que l'infime exerce quelque pouvoir sur l'immense, ne reprennent-ils pas les principes – la croyance – de toute recherche en philosophie, ou en sciences humaines ?

Il n'est pas certain qu'enfermés dans nos bureaux à tenter de comprendre le monde en dessinant des formes sur des feuilles de papier, nous ayons vraiment rompu avec cette tradition hermétique. Il n'est pas certain même que la recherche qui nous anime, cette recherche sur telle pratique artistique, sur tel phénomène historique, sur tel penseur, ne soit pas d'abord et avant tout une manière de répondre à quelque question à la fois intime et universelle. Comme le formulait déjà Gilles Deleuze, on

³ G. Agamben, *L'homme sans contenu*, Circé, Paris 1996, p.58.

⁴ G. Agamben, *L'homme sans contenu*, op.cit., p. 60.

ne cherche pas pour le plaisir de chercher : « Nous ne cherchons la vérité que quand nous sommes déterminés à le faire en fonction d'une situation concrète, quand nous subissons une sorte de violence qui nous pousse à cette recherche. [...] Il y a toujours la violence d'un signe qui nous force à chercher, qui nous ôte la paix.⁵ »

Voilà bien pourquoi la démarche de Irene F. Whittome est emblématique. On écrit, on crée pour soi, lorsqu'on prétend que le monde est une énigme et la création, la manière d'en découvrir le chiffre secret. Toute l'affaire est d'aménager, au creux de l'écriture, un langage encore capable de *faire apparaître* le réel, la pensée. Il n'y a pas d'autre recherche.

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⁵ G. Deleuze, *Proust et les signes*, PUF, Paris 1964, p. 23.

DANIEL PROULX¹

IMAGINATION IN HENRY CORBIN'S THOUGHT: AN INTELLECTUAL HISTORY INQUIRY²

Abstract

This article reconstructs the intellectual history of Henry Corbin's philosophy of imagination within the European context of the 1930s, a period when phenomenology, Protestant theology, and German as well as Arabic philosophy intersected in new and decisive ways. It highlights the formative role of Protestant thought in Corbin's reflections on faith, revelation, and language, particularly shaped by apophatic philosophy. The

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² This essay is partially adapted and translated from several of my earlier publications in French. Wherever possible, I have used existing English translations of Corbin's works, all other translations are my own and have been revised humanly assisted by AI tools.

study also examines the decisive influence of Alexandre Koyré and Carl Gustav Jung, through whom Corbin developed a metaphysical conception of imagination as the organ of theophany rather than a psychological faculty. His sustained participation in the Eranos Circle provided the intellectual setting in which these ideas matured into a phenomenological and hermeneutic vision of the imaginal, conceived as an intermediate mode of being between the sensible and the intelligible. Through a historical and textual analysis, the article traces how the concept of imagination evolved in Corbin's work itself, situating it within the broader currents of twentieth-century intellectual history.

Keywords: Henry Corbin, imagination, Martin Heidegger, Alexandre Koyré, Carl Gustav Jung, Eranos Circle, archives documents

A imaginação no pensamento de Henry Corbin: uma investigação de história intelectual

Resumo

Este artigo reconstrói a história intelectual da filosofia da imaginação de Henry Corbin no contexto europeu dos anos 30, um período em que a fenomenologia, a teologia Protestante e a filosofia tanto Alemã como Árabe se intersectam de maneiras novas e decisivas. Destaca o papel formador do pensamento Protestante nas reflexões de Corbin sobre a fé, a revelação e a linguagem, particularmente formadas pela filosofia apofática. O estudo também examina a influência decisiva de Alexandre Koyré e de Carl Gustav Jung, através dos quais Corbin desenvolveu uma concepção metafísica da imaginação como órgão de teofania mais do que como faculdade psicológica. A sua participação contínua no Círculo Eranos forneceu o cenário intelectual no qual estas ideias amadureceram e se tornaram numa visão fenomenológica e hermenêutica do imaginal, concebido como um modo de ser intermédio entre o sensível e o inteligível. Através de uma análise histórica e contextual, o artigo re-traça a forma como o conceito de imaginação evolui no interior da própria obra de Corbin, situando-o no interior de correntes mais largas da história intelectual do século vinte.

Palavras-chave: Henry Corbin, imaginação, Martin Heidegger, Alexandre Koyré, Carl Gustav Jung, Círculo Eranos, documentos de arquivo.

Introduction

To understand the meanings of *imagination* and the *imaginal* in Henry Corbin's thought, it is necessary to situate them within the trajectory of his own philosophical formation and the intellectual milieu in which they first took shape. In much contemporary discourse, these terms are invoked loosely or metaphorically to legitimize various spiritual or psychological experiences, yet in Corbin's writings they possess a precise and technical significance that demands rigorous interpretation. This study therefore seeks to reconstruct their intellectual history and to clarify their conceptual scope. Although imagination occupies a central position in Corbin's metaphysics, the popularity of works such as *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi* has encouraged a proliferation of derivative usages detached from their original context. Corbin's name now circulates across an extraordinary range of disciplines,

from poetry and philosophy to psychology, education, and even modern forms of esotericism, often through isolated quotations that obscure rather than illuminate his philosophical intent. Because his writings have remained largely peripheral to the academic canon, the intellectual landscape in which he elaborated the ideas of the *imaginal world* (*mundus imaginalis*) and the *active imagination* has been insufficiently examined. As a result, his sources, motivations, and aims have frequently been misunderstood. Yet Corbin's philosophy of imagination did not arise in a vacuum: it emerged from a specific constellation of readings, influences, and debates that defined the intellectual scene of the 1930s, flourishing in dialogue with figures such as Alexandre Koyré and Carl Gustav Jung.

Henry Corbin, *philosophus crucis*

Although widely known within European intellectual circles, Corbin remains an elusive and singular figure. His intellectual and spiritual path, which moved through Protestant theology³, German⁴ and Iranian philosophy, various spiritual and theosophical⁵ currents, and, after his retirement, a brief initiation into a chivalric form of Freemasonry during the final decade of his life⁶, resists any simple classification.

Interpreting Corbin's work is challenging precisely because of the continual interplay between his own philosophical reflections and the thinkers he interprets. His hermeneutic method so closely inhabits their vision that the boundary between his voice and theirs often becomes indiscernible. The distinction between the two is always delicate. Corbin never articulates his philosophy in a direct or systematic form. It reveals itself instead through the mirrored outline of a presence that withdraws as it manifests itself.

His approach may best be described as a labor of *actualization*. He expressed this with remarkable clarity in a letter written in 1947 to his venerable teacher of Persian, Henri Massé⁷. Speaking of traditional Iranian society in the region south of Tehran, Corbin wrote:

I believe that the most fruitful role we can play is indeed to help them

³ D. Proulx, «Les écrits "théologiques" de Henry Corbin, jeune philosophe protestant», *11^e Journée Henry Corbin – Raison philosophique et expérience mystique* (ed.), Paris 2015; J. Brun, «Un missionnaire protestant : Henry Corbin», *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse*, 59, 2 (1979) 187-200.

⁴ M. Heidegger, «Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique ? Leçon inaugurale donnée à l'Université de Fribourg-en-Brisgau le 24 juillet 1929», trad. H. Corbin, *Bifur*(ed.), vol. 8, 1931, p. 9-27; M. Heidegger, *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique ? : suivi d'extraits sur l'être et le temps et d'une conférence sur Hölderlin*, trad. H. Corbin, Gallimard, Paris 1938; A. J. Heschel, «La prophétie», trad. H. Corbin, *Hermès*(ed.), Bruxelles/Paris, R. Henriquez, 1939, p. 78-110.

⁵ H. Corbin, *Swedenborg and esoteric Islam*, trad. L. Fox, Swedenborg Foundation, West Chester, PA. 1995.

⁶ See W. J. Hanegraaff, «Henry Corbin as Knight of the Temple», *New Perspectives on Henry Corbin*, H. Fakhoury (ed.), Palgrave Macmillan, Cham 2025, p. 211-235; J. A. Clergue, «En quête de Henry Corbin franc-maçon chevaleresque I», *L'initiation*, 2 (2009) 84-114; J. A. Clergue, «En quête de Henry Corbin franc-maçon chevaleresque II», *L'initiation*, 4 (2009) 245-273.

⁷ Henry Massé (1886–1969) is a French orientalist and Arabist, professor at the Faculty of Letters in Algiers and later at the Sorbonne, renowned for his studies on Persian culture and Arabic literature. H. Corbin, «L'Iran, patrie des philosophes et des poètes», *L'Âme de l'Iran*, R. Grousset, L. Massignon et H. Massé (ed.), Albin Michel, Paris 2009 [1951], p. 29-42.

learn how to think their own spiritual tradition in a way that gives them a 'self-consciousness' communicable in the present. In return, we have much to receive, and there are several venerable shaykhs of whom I consider myself, in some sense, a *shāgerd*⁸.

What clearly emerges here is that Corbin does not adopt a colonial posture, but that of a *passeur* intent on valuing the other within a form intelligible to Europe. In this sense, he invokes the notions of "actuality" and "actualization" to delineate the emergent phenomenon of *human presence* as a form of personal spiritual anthropology⁹. In Corbin's case, his act of *philosophizing thus functions as a spiritual realization*.

As he himself explained:

In writing the word *actuality*, I do not mean, of course, what is usually understood by that term in a daily newspaper or in the cinema. I mean, more precisely, what is conveyed by the Greek word *energeia*, of which the Latin *actualitas* is only a more or less fortunate translation. It is the idea of a power, latent or in act, that by its very nature produces certain effects¹⁰.

Encounter and Withdrawal from French Heideggerianism

Regarding his role as translator and introducer of Martin Heidegger's philosophy in France, it is essential to recall that Corbin had indeed translated the entirety of *Sein und Zeit* during his years in Turkey (1939-1945). He even dated and signed his translation on July 22, 1943, marking it with the Arabic phrase: « بَمُشَلِّا تَسْبِتَقَا » « I borrowed my flame from the comets, and with it I set my enemies ablaze. » Yet this complete translation was never published.

When Corbin returned to Paris in July 1946, after six years in Turkey and one year in Iran, he discovered that the Heideggerian movement he had first helped introduce to France had taken on a life of its own. The existentialist fervor that now dominated the Parisian intellectual scene no longer bore much resemblance to the metaphysical questions that had originally inspired his interest in Heidegger. As Denis de Rougemont wrote to him on September 21, 1946: « I suppose you have had time to see the damage for which you are responsible through your translation of Heidegger, and that before the existentialism of the *Sixième arrondissement* you have already exclaimed: *Das hatte ich nicht gewollt* [That was not what I meant] »¹¹. It may be inferred that Corbin chose silence over misinterpretation¹². His correspondence with Gallimard concerning his translations and royalties provides further insight. In

⁸ Daniel Proulx, *Catalogue du Fonds Henry et Stella Corbin* (AHSC), Grand équipement documentaire du Campus Condorcet, École pratique des hautes études, Paris, 2016, EPHE BSR 5COR, 48 boxes, 16 linear meters, <http://www.calames.abes.fr/pub/#details?id=FileId-2016>. AHSC 266.31, Henry Corbin à Henri Massé, lettre datée du 7 avril 1946 envoyée de Téhéran, p. 2. <https://calames.abes.fr/pub/#details?id=Calames-2016101116101280947>

⁹ See D. Proulx, « L'anthropologie corbinienne à l'aune de la personne humaine ou le personnalisme métaphysique », *19 Journée Henry Corbin – La personne humaine* (ed.), Paris 2024.

¹⁰ H. Corbin, « Actualité de la philosophie traditionnelle en Iran », *Acta Iranica*, 1, 1 (1968) 1.

¹¹ AHSC 277.18, Lettre de Denis de Rougemont à Henry Corbin datée du 21 septembre 1946, p. 2.

¹² For a reconsideration of this misunderstanding, see H. Corbin, *From Heidegger to Suhrawardi – An interview with Philippe Nemo*, trad. M. Evans-Cockle, amiscorbin.com, Paris 2006.

a pointed letter addressed to Brice Parrain on July 18, 1960, Corbin wrote:

I recall the time when only dear Groethuysen¹³ and I still had faith in my translation of Heidegger. Since then, success has come, and everyone has been meddling in it. That is only natural. I have already explained why the period of my life devoted to such matters now seems to me to belong to the past. My work and teaching in the Iranian field are already more than enough to overburden me. Yet the 1938 volume in the *Essais* formed a coherent whole. It contained an introduction in which I set out my terminology, and it included, above all, a valuable letter from Heidegger himself. That small volume played a pioneering role; it opened a path, and I believe many have benefited from it. Are you sure it is entirely elegant to break apart that unity? [...] In any case, I remain in this affair an ancestor (a pre-existentialist).¹⁴

Protestantism

Another important and often overlooked aspect of Corbin's intellectual formation is his Protestant background. Born in Paris on April 14, 1903¹⁵, into a Catholic family, Corbin converted to Protestantism as a young adult¹⁶. The precise date of his conversion remains unknown, but it likely occurred after 1922, when he abruptly left the Grand Séminaire of Issy-les-Moulineaux¹⁷, and probably before 1927. In that year, the *Archives Henry and Stella Corbin (AHSC)* preserve a fragment of an unfinished, almost certainly autobiographical novel expressing a vehement rejection of Catholicism. The text, written in a tone of poignant pathos, bears the mark of a soul that has endured a profound inner rupture¹⁸.

By 1931, Corbin was already active within Protestant intellectual circles¹⁹. Together with Denis de Rougemont²⁰, Roger Jézéquel, Roland de Pury²¹, and Albert-Marie Schmidt, he co-founded the journal *Hic et Nunc*. The texts he published there reveal with clarity the early outlines of his own thought, particularly the tension between faith and existence, between history and revelation²². The *Hic et Nunc*

¹³ Bernard Groethuysen (1880-1946)

¹⁴ Camilleri and Proulx, «Martin Heidegger et Henry Corbin», art. cit., p. 60. AHSC 265.C.9.

¹⁵ P. Lory, «Henry Corbin», *L'École pratique des hautes études : invention, érudition, innovation de 1868 à nos jours*, P. Henriot (ed.), Paris, Somogy éditions d'art & École pratique des hautes études, Paris 2018, p. 565-566.

¹⁶ It should be noted that Corbin never converted to Islam and remained a Protestant until his death.

¹⁷ C. Jambet, «Repères biographiques», *Henry Corbin*(ed.), L'Herne, Paris 1981, p. 15.

¹⁸ This unfinished novel is preserved in the Henry and Stella Corbin Fonds held at the École pratique des hautes études. The text recounts the experiences of the character Maxence and appears to be "autobiographical." See D. Proulx, *De la hiérobistoire, portrait de Henry Corbin*, sous la direction de J.-M. Counet, PhD, Institut supérieur de philosophie, Université catholique de Louvain, Louvain-la-Neuve (Belgique), 2017, p. 103 ss.

¹⁹ H. Corbin, «La fédération allemande à Caub – 40^e congrès général de la Christliche Studenten Vereinigung», *Le Semeur*, (1931) 38-42.

²⁰ See D. d. Rougemont, «Hérétiques de toutes les religions, unissez-vous !», *Mélanges offerts à Henry Corbin*, S. H. Nasr (ed.), Institute of Islamic Studies, McGill University, Téhéran 1977, p. 539-546.

²¹ See the correspondence with Henry Corbin in this volume. R. d. Pury, *Lettres d'Europe un jeune intellectuel dans l'entre-deux-guerres, 1931-1934*, Labor et fides/du Cerf, Genève/Paris 2010.

²² See, for example, this article on Karl Barth: H. Corbin, «La théologie dialectique et l'histoire», *Recherches philosophiques*, A. Koyré, H.-C. Puech et A. Spaier (ed.), vol. 3, Boivin & C^{ie}, Paris 1933-1934, p. 250-284.

“manifesto” declared that its members sought to be witnesses «of a truth that is not of our making, yet whose very essence calls for our effort to bring it into»²³.

In a brief 1932 text entitled *Témoignage à Kierkegaard* (*Testimony to Kierkegaard*), Corbin reaffirmed his Protestant conviction by insisting that the human being stands before God in a relationship that is paradoxically disproportionate, even absurd, where, as he put it, «to believe is to be»²⁴. Later in the same article, the tension between faith and history becomes explicit when he concludes: «The Reformation was able to incarnate itself in history and become a common good; but beyond history and before all historical greatness, it remains the single act accomplished by each human being, real and alone before God»²⁵.

For scholastic or rationalist theologians, as Corbin called them, such a relation between the human and the divine is impossible, since, as Sohrevardī wrote, repeating a classical theological argument, «God, the Most High, is too exalted for there to be any community of genus, any homogeneity, between Him and His creatures»²⁶. This perspective, however, would be neither Sohrevardī's nor Corbin's²⁷. For both, philosophical reflection becomes a form of *personal spiritual realization*. That is the crux of the philosophical debate around mysticism.

Apophatic Philosophizing

From a philosophical standpoint, how is such a position possible? The answer is to be found in theophany, for the relation itself is rooted in an opening, an *Ungrund*, a groundless ground where the divine discloses itself. Apophatism and theophany together resolve the dilemma: to love the manifestation of God as it presents itself to the soul, yet without confining the divine to that manifestation. The love of God is thus the openness through which the soul meets revelation at the level of its own being. Sohrevardī summarizes the situation with precision: “Every being possessed of vehement desire is therefore a seeker who does not find. Desire implies lack, for it is necessary to its very nature not to find»²⁸.

In his early writings, Corbin makes frequent allusions to Heidegger²⁹, Jaspers³⁰,

²³ H. Corbin, R. Jézéquel, R. de Pury, D. de Rougemont and A.-M. Schmidt, «Manifeste», *Hic et Nunc*, 1 (1932) 2.

²⁴ H. Corbin, «Témoignage à Kierkegaard», *Le Semeur*, (1932) p. 79.

²⁵ Corbin, «Témoignage à Kierkegaard», art. cit., p. 81.

²⁶ S. Y. Sohrevardī, *L'archange empourpré, quinze traités et récits mystiques*, ed. et trad. de l'arabe et du persan, intro. et notes de Henry Corbin, Fayard 1976, Paris p. 460.

²⁷ He reiterates the same warning when analyzing the work of Rūzbehān Baqlī Shīrāzī, the *fidèles d'amour*, and the theme of the Imams' divine affection. «Rūzbehān's great concern will be to dispel the misunderstanding perpetuated by the malice or the helplessness of the orthodox representatives of legalistic Islam. A theophany (*tajallī*) is not an incarnation (*hulūl*) [...] this docetism is nothing less than a 'spiritual realism.'» H. Corbin, *En islam iranien, aspects spirituels et philosophiques – Les fidèles d'amour, shī'isme et soufisme*, vol. 3, Paris, Gallimard 1972, p. 19. On this theme, see Proulx, *De la hiérophistoire, portrait de Henry Corbin*, op. cit., pp. 503-514.

²⁸ Sohrevardī, *L'archange empourpré, quinze traités et récits mystiques*, op. cit., pp. 460-461.

²⁹ Heidegger, «Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?», op. cit.; M. Heidegger, «Hölderlin et l'essence de la poésie», *Mesures*, 3 (1937); Heidegger, *Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique?», op. cit.; M. Heidegger, «Phénoménologie de la mort», trad. H. Corbin, *Hermès*(ed.), R. Henriquez, Bruxelles/Paris 1938.*

³⁰ K. Jaspers, «La norme du jour et la passion pour la nuit», trad. H. Corbin, *Hermès*(ed.), R. Henriquez, Bruxelles/Paris 1938, p. 51-68.

Buber³¹, Barth³², and Baader. From Heidegger he takes the notion of existence, from Jaspers the dialectic of Day and Night, from Buber the concept of the *Thou*, and from Barth and Baader the *cogitor ergo sum*, which stands in deliberate opposition to the Cartesian *cogito*. Yet before Barth appropriated Baader's formulation, Hamann had already written, in a letter later cited by Corbin in his studies on him: «Not *cogito ergo sum*, but rather, and better still according to the Hebrew, *est ergo cogito*»³³. This reversal, "He is, therefore I am," or "I am, therefore I am thought," defines the movement required by an apophatic faith that knows it can never grasp God, yet precisely for that reason listens for the divine Word, aware that, for «it is not within History that the Word of God is to be heard, but each time and always in our present life»³⁴.

This Word, the divine *Logos*, is mediated by the angel. For Corbin, the angel is the hermeneut³⁵ par excellence, the mediation of transcendence itself. It rescues the human being from the solipsism of the ego, from the self-enclosed *cogito* of modern consciousness, opening instead to the *cogitor*, the "I am thought," the emergence of the real subject in its eternal anteriority. The Angel is that median presence through which self-awareness perceives «what relation the 'I' experiences with its Self, as being a form of the thought of that Self»³⁶. This inversion of the *I* by the *Self*³⁷ corresponds to the *significatio passiva*, a technical expression rediscovered by Luther and frequently invoked by Corbin. It marks the reversal of the ordinary relation between subject and object, for understanding no longer determines the object understood but enters into co-presence with it. In this sense, hermeneutics becomes spiritual hermeneutics, a mode of comprehension that is itself a mode of being. Such an orientation safeguards the subject from historicization, for self-knowledge is no longer conceived as the product of temporal or psychological development but as participation in an ever-present act of divine understanding. Corbin summarizes this perfectly:

The past is not something to be "overcome." What matters is to understand what once made that past possible, what brought it into being, what was its own future. When a soul once more apprehends that hidden possibility, mysteriously innate to it, it becomes, in turn and in the present moment, the very future it once anticipated. In doing so, it frees what we call the past from the weight that made it the past.³⁸

³¹ In his 1933 article *Quand nous nous réveillerons d'entre les morts*, published in *Hic et Nunc*, he writes: «The Word nonetheless shatters the enchanted circle of the solitary ego, and the love that gives itself is neither a hypothesis nor a norm, but passion within real time. Ethical existence designates this present instance of being-for, dependent upon the Other, the unique and simply human *Thou*, who confronts from without through the summons and the contradiction». H. Corbin, «Quand nous nous réveillerons d'entre les morts», *Hic et Nunc*, 2 (1933) 51.

³² Corbin, «La théologie dialectique et l'histoire», *op. cit.*, p. 250-284.

³³ H. Corbin and J. G. Hamann, *Hamann, philosophe du luthéranisme*, avec une intro. de J. Brun, Berg international, Paris 1985 [1935], p. 48. Lettre à Jacobi du 1^{er} juin 1785.

³⁴ H. Corbin, «Philosophia crucis», *Hic et Nunc*, 3/4 (1933) 87.

³⁵ H. Corbin, *Le paradoxe du monothéisme*, L'Herne, Paris 2003 [1981], p. 62, 100-101, 119-120.

³⁶ H. Corbin, *Avicenna and the visionary recital*, Pantheon Books, New York 1990 [1960], p. 264.

³⁷ Here one might ask about the influence of Martin Buber in this reversal.

³⁸ Corbin, «Actualité de la philosophie traditionnelle en Iran», *art. cit.*, p. 2.

Such an effort of existence is never accomplished alone, but always before the Word of God. This interior posture of *μόνος πρὸς μόνον*, “alone to the Alone”, so admired by Corbin³⁹ in Jung’s *Answer to Job*⁴⁰, defines the apophatic stance of the soul. This reversal of the Cartesian *cogito* finds another formulation in *En Islam iranien*, where he writes: «It is far more accurate to say that it is spiritual reality that contains and envelops us, rather than that we contain it»⁴¹.

This entire constellation belongs to what Corbin calls *philosophia crucis*⁴², a deliberate echo of Luther’s *theologia crucis*. The opposition between the theology of glory and the theology of the cross finds in Corbin a profoundly original resonance. Following Hamann, who once described himself as practicing a *philologia crucis*, Corbin affirms that «to philosophize is thus an event of existence, which must ultimately lead existence itself to the threshold where the relation between the two worlds becomes transparent»⁴³.

For Corbin, philosophizing is never separable from existence; it is the very act through which thought fulfills itself as spiritual experience. To believe is to be, to think is to pray, and to exist is to reveal. This perspective reveals what the young Corbin found in Sohravardī: a symbolic mode of thinking that opens toward personal spiritual realization⁴⁴ and which, once accomplished, pierces through history and sustains that which actualizes (*existencifie*) the ontological reality of human existence before God. The Word of God, in Corbin’s reading, pierces history.

On the relation between history and love, Corbin cites Friedrich Gogarten’s remarkable essay, inspired by Karl Barth and dialectical theology⁴⁵, which asserts

³⁹ A text of remarkable philosophical density. H. Corbin, «La sophia éternelle. À propos d’un livre récent de C.-G. Jung», *Revue de culture européenne*, 5, (1953), 11-44.

⁴⁰ C. G. Jung, «Answer to Job», *Psychology and religion: West and East* (ed.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1958, p. 355-470. It should be noted that the French edition includes an afterword by Henry Corbin. C. G. Jung, *Réponse à Job*, trad. R. Cahen, avec une postface de Henry Corbin, Buchet/Chastel, Paris 2009 [1964].

⁴¹ H. Corbin, *En islam iranien, aspects spirituels et philosophiques – Le shi’isme duodécimain*, vol. 1, Gallimard, Paris 1971, p. 12.

⁴² Corbin, «Philosophia crucis», art. cit., p. 86-94.

⁴³ Corbin, «Quand nous nous réveillerons d’entre les morts», art. cit., p. 45.

⁴⁴ A comparative reflection could be undertaken on Corbin’s and Bachelard’s respective understandings of *realization*. Bachelard, for his part, writes: «Thus realization takes precedence over reality. The primacy of realization relegates reality to a subordinate rank. A physicist truly knows a reality only insofar as he has realized it, when he becomes master of the eternal recommencement of things and inwardly constitutes an eternal return of reason. The ideal of realization is, moreover, exacting: a theory that realizes partially must realize totally. It cannot be true in a fragmentary way. Theory is the mathematical truth that has not yet achieved its full realization. The scientist must strive toward that complete realization. One must compel nature to go as far as the mind». G. Bachelard, *La philosophie du non, essai d’une philosophie du nouvel esprit scientifique*, 4^e ed., Presses universitaires de France, Paris 1966 [1940], p. 36. In both thinkers, *realization* designates not a mere verification of the real but an act of ontological actualization, a transmutation of knowledge into being, through which the world attains its form within the interiority of the knowing subject.

⁴⁵ Corbin’s engagement with Barth was brief, and by the mid-1930s he had already begun to move beyond that theological horizon. Late in his life, he would look back on this period in the only text of a truly autobiographical nature, where he writes: «We shared Keyserling’s conviction that ‘Karl Barth and his friends hold in their hands the future of Protestantism.’ Alas! Our illusions were to come tumbling down from great heights, and if dear Rudolf Otto had still been with us, he could have taken me by the hand, led me back to Schleiermacher and said: ‘Didn’t I tell you this would happen?’ I quickly became uncomfortable with ‘barthism’ and dialectical theology». H. Corbin,

that «there is history only where, in love, there is truly faith»⁴⁶. Yet along this path of divine love, dangers inevitably arise. If it is possible to love God, some will argue that humanity has reduced the divine to its own measure of affection, while others will maintain that the transcendence of love can never attain the ineffable and that what it reaches is only illusion. It is precisely along this ridge line that Corbin situates the philosophical act itself, at the threshold where the two worlds become transparent. To philosophize, in this sense, is to reveal; and here imagination appears as the faculty that sustains the birth of symbols capable of resolving the fundamental antinomy.

German and Arabic Philosophy

Alongside this Protestant orientation, how did Corbin come to Arabic philosophy? Étienne Gilson's 1925 course on «Latin Avicennism in the Middle Ages»⁴⁷ had already directed the young Corbin toward the Arabic sources of medieval thought. In the autumn of 1926, he turned away from the *agrégation* in philosophy and entered the École des langues orientales, where he studied Arabic, Turkish, Persian, and Sanskrit simultaneously⁴⁸, while pursuing a diploma at the École pratique des hautes études. In 1928 he graduated with a thesis entitled *Augustinisme et stoïcisme dans la pensée de Luis de León* (Augustinianism and Stoicism in the Thought of Luis de León)⁴⁹, and in 1929 he received his degree from the École des langues orientales in Arabic, Turkish, and Persian.

Meanwhile, in October 1928, the Bibliothèque nationale de France hired him as a substitute librarian, immediately recognizing his competence as an Arabist. He attended the lectures of Maurice Gaudefroy-Demombynes⁵⁰, among whose students

Biographical Post-Scriptum to a Philosophical Interview, trad. M. Evans-Cockle, amiscorbin.com, Paris, 2006 [1981]. La rupture date approximativement de 1936, lorsque Barth indique à Corbin dans une lettre que ses travaux sur Sohrawardī relèvent de la « théologie naturelle ». Cela avait confirmé à Corbin que Barth n'en avait pas saisi l'esprit profond. En 1940, il revient sur la question dans une lettre à Denis de Rougemont : « ravi que tu te sois raccommode avec Barth. Moi j'attends encore. Mais je ne nierai jamais, naturellement, le service qu'il nous a rendu ». Fonds Denis de Rougemont, Bibliothèque publique et universitaire Neuchâtel, lettre de Henry Corbin à Denis de Rougemont datée du 20 avril 1940, dans la correspondance générale boîte 3, dossier 4, « c », p. 4.

⁴⁶ Corbin, «La théologie dialectique et l'histoire», *op. cit.*, p. 276.

⁴⁷ É. Gilson, «L'Avicenne latin au moyen âge», *EPHE, Section sciences religieuses*, (1925) 52-53.

⁴⁸ Before turning toward the Islamic and Iranian world, Corbin had first been drawn to the Far East. Evidence of this early attraction can be found in his meeting with the archaeologist Joseph Hackin in April 1926. In his diary, he records the encounter in a tone of exalted clarity: «Since I met Hackin at the Musée Guimet, I have been seized by a joyful certainty. For a year my mind has wandered, from one enchantment to another, not knowing where to go, what precise direction to take. Since discovering the 'Calls of the Orient,' I have lived in a state of perpetual availability [...]». (Henry and Stella Corbin Archives, AHSC 293, Agenda, April 1926, <https://calames.abes.fr/pub/#details?id=Calames-201610271710464898109>. For the complete excerpt, see Proulx, *De la hiérophistoire, portrait de Henry Corbin*, *op. cit.*, p. 109-110. This early testimony already reveals the tone of spiritual expectancy that would characterize Corbin's intellectual path. At that moment, the «East» signified not yet Iran, but the Far East, a symbolic horizon of awakening and inner displacement. Corbin would soon articulate this orientation in his essay signed «Trong-ni», *Regard vers l'Orient*, published in *Tribune indochinoise* on August 15, 1927, where he sought to express his philosophical stance in relation to Eastern thought as a posture of openness rather than appropriation.

⁴⁹ AHSC 310, H. Corbin, *Augustinisme et stoïcisme dans la pensée de Luis de León*, sous la direction de P. Alphanhéry et A. Bayet, section des sciences religieuses, École Pratique des Hautes Études, Paris 1928, 66 p.

⁵⁰ M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, «Sourate V et une partie de la sourate VI, expliquées avec les commentaires

were Henri Laoust and Georges Vajda, both of whom would become close friends. The decisive moment came, however, on October 13, 1929, when Louis Massignon offered him a lithographed edition of Sohrevardī's *Hikmat al-Isḥrāq*⁵¹, an event that permanently fixed his trajectory toward Iran.

Corbin's encounter with Arabic philosophy thus preceded his engagement with German philosophy, since his first trip to Germany began on July 16, 1930, and it was after this journey that he noted in his agenda, on August 6, 1930, «Read Heidegger»⁵². One might even suppose that his study of Heidegger served as a general hermeneutic instrument in philosophy. As he would later confess, «What I was looking for in Heidegger and that which I understood thanks to Heidegger, is precisely that which I was looking for and found in the metaphysics of Islamic Iran»⁵³. It is plausible that he read Heidegger to illuminate Sohrevardī, just as it is plausible that he read Sohrevardī to understand Heidegger. A hypothesis confirmed, to some degree, by the Arabic glosses written in the margins of his personal copy of *Sein und Zeit*⁵⁴.

This constellation of studies, readings, and encounters forms, in a sense, the genesis of his vocation as an Iranologist. It also clarifies the singular mode of philosophizing proper to Corbin: at that time, he was not merely seeking to understand either Heidegger or Sohrevardī, but rather, through them, to discover his own act of philosophizing.

Toward a Phenomenological-Hermeneutics

Through the phenomenological-hermeneutic path, Corbin rejects any form of exclusive dualism and instead proposes what he calls a *dualité*⁵⁵, an inclusive reciprocity⁵⁶. For him, defining the relation between the human and the divine too

de Tabari, Baïdawi, Razi et Abdou», *EPHE, Section sciences religieuses*, (1929) 52 ; M. Gaudefroy-Demombynes, «Questions diverses relatives aux *Ṣaḥīḥ* d'Al Bokhārī, avec les commentaires de Qastallāni et d'Al Aīnī», *EPHE, Section sciences religieuses*, (1929) 52.

⁵¹ Jambet, «Repères biographiques», *op. cit.*, p. 16.

⁵² In his «Biographical Post-Scriptum to a Philosophical», Henry Corbin precisely situates his encounter with Rudolf Otto and notes that it was Jean Baruzi who opened for him the path to Germany, more specifically, who brought him into contact with Otto and Friedrich Heiler, two central figures of liberal Protestant theology. This meeting proved decisive, for it reveals with great clarity the significance of that period in shaping Corbin's relation to German philosophy, even before his discovery of Heidegger's work. The influence of German thought on Corbin is too often reduced to Heidegger alone, whereas it must be understood in relation to Protestant theology. «Marburg an der Lahn!» he writes, as if to emphasize both the topographical and spiritual dimensions of that intellectual landscape. The exclamation itself evokes an entire a topography of the soul. Marburg, the city of Rudolf Otto, Friedrich Heiler, and, shortly before them, of Heidegger, became for Corbin a true *colline inspirée*, a hill of revelation and inspiration. It was also during this period that he also first encountered the thought of Karl Barth and of Emanuel Swedenborg, both of whom would leave an enduring imprint on his vision of theology and the human-divine relation. See <https://www.amiscorbin.com/en/biography/biographical-post-scriptum-to-a-philosophical-interview/>

⁵³ Corbin, *From Heidegger to Suhrawardī – An interview with Philippe Nemo*, *op. cit.*

⁵⁴ Camilleri and Proulx, «Martin Heidegger et Henry Corbin», *art. cit.*, p. 4-63.

⁵⁵ On this concept, see Proulx, «La non-dualité chez Henry Corbin», *op. cit.*, p. 103-123. Voir aussi Proulx, «La dualité comme identité mystique chez Henry Corbin», *art. cit.*, p. 45-58.

⁵⁶ Not to be confused with Karl Rahner's approach. Denis de Rougemont uses the expression «relation of complementarity» in a similar sense: «The 'single path' may therefore designate orthodoxy just as well as heresy. We see here that these two radically antinomic phenomena stand in a *relation of complementarity*." D. de Rougemont,

rigidly risks undermining the very edifice of *theandry*⁵⁷, the divine-human unity that lies at the heart of a certain philosophical anthropology present both in Christology and in Imāmology. The “indeterminacy” of imagination, understood as *gnosis*, as a mode of knowing rather than as a mere producer of images or representational forms, characterizes a metaphysical relation in which imagination functions as the median and mediating faculty between the human and the divine.

Closely linked to this spiritual hermeneutics, which necessarily *involves* the subject, is phenomenology. It provides the essential perspective through which the imaginal “relation”⁵⁸ can be understood as an existential relation in which the subject is engaged in the very act of manifestation. In Corbin’s thought, this “relation” is not an opposition but a polarity, a *dualitude*, a divine-human reciprocity, or as he writes, «a theophanic relation between that which shows itself and the one to whom the vision is shown. God reveals Himself to each according to the aptitude and spiritual degree of the one who receives the vision»⁵⁹. Throughout Corbin’s work, this perceptual relation is often summarized by the Latin phrase *talem eum vidi qualem capere potui*, «For each of us saw him as his capacity permitted»⁶⁰. What appears and what is lived correspond to the capacity of the soul to sustain the locus of manifestation, a locus that necessarily *involves* the subject itself, the *mundus imaginalis*. This is also what Emanuel Swedenborg⁶¹ meant when he wrote that «the body of each Spirit and each Angel is the form of its love»⁶². A formula that encapsulates, for Corbin, the metaphysical relation of the human to God. It is this “manifestation” that Corbin approaches phenomenologically.

In brief, Corbin developed a phenomenological-hermeneutic method profoundly shaped by his Protestant formation, allowing him to delineate the appearing of God

«Hérétiques de toutes les religions...», Henry Corbin, C. Jambet (ed.), L’Herne, Paris 1981, p. 300.

⁵⁷ See H. Corbin, *Face de Dieu, face de l’homme – herméneutique et soufisme*, Entrelacs, Paris 2008 [1983], p. 246-248.

⁵⁸ It would be worth revisiting the opening pages of Kierkegaard’s *The Sickness unto Death*, where the problem of the *relation* is articulated with remarkable precision. Corbin’s early writings frequently return to Kierkegaard’s philosophy, and it should be recalled that during the 1930s, German scholars who had first encountered Kierkegaard through the German translations emphasized the need to render his work more fully into their own language.

⁵⁹ H. Corbin, «Face de Dieu et Face de l’homme», *Eranos-Jahrbuch – Polarität des Lebens*, A. Portmann (ed.), vol. XXXVI/1967, Rhein-Verlag, Zürich 1968, p. 170.

⁶⁰ This statement formulates the very principle of theophanic vision and makes it possible to grasp the differentiated reality of theophanic perceptions, while at the same time unifying the diversity of descriptions of a single spiritual event. Corbin cite the *Apocryphal Acts of John and Peter*: «For each of us saw him as his capacity permitted». J. K. Elliott, *The Apocryphal New Testament: a Collection of Apocryphal Christian Literature in an English Translation based on M. R. James*, Oxford University Press, Oxford/New York 1993, p. 413, § 20. See also in Corbin’s work: Corbin, «Face de Dieu et Face de l’homme», *op. cit.*, p. 198-200. This text essentially reprises the introduction to H. Corbin, «Divine Epiphany and Spiritual Birth in Ismailian Gnosis», trad. R. Manheim, *Cyclical time and Ismaili gnosis*(ed.), Kegan Paul International in association with Islamic Publications Ltd., London / Boston 1983, p. 59-66.

⁶¹ Corbin read Swedenborg extensively and even carried out a comparative study between his thought and that of Ismailism: H. Corbin, «Herméneutique spirituelle comparée - I. Swedenborg II. Gnose ismaélienne», *Eranos-Jahrbuch - Das menschliche Drama in der Welt der Ideen*(ed.), vol. XXXIII/1964, Rhein-Verlag, Zürich 1965, p. 71-176.

⁶² E. Swedenborg, *De Coelo et ejus mirabilibus, et de inferno, ex auditis et visis*, Londini 1758, p. 153, §363. Cité dans H. Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth: from Mazdean Iran to Shi’ite Iran*, Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J. 1977, p. 102.

in a way that neither reduces what appears to the perceiving subject nor objectifies it, but rather understands it as a *dualitude relation*, a reciprocity grounded in co-presence and mutual manifestation. The theophanic *relation* is the manifestation of divine love itself, and what appears must be interpreted as the symbolic *cipher*⁶³ of what it *involves*.

Imagination

For Corbin, imagination constitutes the very organ of ontological mediation. It links, without confusing them, the two poles of being, the sensible and the intelligible, the human and the divine. In it unfolds what he calls *dualitude*: a reciprocal and co-present relation in which each term finds its fulfillment in the other. The *mundus imaginalis* designates precisely this intermediate plane of being where revelation takes form, where spirit becomes vision and vision becomes knowledge. Imagination is therefore not a psychological faculty but the locus of an ontological encounter, the very space of theophany.

The notion of imagination constitutes one of the key loci of Corbin's thought. From the *imaginatio vera* to the *imaginal*, from the *mundus imaginalis archetypus* to the "eighth climate," through visionary recitals and spiritual experiences, imagination appears as the unifying organ of these multiple dimensions. Through his exploration of Islamic, particularly Iranian, philosophy, Corbin elaborated a philosophy of imagination that is original in both its hermeneutic scope and its spiritual depth.

Even though philologists and Orientalists have rightly pointed out certain limitations in his interpretations, the focus here lies on Corbin's own reception of imagination. The aim is not to examine the concept of imagination as it appears within Islamic philosophy or in specific authors, but rather as Corbin developed, reformulated, and integrated it into his spiritual anthropology. Assessing the fidelity of these transpositions belongs to specialists of Iranian thought⁶⁴. What matters first is to retrace the genesis of the notion of imagination within Corbin's work, for understanding what the term means presupposes an inquiry into its origins and the influences that shaped it. Any analysis of imagination in Corbin must therefore consider the decisive impact of Alexandre Koyré and Carl Gustav Jung before examining the structure and function of imagination within Corbin's own metaphysical architecture.

⁶³ This notion also appears in the final section of the outline for Corbin's unfinished dissertation, preserved in the AHSC. Associated with Karl Jaspers, the last section of the plan suggests that Jaspers was the philosophical source on which Corbin intended to draw, for in the third volume of his monumental work, simply titled *Philosophie*, Jaspers had resolved the problem of radical transcendence through the idea of the *cipher* (*Chiffre*). Corbin's essay on Hamann attests perfectly to this influence. There he writes: «The data of universal history are 'ciphers,' signs, a commentary on Scripture». (Corbin and Hamann, *Hamann, philosophe du luthéranisme*, *op. cit.*, p. 20.) For Corbin, it is precisely this symbolic property of the divine Word that prevents one from falling into pantheism and safeguards the transcendence of God. On this theme, see X. Tilliette, «La "Lecture des Chiffres" : interprétations. Réflexions sur la Métaphysique de Karl Jaspers», *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 65, 3 (1960) 290-306. From an autobiographical standpoint, one may recall Corbin's letter to Hugo Friedrich, see below section on Corbin's faith.

⁶⁴ See for instance E. a. Rahmati, کیسانشن-برک، نادج و نادج رادی-پ (Karbon-shenasi: Padidar-e Jan va Jahan), vol. 1, Sofiya, Tehran 2025.

Alexandre Koyré

It is difficult to determine the precise moment when Corbin first turned his attention to the problem of imagination. The earliest trace, however, suggests that it was during a course given by Alexandre Koyré⁶⁵ in 1925 at the École Pratique des Hautes Études (EPHE) that Corbin first encountered the philosophical question and function of imagination. Immediately after completing his thesis *On the Idea of God and the Proofs of His Existence in Descartes*⁶⁶, Koyré delivered from 1922 to 1927 a series of “temporary lectures” at the EPHE on *speculative mysticism in Germany*⁶⁷. In the first course of series, he examined the influence of Jakob Böhme and Franz von Baader and continued his research in 1924 with lectures on the religious doctrines of Schleiermacher and Schelling. His aim was to demonstrate the influence of medieval and Renaissance mysticism upon the doctrines of German idealism. At the center of these studies lies Koyré's original and decisive hypothesis, the gravitational axis of his entire philosophy, namely, that

the various philosophical positions of the post-Kantian systems are determined above all by religious positions [...]. Their philosophical theses translate theological inspirations and standpoints; hence they are all in irreducible opposition to Kantianism, and all animated by the desire to reconquer for man that central place in the universe which mystical theology assigns to him⁶⁸.

The course Corbin attended in 1925 represented a direct application of this hypothesis, seeking to trace the theological and mystical influences on Fichte, as revealed indirectly in his polemic with Schelling, who had himself been influenced by Oetinger. Passing through Böhme⁶⁹, Paracelsus⁷⁰, and Sebastian Franck⁷¹, the course devoted special attention, within a perspective of negative theology, to “the idea of the body and of imagination.” Koyré summarized the inquiry as follows:

We have been able to establish in Fichte the persistence of belief in the ‘subtle body,’ the ‘etheric’ or ‘spiritual body’ [...]. The idea of imagination (*productive Einbildungskraft*) has given rise to a very curious historical misunderstanding [...]. We have been able to show that [Novalis] identified Fichte's conception with that of Paracelsus, and believed he had rediscovered in Fichte the doctrine of the creative and magical role of imagination as a formative power⁷².

⁶⁵ For a presentation of Koyré's complete academic career as traced through the *Annuaire* of the École pratique des hautes études, see P. Vignaux, «Alexandre Koyré (1892-1964)», *École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses*, (1963) 43-49.

⁶⁶ A. Koyré, *Essai sur l'idée de Dieu et les preuves de son existence chez Descartes*, E. Leroux, Paris 1922, 222 p.

⁶⁷ See the summaries of his courses in the *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études, Section des sciences religieuses*, from 1922 to 1927.

⁶⁸ A. Koyré, «Le mysticisme spéculatif en Allemagne», *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études – Section des sciences religieuses*, 34, (1924) 64.

⁶⁹ A. Koyré, *La philosophie de Jacob Boehme*, 2^e ed., Vrin, Paris 1971 [1929], XVII + 523 p.

⁷⁰ A. Koyré, «Paracelse», *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse*, (1933) 46-75 et 145-163.

⁷¹ A. Koyré, «Sébastien Franck», *Revue d'histoire et de philosophie religieuse*, (1931) 353-385.

⁷² A. Koyré, «Le mysticisme spéculatif en Allemagne», *Annuaire de l'École pratique des hautes études – Section*

This brief overview of Koyré's courses on speculative mysticism in Germany, which Corbin attended, reveals the decisive influence of that teaching on the formation of his thought. The themes of the subtle or spiritual body, imagination, negative theology, and theosophy, concepts that would later occupy a central place in his work, emerge here in embryonic form, even though his subsequent investigations would take root in Islamic rather than German philosophy. The presence of German mystics, spiritual thinkers, and alchemists in Corbin's later writings thus takes on a new significance, for it reveals that his primary source for understanding these authors, whom he often cited in counterpoint, was most likely Koyré's teaching.

One might be tempted to minimize Koyré's influence if one considered only this course and neglected the fact that the two men remained close collaborators between 1930 and 1939⁷³. Indeed, the 1931 issue of *Bifur*, which contained the first French translation of a text by Martin Heidegger, translated by Corbin, also included a short introduction signed by Koyré⁷⁴. From 1931 to 1937, Koyré served as the principal editor of *Recherches philosophiques*, and in the six substantial volumes of that remarkable philosophical venture, anticipating much of twentieth-century philosophy, Corbin published his major essays, including *For a Philosophical Anthropology*⁷⁵ and *Dialectical Theology and History*⁷⁶, along with nineteen book reviews. Finally, in 1937, when Koyré departed on a mission to Cairo, he asked Corbin to replace him at the EPHE⁷⁷ and to supervise and coordinate the publication of *Recherches philosophiques*. All these collaborations testify to the mutual esteem and friendship that united the two men. As Corbin later recalled, he was «the last of his colleagues from the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes to take his hand at the clinic, on the eve of his death»⁷⁸.

Imaginatio vera

Corbin often cites the notion of *imaginatio vera*⁷⁹, consistently attributing it to Paracelsus, and he employs it to establish the distinction between the chimerical imagination (*phantasia*) and the real imagination (*imaginatio*). He writes, for instance: «As Paracelsus already observed, fantasy, unlike Imagination [*imaginatio vera* (in the original)], is an exercise of thought without foundation in nature, it is

des sciences religieuses, (1925) 63-64.

⁷³ The collaboration came to an end in 1939, the year Corbin departed for Turkey, where he would remain until the end of the war. From that point onward, his intellectual focus shifted almost entirely to Iranian and Islamic philosophy.

⁷⁴ See Alexandre Koyré's introduction (pp. 5-8) in Heidegger, «Qu'est-ce que la métaphysique ?», *op. cit.*, pp. 9-27. He was also very close to Corbin at the time of the publication of his well-known volume on Heidegger in 1938. For the correspondence and a portrait of Corbin's relationship with Heidegger, see Camilleri and Proulx, «Martin Heidegger et Henry Corbin», *art. cit.*, pp. 4-64.

⁷⁵ H. Corbin, «Pour l'anthropologie philosophique : un traité persan inédit de Suhrawardî d'Alep († 1191)», *Recherches philosophiques*, A. Koyré, H.-C. Puech et A. Spaier (ed.), vol. 2, Boivin & C^e, Paris 1932-1933, pp. 371-423.

⁷⁶ Corbin, «La théologie dialectique et l'histoire», *op. cit.*, pp. 250-284.

⁷⁷ It should be noted that Alexandre Kojevnikov, who later shortened his name, was Koyré's second replacement.

⁷⁸ Corbin, *Biographical Post-Scriptum to a Philosophical Interview*, *op. cit.*

⁷⁹ At least eight different texts refer to Paracelsus and *imaginatio vera*.

the 'madman's cornerstone'»⁸⁰. Both Koyré and Jung had studied the writings of the Swiss alchemist-physician, which makes it difficult to determine which of the two most directly influenced Corbin, and whether the credit for the distinction between *imaginatio* and *phantasia* belongs to Koyré or to Jung⁸¹.

In Jung's 1935 Eranos lecture⁸² *Dream Symbols of the Process of Individuation*, one finds the sentence «*Et hoc imaginare per veram imaginationem et non phantasticam*»⁸³ drawn from the *Rosarium philosophorum*, yet the Latin expression *imaginatio vera* does not appear in Jung's own vocabulary, for his concern lies primarily with the notion of active imagination. By isolating this expression, Corbin appears as both a careful and selective reader of Jung.

The problem of attribution thus arises: if both Jung and Koyré speak of a "true imagination" as opposed to a chimerical one, it is Corbin who associates Paracelsus's thought with the formula of the *Rosarium philosophorum* and attributes the phrase to Paracelsus himself, even though it does not appear literally in the physician-alchemist's works. Was it through Koyré's writings that Corbin absorbed this distinction, or did it take root through his reading of Jung? One thing is certain: Corbin never cites Paracelsus directly. He consistently refers to Koyré, and while in his first use of the expression *imaginatio vera* (1949) he footnotes Jung's 1936 *Eranos-Jahrbuch* essay, and once his own terminology surrounding imagination becomes stabilized, his references shift from Jung to Koyré⁸⁴.

This is already the case in the prologue to his 1956 Eranos lecture, which would later become the second part of his celebrated *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*⁸⁵. Does this mean that Corbin distanced himself from Jung? It would seem not, for he continued to cite Jung throughout most of his works. It would be inaccurate to speak of a genuine rupture, for Corbin had in fact envisaged a joint publication with Mircea Eliade on Jung's thought and had composed two extensive essays directly influenced by the Swiss psychoanalyst⁸⁶. What is striking, however, when examining the Jungian texts cited by Corbin, is that after 1956 references to

⁸⁰ H. Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, Princeton (N.J.), Princeton University Press 1998, p. 179. In the French version, Corbin uses the expression *imaginatio vera*. H. Corbin, «Imagination créatrice et prière créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi», *Eranos-Jahrbuch – Der Mensch und das Schöpferische*, O. Fröbe-Kapteyn (ed.), vol. XXV/1956, Rhein-Verlag, Zürich 1957, p. 122.

⁸¹ See details in D. Proulx, «Henry Corbin et l'*imaginatio vera*», *L'histoire du concept d'imagination en France, de 1918 à nos jours*, R. Barontini et J. Lamy (ed.), Classiques Garnier, Paris 2019, p. 187-195.

⁸² C. G. Jung, «Traumsymbole des Individuationsprozesses. Ein Beitrag zur Kenntnis der in den Träumen sich kundgebenden Vorgänge des Unbewussten», *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, III/1935, (1936), pp. 91-92. This lecture constitutes the second section of *Psychologie und Alchimie*, published in 1944 and translated in 1953. See C. G. Jung, «Individual Dream Symbolism in Relation to Alchemy: A Contribution to the Psychology of the Unconscious», trad. R. F. C. Hull, *The collected works of C. G. Jung – Psychology and Alchemy*, H. Read, M. Fordham et G. Adler (ed.), vol. 12, Princeton University Press, New York 1980 [1968], §§ 44–331.

⁸³ «And imagine this with true imagination, not with fantastical imagination». Anonyme, «Liber Rosarium philosophorum», *Artis auriferæ quam chemiam vocant* (ed.), vol. 2, Basileae excudebat Conrad Waldkirch expen. C. de Marne et J. Aubry, 1593, p. 215.

⁸⁴ Corbin, «Imagination créatrice et prière créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi», *op. cit.*, «Prologue», pp. 121-125.

⁸⁵ Corbin, *Alone with the Alone: Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabi*, *op. cit.*

⁸⁶ See H. Corbin, *Jung, Buddhism, and the Incarnation of Sophia: unpublished writings from the philosopher of the soul*, trad. J. Cain, with the collaboration of Daniel Proulx, Vermont, Inner Traditions, Rochester 2019.

alchemy, and to *imaginatio vera*, disappear almost entirely.

The Eranos Circle

The meeting between Corbin and Jung⁸⁷ was made possible through the Eranos Circle⁸⁸, and more precisely through the invitation that Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn sent to Corbin on January 27, 1948, inviting him to take part in the conference scheduled for August of the same year. On February 20, Corbin replied in a long letter proposing to present a lecture on 'Alī Shāh. Then, on April 6, 1948, after reading Corbin's French introduction to Mohammad Mo'in's *L'influence du mazdéisme dans la littérature persane*⁸⁹ and discovering in it an interpretation of the Grail, Fröbe-Kapteyn encouraged him to address that theme explicitly, noting that it would also be of interest to Jung.

Corbin almost immediately embraced the spirit of Eranos, whose orientation corresponded perfectly to his own philosophical outlook. He wrote to Fröbe-Kapteyn in February 1948 with evident enthusiasm:

I rejoice infinitely at the prospect of finding myself among you for the first time, and of participating in the spirit that animates your research, which I have so deeply admired in the *Jahrbuch*. For two years I have wished to make

⁸⁷ On Jung and Corbin, see F. Serina, «Jung et les orientalistes, ou les impérities métaphysiques de la psychologie analytique», *C. G. Jung en France rencontres, passions et controverses*(ed.), Paris, Les Belles Lettres, 2021, p. 281-304. Also Proulx, «L'imagination selon Henry Corbin», *op. cit.*, p. 421-437. Corbin, «La sophia éternelle», *art. cit.*, p. 11-44.

⁸⁸ On the history of the Eranos Circle, see H. T. Hakl, *Eranos : An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, trad. C. McIntosh, Montréal, McGill-Queen's University Press 2013. To understand Corbin's perspective on Eranos, read H. Corbin, «De l'Iran à Eranos», *Du*, 15, 4 (1955), p. 29; H. Corbin, «The Time of Eranos», trad. R. Manheim, *Man and time. Papers from the Eranos Yearbooks*, J. Campbell (ed.), London, Princeton University Press, 1983 [1957], p. xiii-xx; H. Corbin, «Eranos: liberté et spontanéité», *Eranos-Jahrbuch – Der Mensch, Führer und Geführter im Werk*, A. Portmann (ed.), vol. XXXI/1962, Rhein-Verlag, Zürich 1963, p. 9-12.

⁸⁹ H. Corbin, «Introduction», *L'influence du mazdéisme dans la littérature persane* (ردن آریشات و انسی‌دزم) (یسراب تایی‌دبا, M. Mo'in (ed.), Téhéran 1948, p. 1-36. Here an excerpt, p. 33-34: «The Wine of the Magi and the Grail, this is perhaps the keystone of the entire lexicon (cf. p. 532). It is defined as “an intimate savor irradiating upon the mystic's heart the lights of celestial Realities”. Concerning this Grail, which possesses a long mythical lineage, the traditional Persian dictionaries say that it reveals all the circumstances of Good and Evil in the universe. Its origin is sometimes attributed to *Jamshīd* (cf. supra, pp. 275-277), sometimes to *Kay Xusraw* (who further endowed it with the virtues of the astrolabe). The *Shāh-nāmāh* knows only the Grail of Kay Xusraw; around the sixth century A.H., Jamshīd recovers his privilege. At times it is called “the Grail that shows the world,” at times “the Grail that sees the world.” The multiple interpretations virtually contained in this double aspect of a single virtue will gather together the motifs of the microcosm and of the Perfect Man. The verses of *Shabistari* (quoted p. 533) are laden with allusion: “When, I asked, did the Sage bestow upon thee this Grail that sees the world? — On the very day, he replied, when he created the enamelled vault of Heaven.” This mystical Grail, the '*urafā*' discern as transparent through all the concepts of their gnosis. *Sanā'ī* uses it to signify the heart, as does *Attār*. For the entire cosmos appears within this Grail; all knowledge of Real-Reality (*haqiqā*) is inward, and inward knowledge, mystical gnosis, is the experience of that Real-Reality manifested to the heart and within the heart. The kindling of the Grail is here, in the strict sense, the illumination of the heart (cf. *bayt* of *Shabistari*, p. 534). Water of Life, astrolabe, Mirror of the Reality-of-Being, in which the true Heart (itself this Mirror) contemplates and admires the entire kingdom of being, each has spoken of it according to the measure of his knowledge and experience. Yet this difficult question is by no means an easy one, for while “many have said all manner of things about it,” this Grail is revealed only to the soul “when the Perfect Man is born within it,” and then “it comprehends the totality of beings... The initiate of Real-Reality, though still human, when he attains the mystical knowledge of himself, is himself the Grail of Jamshīd.” (p. 535) Two passages from *Hāfez* and *Shabistari* likewise evoke this quest for the Grail in the secret depths of the heart of the Perfect Man. The symbolism of the alchemists will follow the same intention in speaking of the “Sublime Elixir”.

this monument known to our Iranians, and to comment on this admirable example of religious studies.⁹⁰

Corbin would go on to deliver twenty-six lectures at Eranos, each of which can be read as a testimony to his inner life. Mircea Eliade perceived this clearly: «You think with pencil in hand; it matters little which book you read, for it is always your own profound and personal thought that you pursue»⁹¹. Corbin also distinguished between two kinds of participants at Eranos, those who, passing through, failed to harmonize with its spirit, and those who, «as the years went by and without any kind of premeditation, there was a small group of participants who became the very cornerstones and primary support of the concept of Eranos»⁹².

Like Fröbe-Kapteyn, who refused to define Eranos in rational terms⁹³, since, in her view, any definition would have confined the phenomenon to something it was not⁹⁴, Corbin likewise rejected all attempts at definition. For him, Eranos was «a place where [the speakers] could be wholly themselves,⁹⁵» where each «allowed the depths of his being to speak»⁹⁶.

In *Le Temps d'Eranos*, one of Corbin's most personal texts⁹⁷, he reflects on how future historians might view the Eranos Circle:

He will [the future historian] perhaps believe that he has «explained» it by a profound and ingenious dialectic of causes. But he will not have divined that the real problem would have been to discover not *what* explains Eranos, but *what* Eranos *explains* by virtue of what it *implies*⁹⁸.

This hermeneutical reversal is typical of Corbin's approach, allowing him to develop a *spiritual hermeneutics* while avoiding the pitfalls of historicism and reductionist determinism.

This spontaneous freedom found symbolic expression in the stele erected in 1950 by van der Leeuw and Jung⁹⁹, dedicated to *the unknown genius of the place* (*Genio loci ignoto*). As van der Leeuw had already written in 1933, «It is not because of the sanctuary that its site is sacred; it is the sanctity of the site that calls forth the erection of the sanctuary.¹⁰⁰» Jung and van der Leeuw recognized in Eranos this elusive *je-ne-sais-quoi*, and Fröbe-Kapteyn herself observed that the meetings seemed to organize themselves¹⁰¹, that she simply allowed them to unfold of their own

⁹⁰ AHSC 126, Henry Corbin à Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, 20 février 1948, envoyé de Téhéran.

⁹¹ AHSC 272.2, Mircea Eliade à Henry Corbin, lettre manuscrite datée du 30 décembre 1952.

⁹² Corbin, *Biographical Post-Scriptum to a Philosophical Interview*, *op. cit.*

⁹³ O. Fröbe-Kapteyn, «Ein Brief der Gründerin», *Du*, 15, 4 (1955) 10.

⁹⁴ Corbin, «Eranos : liberté et spontanéité», *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁹⁵ Corbin, «Eranos : liberté et spontanéité», *op. cit.*, p. 10.

⁹⁶ Corbin, *Biographical Post-Scriptum to a Philosophical Interview*, *op. cit.*

⁹⁷ This text reveals Corbin's feelings toward what the Eranos Circle had brought him and how he perceived it. In Corbin's work, texts of such a personal tone are exceedingly rare.

⁹⁸ Corbin, «The Time of Eranos», *op. cit.*, xiii.

⁹⁹ Let us recall that Jung had learned stone carving to build his tower at Bollingen. The stele, however, was carved by Paul Speck, not by Jung himself.

¹⁰⁰ G. van der Leeuw, *La religion dans son essence et ses manifestations : phénoménologie de la religion*, trad. J. Marty, ed. française refondue et mise à jour par l'auteur avec la collaboration du traducteur Jacques Marty, Payot 1955, Paris, p. 386.

¹⁰¹ Haki, *Eranos : An Alternative Intellectual History of the Twentieth Century*, *op. cit.*, p. 218-220.

accord, though, in truth, this required great inner discipline on her part. By granting the speakers a genuine space of freedom, Fröbe-Kapteyn channelled within them the unknown genius of Eranos. The three decades that Corbin would devote to Eranos were already foreshadowed in the empathy and intellectual kinship that marked his earliest exchanges with Fröbe-Kapteyn.

On July 11, 1948, Corbin sent her a letter written in a tone of deep regret: he could not come to Ascona.

I have delayed writing back to you, hoping I would not have to communicate news that may disappoint you as much as it grieves me. I was very touched by your last letter, in which you spoke of your interest in my study of Dr. Mo'in's book, and in order to join in your concerns, which are also precisely my own, my intention was to propose a one-hour talk on 'Anthropomorphosis and Resurrection in Ismailian Gnosis' (as the most characteristic aspect of Shi'ite gnosis), and another on 'The Holy Grail in Iran.' I was greatly looking forward to meeting you this year, and especially to meeting under your auspices Professors Jung and van der Leeuw.¹⁰²

Naturally, Fröbe-Kapteyn invited him to the 1949 session, rightly sensing, as Corbin himself had written, that «the general orientation of my work is in itself sufficient guarantee that it accords with the programs and spirit of Eranos»¹⁰³.

In 1949, Henry and Stella Corbin arrived in Ascona, Switzerland. There Corbin delivered his first Eranos lecture, "The Initiatory Tale and Hermetism in Iran (An Angelological Inquiry)." In April of that year, during the correspondence preceding the conference, he provided Fröbe-Kapteyn with details about his forthcoming lecture:

Since the subject pleases you, my intention remains to comment on at least one of the short "initiatory romances" of Suhrawardī. It is entitled *The Tale of the Occidental Exile* and is entirely unpublished (in both Arabic and Persian). I believe that, through its symbolism, it fits particularly well with the general program of Eranos and with the theme chosen for this year. It allows me to address the question of 'Alchemy and Eschatology,' and thus to connect with Dr. Jung's admirable research.

Since I understand that you are interested in Chinese philosophy, I still recall the beautiful paper by Erwin Rousselle published in the *Jahrbuch*, and even more the teachings of *The Secret of the Golden Flower*. This has led me to take a far greater interest than before in our Arabic and Persian alchemical literature. I believe that Dr. Jung's theses will find powerful confirmation from this side.¹⁰⁴

To summarize: Corbin had read the *Eranos Jahrbücher*¹⁰⁵, he had studied Jung,

¹⁰² AHSC 126, Henry Corbin à Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, 11 juillet 1948, envoyé de Téhéran.

¹⁰³ *Ibid.*

¹⁰⁴ AHSC 126, Henry Corbin à Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn, 18 avril 1949, envoyé de Téhéran.

¹⁰⁵ Florent Serina, curator of the exhibition «Carl Gustav Jung et la France. Lettres, dédicaces et livres rares» (French Society of Analytical Psychology, Paris), has noted that several works related to Jung and psychology were bequeathed there, among them *Eranos Jahrbuch* volumes annotated by Corbin and a few dedications from Jung addressed to him. The AHSC preserves records of this donation, as well as of similar gifts made to the Faculty of Protestant Theology in Paris and to the Saint-Serge Institute. AHSC 47, <http://www.calames.abes.fr/pub/ms/>

and he was eager to meet both him and van der Leeuw¹⁰⁶. *The Secret of the Golden Flower*¹⁰⁷ had drawn him further into the study of Islamic alchemical literature, elements that resonate vividly in his early Eranos lectures.

Carl Gustav Jung

The following year, Corbin contributed a text derived from his research on Avicenna's visionary recitals. This second lecture at the Eranos Circle coincided with the celebration of Jung's seventy-fifth birthday. For the *Festschrift* dedicated to Jung, Corbin offered an essay entitled *The Book of the Glorious by Jābir ibn hayyān*. In a letter to Louis Massignon, Corbin explained his motive for writing it: «It was an opportunity to pay homage to poor Kraus, to connect Jābir with Jung's symbolism through my own interpretation, and, above all, to meditate upon and highlight your Salmān Pāk, whose meaning I always love in advance»¹⁰⁸. The significance of this essay lies not only in the fact that it was offered to Jung, but also in Corbin's explicit acknowledgment of Jung's symbolic influence. The subtitle, "Alchemy and Archetype," makes the reference unmistakable. Jung is mentioned directly four times in the text and cited another four times in footnotes.

Corbin wrote to Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn: «But it was so hopelessly complex that if I were able to finally get to the end of it, it was from the love of Eranos and for C.G. Jung»¹⁰⁹! His homage to Jung in this 1950 volume belongs fully to the intellectual atmosphere of Eranos, where alchemy had become a shared symbolic language bridging psychology, philosophy, and mystical experience. Yet it must be emphasized that while Jung developed his psychological interpretation of alchemy as a process of psychic transformation, Corbin's research on spiritual hermeneutics and visionary recitals situated these same symbols within a *hierohistory* of spiritual forms. Jungian psychology cannot be simply superimposed upon Corbin's metaphysics. While both shared the conviction that alchemical imagery expresses inner transmutation, Corbin's project carried a metaphysical scope that far exceeded the psychological. The *depth psychology* of Jung, for all its suggestive power, could not account for the ontological and metaphysical dimension of the symbol, which for Corbin ultimately points toward a transcendent reality.

Following these early Eranos lectures and his encounter with Jung, Corbin, at the request of Mircea Eliade¹¹⁰, composed in December 1952 a substantial review

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¹⁰⁶ It should be recalled that Corbin wrote a review of *La religion dans son essence et ses manifestations*. H. Corbin, «Compte-rendu - G. Van der Leeuw, *Phänomenologie der Religion*», *Revue critique d'histoire et de littérature*, 67, (1934) 486-489.

¹⁰⁷ C. G. Jung, «The Secret of the Golden Flower», trad. R. F. C. Hull, *The Collected Works of C. G. Jung – Alchemical Studies*, H. Read, M. Fordham et G. Adler (ed.), vol. 13, Princeton University Press, New York 1980 [1968], pp.1-86.

¹⁰⁸ AHSC 273.43, lettre de Henry Corbin à Louis Massignon, 19 juin 1950.

¹⁰⁹ Corbin, *Jung, Buddhism, and the Incarnation of Sophia : unpublished writings from the philosopher of the soul*, op. cit.

¹¹⁰ The friendship that Corbin would maintain with Eliade centered on their shared interest in Jungian thought. Corbin notes: «The first time I ever heard the name of Mircea Eliade [...] was in Istanbul, in Constantinople, during the war, in 1942». H. Corbin, «Mircea Eliade», *Mircea Eliade*, C. Tacou (ed.), L'Herne, Paris 1977, p. 266. This was most likely at the periphery of his work on the writings of Stăniloae and Bulgakov. He finally met the renowned

article for the *Revue de culture européenne*, entitled *La Sophia éternelle : à propos d'un livre récent de C.-G. Jung*¹¹¹, on Jung's *Answer to Job*. In that work, Jung sought, as a psychologist, to confront the problem of divine arbitrariness and duality. In Corbinian terms, Jung was attempting to move beyond the dualism of God toward what Corbin would call divine *dualitude*, by means of the exemplification of the archetype of God¹¹². Jung wrote:

There is no doubt that there is something behind these images that transcends consciousness and operates in such a way that the statements do not vary limitlessly and chaotically, but clearly all relate to a few basic principles or archetypes¹¹³.

Corbin discerned in Jung's exploration of the figure of Job a quest for the image of God within the human being, the search for *Sophia*. For Jung, Job dramatizes the loss of divine Wisdom. As Jung observes, Job «He clearly sees that God is at odds with himself so totally at odds that he, Job, is quite certain of finding in God a helper and an 'advocate' against God»¹¹⁴. In Jung's interpretation, it is Job who enables God to differentiate Himself and to become incarnate, for Job, by never yielding to God, by never abandoning God, proves wiser and more virtuous than God, who had yielded to Satan's provocation. In Job, God rediscovers the Wisdom He had forgotten, the *anamnēsis* of Sophia¹¹⁵.

Romanian mythologist in person in 1949 in Paris. Their first two meetings took place on 20 and 23 October 1949. The friendship between the two men developed rapidly, and all evidence suggests that it was Corbin who proposed that Eliade be invited to Eranos the following year. Indeed, a letter from Olga Fröbe-Kapteyn to Corbin, dated 16 October 1949, reads: «I have invited Mircea Eliade to collaborate at Eranos 1950, and he accepted with pleasure. He was already well informed about Eranos, which made things easier». AHSC 126, <http://www.calames.abes.fr/pub/ms/Calames-2015112417114829328>. W. McGuire, *Bollingen, an adventure in collecting the past*, Princeton, N.J., Princeton University Press 1982, p. 150. It was also through Corbin's intervention with John Barrett, the administrator of the Bollingen Foundation and a participant at Eranos in 1949 and 1950, that Eliade obtained a grant of two hundred dollars per month for three years, a scholarship that undoubtedly "motivated" him to work more directly on Jungian thought. See M. Eliade, *Fragments d'un journal 1945-1969*, trad. L. Badesco, vol. 1, Gallimard, Paris, 1973, p. 130 9 décembre 1950.

¹¹¹ Corbin, «La sophia éternelle», art. cit., p. 11-44.

¹¹² Jung in fact told Corbin that the original idea for *Answer to Job* came to him during an illness accompanied by high fever: «You say that you read my book as an 'oratorio.' The book 'came to me' during an illness, in fever. It was as though it were accompanied by the great music of a Bach or a Handel. I do not belong to the auditory type; that is why I heard nothing. It was only the feeling of a vast composition, or rather of a concert at which I was present. The whole thing was an adventure that happened to me, and which I was eager to record». Letter from Jung to Corbin, dated 4 May 1953, published in Jung, *Réponse à Job*, op. cit., p. 259. The fever, moreover, could be regarded as analogous to the ordeal that God inflicts upon Job. Fever is the ally of the afflicted body, setting it in antagonism with itself, compelling it to struggle. The patient must surrender to the fever in a kind of paradoxical trust.

¹¹³ Jung, «Answer to Job», op. cit., p. 361 § 555.

¹¹⁴ Jung, «Answer to Job», op. cit., p. 369 § 567. Corbin's association of Jung's text with the Sophianic tradition of Jakob Böhme arises from the fact that Böhme, in *The Aurora (Aurora oder Morgenröte im Aufgang)*, offers a profound meditation on the struggle of God with Himself—the drama of the divine self-division and the "second birth" of God. This moment, in Böhme's vision, marks the act through which the Creator subdues the luciferian forces that have emanated from His own being. As Böhme writes, «It was not man, nor any creature, that opposed God, but God Himself set in conflict with God». Translated from the French. J. Böhme, *L'aurora naissante ou la racine de la philosophie, de l'astrologie et de la théologie*, trad. L.-C. d. Saint Martin, Milano, Archè 1977, p. 244, chap. XIV, § 72.

¹¹⁵ On the *anamnēsis* of Sophia, see Henry Corbin, «La Sophia éternelle. À propos d'un livre récent de C.-

As Corbin summarizes it: «The Creator experiences Himself as belated with respect to His creature; He must catch up with her. The merciful intervention of Sophia is the consciousness of that delay»¹¹⁶. What God rediscovers through Job's piety is Sophia herself. For Jung, this recovery of Wisdom marks the point of departure for his search for the amplifications that constitute «an Old Testament of the sophianic religion»¹¹⁷, as Corbin phrases it. This exploration of the *sophianic manifestations* forms the heart of *Answer to Job* as the exemplification of the archetype of God.

At this point, however, a divergence begins to appear between the metaphysical and the psychological approaches. Corbin, by amplifying Jung's insights through his reading of Sergei Bulgakov¹¹⁸, takes a path that departs from Jung's psychological interpretation toward a metaphysical one. As Corbin writes, paraphrasing Bulgakov, the latter «sought to show that the divinity in God constitutes the divine Sophia [...] that this Sophia is not itself a hypostasis, but the power to hypostatize itself in a given hypostasis and to constitute its life»¹¹⁹.

The Imaginal and the Mundus Imaginalis

Through a careful examination of Corbin's writings and lectures, one can discern three decisive movements in the unfolding of his thought on imagination. To discern this development, it is necessary first to arrange his writings in chronological order. Such a reorganization is crucial, since Corbin's major "books" are, in most cases, not books in the ordinary sense. Whether one considers *Creative Imagination in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, *The Paradox of Monotheism or Temple and Contemplation*, and the list continue, the majority of Corbin's works are in fact collections of lectures delivered at the Eranos Circle. It is therefore misleading to classify Corbin's writings according to the publication dates of his books. The proper approach is to follow the order of his Eranos conferences. Doing so allows us to identify three decisive moments in the development of his reflection on imagination: first, 1953, with *Celestial Earth and the Body of Resurrection*¹²⁰, then 1956, with *Creative Imagination and Creative Prayer in the Sufism of Ibn 'Arabī*¹²¹, and finally 1964, with the publication of *Mundus imaginalis, or the Imaginary and the Imaginal*¹²². Returning to the original dates of composition is essential, for relying on the printed books reverses the order.

G. Jung », dans *Revue de culture européenne*, vol. 5, 1953, pp. 21 ss.

¹¹⁶ Corbin, «La sophia éternelle», art. cit., p. 25.

¹¹⁷ Corbin, «La sophia éternelle», art. cit., p. 21.

¹¹⁸ It would also be worth examining the parallel that Corbin draws with Mazdean cosmology.

¹¹⁹ Corbin, «La sophia éternelle», art. cit., p. 39.

¹²⁰ H. Corbin, «Terre céleste et corps de résurrection», *Eranos-Jahrbuch - Mensch und Erde*, O. Fröbe-Kapteyn (ed.), vol. XXII/1953, Rhein-Verlag, Zürich 1954, p. 97-194.

¹²¹ Corbin, «Imagination créatrice et prière créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabī», *op. cit.*, p. 121-240.

¹²² H. Corbin, «*Mundus imaginalis* or the Imaginary and the Imaginal», trad. R. Horine, *Spring: An Annual of Archetypal Psychology and Jungian Thought*(ed.), 1972 [1964]. Moreover, the role of Gilbert Durand in the emergence of this text ought to be examined. See M. Quinon, «Préhistoire et histoire des *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme* (1950-1970) : Les parcours croisés de Claire Lejeune et de Gilbert Durand», *Cahiers internationaux de symbolisme*, 119-120-121 (2008) 145-175.

Until the appearance of *Mundus imaginalis* in 1964, Corbin's vocabulary concerning imagination had not yet crystallized. Without attempting an exhaustive inventory, his writings employ numerous epithets: imagination can be *creative*, *active*, *true*, *autonomous*, *separated*, *theophanic*, *immanent*, *absolute*, or *divine*. Jung had already used the expressions "creative" and "active imagination," and it is evident that this had a strong influence on him. Yet one must not confuse their respective uses. Corbin employs the term within a highly metaphysical and theological framework. For Jung, imagination is a means of generating mental images that sustain an inner, creative dialogue «things pass from an unconscious potential state to a manifest one»¹²³. Jung remains, at his core, a psychologist, albeit one whose work is never far from the spiritual, whereas Corbin, drawing on the Iranian mystics and theosophers he studied, conceives the same process within a framework where the existence of God is neither questioned nor muted in the name of psychological scientificity. Thus, for Corbin, imagination is no longer merely the faculty that renders inner contents manifest, but rather the very faculty through which the existence of God is made manifest. Imagination is literally *theophanic*, and the space in which divinity discloses itself corresponds to the *mundus imaginalis*. By contrast, in Jung, imagination functions as a practice of the self, a technique of "active imagination" through which the contents of the unconscious are given form, a practice that culminated in *The Red Book*¹²⁴. As Jung wrote in *Psychological Types*:

phantasy, therefore, appears to me as the clearest expression often specific psychic activity. Before everything it is the creative activity whence issue the solutions to all answerable questions; it is the mother of all possibilities, in which too the inner and the outer worlds, like all psychological antitheses, are joined in living union. Phantasy it was and ever is which fashions the bridge between the irreconcilable claims of object and subject, of extraversion and introversion. In phantasy alone are both mechanisms united¹²⁵.

The structure of imagination proposed by Corbin is, in many respects, analogous to that of Jung's psychology. One might even ask whether Jung's *introverted* and *extraverted* types correspond, at some level, to the *esoteric* and *exoteric* typology that characterizes Corbin's hermeneutics. For Jung, imagination is a bridge between subject and object, allowing the inner life to enter into conjunction with outer reality so that the psyche may discover meaning within the world in which it is immersed. In Corbin, this structure becomes metaphysical. As he writes in his *Imaginal Charter*:

It [creative imagination] is essentially a mediating and intermediate power, just as the universe to which it gives access is an intermediate and mediating world, an interworld between the sensible and the intelligible, without which the articulation between the two would be definitively blocked¹²⁶.

¹²³ Jung, «Psychology and Alchemy», *op. cit.*, p. 274 §390.

¹²⁴ C. G. Jung, *The red book: Liber novus*, 1st, W.W. Norton & Co, New York 2009.

¹²⁵ C. G. Jung, *Psychological types*, trad. H. G. Baynes, K. Paul, Trench, Trubner & co. Harcourt, Brace & company, inc., London/New York 1923, p. 69.

¹²⁶ H. Corbin, «Prélude à la deuxième édition - Pour une charte de l'Imaginal», *Corps spirituel et Terre céleste - de l'Iran mazdéen à l'Iran shi'ite*(ed.), Buchet/Chastel, Paris 2005 [1960], p. 9.

This intermediate and mediating world is the *mundus imaginalis*. In Jung's writings, though less metaphysically defined, one finds its analogue in the *mundus archetypes*¹²⁷, a world explored through imagination itself.

After 1964, with the publication of *Mundus imaginalis* in the *Cahiers internationaux du symbolisme*, Corbin's terminology became influential among a younger generation of scholars concerned with the question of imagination. *Imaginal* gradually replaced *archetypal* in James Hillman's psychology¹²⁸, while Gilbert Durand adopted it in 1965 to designate the «place of anthropological epiphanies»¹²⁹. Both expressions, *imaginal* and *mundus imaginalis*, continued to evolve. Though the Latin phrase seems ancient, it is in fact Corbin's own coinage. Before stabilizing in this form, he referred to it variously as the *mundus archetypus*, *mundus imaginalis archetypus*, "land of the imagination," "world of imagination," "world of Idea-Images," and "archetypal world." These variations trace the spiritual and metaphysical itinerary of Corbin's quest.

In its full form, *mundus imaginalis archetypus* clearly borrows one of the central ideas of Jung's work. Yet again, Corbin neither analyzes nor debates the Jungian notion of the archetype, and because he later abandoned it using simply *mundus imaginalis*, the connection to Jung is not immediately apparent to readers. Corbin himself explains the distance he introduced between their approaches:

But I was forced to take note of the following. All that the psychologist [C.G. Jung] says of the *Imago*, acquires a metaphysical meaning for the metaphysician. In turn, all that the metaphysician says will be interpreted by the psychologist in psychological terms. From whence the possible misunderstandings. This is why, as I said above, having once shared the information at each other's disposal, one has to accept the inevitable separation when the time comes¹³⁰.

This self-understanding as a metaphysician explains why Corbin rather quickly ceased to cite Jung directly. In several texts written after 1964, he even claimed that he had coined the expression while working with a Latin dictionary, statements that further obscure Jung's influence on Corbin's conception of imagination:

It was precisely this last expression [*hālam al-mithāl*] that recently made me feel our deficiencies. I could not translate it as 'the world of the imaginary,' for it is not of the imaginary, and we only worsen the confusion when we

¹²⁷ C. G. Jung, «Paracelsus as a Spiritual Phenomenon», trad. R. F. C. Hull, *The collected works of C. G. Jung – Alchemical Studies*, H. Read, M. Fordham et G. Adler (ed.), vol. 13, Princeton University Press, New York, 1983 [1967], p. 171, §210. In the English translation "archetypal world" is used. In the French translation "mundus archetypus" C. G. Jung, *Synchronicité et paracelsica*, trad. C. Maillard et C. Pelieger-Maillard, Paris, Albin Michel 1988, p. 220, §210. The expression *mundus archetypus* is also used in C. G. Jung, «The Third Stage: The Unus Mundus», trad. R. F. C. Hull, *The collected works of C. G. Jung – Mysterium Coniunctionis*, H. Read, M. Fordham et G. Adler (ed.), vol. 14, New York, Princeton University Press, 1970, p. 534.

¹²⁸ Moreover, the fact that James Hillman reintroduced the notion of the *imaginal* within a psychological framework led to considerable misunderstanding, for in Corbin's view the *imaginal* is never psychological but rather the manifestation of a metaphysical cosmology. See T. Cheetham, *Imaginal Love - The Meanings of Imagination in Henry Corbin and James Hillman*, Spring Publications 2015, 200 p.

¹²⁹ G. Durand, «Tâches de l'Esprit et impératif de l'Être», *Eranos-Jahrbuch*, XXXIV/1965, (1966), p. 343.

¹³⁰ Corbin, *Biographical Post-Scriptum to a Philosophical Interview*, op. cit.

concede a ‘reality of the imaginary.’ No, it was necessary, simply with the help of the Latin dictionary, to find an adequate expression, and we began to speak of the ‘world of the imaginal’¹³¹.

All this suggests that the contributions of both Koyré and Jung are essential for understanding Corbin’s conception of imagination, though one must never forget the metaphysical standpoint from which he speaks. Unfortunately for his readers, neither is mentioned in *Mundus imaginalis, or the Imaginary and the Imaginal*, which has led commentators to treat Corbin’s work as an isolated continent. Ultimately, a full analysis of the reception of German speculative mysticism, as introduced to Corbin by Koyré, should be paired with a detailed comparison of the uses and meanings of *active imagination* in Jung and Corbin. In such a study, special attention should be given to James Hillman, deeply influenced by Corbin, while keeping in mind Corbin’s own warning about «the misunderstanding that has crept into the psychologists’ use of certain neologisms»¹³².

Corbin’s Metaphysics

In brief, Corbin’s work may be described as an attempt to recover the metaphysical unity of the religions of the Book within what might be called a *hierohistorical anthropology*. Yet whenever one seeks unity, the greatest danger is that of reducing what is studied to the unity one hopes to find. Fully aware of this problem, and unlike the *perennialists* or the movements he himself called “pseudo-esotericisms,” Corbin did not pursue an original unity from which one might deduce the features of a universal religion. His project should therefore not be confused with that of René Guénon¹³³. The differences between the two are far too profound to be reconciled.

Guénon was not merely an intellectual pilgrim of the spirit but the spiritual head of his own *tariqa*, and as such he opposed secular Western modernity with intransigent rigor. For him, the opposition between East and West was absolute and irreducible. Corbin, on the other hand, never converted to Islam and remained a Protestant throughout his life. The apparent affinities with Guénon, terms such as “esotericism” or “symbol,” for instance, vanish under closer scrutiny¹³⁴. Corbin himself clarified his position in a letter to Richard Pickrell, who had asked why he never cited Guénon. He replied:

Guénon rendered a service by finally opening a path that was neither historicist nor sociological. But I cannot say that I was influenced by him. [...] Have you made a precise count of the Arabic texts he actually knew firsthand? [...] I am certainly not the first to regret his ‘dogmatism,’ his ‘intellectualism’

¹³¹ H. Corbin, «Siyavakhsh à Persépolis», *Orient*, (1966), p. 70.

¹³² AHSC 276.5 This warning comes from a letter by Stella Corbin to Dario Caggia, dated 1985.

¹³³ For a comprehensive and critical presentation of Guénon’s work, see D. Bisson, *René Guénon. Une politique de l’esprit*, PGDR, Paris 2013, 526 p.

¹³⁴ See, for instance, the excellent and well-documented article by X. Accart, «Identité et théophanies René Guénon (1886-1951) et Henry Corbin (1903-1978)», *Politica Hermetica - René Guénon, lectures et enjeux*, 16, (2002), p. 176-200.

(although I dislike the word). He seems systematically to disregard the affective dimension. What bothers me most is that he never provides references; one must simply take him at his word. I have always tried, on the contrary, to indicate all my sources and the byways of my research so that others may retrace the same path. [...] I myself adhere neither to historicism, nor to sociology, nor to psychology, etc. I am truly pursuing a metaphysical inquiry, which is not at all 'fashionable' these days. [...] I agree with what he sought to restore, but his work seems to me an example to study and to learn from, not a dogma to be received servilely¹³⁵.

Corbin's pursuit was unambiguous: spiritual realities must be received in the freedom of the Spirit. His aim was to present Iranian spirituality as a mirror through which the West might rediscover, within its own roots, the traces of its great mystical and theological traditions. Hence the importance of textual fidelity and precise citation: Corbin's task was not to invent a new path but to uncover what materialism and literalism had concealed.

This did not prevent him, however, from speaking of a «metaphysical catastrophe» in the modern West, resulting from «the disappearance of the world of the celestial Souls, the world of correspondences and subsisting images, whose proper organ of knowledge was active Imagination»¹³⁶. For Corbin, the contemporary incapacity to perceive the reality of symbols is a consequence of this metaphysical catastrophe, which reduced the perception of reality to empirical fact. And because he seemed inwardly to live the very traditions he studied, Corbin has often been treated as a privileged witness, one whose own metaphysical life gave existential grounding to the spiritual realities he uncovered, an impression that helps explain why his thought has been appropriated in so many personal ways.

Geographia Imaginalis

Corbin's metaphysics of imagination rests simultaneously upon phenomenology and hermeneutics. He was deeply conversant with both philosophical traditions. His Protestant hermeneutic drew upon the notion of *Chiffreschrift*, or cipher-writing, much as Kant had spoken in the *Critique of Judgment* of the ciphered writing of Nature¹³⁷. This notion is central to Corbin's hermeneutics: for without something to decipher, there can be no hermeneutic act. Symbols thus serve as keys to the cipher. The concept of *chiffre* also bears conceptual affinities with that of *ta'wil*.

Indeed, whenever Corbin discusses the symbol, he often introduces the idea of the *chiffre*. «The symbol», he writes, «The symbol announces a plane of consciousness distinct from that of rational evidence; it is the cipher [*chiffre*] of a mystery, the only means of saying something that cannot be apprehended in any other way»¹³⁸. For Corbin, a symbol can never be «explained once and for all», but must always remain open to interpretation corresponding of the *via apophatic*.

¹³⁵ AHSC 15, letter dated September 28, 1976, Henry Corbin to Richard Pickrell.

¹³⁶ H. Corbin, *L'imagination créatrice dans le soufisme d'Ibn 'Arabi*, 2^e ed., Flammarion, Paris 1976 [1958], p. 19.

¹³⁷ It should be noted that this already constitutes a romanticized interpretation, Kant himself speaks rather of a symbol.

¹³⁸ Corbin, *Alone with the Alone : Creative Imagination in the Sūfism of Ibn 'Arabi*, op. cit., p. 26.

In sum, for Corbin phenomenology had exposed the insufficiency of the conceptual apparatus meant to mediate between understanding and empirical data, an insufficiency that only imagination could remedy. This, he believed, was the spiritual crisis of the modern West, the very mark of its metaphysical catastrophe: where imagination should have been recognized as a noetic faculty, its place was left vacant. Yet one must not reduce imagination to a mere metaphorical or aesthetic mediation. Drawing upon Hamann's hermeneutics, the concept of the *chiffre*, and later that of the symbol, Corbin forged the term *imaginal* to designate the ontological function that makes possible the actual experience of divine presence, that is, *theophany*. As he often repeated, the imaginal «that is to say it gives us access to a region and a reality of Being which without that function remains closed and forbidden to us»¹³⁹.

Corbin's phenomenology thus culminates in an exploration of *imaginative consciousness*. It is not a phenomenology of mental content but a description of access to a new ontological dimension: the *mundus imaginalis*. This world constitutes an autonomous order of being, intermediate between the sensible and the intelligible. From this perspective, Corbin's phenomenology discloses a deeper and more comprehensive level of human consciousness, a level Jungians might call *archetypal*, but which Corbin interprets within a properly metaphysical orientation. The *mundus imaginalis* is not a psychic construct but a real, spiritual world within which the human being is contained. For, as Corbin writes, it is not human consciousness that encompasses spiritual reality, but spiritual reality itself that contains, envelops, and grounds human presence.

Concluding Opening: Corbin's Faith

How much interiority is directly projected into his work? Corbin was undoubtedly a believer for whom the reality of angels and visionary dreams was never in doubt. To understand his cosmology, one must refer to the only spiritual experience he ever described, which took place in 1932 during a summer journey to Lake Leksand, when he was not yet thirty. The trace of this experience appears in his correspondence with Hugo Friedrich¹⁴⁰ and in a short poetic text entitled *Theology by the Lake*. In it, he exults in the divine mystery revealed as that of the Earth of the Angel and of the Woman:

As soon as you have read and received, as soon as you look, wish to understand, wish to possess, to name and to retain, to explain and to rediscover, ah! there remains only a cipher, and your judgment is pronounced¹⁴¹.

This experience is decisive, marking the moment when Corbin seems to have touched the divine mystery itself. It is the only explicit trace of such an event in his

¹³⁹ H. Corbin, «Towards a Chart of the Imaginal», trad. P. Russel, *Spiritual body and celestial Earth: from Mazdean Iran to Shi'ite Iran* (ed.), Princeton University Press, Princeton, N.J., 1977, p. vii.

¹⁴⁰ This correspondence has not been published; all the letters are preserved in the Henry Corbin Archives. See, however, F.-R. Hausmann, «Hugo Friedrich und Henry Corbin – Briefzeugnisse eines ungewöhnlichen Gedankenaustauschs», *Romanistische Zeitschrift für Literaturgeschichte*, 36, 1-2 (2012) 111-145.

¹⁴¹ H. Corbin, «Théologie au bord du lac», *Henry Corbin*, C. Jambet (ed.), L'Herne, Paris 1981 [1932], p. 63.

corpus. Described through the term *chiffre* (cipher), it reflects the influence of his readings of Luther, Hamann, and Jaspers. In a letter to Hugo Friedrich, he wrote:

Thus, the immediate work was steeped in the reflection of boundless forests and the countless lakes, beside which stand low wooden houses where man still abides in kinship with the earth. I felt many things there, in that North, above all, the revelation of the “Thou” through geography. I sought to record it; it was so difficult to render, yet so new, so vital, so compelling, the fleeting reading of the *Chiffreschrift*¹⁴².

His 1953 Eranos lecture, which became the first part of *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, continues this very *geographia imaginalis* first experienced at Lake Leksand. The text opens with a passage from Gustav Theodor Fechner (1801–1887), founder of psychophysics, describing how, one morning, he was seized by a transfiguring light that haloed the face of the Earth. «He was struck not merely by the esthetic idea, but by the vision and concrete evidence the ‘the Earth is an Anglet, such a gorgeously real Angel, so like a flower’»¹⁴³! The resonance between Fechner’s text and Corbin’s experience at Leksand suggests that, from 1932 to 1953, the underlying structure of Corbin’s vision of the world remained remarkably consistent: for him, the world was a *geographia imaginalis*, unrelated to geology or geography in the ordinary sense, but a landscape of theophanies¹⁴⁴.

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¹⁴² Universitätsarchiv der Albert-Ludwigs-Universität Freiburg I, Nachlass Hugo Friedrich, C0135-019-Korrespondenz A-C (1931-1977), Lettre à Hugo Friedrich 29 septembre 1932, p. 3.

¹⁴³ Corbin, *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, *op. cit.*, p. 3. The first reference to Fechner in Corbin’s work that has been identified appears in his 1951 lecture *Iranologie et philosophie*, where he cites as his source W. James, *A pluralistic universe; Hibbert Lectures to Manchester College on the present situation in philosophy*, New York, Longmans, Green, and Co. 1909, p. 164-165. Later, in *Spiritual Body and Celestial Earth*, Corbin directly quotes G. T. Fechner, *Über die Seelenfrage, ein Gang durch die sichtbare Welt, um die unsichtbare zu finden*, Leipzig, Amelang 1861.

¹⁴⁴ It is worth recalling here that Éric Dardel, Henry Corbin’s brother-in-law, was a geographer who, in 1952, published E. Dardel, *L’homme et la terre : nature de la réalité géographique*, Paris, P.U.F. 1952, 133 p.. In this book, he explores the existential bond between human beings and the world’s geography, what he calls “geographicity.” As J.-M. Besse notes in “Lire Dardel aujourd’hui” (*Espace géographique*, 1988, pp. 43-46), Dardel had already, in an earlier work from 1946, *L’histoire, science du concret* (Paris: P.U.F., 1946), explicitly acknowledged his intellectual debt to Henry Corbin.

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DARIO GALVÃO¹

INVENTING SOCIETY: ANIMALITY AND IMAGINATION IN HUME

Abstract

This article examines how Hume engages with the notions of animality and imagination in his account of the origin of human society. I argue that, although Hume treats the formation of society as a development specific to the human species, he grounds it in principles shared with other animals such as need and self-preservation. Central to this account is the imagination, which enables human beings to adapt means to ends in response to necessity and to invent society – thus surpassing other species and asserting their dominance over nature. For Hume, in contrast to traditional philosophical accounts, it is not Reason that elevates humanity, but rather imagination: an animal faculty we share with other species and which he conceives as the cornerstone of knowledge.

Keywords: Enlightenment, imagination, invention, animal reason, convention.

Inventando a Sociedade: Animalidade e Imaginação em Hume

Resumo

Este artigo examina como Hume mobiliza as noções de animalidade e imaginação em sua análise da origem da sociedade humana. Sustentamos que, embora Hume considere a formação da sociedade como um desenvolvimento específico da espécie humana,

¹ Université de Namur. I would like to express my gratitude to the *São Paulo Research Foundation* (Fapesp) for their support throughout the research and writing of this article (grant n. 2018/03829-0).

ele a fundamenta em princípios compartilhados com os animais, como a necessidade e a autopreservação. No cerne dessa explicação está a imaginação, que permite aos seres humanos adaptar meios a fins em resposta à necessidade e inventar a sociedade – superando outras espécies e afirmando seu domínio sobre a natureza. Para Hume, em contraste com as concepções filosóficas tradicionais, não é a Razão que distingue a humanidade, mas a imaginação: uma faculdade animal compartilhada com outras espécies, e que ele concebe como o alicerce do conhecimento.

Palavras-chave: Luzes, imaginação, invenção, razão animal, convenção.

Hume generally displays little interest in detailing animal behaviour or the various forms of cunning that animals display. When he does address the topic, he restricts himself to ordinary observations that are sufficient for the purposes of his argument. More often than not, a simple behaviour exhibited by an animal is enough: a dog that «avoids fire and precipices, that shuns strangers, and caresses his master»², and that tracks its prey by scent and responds when called by name³. These examples illustrate the limited scope of what we learn about dogs in Hume's work, despite the fact that the dog is the animal to which he most frequently refers.

Although Hume's portrayal of animals may appear limited from the standpoint of natural history, it is through a philosophical lens that the precision and significance of his analyses become fully apparent. This article seeks to explore how Hume mobilizes the theme of the animal to illuminate key questions within his *science of man* – a term he introduces at the opening of his *Treatise of Human Nature* (1739). I argue that the animal serves as a methodological tool for deepening our understanding of human nature, aligning with the approach identified by Jean-Luc Guichet in relation to Rousseau and the French materialists⁴. My focus here is specifically on how Hume employs the figure of the animal to address the question of the origin of human society, a theme he develops in the third book of the *Treatise*.

By engaging with this theme, the article contributes to Enlightenment animal studies, a field that has, until now, overlooked the relevance of Hume's work⁵. It also adds to ongoing research on the role of animality in the thought of the Scottish philosopher. I adopt the perspective advanced by Claude Gautier, who contends that the animal plays a critical role in illuminating the nature of Humean scepticism⁶. In line with Gautier, I distance myself from substantialist interpretations of Hume's

² D. Hume, THN 1.3.16.5. References to *A Treatise of Human Nature* will be cited as follows: THN book, part, section, paragraph.

³ D. Hume, EHU 9.3. References to *An Enquiry Concerning Human Understanding* will be cited as follows: EHU section, paragraph.

⁴ J.-L. Guichet, *Rousseau, l'animal et l'homme. L'animalité dans l'horizon anthropologique des Lumières*, Les Éditions du Cerf, Paris 2006.

⁵ See the "Animal" issue of the journal *Dix-huitième siècle*: BERCHTOLD, J. & GUICHET J.-L. (dir.), « L'Animal des Lumières », *Revue Dix-huitième siècle*, 42 (2010). I would also draw attention to H. HASTINGS, *Man and Beast in French Thought of the Eighteenth Century*, Oxford University Press, London 1936; and E. de FONTENAY, *Le Silence des bêtes*, Fayard, Paris 1998.

⁶ C. Gautier, « La raison des animaux (section IX) », in C. ETCHEGARAY & P. HAMOU (dir.), *Lire l'Enquête sur l'entendement humain de Hume*, Vrin, Paris 2022, pp. 213-227.

writings on animals – readings that focus on cataloguing similarities and differences between humans and animals solely to reaffirm human superiority⁷.

As we shall see, Hume's interest in animals moves in a different direction: what matters to him is the parity between humans and animals, which serves as a touchstone for rejecting the philosophical systems of tradition⁸. In the case of the origin of society, this parity supports the claim that the human species differs from others in ways and for reasons that are strictly animal in nature. Society is conceived as an invention of the imagination – a faculty shared with other species. For Hume, this invention operates as a remedy, allowing the human species to overcome the precarious condition in which it finds itself in the natural world. On their own, human beings lack the necessary means to satisfy their many needs and to face the dangers posed by many other species whose natural constitutions surpass their own. From this perspective, society originates in animality: it is an artifice crafted by an animal species for the purpose of shielding itself from the threats inherent in nature⁹.

This article has two parts. First, I examine how, in Book III of the *Treatise*, Hume presents the human being as an animal whose imagination – driven by the pressure of need – gives rise to society through the invention of indirect means of satisfaction. Society is thus understood as an artificial response to a natural mismatch between needs and resources, emerging not from pure reason but from imagination, grounded in experience. In the second part, I analyse the consequences of this account, particularly the analogy between instinct and institution: while instincts provide animals with natural procedures of satisfaction, institutions function as artificial procedures for humans, sustaining an open-ended spiral of invention and desire that underlies the development of culture, politics, and knowledge. This second part draws on the work of authors such as Gilles Deleuze and Luiz Roberto Monzani.

Society as remedy: a progressive and animal invention

In the third book of the *Treatise*, the human being is portrayed as a creature who, like all animals, is driven by needs and equipped with resources to meet them. As Hume observes, the lion requires a substantial amount of food to satisfy its appetite; yet this food constantly eludes it, as it must be hunted. While the lion's needs are numerous, they are offset by the natural advantages of its species – agility, courage, arms, and force¹⁰. A balance exists between its needs and its capacities. According to Hume, this proportionality is found across a wide range of animal species, including herbivores such as the sheep and the ox, which, though lacking

⁷ T. L. Beauchamp, «Hume on the Nonhuman Animal», *Journal of Medicine and Philosophy*, 24:4 (1999) 322-335 ; D. G. Arnold, «Hume on the moral difference between humans and other animals», *History of Philosophy Quarterly*, 12/3 (1995) 303-316.

⁸ Hume, THN 1.3.16.3.

⁹ Our analysis gives particular attention to Part 2 of Book 3 of Hume's *Treatise*.

¹⁰ Hume, THN 3.2.2.2.

the lion's strengths, have moderate appetites «and their food is of easy purchase»¹¹. No species, he suggests, possesses more resources than it needs, nor is burdened with more needs than its resources can accommodate – except the human species.

Unlike other species, the human being suffers from a profound mismatch between needs and resources. Of «all the animals, with which this globe is peopled», Hume writes, «there is none towards whom nature seems, at first sight, to have exercised more cruelty than towards man, in the numberless wants and necessities, with which she has loaded him, and in the slender means, which she affords to the relieving these necessities»¹². This represents an «unnatural conjunction of infirmity, and of necessity»¹³. The condition is termed *unnatural* because it defies the general pattern observed in nature, where species exhibit a proportional balance between their needs and their capacities. Yet paradoxically, in the case of the human species, this very imbalance appears as something entirely *natural*, insofar as it expresses a defining characteristic of the species itself.

According to Hume, this condition appears from the very beginning of human history. Before the advent of society, the human being is a «barbarous, necessitous animal»¹⁴. On the side of needs, «the food, which is required for his sustenance, flies his search and approach, or at least requires his labour to be produced»; he must also secure clothing and shelter to protect himself from the elements¹⁵. On the side of resources, «he is provided neither with arms, nor force, nor other natural abilities, which are in any degree answerable to so many necessities»¹⁶. Confronted with this disadvantageous condition, the human being is compelled to invent new means to meet needs that far exceed what his natural constitution can provide. Human survival, then, hinges on the capacity to generate resources that are not originally given, but must be fabricated through artifice.

Hume thus reengages with the classical theme of the human being as an animal deprived of natural advantages, yet endowed with reason, through which he develops tools and asserts dominance over other animals¹⁷. The originality of Hume's account, however, lies in the fact that he does not explain tools as the product of a uniquely human rationality. Instead, he traces them back to the imagination – a faculty shared with other animals and grounded in the fundamental needs of living beings. The capacity to invent, in this view, stems less from a privileged cognitive faculty than from a pressing necessity. Ultimately, it is need – not an extraordinary mental faculty – that accounts for the distinctiveness of the human species.

According to Hume, since artifice arises directly from the needs of human nature, it is, in a certain sense, natural (a theme already explored by several scholars

¹¹ *Ibid.*

¹² *Ibid.*

¹³ *Ibid.*

¹⁴ D. Hume, *The Natural History of Religion*, A. and H. Bradlaugh Bonner, London 1889 [1757], p. 4.

¹⁵ *Ibid.*

¹⁶ *Ibid.*

¹⁷ See the myth of Protagoras (Plato, *Protagoras*, in *Œuvres complètes*, vol. III, part 1, Belles Lettres, Paris 2002, p. 320), as well as Thomas Aquinas's *De Regimine Principum*. François Sigaut offers a commentary on Aquinas in F. Sigaut «Les outils et le corps», *Communications*, no. 81 (2007), p. 9.

of Hume's work¹⁸). This holds true for all forms of invention, from the simplest – such as clothing and shelter – to the most complex, such as political institutions. For Hume, political institutions are artifices invented by the human species to ensure its preservation. In this light, society emerges as an invention of the utmost importance. It is «by society alone» that the human being «is able to supply his defects, and raise himself up to an equality with his fellow-creatures, and even acquire a superiority above them»¹⁹. Although society entails a multiplication of needs, such as the artificial desires that arise within social life, human being may still take satisfaction in their own creations: his capacities continually expand «and leave him in every respect more satisfied and happy, than it is possible for him, in his savage and solitary condition, ever to become»²⁰.

According to Hume, society would never have come into being were it not for the relief it offers from the unfavourable condition of the human species in comparison to other animals. Even in its most rudimentary form, society proves advantageous over working in isolation, as it provides «a remedy for these three inconveniences»²¹: first, «his force is too small to execute any considerable work»; second, «his labour being employed in supplying all his different necessities, he never attains a perfection in any particular art»; and finally, since his strength and success are not always constant, «the least failure in either of these particulars must be attended with inevitable ruin and misery»²². The union of forces, the division of labour, and mutual assistance in times of need, these are the immediate advantages that society confers upon human beings²³.

Hume nonetheless recognizes that the establishment of society faces a fundamental obstacle: the instability of possessions, which can only be resolved through the convention of private property. Without this remedy, how could the mutual exchange of services, which is crucial to any benefit society might offer, ever take place? As he puts it, «after the agreement for the fixing and observing of this rule [of private property], there remains little or nothing to be done towards settling a perfect harmony and concord»²⁴.

If society is understood as a remedy for the species' original precariousness, then the convention of private property serves as a remedy for the obstacle of the instability of possessions. Hume argues that this obstacle stems from the conjunction of two natural factors: the limited generosity of human beings and the scarcity of goods in nature²⁵. Hume does not reduce human action to self-interest, as if human nature were inherently selfish²⁶. Yet this does not prevent him from acknowledging

¹⁸ On the continuity between the artificial and the natural, see, for instance, F. de O. Salles «Natureza e artifício: Hume crítico de Hutcheson e Mandeville», *Discurso*, 50:1 (2020) 65-79.

¹⁹ Hume, THN 3.2.2.3.

²⁰ *Ibid.*

²¹ *Ibid.*

²² *Ibid.*

²³ *Ibid.*

²⁴ Hume, THN 3.2.2.12.

²⁵ Hume, THN 3.2.2.16

²⁶ Hume's position contrasts with that of Bernard Mandeville in *The Fable of the Bees* (1714). See the appendix entitled «Of Self-Love» in Hume's *An Enquiry Concerning the Principles of Morals* (1751).

that we are inherently partial, that we tend to prefer ourselves, our families, and our neighbours over strangers²⁷. As Philippe Saltel puts it, « it is less selfishness than partiality that characterizes human beings »²⁸. In this respect, there is a « limited generosity »²⁹ (grounded in the principle of sympathy) that differs from a universal benevolence toward all members of the species. If our generosity had no limits, if we made no distinction between our own interests and those of others, there would be no need for such a remedy³⁰. Generosity alone would suffice to preserve the stability of possessions, since it would prevent one person from depriving another of their goods.

Yet limited generosity is not the only natural factor that leads to the necessity of inventing an artifice. According to Hume, the scarcity and mobility of external goods also play a decisive role. In a context of material abundance, the mobility of goods would cease to pose a problem, and with it, the very instability of possessions would disappear³¹. But since this is not the case, remedies are needed, namely, conventions, or in other words, the rules of justice, a virtue that Hume explicitly defines as *artificial* in Book III of the *Treatise*³². These rules are « clearly a human invention (and in that sense, artificial), and they rest upon an agreement among individuals (and in that sense, conventional) »³³.

Hume explains that although the conventions upon which social cohesion and stability depend are artificial, they are nonetheless natural³⁴. This is because the invention of artifices is so necessary to the human species that it may rightly be considered natural. In this regard, Hume emphasizes in his discussion of the rules of justice that mankind is an « inventive species »³⁵, and argues that when an invention « is obvious and absolutely necessary, it may as properly be said to be natural as anything that proceeds immediately from original principles, without the intervention of thought or reflection »³⁶. Hume thus sets aside the traditional natural law distinction between laws of nature and positive laws³⁷. For him, laws are both artificial and natural: no law precedes the emergence of society, and the laws that arise with it are natural insofar as they are the product of interests rooted in human nature. In this sense, he asserts that although the « rules of justice be *artificial*, they are not *arbitrary* »³⁸.

²⁷ Hume, THN 2.1.11.

²⁸ Philippe Saltel in the notes to his French translation of Book III of the *Treatise* (*Traité de la nature humaine. Livre III*, trad. Philippe Saltel, Flammarion, Paris 1993, p. 259). Hume also addresses this topic in the appendix to the second *Enquiry*.

²⁹ Hume, THN 3.2.2.16

³⁰ *Ibid.*

³¹ *Ibid.*

³² *Ibid.*

³³ C. Etchegaray, *David Hume. L'esprit sensible*, Éditions Belin / Humensis, Paris 2018, p. 118.

³⁴ Hume, THN 3.2.1.19.

³⁵ *Ibid.*

³⁶ *Ibid.*

³⁷ Despite his critique of natural law theory, Hume nonetheless shares certain points of convergence with that tradition. On this, see S. Buckle, *Natural Law and the Theory of Property: Grotius to Hume*, Clarendon Press, Oxford 1991.

³⁸ *Ibid.*

Thus, the emergence of society should not be conceived as a means of securing supposedly natural rights (for instance, the notion that the right to property is innate and that government exists merely to preserve it). Hume inverts this line of reasoning: it is the very concept of a right to property that arises from society, not the reverse. In the absence of society, there is no notion of right at all. As such, this idea is the product of a general scheme that takes shape gradually, through necessity and the accumulated experience of social life. The same is true of the notion of duty.

For Hume, society and its institutions do not emerge directly from nature or reason. They are the outcome of a gradual process of reflection, one that is fundamentally practical, as it involves exploring and testing means capable of addressing human needs. Primitive in its origins, society becomes increasingly complex as needs are met and multiplied, and as conventions are progressively improved «as the society enlarges»³⁹.

In this regard, Hume observes that the convention of property rights «arises gradually, and acquires force by a slow progression, and by our repeated experience of the inconveniences of transgressing it»⁴⁰. He points out that the same process applies to the development of language and to the adoption of gold and silver as instruments of exchange – both of which are, likewise, products of human convention⁴¹. For Hume, the establishment of society cannot be reduced to the signing of a contract *ex nihilo*, as if individuals could immediately grasp both the terms of the agreement and the necessity of complying with them. On the contrary, Hume seeks to demonstrate that conventions are rooted in experience, in the ideas and passions that arise in response to concrete circumstances. In this context, transgression plays a constitutive role: it is by experiencing the harmful effects of violating emerging norms that individuals come to appreciate the value of adhering to them. Over time, this process gives rise to a set of habits that prove effective in given situations and that gradually grow more complex. In this sense, Hume departs from the contractualism of thinkers like Hobbes: the agreement between individuals does not consist in a formal pact or promise, but rather emerges from «collective experience – precisely because individuals come to see that, by acting in a certain way (without the need for prior deliberation), the practice improves, becoming more effective or more advantageous»⁴².

Since agreements are established gradually, Hume observes that there exists a primordial form of association among individuals that provides the first experiences of life in common: the family. According to him, it is within the family that the imagination becomes attuned to the advantages of social existence: « In a little time, custom and habit operating on the tender minds of the children, makes them sensible of the advantages, which they may reap from society, as well as fashions them by degrees for it, by rubbing off those rough corners and untoward affections,

³⁹ Hume, THN 3.2.2.14. Although a convention is an artifice, it arises from nature and evolves naturally, such as the different languages in the world. (THN 3.2.2.10). On Hume's relation to contractualism, see F. BRAHAM, "Hume, contractaliste? Famille, droit, pouvoir dans la philosophie de Hume," *Philosophique*, 12 (2009) 79-92.

⁴⁰ Hume, THN 3.2.2.10.

⁴¹ *Ibid.*

⁴² C. Etchegaray, *op. cit.*, p. 118.

which prevent their coalition»⁴³. Hume grounds the formation of the family in a basic natural impulse (the attraction between the sexes) without which the initial perception of life in common as beneficial would never arise. For him, just as later for Buffon (and against Rousseau), the human being has never lived in complete isolation⁴⁴. The family has always been present, and it is through the experience of familial life that individuals first come to grasp the benefits of social existence. As Hume writes, «in order to form society, it is requisite not only that it be advantageous, but also that men be sensible of these advantages»⁴⁵.

Hume argues that the awareness of social advantages does not stem from abstract study or rational deliberation, but from the concrete experience of family life⁴⁶. In this context, he identifies two fundamental bonds: first, the sexual appetite between the sexes; and second, the parents' concern for their common offspring⁴⁷. These natural ties offer individuals an initial experience of the benefits of human association, furnishing the imagination with ideas that will become crucial to the progressive establishment of conventions and, ultimately, of society itself. Once the imagination becomes sensible of the advantages of social life, it begins to perceive new relations of cause and effect, relations that enable the invention of new means for addressing emerging needs. It is on this foundation that the most complex social and political institutions are gradually built.

The central role of animality in this narrative is unmistakable. The origin of human society is explained by conceiving the human being as an animal: a creature endowed with specific natural traits and exposed to external threats. It is therefore unsurprising that the «first and original principle»⁴⁸ of society does not rest on what we commonly associate with human undertakings, namely, abstract rational reflection. Instead, this principle is grounded in what is shared with all animal species: sexual attraction and parental concern for offspring. It is the pressure of necessity that drives the emergence of human society. The rationality that intervenes in the origin and progressive development of society is the rationality of the imagination: a practical, animal rationality that seeks means to satisfy needs, and does so through the gradual learning that experience affords.

The traditional notion of understanding is challenged: in Hume's philosophy, it is no longer possible to draw a clear separation between understanding, on the one hand, and the senses, imagination, and the body, on the other. As João Paulo Monteiro explains, rather than such a separation, what we find is a connection, and even a precedence, of imagination over understanding⁴⁹. Understanding is «a

⁴³ Hume, THN 3.2.2.4.

⁴⁴ G.-L. L. Buffon, "Discours sur la nature des animaux", in: *Œuvres*, Bibliothèque de la Pléiade, Éditions Gallimard, Paris 2007, p. 487.

⁴⁵ *Ibid.*

⁴⁶ *Ibid.*

⁴⁷ *Ibid.*

⁴⁸ Hume, THN 3.2.2.4.

⁴⁹ The relation between imagination and understanding has been the subject of sustained debate among Hume scholars (see T. Costelloe, *The Imagination in Hume's Philosophy: The Canvas of the Mind*, Edinburgh University Press, 2018, pp. 2-7). Monteiro's interpretation resonates with perspectives also found in readings of Hume proposed by Gilles Deleuze, Yves Michaud, and Jean-Pierre Cléro.

modification of the imagination itself, a certain capacity to engage with the world that emerges [...] from the most primary layers of the subject, conceived as its origin and condition of possibility»⁵⁰. Hence Hume's assertion that reason «is nothing but a kind of instinct», and that habit, the foundation of knowledge, «is only one of the principles of nature, and derives all its force from that origin»⁵¹. These claims are difficult to grasp in their full significance without acknowledging the priority of imagination over understanding and reason. This conception of imagination (as a fundamental operation of the association of ideas essential to survival) is key to Hume's defence of the continuity between human and animal intellectual faculties. After all, the animal reason developed in dedicated sections of both the *Treatise* and the *Enquiry* is, strictly speaking, none other than Humean imagination itself, rooted in habit and nature»⁵².

Instincts and institutions

The proximity between society and animality in Hume is explored in the 1953 text «Instincts and Institutions», where Gilles Deleuze describes institutions as «procedures of satisfaction», much like instincts⁵³. Instincts are understood as natural means of satisfaction, insofar as they consist in the organism's spontaneous responses to external stimuli: reactions that enable it to fulfil its tendencies and needs. This set of responses constitutes what Deleuze calls a «specific world», that is, a world proper to the species: instincts are shared by all individuals of a given species. Institutions, by contrast, while also functioning as procedures of satisfaction, are artificial rather than natural. In this context, Deleuze writes that the subject institutes an original world between its tendencies and the external world, a world in which the artificial means of satisfaction «liberate the organism from nature by subjecting it to something else, and transform the tendency itself by inserting it into a new universe [*milieu*]»⁵⁴. These are not natural responses to stimuli, but rather the institution of an entirely new world, wherein tendencies and needs are reconfigured: marriage, for instance, releases the individual from the need to seek a partner, but that need is transformed into others, as new obligations and roles emerge within the instituted world.

Despite the distinction between instinct and institution, Deleuze argues that both represent «organized forms of possible satisfaction»⁵⁵. For him, a natural tendency is transformed when it is introduced into a new *milieu*, the institutional universe. This is his way of highlighting the continuity between the natural and the artificial that is central to Hume's account. As Hume notes regarding convention, the

⁵⁰ J. P. Monteiro, «Tendência e realidade em Hume e Freud», *Revista Discurso*, vol. 3.3 (1972) 149.

⁵¹ Hume, THN 1.3.16.9.

⁵² For further discussion of Hume's conception of animal reason, see D. Galvão, «La rationalité animale: David Hume sur l'humain et l'animal», *Siglo Dieciocho*, n. 2, (2021) 103–123.

⁵³ G. Deleuze, «Instincts et institutions», in: *id.*, *L'Île déserte*, ed. David Lapoujade, Les Éditions de Minuit, Paris 2002, p. 24. This text was originally published as the introduction to *Gilles Deleuze, Instincts et Institutions*, in the *Textes et documents philosophiques* series, edited by G. Canguilhem and curated by Deleuze himself, Classiques Hachette, Paris 1953.

⁵⁴ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁵⁵ *Ibid.*

constraint is not «contrary to these passions; for if so, it could never be entered into, nor maintained; but it is only contrary to their heedless and impetuous movement»⁵⁶. Elsewhere, Hume makes it clear that conventions serve to satisfy natural tendencies, not by repressing them, but by redirecting them: «All they can pretend to, is, to give a new direction to those natural passions, and teach us that we can better satisfy our appetites in an oblique and artificial manner, than by their headlong and impetuous motion»⁵⁷.

Deleuze highlights the priority of social institutions over properly political ones. To understand Hume, we must indeed regard political institutions as secondary to social institutions. There is, for Deleuze, no doubt that institutions such as the government «are secondary – that they already presuppose institutionalized behaviours, that they derive their utility from a properly social sphere, which ultimately finds its principle in the relationship between the social and the tendencies it organizes»⁵⁸. Marriage and private property are among the conventions Deleuze identifies as antecedent to the establishment of government, as Hume himself makes clear in Book III of the *Treatise*. There, Hume argues that without the convention of private property, one cannot overcome what he considers the principal obstacle to the preservation of society: the ease with which possessions are transferred from one person to another – in short, the instability of property. The institution of private property thus signifies the creation of a new, original, and artificial world – one that, like instinct, gives rise to a «organized forms of possible satisfaction»⁵⁹. Within these organized forms, behaviour becomes institutionalized, and the passions are satisfied in indirect, mediated ways⁶⁰.

Government emerges later, yet it is not absent from Hume's narrative of the origin of society. In Book III of the *Treatise*, Hume devotes a brief section to the question of government's origin – one that, as expected, approaches the issue from a practical standpoint, emphasizing its utility. Once again, the institution is conceived as a product of the artificial world in which natural tendencies are transformed and passions are satisfied obliquely. In broad terms, the role of government is to uphold the conventions already established within society⁶¹. Hume refers to these conventions as the rules of justice (what Deleuze describes as the institutionalization of behaviour) which prove crucial to the maintenance and preservation of the social body.

For Hume, government is artificial in nature, as it arises as a remedy for a condition that threatens the stability of the social order. The source of this threat lies in human nature itself – specifically, in the tendency to prefer immediate over distant goods. As Hume puts it, men «are not able radically to cure, either in themselves or others, that narrowness of soul, which makes them prefer the present to the remote»⁶². Individuals may be tempted to violate the rules of justice (to seize another's property, for instance)

⁵⁶ Hume, THN 3.2.2.9.

⁵⁷ Hume, THN 3.2.5.9.

⁵⁸ G. Deleuze, «Instincts et institutions», art. cit., p. 25.

⁵⁹ *Ibid.*, p. 24.

⁶⁰ Hume, THN 3.2.5.9.

⁶¹ Hume, THN 3.2.7.6.

⁶² *Ibid.*

because they fail to recognize that such transgressions, while immediately beneficial, may ultimately lead to the collapse of society and the loss of future security. Since human nature cannot be changed, Hume argues, all «they can do is to change their situation»⁶³. The solution, then, lies in creating conditions under which the immediate interests of certain individuals align with the enforcement of justice. Motivated by the desire to preserve their social standing (an immediate concern) these individuals assume responsibility for upholding the conventions. Largely «indifferent to the greater part of society», these guardians of the law «have no interest, or but a remote one, in any act of injustice; and being satisfied with their present condition, and with their part in society, have an immediate interest in every execution of justice, which is so necessary to the upholding of society»⁶⁴.

Thus, the establishment of government serves to preserve society and maintain social order. Ultimately, its function is to «render the observance of the laws of justice our nearest interest, and their violation our most remote»⁶⁵, allowing individuals to act in accordance with the rules of an artificial world in which natural needs are satisfied through indirect or oblique means. «More precisely, the role of public authority in this case is to make present the idea of a cost great enough to outweigh the appeal of antisocial behaviour»⁶⁶. Like society itself, government is understood as a product of the imagination, an invention whose efficacy lies in its capacity to meet the fundamental needs of the human species.

From this perspective, if government exists among humans but not among other animals, it is, according to Hume, because the mismatch between means and ends in the human species has made such an artifice necessary. Government is conceived as an artifice rooted, above all, in the imagination. Driven by necessity, the imagination draws upon experience to devise solutions, operating according to the logic of animal reason. Indeed, Hume does not propose a difference in kind between humans and animals, but rather a difference in degree: animals, too, possess imagination, which functions in response to their needs. Hence the parity of reason to which Hume refers in his essay *Of the Immortality of the Soul*: «The powers of men are no more superior to their wants, considered merely in this life, than those of foxes and hares are, compared to their wants and to their period of existence. The inference from parity of reason is therefore obvious»⁶⁷.

This raises the inevitable question: what, then, remains of the distinction between human and animal? According to Hume, the human species is distinguished by the complexity of its imagination and the excess of its needs – two traits that are intimately and intrinsically connected. The mismatch between means and ends in human life

⁶³ Ibid.

⁶⁴ Ibid.

⁶⁵ Ibid.

⁶⁶ R. Kuntz, «Hume: A teoria social como sistema», *Kriterion*, 52:124 (2011) 462.

⁶⁷ D. Hume, «Of the Immortality of the Soul», in: *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, ed. Eugene F. Miller, Liberty Fund, Indianapolis 1987, p. 593. In this essay, Hume argues that if we accept the mortality of animal souls, then by analogy, we must also accept the mortality of the human soul (*ibid.*, p. 597). For Hume, if the immortality of the human soul were real, its powers ought to be proportionate to the needs it experiences – not only in this life, but across all previous lives of the same soul. Yet, he contends, this is not the case: experience reveals a proportionality between the powers of the human soul and the needs of this present life.

«creates the urgency of a controlled action»⁶⁸, the effectiveness of which depends on the individual's familiarity with the surrounding world. It is through imagination that this familiarity is acquired: by discerning patterns in experience, the imagination draws connections between objects, projects past associations into the future, generates new combinations, and ultimately guides action. Yet, according to Hume, the human being is not the only animal capable of recognizing regularities in experience and using them to its advantage – without this capacity, no animal could survive⁶⁹.

Although imagination, in Hume's philosophy, is not an exclusive attribute of the human species, it is through imagination that something distinctive arises – one that sets humans apart from other animals by a difference of degree, not of kind. In humans, imagination attains such a degree of complexity that, according to Hume, it allows them to overturn their original disadvantage relative to other animals. Theological doctrine holds that man was created as a superior being, made in the image and likeness of God, and that all other species were created for his nourishment⁷⁰. Hume, by contrast, offers a different account: humanity became superior through a victory whose merit is, at best, ambiguous. It was the precariousness of the human condition in nature that led to the refinement of the imagination, and, with it, to all subsequent achievements, not only in the domain of mechanical arts, but also in the sciences⁷¹. In short, humanity was not born superior; it became superior in order to survive. From a Humean perspective, it was precisely human fragility that compelled individuals to unite in society, thereby setting in motion an endless chain of invention – of new means and ever-expanding needs⁷².

Although imagination and society serve to preserve and ease the condition of the human species, this does not mean that humanity is able to overcome its original feature: the mismatch between means and ends. For Hume, human beings do not remain content with the satisfaction of their basic needs; once these are met, new ones inevitably emerge. He speaks of an ever-expanding multiplication of needs: «If the reason of man gives him a great superiority above other animals, his necessities are proportionably multiplied upon him»⁷³. No matter how far the human species advances in technology and science, the proliferation of needs offers no relief: «his whole time, his whole capacity, activity, courage, and passion, find sufficient employment in fencing against the miseries of his present condition, and frequently, nay almost always are too slender for the business assigned them»⁷⁴.

One need gives rise to another, just as one invention sets the stage for further inventions. Once the first piece of clothing is crafted and the first shelter constructed, the techniques employed become subjects of new inquiries and experiments, which in turn lead to further innovations. Each new invention serves a novel purpose, and

⁶⁸ D. Deleule, «Anthropologie et économie chez Hume: la formation de la société civile», in: C. Gautier (dir.), *David Hume et la question de la société civile*, PUF, Paris 2001, p. 23.

⁶⁹ For the pragmatic aspect of animal reason, see Hume, THN 1.3.16.

⁷⁰ See, for instance, *Genesis*, I:26.

⁷¹ D. Hume, «Of the Rise and Progress of the Arts and Sciences», in: *Essays, Moral, Political and Literary*, op. cit. For Hume, the sciences derive from the imagination just as much as the mechanical arts.

⁷² Hume, «Of the Immortality of the Soul», in: op. cit., p. 593.

⁷³ *Ibid.*

⁷⁴ *Ibid.*

that purpose, in time, is likely to become a new necessity. A piece of clothing, for instance, may come to be valued not merely for protection, but for the admiration it inspires. What emerges is a logic of the superfluous, whereby human beings, by nature, are driven to desire and to produce constantly beyond what is strictly necessary. Luiz Roberto Monzani uses the notion of a « taste for the superfluous » to describe what he sees as the darker side of the Enlightenment: an anthropology shaped not by the image of reason emancipated from its many tutelages, but by the insatiability and indeterminacy of human desire⁷⁵. This taste for the superfluous, he writes, is «a spring inherent to man, one that operates continuously, in a temporal geometric progression, as knowledge advances»⁷⁶.

From this perspective, what distinguishes the human being from other animals is the unfolding of desire. In animals, there is a closed sequence of three terms – need, desire, and satisfaction. In humans, by contrast, this sequence is open-ended: it begins and ends with desire. Desire gives rise to an indeterminate need, which is followed by imaginative elaboration, the realization of the object, fleeting satisfaction, and once again, desire. This open series breaks « the near-perfect correspondence that exists in animals between need and fulfilment, and installs in its place a new kind of cycle, an indefinite spiral of transitory satisfactions and ever-renewed desires, each one giving rise to the next in a continuous and unending progression»⁷⁷.

In Hume's account, human society emerges not from a rupture with nature, but from the continuous unfolding of natural tendencies under the pressure of necessity. From the fragility of the human condition arises the need for artifice, and from the imagination, shared with other animals yet reaching unparalleled complexity in humans, comes the gradual invention of social and political institutions. The passage from instinct to institution does not erase the natural roots of human nature, but reorganizes them within an ever-expanding artificial world. In this way, Hume offers a profoundly naturalistic account of human society – one in which the human being remains, at every stage, an inventive animal.

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⁷⁵ L. R. Monzani, *Desejo e prazer na idade moderna*, Editora da Unicamp, Campinas 1995, p. 50.

⁷⁶ *Ibid.*, p. 52.

⁷⁷ *Ibid.*

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VALERIA ASCHERI¹

**SCIENTIFIC DISCOVERY: THE ROLE OF IMAGINATION
RAISING INVENTION
ACCORDING TO MICHAEL POLANYI'S THEORY OF
KNOWLEDGE**

Abstract

In the development of scientific theories, imagination emerges as a fundamental and indispensable methodological tool. Michael Polanyi (1891–1976), a scientist and philosopher of science, particularly emphasizes this point in his principal work, *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*. Polanyi highlights the significance of the ‘personal component’ that influences the cognitive process in a distinctive and decisive manner. Ultimately, the hypotheses formulated by scientists are shaped by both their prior knowledge – encompassing educational background and past experiences – and their individual worldview (*i.e.*, *cosmovisión* or *Weltanschauung*). According to Polanyi, knowing is an integrated human act, wherein imagination plays a crucial role: this act of cognition, while not irrational, is inherently linked to the capacity to generate ‘creative intuition’, a faculty that endows human intelligence with its unique and exceptional qualities.

Keywords: Polanyi, creative intuition, imagination, discovery, tacit knowledge.

Descoberta científica: o papel da imaginação no fomento da invenção, segundo a teoria do conhecimento de Michael Polanyi

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Resumo

No desenvolvimento de teorias científicas, a imaginação emerge como um ferramenta metodológica fundamental e indispensável. Michael Polanyi (1891-1976), cientista e filósofo da ciência, enfatiza em especial este ponto na sua obra principal, *Personal Knowledge: Rumo a uma Filosofia Pós-Crítica*. Polanyi destaca a importância da ‘componente pessoal’ que influencia o processo cognitivo de forma distinta e decisiva. Em última análise, as hipóteses formuladas por cientistas resultam do seu conhecimento anterior – que engloba tanto a formação educacional como as experiências passadas – e as suas concepções do mundo (i.e. cosmovisão ou *Weltanschauung*). Segundo Polanyi, conhecer é um acto humano integrado, no qual a imaginação desempenha um papel fundamental: este acto de cognição, apesar de não ser irracional, está inerentemente ligado à capacidade de gerar “intuição criativa”, uma faculdade que dota a inteligência humana com as suas qualidades únicas e excepcionais.

Palavras-chave: Polanyi, intuição criativa, imaginação, descoberta, conhecimento tácito.

1. Introduction. Michael Polanyi from science to philosophy of science

Michael Polanyi was born into an upper-class Jewish family (later baptized and a frequent participant in English Methodist circles). He studied medicine and, in 1913, as a scientist in the Austro-Hungarian army, participated in World War I. Subsequently, Polanyi specialized in physical chemistry, earning a doctorate for his research on the chemical foundations of life. Following his interests and political events, he moved to Berlin (Germany) and in 1929 became a lifetime member of the Kaiser Wilhelm Institute. However, in 1933, concerned about the political situation in Germany and the growing antisemitism, he moved to the University of Manchester (Great Britain), where he taught physical chemistry and continued his laboratory research, publishing more than two hundred specialized articles during his scientific career.

In the 1930s, Polanyi broadened his studies beyond the scientific realm, focusing on the relationships between the scientific community and political culture, prompted by the events that were shaking Europe, such as the persecution of scientists in Stalinist Russia. Consequently, starting in the late 1930s and then in the 1940s and 1950s, he published several essays on the organization of science in society and on the relationships between economics, science, and political philosophy, such as *Science, Faith and Society* (1946) and *Logic of Liberty* (1951).

Then, from 1948, Polanyi shifted to teaching social sciences, still at the University of Manchester, and began frequently traveling to the United States for seminars and courses at the most prestigious universities. In 1951-1952, he was invited to deliver the Gifford Lectures at the University of Aberdeen, from which, after some years of work, he would publish his most systematic and representative essay: *Personal Knowledge: Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (1958). Meanwhile, from 1955, he was appointed Senior Research Fellow at Merton College, Oxford, and a Fellow of the Royal Society. *The Study of Man* (1959) followed, in which he

presented his reflections on the concept of meaning in history, and *Beyond Nihilism* (1960). In 1962, he gave the Polanyi's Terry Lectures at Yale University, on which *The Tacit Dimension* (1966) and the collection of essays *Knowing and Being* (1969) were based. His last book, in collaboration with the American philosopher Harry Prosch, *Meaning*, was published in 1975 and developed the problems surrounding meaning in the 20th century, a question already treated synthetically in the previous *The Study of Man*, with openness to the dimensions of art and religion. He died in Northampton (Great Britain) on February 22, 1976².

Culturally, Polanyi was formed in the Hungarian branch of Habsburg culture, which, in the same time frame, had already seen the birth of great scientists and philosophers such as L. Boltzmann, E. Schrödinger, W. Pauli, L. Von Bertalanffy, L. Von Neumann, L. Wittgenstein, K. R. Popper, and the thinkers of the Vienna Circle. From a young age, based on a broad education, he cultivated interests in literature and the arts, but then turned to scientific studies and, initially, to medicine. Despite these early interests, to which he would gradually and definitively return in the second phase of his academic career, his works contain no references – as one might expect, in light of what he argued – to philosophers such as Aristotle, Thomas Aquinas, and Pascal, nor references to German philosophy and, in particular, to the idealists, or to the phenomenology of Husserl or to Jaspers³.

As Del Re (2002) explains, Polanyi occupies a unique place in the epistemology of the 20th century for several reasons. First, he was a physical chemist, but with a biological background as well, and this helped him avoid fiscalist reductionism. Furthermore, he was not attracted to the neopositivist approach because his discipline was already strongly operational in the cognitive phase. Finally, he was personally convinced of the 'unity of the person', which would lead him, in the course of his philosophical reflection, to clarify the relationship between scientific thought and religious faith. These three characteristics give a glimpse of how his epistemological reflection reveals itself to be among the most original and matured after cutting-edge scientific research that, from a very young age, had already made him known in Budapest and Berlin in the story of the discovery of the chemical bases of life⁴.

2. Knowledge as a 'personal activity'

From chemistry and his research on molecules, atoms, particles and energy transfers, Polanyi moved on to an investigation into the cognitive process and how scientific knowledge and the cogitative activities of ordinary life arise and develop, including socio-political discussions.

His discovery, then, was that knowing – the approach of a living being to

² Cfr. G. Del Re, *Michael Polanyi (1886-1976)* in *Dizionario Interdisciplinare di Scienza e Fede. Cultura scientifica, filosofia e teologia*, a cura di G. Tanzella-Nitti e A. Strumia, Urbaniana University Press - Città Nuova Editrice, Roma 2002, vol. II, pp. 2047-2054.

³ Cfr. V. Ascheri, *Interdisciplinarietà e unità del sapere nel XX secolo. Maritain, Polanyi Ladrière*, IF Press, Morolo (FR) 2014, pp. 133-137.

⁴ M. Polanyi, *Life's Irreducible Structure* in *Knowing and Being* (Edited with an introduction by M. Grene), University of Chicago Press and (UK) Routledge and Kegan Paul, Chigaco / London 1969, pp.225-239.

reality – is not reproducible in a scheme like those described by the formal sciences or hypothesized by behaviorist psychology. Rather, it is a ‘personal activity’ that encompasses all dimensions of the rational and emotional sphere: sensibility, emotionality, sociality, risk, choice, responsibility, respect for others, beliefs, etc. Thus, it becomes clear that his turn towards philosophy is the result not so much of a reflection based on the doctrines of some philosopher of the past or his contemporary, but rather of a reflection starting from science and on the identity and role of the scientist, matured in that particular century which was the 20th.

This approach leads Polanyi to reflect on and valorize his experience as a scientist, researcher, and ‘discoverer’. Lacking, therefore, a solid philosophical training, as Karl E. Sveiby notes, Polanyi was never considered a ‘true philosopher’, although his ideas influenced contemporary and subsequent philosophy of science⁵. For example, some of Polanyi’s ideas appear to have been taken up by Popper, particularly regarding the context of scientific discovery and the issue of scientific fallibilism, given that following the purely empirical-inductive scientific method does not guarantee or ensure the validity of theories, nor the eternity or immutability of discovered scientific truths⁶. And in all probability, some of his theses inspired, in addition to anticipating, certain aspects of the philosophy of science of Thomas S. Kuhn regarding the genesis of scientific theories, which fall within a historical-social and cultural framework, and of Norwood R. Hanson related to the use of *Gestalt* psychology to justify the elaboration of new scientific models and theories that may be better suited to explain a given phenomenon and are based on the so-called ‘theory-ladenness’ of experience, which argues that there are no theoretically ‘neutral’ observational data but depend on prior and sometimes ‘tacit’ theories and notions, and which depend on individual vision and reflection⁷.

3. Against pure rationality and scientific objectivism

Polanyi’s philosophical approach as a scientist has its starting point in the analysis of rationality, mostly scientific, and of the idea of ‘reasonableness’ (*Vernünftigkeit*) understood as thought dominated by reason, which is not blind and absolutist, but, on the contrary, one could say, it is illuminated and guided by all the other faculties that are very present and active in all man’s actions. From Bacon onwards, in fact, all science has placed objectivity as a constitutive characteristic, a guarantee of true and truthful knowledge, not conditioned or the result of subjective settings and elaborations that can give a distorted, if not false, vision of reality. Polanyi does not contest objectivity a priori, but the attitudes that, starting from it, have claimed to totally eliminate the human component, trying to build an ‘aseptic’ and a-personal science: the Philosopher does not argue with the neopositivists, but takes a critical position and decides to analyze the Laplacian ideal of science, which he considered

⁵ Cfr. K. E. Sveiby – T. Loyd, *Managing know how*, Bloomsbury, London 1988.

⁶ Cfr. K. R. Popper, *The Logic of Scientific Discovery*, Hutchinson & Co, London 1959.

⁷ Cfr. N. R. Hanson, *Patterns of Discovery: An Inquiry into the Conceptual Foundations of Science*, Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1958; T. S. Kuhn, *The Structure of Scientific Revolutions*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1962.

the paradigm of the ‘standard’ objective conception: even if it were possible to obtain complete knowledge of the universe, of the past, the present and the future, this would be of no use to man. It would only be a set of information on the state of the particles – the spatial coordinates and the impulses – that make up the universe, and therefore, as a sole result, the universe would be like a machine, and therefore a purely mechanistic conception.

Particularly, the Philosopher underlines that objectivism itself is put into crisis by a conception of the universe as a machine: in fact, understanding a machine requires that man evaluates its functioning and judges whether the purpose of the machine is positive or negative. The acts of the person who judges, reflects and understands, or the acts of knowledge, are not reducible to impersonality: a vision of science that wants to ignore, not only the personal and existential dimension, but also the ethical duties that the work of the scientist necessarily brings with it and any religious instances, is, according to Polanyi, to be refuted and therefore excluded⁸.

Therefore, as Torrance explicates in *Belief in Science and in Christian Life*, Polanyi contends that the scientist must adopt:

a new approach in which to overcome the harmful caesura between subject and object, mind and matter, or thought and experience, and reconstitute the natural unity of knowing and being, since without the integrative way of thinking that this rational equilibrium brings, science can only hinder its own attempts to grasp the finest and most delicate structures embedded in nature⁹.

4. The personal component of the cognitive process

Polanyi’s epistemological approach focuses on the anthropological and insists on the highly ‘personal component’ that affects the cognitive process in a unique decisive way: constructing the hypothesis, that is the starting point of making a theory which aims to explain phenomena, is the result of scientists’ previous knowledge and experience as well as his general way of thinking and seeing reality, *i.e.* his ‘*cosmovisión*’ (worldview or even *Weltanschauung*). Therefore, the hypothesis is part of the cognitive act which, without being irrational, comes out from imagination and ‘creative intuition’ proper to human act.

The fundamental Polanyian thesis presented in the book *Personal Knowledge* (1958) is that no knowledge is entirely focal or explicit, that is, there are always implicit, ‘tacit’ and subsidiary aspects, as the path that leads to knowledge develops through personal interpretation of a series of clues that point towards awareness, which will then be made explicit¹⁰. As the Philosopher explains:

⁸ Cfr. T. F. Torrance, *Il recupero del realismo nella moderna epistemologia e il pensiero di Michael Polanyi* (1984), in Th. F. Torrance (a cura di), *Senso del divino e scienza moderna*, LEV, Città del Vaticano 1992, pp. 193-281.

⁹ T. F. Torrance (ed.), *Belief in Science and in Christian Life. The relevance of M. Polanyi’s thought for Christian faith and life*, The Handsel Press, Edinburgh 1980, p. XV.

¹⁰ Cfr. M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge, Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy* (1958), University of Chicago, Chicago 1962; V. Ascheri, *Science as ‘Personal Knowledge’ in the Epistemology of Michael Polanyi*, *Forum Supplement to Acta Philosophica*, Vol. 10 (2024) 169-180.

I think we may distinguish between the personal in us, which actively enters into our commitments, and our subjective states, in which we merely endure our feelings. This distinction establishes the conception of the personal, which is neither subjective nor objective. In so far as the personal submits to requirements acknowledged by itself as independent of itself, it is not subjective; but in so far as it is an action guided by individual passions, it is not objective either. It transcends the disjunction between subjective and objective¹¹.

In all acts of understanding there is a decisive ‘personal participation’, which does not, however, make the cognitive activity an arbitrary act or a passive experience, but which qualifies it as a responsible act. Any possible cognitive act cannot in any case be neutral or free from suppositions and contextual implications which, aspiring to universal validity, is realized in a knowledge that is *objective*, in the sense that it establishes a contact with a hidden reality that one believes knowable and real.

It appears indubitable that no knowledge can be entirely ‘focal’ and made explicit, and completely ‘translatable’ rationally in an analytical and logically demonstrable way. There are always implicit, ‘tacit’, and subsidiary aspects, since the path leading to knowledge develops through the personal interpretation of a series of clues that orient towards awareness, which will then be made explicit.

5. Tacit dimension and *Gestalt Psychology*

Polanyi argues that it is precisely the tacit dimension that is fundamental and primary, as it precedes and grounds all knowledge, which is certainly not resolved within the realm of the expressible, the formalizable, and the linguistic – that is, on what is ‘signifiable’ within the logical-rational domain and explains that:

what is usually described as knowledge as it is formulated in written words, schemes or mathematical formulas, is only one type of knowledge; while the unformulated knowledge, which is what we have of something we are in the act of doing, is another form of knowledge. If we call the first ‘explicit knowledge’ and the second ‘tacit knowledge’, we can say that we always tacitly know, that we are the support of the truthfulness of our explicit knowledge¹².

Eliminating this tacit component, as traditional epistemology has attempted to do by considering knowledge only that which is expressible, objectifiable and perfectly controllable and verifiable, would result, according to what Polanyi states in the essay *Tacit Knowledge*: «that tacit thought forms an indispensable part of all knowledge, then the ideal of eliminating all personal elements of knowledge would, in effect, aim at the destruction of all knowledge. The ideal of exact science would turn

¹¹ M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge, Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, op.cit., p. 300.

¹² M. Polanyi, *The Study of Man*, University of Chicago Press, Chicago 1959, p. 65.

out to be fundamentally misleading and possibly a source of devastating fallacies».¹³

Reasoning about this implicit and inexpressible aspect, one cannot fail to recall and juxtapose this central point of Polanyian epistemology to what Wittgenstein writes, in the section that concludes the *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus* (1922), stating that there is an ineffable aspect, the so-called ‘mystical’, which cannot be expressed and therefore about which we cannot speak but only be silent¹⁴. Although the comparison between Polanyi and Wittgenstein deserves further investigation, we can say that both recognize that there is a dimension present in human beings on which not only science but not even philosophy can give an exact and expressible explanation through the ‘interpretive language’ of rationality, but this does not mean that it does not exist or that it is an aspect in some way unreliable and, so to speak, ‘optional’ in the cognitive process: on the contrary, it is an aspect that is always present and, indeed, stands as a necessary foundation for knowledge, particularly in the moment of ‘discovery’ to occur.

In explaining the tacit dimension of knowledge and the role it plays in the dynamics of the cognitive process, Polanyi focuses on *Gestalt* psychology (*Gestaltpsychologie*) – born in Germany and then developed in the United States in those years – arguing that this approach can be very useful in understanding the ways of observing the phenomena that are studied, and in their understanding or in the discovery of new properties or ways to progress in research¹⁵. As the philosopher explains:

All authentic scientific research begins by stumbling upon a profound and promising problem, and that is half the discovery. [...]. My response is to re-establish an ancient metaphysical conception in new terms, guided by *Gestalt* psychology. We give meaning to experience based on clues that we are often aware of only as indicators of their hidden meaning; this meaning is an aspect of reality which as such may yet reveal itself in an indeterminate range of future discoveries.

This is in fact my definition of external reality: reality is something that attracts our attention with clues that stimulate and entice our minds to go further and further into it and which, since it must give its attractive power to its independent existence, it can always manifest itself in still unexpected ways. If we have grasped an authentic and deeply hidden aspect of reality, then its future manifestations will be unexpected confirmations of our present knowledge of it¹⁶.

Consequently, Polanyi states in the essay *The Unaccountable Element in Science*

¹³ M. Polanyi, *The Tacit Dimension*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1966, p. 20.

¹⁴ Cfr. L. Wittgenstein, *Tractatus Logico-Philosophicus*, Routledge & Kegan Paul, London 1922 (from n. 6.44 to n. 7).

¹⁵ Cfr. J. G. Benjafield, *Psicologia dei processi cognitivi*, Il Mulino-Prentice Hall International, Bologna 1995, pp. 25-33; C. Vinti, *Michael Polanyi. Conoscenza scientifica e immaginazione creativa*, Studium, Roma 1999, pp. 59-74.

¹⁶ M. Polanyi, «The Unaccountable Element in Science» in *Philosophy*, Vol. 37, No. 139 (Jan., 1962), p. 13.

that he wants «to restate an ancient meta-physical conception in new terms guided by *Gestalt Psychology*»¹⁷ because what is usually described as knowledge as it is formulated in written words, schemes or mathematical formulas, is only one type of knowledge; while the unformulated knowledge, which is what we have of something we are in the act of doing, is another form of knowledge, but of the same rank and of extreme value. Moreover, Polanyi explains:

We make sense of experience by relying on clues of which we are often aware only as pointers to their hidden meaning; this meaning is an aspect of a reality which as such can yet reveal itself in an indeterminate range of future discoveries. This is in fact my definition of external reality: reality is something that attracts our attention by clues which harass and beguile our minds into getting ever closer to it, and that, since it owes this attractive power to its independent existence, can always manifest itself in still unexpected ways¹⁸.

6. The creative and the operational aspects of cognitive process

Studying the cognitive process that leads to discovery involves two aspects of the person. Polanyi distinguishes particularly two phases: the ‘creative’ phase and the ‘operational’ phase.

The first one is characterized by the free creation of man who, in order to orient himself in the reality of a thousand and more details, must try to learn it by selecting, classifying, ordering information, as the painter does when he has to represent a landscape very rich in nuances and objects. Regarding this first aspect, Polanyi explains that:

Discovery is made therefore in two moves: one deliberate, the other spontaneous, the spontaneous move being evoked in ourselves by the action of our deliberate effort. The deliberate thrust is a focal act of the imagination, while the spontaneous response to it, which brings discovery, belongs to the same class as the spontaneous co-ordination of muscles responding to our intention to lift our arm, or the spontaneous co-ordination of visual clues in response to our looking at something. This spontaneous act of discovery deserves to be recognized as the *creative intuition*¹⁹.

The second phase consists instead in verifying, through experiments and tests of various kinds, what was theorized or verified only a few times.

According to Polanyi knowing is a human act as a whole, in which imagination plays a fundamental role in the cognitive act which, without becoming irrational for this reason, is linked to the capacity of generating a ‘creative intuition’ that

¹⁷ *Ibidem*, p. 13.

¹⁸ *Ibidem*.

¹⁹ M. Polanyi, «The Creative Imagination» in *The Concept of Creativity in Science and Art*, eds. Denis Dutton and Michael Krausz, Martinus Nijhoff, 198, Hague, Netherlands, pp. 103.

qualifies human intellect in a unique and special way. We can say that imagination, as an essential element of human knowledge, is the ability that, based on previous experiences and reasoning through analogy, allows us, for example, to predict what might happen in the future or to understand a phenomenon intuitively and rapidly, without it being fully developed or studied in depth. As Polanyi explains:

Our conceptual imagination, like its artistic counterpart, draws inspirations from contacts with experiences. And like the works of imaginative art, the constructions of mathematics will tend therefore to disclose those hidden principles of the experienced world of which some scattered traces had first stimulated the imaginative process by which these constructions were conceived²⁰.

7. The role of imagination in the creative intuition

In the elaboration of scientific theories, the faculty of imagination emerges as a fundamental and irreplaceable methodological tool. Several epistemologists and philosophers of science, notably Karl Popper, Thomas Kuhn and our key author Michael Polanyi, have emphasized the crucial role of imagination, particularly within the ‘context of discovery’. The distinction between the ‘context of discovery’ and the ‘context of justification’ has significantly shaped discussions concerning discovery in 20th-century philosophy of science, establishing a clear division between the generation of a novel idea or hypothesis and its subsequent defense (testing, verification). The context of discovery encompasses the *de facto* thinking processes, whereas the context of justification pertains to the *de jure* defense of the veracity of these thoughts²¹.

According to Polanyi, imagination transcends its conventional depiction as a mere creative or fanciful faculty, functioning instead as a fundamental and indispensable constituent of the scientific epistemic process. He posits that scientific discovery is often predicated upon a moment of creative intuition, a spontaneous cognitive event wherein imagination facilitates the researcher’s discernment of latent connections and concealed significances within the fabric of reality. This capacity for insightful creation, intrinsically linked to the human activity of knowing, is neither irrational nor arbitrary; rather, it constitutes a unique and epistemologically valuable mode of engagement with the phenomenal world.

Explicitly referring to the two complementary phases of the cognitive process we already discussed in the previous paragraph, Polanyi underlines that the creative dimension encompasses imagination and innovation, while the operative dimension relies on the rigorous verification and practical application of hypotheses. The creative phase, in particular, hinges upon a form of spontaneous coordination between the cognitive apparatus and the objective world, whereby imagination serves as a catalyst

²⁰ M. Polanyi, *Personal Knowledge, Towards a Post-Critical Philosophy*, p. 46.

²¹ Cfr. C. Vinti, *Michael Polanyi. Conoscenza scientifica e immaginazione creativa*, Studium, Roma 1999, pp. 55-62.

in the formulation of novel hypotheses and the unveiling of previously unrecognized properties or aspects of natural phenomena. This creative intuition, sometimes contextualized within Polanyi's concept of 'tacit knowing', enables scientists to achieve paradigm-shifting breakthroughs and to propel the advancement of scientific knowledge²².

According to Polanyi, imagination is, in a certain sense, a capacity to project being into other ways in which it 'can', or 'will be able to', or 'could' be: imagination is in some way the fruit of tacit knowledge itself, which, at a certain point, can emerge and give rise to so-called 'reasonable entities' (*i.e.*, entities that do not exist in reality but only in fantasy) and of all kinds in living beings. Imagination certainly sees something deeper and more complex in reality, both in its structure and in its possible developments.

Un-Chol Shin delves very well into the roles of intuition and imagination and their mutual relationship in Polanyian epistemology, specifying that:

The roles of intuition and imagination, in acts of the human mind complement each other. Polanyi explains their functional relationship by stating that "intuition informs the imagination which in its turn releases the power of intuition."²³ The greater is the power of intuition, the greater is the power of imagination. With a greater power of imagination, our intuition can sense a deeper coherence. Our imagination carries all the available resources forward, pointing to the future manifestations of a deeply hidden coherence, while our intuition integrates those resources and recognizes the final result of our imagination to be valid. Even when our quest for a coherence has ended, our intuition and imagination are not exhausted. The inquiring mind returns again for a deeper, more profound new vision of coherence²⁴.

To conclude, Polanyi argues that imagination constitutes an essential element in the process of scientific discovery, affording researchers the capacity to transcend the limitations inherent in purely logical or deductive reasoning and to access deeper, more subtly nuanced facets of reality. As a uniquely human faculty, imagination renders science a dynamic, personalized, and creative endeavor, contributing decisively to both innovation and invention and fostering a more comprehensive understanding of the cosmos.

Conclusion: *Knowing and Being*

The central point is that a person is not an 'automaton,' and therefore their actions - their activity in general - are not automatic. This is a fundamental thesis for mechanistic doctrines, which hold that an activity is entirely determined by the initial conditions from which it arises. The concept of 'person' is closely linked to

²² Cfr. M. Polanyi, «*The Creative Imagination*», in *The Concept of Creativity in Science and Art*, *op.cit.* pp. 91-108.

²³ *Ibidem*, p. 104.

²⁴ U.-C. Shin, «*The Role of Imagination in Integrative Knowledge*», in *Tradition and Discovery*, 21 (2), (1994) 21.

that of 'living being,' and thus an agent in all actions, including those of knowledge, which cannot be considered as a set of automatisms or as processes determined solely from external factors. The specifically human ability to have ideas, to give life to new works, to have initiatives and to invent new tools or new ways of acting, require the 'unique' ability that is that of imagination and precisely from imagination comes creativity and the ability to grasp new perspectives and find the most suitable solutions to problems.

Knowing and Being, the title of the latest collection of articles published posthumously and edited by Marjorie Green²⁵, identifies these two concepts as the fundamental aspects of human existence. However, they do not merely give rise to actions such as acting, taking risks, or adapting to new or unforeseen circumstances; rather, they also involve engaging in these activities in a conscious and reflective manner. This entails understanding and executing actions within a broader perspective – one that is as comprehensive as possible – encompassing the entirety of reality and the history of the universe.

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²⁵ Cfr. M. Polanyi, *Knowing and Being*, Edited with an introduction by M. Grene. University of Chicago Press and Routledge and Kegan Paul, Chicago 1969.

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NATHANIEL GAN¹

IMAGINATION-BASED ARTIFICIAL INTELLIGENCE

Abstract

This paper highlights imagination-based artificial intelligence as a new and promising approach to artificial intelligence (AI). The characteristic features of imagination-based AI are a framing of target tasks in terms of affordances and an identification of those affordances using internal simulations. Systems incorporating the imagination-based approach have attained comparable performance levels to deep-learning-based models while having lower data requirements and greater explainability. Work remains to be done to develop the breadth of applicability of the imagination-based approach, and this class of AI systems raises philosophically interesting issues regarding the possibility of imagination in artificial systems.

Key words: artificial intelligence; imagination; simulations; affordances; deep learning

Inteligência artificial baseada na imaginação

Resumo

Este artigo destaca a inteligência artificial baseada na imaginação como uma nova e promissora aproximação à inteligência artificial (AI). As características da IA baseada na imaginação são a definição das tarefas-alvo em termos de *affordances* e a identificação dessas *affordances* pelo uso de simulações internas. Os sistemas que incorporam a aproximação baseada na imaginação atingiram níveis de desempenho comparáveis aos

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modelos baseados em *deep-learning* apesar de terem requisitos de dados mais baixos e uma maior compreensibilidade. Ainda há trabalho a fazer para desenvolver a amplitude de aplicabilidade das propostas baseadas na imaginação, e esta classe de sistemas de IA levanta questões filosóficas interessantes acerca da possibilidade da imaginação em sistemas artificiais.

Palavras-chave: inteligência artificial; imaginação; simulações; affordances; deep learning

Deep learning currently represents one of the most popular approaches to artificial intelligence (AI), having found a wide range of applications to autonomous vehicles, chatbots, and game-playing engines, among other things. This interest in deep learning is primarily motivated by its advantages over traditional machine learning models, compared to which deep-learning-based models are able to process larger volumes of data more efficiently to perform at higher levels. But deep learning also has its drawbacks. Neural networks are known to require large amounts of training data and be computationally expensive. It is also often challenging to interpret trained models or explain their decisions. So despite the current popularity and success of deep learning, it might be worth exploring other approaches to AI.

This paper aims to highlight a recent and lesser-known approach to AI that presents a viable alternative to deep learning: *imagination-based AI*². It will be seen that imagination-based AI shares some of the advantages that deep learning has over traditional machine learning. At the same time, imagination-based AI mitigates the weaknesses of deep learning pertaining to data and computational requirements, and offers greater interpretability. As an area for research, furthermore, imagination-based AI provides potentially fruitful avenues for technical and philosophical exploration.

In what is to come, §1 introduces the imagination-based approach to AI. §2 makes a case for the viability of this approach by arguing that it shares some strengths of deep learning while mitigating some of its weaknesses. §§3–4 highlight potential areas for technical and philosophical research.

1. Imagination-based AI

The imagination-based approach to AI has two distinctive characteristics. The first concerns the conceptualisation of the target task. According to some popular views in ecological psychology, animals learn to function in their environment by perceiving possible ways in which they can interact with objects around them—James Gibson³ called these possible interactions *affordances*⁴. Imagination-based

²The philosophical appropriateness of this term will be considered in §4.

³J. J. Gibson. *The Perception of the Visual World*. Houghton Mifflin, Boston 1950 and *The Ecological Approach to Visual Perception*. Routledge, New York 1979.

⁴Views differ in the literature over how precisely to understand the nature of affordances and their role in natural selection—see I. Chong, I. & R. W. Proctor, «On the evolution of a radical concept: Affordances according to Gibson and their subsequent use and development» in *Perspectives on Psychological Science*, 15(1) (2019) 117–132.

AI systems adapt this idea by framing their tasks in terms of affordances. When attempting to identify a chair in its environment, for instance, an imagination-based system might seek to detect objects that afford sitting, and take this affordance as a key indicator for whether a given object is a chair. This is in contrast to deep learning models, which typically frame object-detection tasks in terms of pattern-matching for visual features.

With a task framed in terms of affordances, a second distinctive feature of imagination-based AI is that it attempts to detect these affordances using internal simulations. When attempting to determine if an object affords sitting, an imagination-based system might run simulations in which a human attempts to sit on the object, and deduce the presence of the sitting-affordance based on the results of the simulation. To be sure, the use of representations of world states to inform model decisions is already a known technique in AI systems⁵. The imagination-based approach develops this technique further by integrating the use of world models with affordance-detection methods.

An example of imagination-based AI is the chair-detection system introduced in Wu et al.⁶ and implemented in Wu et al.⁷ and Meng et al.⁸. This system uses an affordance-based definition of ‘chair’ as follows:

An object which can be stably placed on a flat horizontal surface in such a way that a typical human is able to sit (adopt or rest in a posture in which the body is supported on the buttocks and thighs and the torso is more or less upright) stably above the ground⁹.

Given an unidentified object, the system takes as input images of the target object from different perspectives (when implemented in an embodied system, the images are obtained using a camera attached to a robot). An internal three-dimensional simulation of the target object in its present orientation is then constructed.

Then, the system performs two series of simulations to determine, respectively, the orientations in which the object can be stably placed on the ground and whether a human can sit stably on the object in its stable orientations. In the first series of simulations, the system simulates the motion of the object under the usual physical laws when dropped from a height after some rotation in 3D space. An orientation is considered stable if, when dropped from that orientation, the rotational and

⁵ D. Ha, & J. Schmidhuber, «World models» in *arXiv preprint* (2018) 1–21; Schmidhuber, J. «On learning to think: Algorithmic information theory for novel combinations of reinforcement learning controllers and recurrent neural world models». *arXiv preprint* (2015) 1–36. Thanks to a reviewer for highlighting this point.

⁶ H. Wu, D. Misra & G. S. Chirikjian, «Is that a chair? Imagining affordances using simulations of an articulated human body». *IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation*, Paris, 2020 :10.1109/ICRA40945.2020.9197384

⁷ H. Wu, D. Misra & G. S. Chirikjian *Put the bear on the chair! Intelligent robot interaction with previously unseen chairs via robot imagination*. *arXiv preprint* (2022a):arXiv:2108.05539

⁸ Meng, X., Wu, H., Ruan, S., & Chirikjian, G. S.. «Prepare the chair for the bear! Robot imagination of sitting affordance to reorient previously unseen chairs». *arXiv preprint* (2023): doi:arXiv:2306.11448v1

⁹ H. Wu & G.S. Chirikjian, Can I pour into it? Robot imagining open containability affordance of previously unseen objects via physical simulations. *IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters*, 6(1) (2020) 271–278.

translational motion of the object is below a threshold (determined during training¹⁰). In the second series of simulations, the simulated object is oriented to a stable position, and a simulated humanoid is dropped onto it. The humanoid's final resting position is considered a sitting position if its height, joint angles, and contact with the object fall within predetermined thresholds. The target object is classified as a chair if for at least one orientation, the simulated humanoid finds a sitting position at least once.

Besides this example, the imagination-based approach has also been applied to object rearrangement tasks¹¹, and the identification of other objects like containers¹², frying pans¹³, tools¹⁴, and others¹⁵.

2. Strengths of imagination-based AI

The imagination-based approach to AI is relatively unknown—whereas deep learning has found a wide range of applications, the use of imagination-based AI has hitherto not extended far beyond the examples cited above. Nevertheless, this section will argue, the imagination-based approach has significant strengths.

To begin with, the performance levels of imagination-based systems are comparable to those attained by deep learning models. One consideration typically raised in favour of deep learning is the improved performance of deep learning algorithms relative to traditional machine learning algorithms. In a 2017 study comparing various models aimed at predicting energy consumption, for instance, it was found that deep learning models surpass benchmarks set by models based on traditional machine learning algorithms such as linear regression, support vector machines, decision trees, and Gaussian processes¹⁶. Deep learning models have also been shown to perform at higher levels than traditional machine learning models at

¹⁰ The system uses a training set of 30 objects from the chair class of the Princeton ModelNet40 dataset (Wu et al., 2015). The thresholds are chosen in such a way as to maximise sitting quality and accuracy across the training examples.

¹¹ Wu, H., Ye, J., Meng, X., Paxton, C., & Chirikjian, G. S. (2022b). *Transporters with visual foresight for solving unseen rearrangement tasks*. arXiv preprints.

¹² Wu, H., & Chirikjian, G. S. (2020). Can I pour into it? Robot imagining open containability affordance of previously unseen objects via physical simulations. *IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters*, 6(1), 271–278.

¹³ Ho, S. B. (2023). Why is that a good or not a good frying pan? Knowledge representation for functions of objects and tools for design understanding, improvement, and generation. *arXiv*. doi:10.48550/arXiv.2303.06152

¹⁴ Zhu, Y., Zhao, Y., & Zhu, S. (2015). Understanding Tools: Task-Oriented Object Modeling, Learning and Recognition. *IEEE Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition*, 2855–2864. doi:10.1109/CVPR.2015.7298903

¹⁵ Bar-Aviv, E., & Rivlin, E. (2016). Functional 3D Object Classification Using Simulation of Embodied Agent. *Proceedings of the British Machine Vision Conference*, 307–316.

¹⁶ N. G. Paterakis, E. Mocanu, M. Gibescu, B. Stappers & W. Alst., «Deep Learning Versus Traditional Machine Learning Methods for Aggregated Energy Demand Prediction in 2017 IEEE PES Innovative Smart Grid Technologies Conference Europe (2017) 1–6.

tasks like image recognition¹⁷, natural language processing¹⁸, fraud detection¹⁹, and others.

Imagination-based AI shares this advantage of deep learning, having attained performance levels comparable to those attained by state-of-the-art deep learning models where the two approaches are applicable. The chair-detection system introduced in §1 attained 97% accuracy on a test set comprising 300 labelled images of randomly oriented objects, and an accuracy of 94.4% in physical experiments with previously unseen objects. In comparison, appearance-based models that use convolutional neural networks attained below 90% accuracy on the same test set²⁰. Some other examples are given in the table below.

Task	Imagination-based systems	Deep learning models
Chair detection	(Wu et al., 2022a; Wu et al., 2020): Accuracy = 97% (Hinkle & Olson, 2013): Accuracy = 90%	(Kanezaki et al., 2018): Accuracy = 83.0% (Su et al., 2018): Accuracy = 86.3%
Object rearrangement	(Wu et al., 2022b): Accuracy = 74.35%	(Seita et al., 2021): Accuracy = 48.47%
Container detection	(Wu & Chirikjian, 2020): Accuracy = 100%; Success rate = 98.18% (Hinkle & Olson, 2013): Accuracy = 93%	(Do et al., 2018): Accuracy = 100%; Success rate = 91.30%

The imagination-based approach also has an advantage over deep learning when it comes to data requirements. Deep learning models often require numerous training examples to reach their performance levels. The deep-learning-based chair-detection system in Kanezaki, Matsushita & Nishida²¹ attained the performance level observed above after training on close to 10,000 examples, while the deep-learning-based container-detection system in Do et al.²² was trained on 21,000 examples. The high data requirements of deep learning models make them computationally costly,

¹⁷ Y. Lai, «A Comparison of Traditional Machine Learning and Deep Learning in Image Recognition», in *Journal of Physics: Conference Series*, 1314, (2019) 1–8.

¹⁸ Li, H. «Deep learning for natural language processing: advantages and challenges», *National Science Review*, 5(1), (2018) 24–26.

¹⁹ Gupta, S. *Deep learning vs. traditional machine learning algorithms used in credit card fraud detection*. (Masters thesis). National College of Ireland (2016).

²⁰ A. Kanezaki, Y. Matsushita, & Y. Nishida, «Rotationnet: Joint object categorization and pose estimation using multiviews from unsupervised viewpoints». *Proceedings of the IEEE Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition*, (2018) 5010–5019; J. C. Su, M. Gadelha, R. Wang & S. Maji «A deeper look at 3d shape classifiers». *Second Workshop on 3D Reconstruction Meets Semantics* (2018).

²¹ A. Kanezaki, Y. Matsushita & Y. Nishida «Rotationnet: Joint object categorization and pose estimation using multiviews from unsupervised viewpoints», in *Proceedings of the IEEE Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition*, 5010–5019.

²² T. Do, A. Nguyen, & I. Reid «Affordancenet: An end-to-end deep learning approach for object affordance detection», in *IEEE International Conference on Robotics and Automation*, (2018) 1–5.

which potentially leads to practical limitations in the long run²³.

Imagination-based AI systems require considerably less training data. The imagination-based chair-detection system described in §1 attained its accuracy of 97% after training on just 30 examples, while the imagination-based container-detection system in Wu and Chirikjian²⁴ attained the accuracy observed above after training on 11 examples. The imagination-based object-detection system in Hinkle and Olson²⁵ was able to detect four classes of objects with 80% accuracy after training on 85 examples. Insofar as these examples are representative of the data requirements of imagination-based AI, this approach appears to mitigate a weakness of deep learning.

Another well-known limitation of deep learning is a lack of interpretability. The training of deep learning models usually involves little human intervention—it is left up to the model to identify the relevant features from training examples and relate these features to the target tasks. Consequently, after a model has been trained and deployed, the process by which it arrives at its decisions is often somewhat opaque. While it is possible to track the activation of various nodes in a neural network, it is difficult—often practically impossible—to identify the input features that correspond to the activation of each node. And even if it is in principle possible to implement deep learning models whose working is comprehensible, the more successful deep learning models in practice are usually of such complexity that opacity is practically unavoidable. For this reason, deep learning models are typically labelled ‘black boxes’, and sometimes thought to have limited utility for the purpose of scientific discovery (Raghu & Schmidt; Rudin)²⁶. This lack of explainability has ethical implications for the use of AI systems. For instance, a less explainable system makes it difficult for users to tell when system decisions are incorrect or unreliable, and hence require greater epistemic trust from their users (Buijsman & Veluwenkamp; Gouveia & Malik; Miller)²⁷. Besides this, it has also been argued that less explainable AI systems lend themselves less readily to contestation (Henin & Métayer)²⁸, make algorithmic bias less detectable²⁹ (Chuan et al.), and subsequently might even infringe on the

²³ N. C. Thompson, , K. Greenewald, K. Lee, G. F. Manso, *The computational limits of deep learning*. arXiv preprint, 2022.

²⁴ H. Wu, & G. S. Chirikjian, «Can I pour into it? Robot imagining open containability affordance of previously unseen objects via physical simulations», in *IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters*, 6(1), 2020, 271–278.

²⁵ L.Hinkle, & E. Olson, «Predicting object functionality using physical simulations». *IEEE/RSJ International Conference on Intelligent Robots and Systems* (2013) 2784–2790.

²⁶ , M. Raghu, & E. Schmidt, «A survey of deep learning for scientific discovery», in arXiv preprint (2020); Rudin, C. «Stop explaining black box machine learning models of high stakes decisions and use interpretable models instead». *Nature Machine Intelligence*, 1(5), (2019) 206–215.

²⁷ S. Buijsman & H. Veluwenkamp «Spotting When Algorithms Are Wrong» in *Minds and Machines* (2022); S. S. Gouveia & J. Malik «Crossing the trust gap in medical AI: Building an abductive bridge for XAI». *Philosophy and Technology*, 37(3), (2024) 1–25.; T. Miller «Explanation in artificial intelligence: Insights from the social sciences», in *Artificial intelligence*, 267 (2019) 1–38. Thanks to two reviewers for helping to clarify this point.

²⁸ C. Henin & D. L. Métayer «Beyond explainability: justifiability and contestability of algorithmic decision systems», in *AI and Society*, 37 (2022) 1397–1410.

²⁹ C. Henin & D. L. Métayer, «Beyond explainability: justifiability and contestability of algorithmic decision systems», in *AI and Society*, 37, (2022) 1397–1410.

autonomy of their users (Bayamlioğlu; Lyons et al.)³⁰.

Imagination-based AI systems run into fewer issues with explainability because their inner workings are more perspicuous. Since it is known that such systems frame their tasks in terms of object affordances, the features that influence the systems' decisions are less mysterious—the decisions may be expected to depend primarily on the detection of affordances. And since imagination-based systems detect affordances using internal simulations, we can examine the process by which these systems arrive at their decisions by examining the simulations. When the chair-detection system in §1 classifies an object as a chair, for instance, the simulation results would reveal the orientations of the target object the system considered stable, and the expected behaviour of humans when attempting to sit on the object. This greater interpretability mitigates the limitations of deep learning models with respect to explainability. By having greater insight into the process by which imagination-based systems arrive at their decisions, users are in a better position to tell when the system's results are unreliable and intervene accordingly. This greater explainability is particularly significant in view of the observed performance levels of imagination-based systems above, since there is often thought to be a trade-off between the explainability and performance levels of AI systems (Došilović, Brčić & Hlupić)³¹.

Besides the ability of AI to perform tedious or difficult tasks, we might also be interested in AI as a model of human intelligence. Indeed, it is sometimes thought that one factor contributing to the success of deep learning is the resemblance between the structures of neural networks and human cognition. For instance, the process of visual perception in humans is thought to have a hierarchical structure in which perceived features move from being simple to abstract along the process (Goodale & Milner; Hong et al.)³². Similarly, convolutional neural networks process images by passing activation values sequentially through layers of the network, with activation values in nodes corresponding to progressively more complex features in later layers. This resemblance between the two structures is sometimes thought to explain the effectiveness of convolutional neural networks at image recognition tasks (Khaligh-Razavi & Kriegeskorte; Yamins & DiCarlo)³³. The process by which humans comprehend and summarise an article is also thought to

³⁰ E. Bayamlioğlu, «The right to contest automated decisions under the General Data Protection Regulation: Beyond the so-called “right to explanation”», in *Regulation and Governance*. (2021) ; , H. Lyons, , E.Velloso & , T. Miller «Conceptualising contestability: Perspectives on contesting algorithmic decisions», in *Proceedings of the ACM on Human-Computer Interaction*, 5, (2021) 1–25.

³¹ , F. K. Došilović, M. Brčić, & N. Hlupić (2018). «Explainable artificial intelligence: A survey». *2018 41st International Convention on Information and Communication Technology, Electronics and Microelectronics (MIPRO)*, 210–215; Gunning, D., Stefik, M., Choi, J., Miller, T., Stumpf, S., & Yang, G. (2019). XAI—Explainable artificial intelligence. *Science Robotics*, 4(37) This purported relation has more recently been contested — see for instance Crook et al. (2023): Crook, B., Schlüter, M., & Speith, T. Revisiting the performance-explainability trade-off in explainable artificial intelligence (XAI). *arXiv preprint* (2023) 1–9.

³² M. A. Goodale & A. D. Milner, «Separate visual pathways for perception and action». *Trends in Neurosciences*, 15(1), (1992) 20–25 ; , H. Hong, D. L. Yamins, N. J. Majaj & J. J. DiCarlo «Explicit information for category-orthogonal object properties increases along the ventral stream», in *Nature Neuroscience*, 19(4), (2016) 613–622.

³³ S. M. Khaligh-Razavi & N. Kriegeskorte. «Deep supervised, but not unsupervised, models may explain IT cortical representation», in *PLoS Computational Biology*, 10(11) (2014); D. L. Yamins & J. J. DiCarlo, «Using goal-driven deep learning models to understand sensory cortex», in *Nature Neuroscience*, 19(3), (2016) 356–365.

follow a hierarchical structure, which, when implemented as a neural network, yields an abstractive text summarisation model that outperforms alternatives in producing human-like results³⁴. From this perspective, the accuracy of deep learning models in reproducing human decisions serves as evidence that neural networks can model human intelligence.

However, there are also reasons to think that deep learning models might be limited as models of human intelligence. For one, as noted above, the number of training examples required to train deep learning models far exceeds the number of examples humans may plausibly be expected to require when learning to perform tasks like object recognition. Also, the low explainability of deep learning models implies that our grounds of claiming resemblance between deep learning models and human intelligence are limited. Even if such models can attain high accuracy levels, this only shows that they can replicate human behaviour at certain tasks; it would be difficult to claim with confidence that the observed behaviour is the result of human-like processes.

In these respects, imagination-based systems better model human intelligence than do deep learning models. As observed earlier, the performance levels of imagination-based systems are comparable to those attained by deep learning models, so the two approaches are on a par with respect to replicating human behaviour. At the same time, the number of training examples required by imagination-based systems to attain these performance levels are typically fewer than a hundred—closer to what human learning may be expected to require. Moreover, their greater explainability allows us to examine the processes by which they produce their behaviour and compare them to human cognition. To be sure, explainability alone does not guarantee that imagination-based AI accurately models human intelligence when it comes to the relevant tasks. Further work would be required to determine if, for instance, humans learn to recognise chairs by considering the stability of objects and the ways they interact with humans.

Nevertheless, there is some reason to think that the processes used by imagination-based systems are human-like in important respects. For one, according to popular views in ecological psychology, animals do learn to interact with their environment by perceiving object affordances. Furthermore, some research in cognitive science suggests that humans sometimes do employ mental processes resembling the internal simulations of imagination-based systems. In an study by Metzler and Shepard³⁵, for example, human subjects were presented with pairs of similar-looking objects differing by a rotation and asked to determine if the objects are congruent. Subjects' introspective reports suggest that they performed the tasks by mentally rotating the objects, and these reports were corroborated by the observation that subjects' response times to the task increase linearly with the angular displacement of the objects. Other experiments similarly suggest that humans work with mental images

³⁴ M. Yang, C. Li., Y. Shen, Q. Wu, Z. Zhao, & X. Chen, Hierarchical Human-Like Deep Neural Networks for Abstractive Text Summarization. *IEEE Transactions on Neural Networks and Learning Systems*, 32(6), (2021) 2744–2757.

³⁵ J. Metzler, & R.N. Shepard. Mental rotation of three-dimensional objects. *Science*, 171, (1971) 701–703.

when performing certain tasks (Ball et al.; Finke & Pinker)³⁶. Some studies moreover suggest that the performance of imagination-based AI is at least partly due to its use of human-like processes. In a study of human shape perception, it was found that the accuracy and speed with which humans infer the shape of an occluded object from visual cues agree with those of AI models based on simulations, even more so than with those of models based on convolutional neural networks (Yildirim et al.)³⁷. Lake et al. also argue, along these lines, that aligning AI systems with human intelligence would require that the former move beyond mere pattern-recognition algorithms to the use of causal world models.

The upshot is that the imagination-based approach to AI is reasonably viable, sharing the strengths of deep learning while mitigating some of its weaknesses. To be sure, adopting the imagination-based approach might not require abandoning other approaches. Although the examples of imagination-based AI examined above do not rely at all on neural networks, it might be possible for the imagination-based approach to come in as an enhancement to deep learning. There might be an AI system with the capacity to detect numerous objects via the imagination-based approach, but it might also be too resource-intensive in practice to perform the simulations corresponding to all these possible objects for a single instance of object detection. Such a system could perhaps be made more efficient by having a deep learning model early in the pipeline that narrows down the class of candidate objects before turning to the imagination-based approach to classify among these candidates. If the classification required by the deep learning component of such a system is less extensive than that required of models based purely on deep learning, perhaps the data requirements and complexity of such a system can still be reduced, and the hybrid system would retain some strengths of imagination-based AI.

3. Technical limitations

For its strengths, imagination-based AI as it presently stands also has limitations compared to more popular approaches to AI, particularly with respect to generalisability. While deep-learning-based models have found a wide variety of applications, the imagination-based approach has thus far been applied mostly to object recognition tasks. Several obstacles affect the generalisability of the imagination-based approach.

First, the generalisability of imagination-based systems runs into a conceptual challenge, since at present it is difficult to see how some tasks can be made amenable to the imagination-based approach. For instance, it is unclear how text summarisation,

³⁶ T. Ball, S. Kosslyn & B. Reiser, «Visual images preserve metric spatial information: evidence from studies of image scanning», in *Experimental Psychology: Human Perception and Performance*, 4, (1978) 47–60.; R. A. Finke & S. Pinker «Directional scanning of remembered visual patterns», in *Journal of Experimental Psychology: Learning, Memory and Cognition*, 9(3), (1983) 398–410.

³⁷ I. Yildirim, M.H. Siegel, A.A. Soltani, S.R. Chaudhari & J.B. Tenenbaum, «3D Shape Perception Integrates Intuitive Physics and Analysis-by-Synthesis». *arXiv preprint* (2023); B.M. Lake, T.D. Ullman, J.B. Tenenbaum & S.J. Gershman, «Building machines that learn and think like people», in *Behavioral and Brain Sciences*, (2017) 1–72.

speech recognition, or facial recognition can be framed in terms of affordances, or even approached using computer simulations. Nevertheless, it is plausible that some form of mental simulation plays a role in these tasks for humans—when attempting to identify a familiar face in an image, humans might recall known faces from memory and mentally compare them with the target image. There is thus the possibility that the applicability of imagination-based AI can be broadened with the right conceptual framing for the target tasks.

Another factor impeding generalisation is the lack of a clear delineation between domain-specific and domain-agnostic components of imagination-based systems. It is known that the deep learning approach allows for *transfer learning*, in which a neural network is pre-trained on a relatively broad dataset spanning a wide domain before it is fine-tuned on a smaller and more domain-specific dataset to yield a final model. For instance, a convolutional neural network can be pre-trained on a large dataset to be able to identify common features present in a wide range of objects, and subsequently fine-tuned on domain-specific images to yield image recognition models for use in specific contexts. An advantage of transfer learning is that it reduces the amount of domain-specific training data required, since the number of training examples required to fine-tune a pre-trained model is typically smaller than that required to train a neural network from scratch. Neural networks allow for training at some level of generalisation because of their hierarchical structure, in which the activation of nodes in early layers of a model typically correspond to simpler features and that of later layers correspond to more domain-specific features. A neural network can thus be pre-trained by having its early layers tuned to the more domain-agnostic features of a wide range of data, and subsequently fine-tuned by training its later layers to recognise domain-specific features.

In contrast, imagination-based systems at present seem tailored particularly to their respective tasks, with task-specific features hardcoded into the system. The chair-recognition system in §1, for instance, has criteria for the stability of the target object and its interaction with humans that seem useful just for chair-detection and not for other tasks. It seems unclear how such a system can be made applicable to other tasks simply by slight modification of its structure, or by tuning the parameters of just some of its components.

Yet another factor hindering the generalisability of imagination-based AI is its present inability to identify the relevant features of data independently. It is known that deep learning can be used for *feature extraction* from a rich dataset with many features, in which a neural network is designed in such a way that when trained on the dataset, the trained model can subsequently be examined to discover what the most representative features of the data are. With images of human faces, for example, one might be interested in identifying the features that play the most significant roles in facial recognition. One type of neural network that can extract the desired features is an *autoencoder*, in which the target output is identical to the input, and the network contains a hidden layer whose dimensionality is much smaller than that of the input layer. After training on the image data, the activation values of the hidden layer for a given image can be taken as an efficient representation of the image. If, moreover, the activation values can be correlated with particular visual

features within the images, we would have a sense for which features are the most significant for the model's internal representation. Feature extraction techniques like these have been applied to aid image recognition (Gogoi & Begum; Wang et al.)³⁸ and natural language processing (Liang et al.)³⁹. Deep learning models can perform feature extraction because they work largely without human intervention—during training, it is left to the model to learn what the relevant features of the data are. This opens the possibility that deep learning models might find significance in features that were previously unnoticed by human engineers.

At present, imagination-based systems lack the ability to draw insights from data in this way, since the relevant features for the target tasks are hardcoded in such a way that little room is left for independent identification of those features. For example, it is hardcoded into the chair-detection system in §1 that chairs are characterised by their stability and interaction with humanoids, and learning is limited just to the parameters that define stability and acceptable humanoid interaction. While does not mean that the system cannot produce unexpected results, the heavy reliance on domain-specific information from human engineers makes it doubtful that the system can independently discover new insights from data. Nevertheless, some conceptual work is being done to explore the possibility of reducing the reliance of imagination-based systems on hardcoded domain knowledge (Gan)⁴⁰. If the imagination-based approach can be developed in such a way as to accommodate a greater degree of learning, this would increase its potential to broaden its range of possible applications.

To be sure, the above limitations should not be taken as reasons to disregard the imagination-based approach to AI. Indeed, deep learning has limitations of its own (as observed earlier), and these are often seen not as reasons against the use of deep learning, but as avenues for further research. Similarly, the observations above suggest that imagination-based AI presents several opportunities for technical and conceptual exploration, which can potentially yield significant progress toward making imagination-based AI more broadly applicable.

4. Philosophical issues

The similarity between imagination-based AI and human intelligence was earlier identified as a potential strength of the imagination-based approach. To assess this potential strength more thoroughly, some philosophical issues raised by imagination-based AI may be considered.

Foremost, the appropriateness of the term 'imagination' as a description of the internal simulations used by imagination-based systems should be discussed. Wu et

³⁸ M. Gogoi & S.A. Begum, «Image Classification Using Deep Autoencoders». *IEEE International Conference on Computational Intelligence and Computing Research* (2017).; Y. Wang, X. Wang, & W. Liu, «Unsupervised local deep feature for image recognition», in *Information Sciences*, 351, (2016) 67–75.

³⁹ H. Liang, X. Sun, Y. Sun & Y. Gao, «Text feature extraction based on deep learning: a review», in *EURASIP Journal on Wireless Communications and Networking*, 211 (2017). doi:10.1186/s13638-017-0993-1

⁴⁰ N. Gan, «Learning the logic of simulation», in J. Seibt, P. Fazekas, & O. S. Quick (Eds.), *Social Robots With AI: Prospects, Risks, and Responsible Methods*, IOS Press 2025, pp. 428–439.

al. describe their chair-detection system as using «novel method which imagines an object's affordance as a chair by physically simulating a human agent interacting with the object»⁴¹, while Grabner et al. describe a similar system as one that «imagines an actor performing an action typical for the target object class, instead of relying purely on the visual object appearance»⁴².

From a philosophical perspective, the resemblance between the relevant simulations and human imagination suggest initial reasons in favour of this term. On some popular accounts, human imagination consists in the running of an internal simulation (Currie & Ravenscroft; Goldman; Jackson)⁴³. Furthermore, imagination is often thought to resemble perception in its phenomenology. Amy Kind, for instance, writes that 'the phenomenology of imagining resembles that of perception' (Kind)⁴⁴, while Christopher Gauker takes imaginative episodes to have 'the same representational format as perceptions' (Gauker)⁴⁵. At the same time, imagination is thought to differ from perception by being able to represent things differently from how they in fact are (Jackson)⁴⁶. These key features seem to be shared by the internal simulations of imagination-based AI, which represent actual objects in hypothetical scenarios. The two phenomena thus seem to be analogous at a functional level.

There are also similarities between the epistemic roles of human imagination and the relevant simulations. It has been argued that imaginative episodes can represent future possibilities (Fernández; Harris; Schacter et al.)⁴⁷, and our beliefs about such possibilities can be justified by imagination (Jackson; Kind; Kind & Kung; Myers; Williamson)⁴⁸.

⁴¹ H. Wu, & G.S. Chirikjian, «Can I pour into it? Robot imagining open containability affordance of previously unseen objects via physical simulations», *IEEE Robotics and Automation Letters*, 6(1) (2020) 271.

⁴² H. Grabner, J. Gall & L. V. Gool, What makes a chair a chair? *Conference on Computer Vision and Pattern Recognition* (2011) 1529.

⁴³ G. Currie & I. Ravenscroft, *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology*, Oxford University Press Oxford 2002; A. Goldman, *Simulating Minds: The Philosophy, Psychology, and Neuroscience of Mindreading*: Oxford University Press, Oxford 2006; M. B. Jackson, «Justification by imagination», in F. Macpherson & F. Dorsch (Eds.), *Perceptual Imagination and Perceptual Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 209–226.

⁴⁴ (Kind, 2001, p. 96)

⁴⁵ C. Gauker. «Imagination constrained, imagination constructed», in *Inquiry* (2021) 2. Also see G. Currie, & I. Ravenscroft. *Recreative Minds: Imagination in Philosophy and Psychology*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2002; P. Fazekas, B. Nanay & J. Pearson «Offline perception: an introduction», *Philosophical Transactions B*, (2021) 376; M. B. Jackson, «Justification by imagination», in F. Macpherson & F. Dorsch (Eds.), *Perceptual Imagination and Perceptual Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 209–226; F. Macpherson & F. Dorsch, *Perceptual Imagination and Perceptual Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, p. 2.

⁴⁶ M. B. Jackson Justification by imagination. In F. Macpherson & F. Dorsch (Eds.), *Perceptual Imagination and Perceptual Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 211–214.

⁴⁷ J. Fernández, «The contents of imagination», *Canadian Journal of Philosophy*, 52(8), (2023) 828–842.; P. L. Harris, (2021), «Early constraints on the imagination: The realism of young children», in *Child Development*, 92(2) 466–483; D.L. Schacter, Addis & R. L. Buckner, R. L., «Remembering the past to imagine the future: the prospective brain», *Nature Reviews Neuroscience*, 8, (2023) 657–661.

⁴⁸ M.B. Jackson, Justification by imagination. In F. Macpherson & F. Dorsch (Eds.), *Perceptual Imagination and Perceptual Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 209–226; A. Kind, How imagination gives rise to knowledge. In F. Macpherson & F. Dorsch (Eds.), *Perceptual Memory and Perceptual Imagination*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2018, pp. 227–246 ; A. Kind, & P. Kung, *Knowledge Through Imagination*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016 ; J. Meyers, Reasoning with imagination. In A. Kind & C. Badura (Eds.), *Epistemic Uses of Imagination*: Routledge, London 2021; T. Williamson, Knowing by imagining. In A. Kind & P. Kung (Eds.), *Knowledge Through Imagination*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016. For arguments

Likewise, the simulations run by imagination-based AI systems are intended to be informative about future possibilities in our world—when the chair-detection system runs simulations in which a humanoid attempts to sit on an object, these are intended to represent what would happen if a human were to attempt to sit on the actual object.

Moreover, the AI simulations and human imagination are both reliably informative under similar conditions. It has been argued that human imagination can justify beliefs about our world only insofar as they align with reality in certain key respects. On Amy Kind's account of 'imagining under constraints'⁴⁹, for instance, imaginative episodes are justificatory only insofar as they satisfy two constraints: a reality constraint requiring the content of imaginative episodes to correspond to the world, and a change constraint requiring imaginative episodes to develop in a realistic manner. On alternative accounts, similarly, imagination justifies belief only insofar as it is constrained to align with reality (Dorsch; Jackson; Langland-Hassan; Meyers; Miyazono & Tooming; Williams; Williamson)⁵⁰. Likewise, the simulations run by imagination-based AI systems can reliably inform the systems' decisions only insofar as they are sufficiently accurate in their representation of the target scenario, the physical laws of our world, and the like.

To be sure, the resemblance between AI simulations and human imagination is limited. *Prima facie*, the former operate at a purely mechanical and syntactic level, while the latter is naturally associated with intentionality and semantic understanding, which are not typically associated with AI systems. Furthermore, since imagination is a mental state, it might be thought that imagination requires consciousness. But it would be at least surprising if imagination-based AI systems are thought to be conscious simply because they use internal simulations. Similarly, we also use human imagination to take the perspectives of others (Ravenscroft)⁵¹, to engage in fiction (Currie; Walton)⁵², and to engage emotionally with scenarios (Leeuwen)⁵³, all of which capacities are not usually attributed to AI systems. These implications suggest that when AI simulations

to the contrary, see J. Egeland, «Imagination cannot justify empirical belief», *Episteme*, 18(4), (2021) 507–513. and Spaulding, S. (2016). Imagination through knowledge. In A. Kind & P. Kung (Eds.), *Knowledge Through Imagination* (pp. 207–226). Oxford: Oxford University Press).

⁴⁹ A. Kind', «Imagining under constraints», in A. Kind & P. Kung (Eds.), *Knowledge Through Imagination*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, pp. 145–159, A. Kind, «How imagination gives rise to knowledge», in F. Macpherson & F. Dorsch (Eds.), *Perceptual Memory and Perceptual Imagination*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 227–246.

⁵⁰ F. Dorsch, «Knowledge by imagination—how imaginative experience can ground factual knowledge», *Teorema: Revista Internacional de Filosofia*, 35(3), (2016) 87–116.; M. B. Jackson, «Justification by imagination», In F. Macpherson & F. Dorsch (Eds.), *Perceptual Imagination and Perceptual Memory*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2018, pp. 209–226; P. Langland-Hassan, «On choosing what to imagine». In A. Kind & P. Kung (Eds.), *Knowledge Through Imagination*, op. cit., vol. 2, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016, pp. 61–84 ; J. Meyers Reasoning with imagination. In A. Kind & C. Badura (Eds.), *Epistemic Uses of Imagination*: Routledge, London 2021; K. Miyazono & U. Tooming, «Imagination as a generative source of justification», *Noûs* (2023); D. Williams, «Imaginative constraints and generative models», *Australasian Journal of Philosophy*, 99(1), (2021) 68–82; T. Williamson, «Knowing by imagining», in A. Kind & P. Kung (Eds.), *Knowledge Through Imagination*, Oxford University Press, Oxford 2016.

⁵¹ J. Ravenscroft, «What is it like to be someone else? Simulation and empathy». *Ratio*, 11, (2002) 170–185.

⁵² G. Currie, *The Nature of Fiction*. Cambridge University Press, Cambridge 1990 ; K. Walton, *Mimesis as Make-Believe*. Harvard University Press, Massachusetts (1990).

⁵³ N. v. Leeuwen, «The imaginative agent», in A. Kind & P. Kung (Eds.), *Knowledge Through Imagination*, op.cit., pp. 85–110.

are described as instances of imagination, either the description should be interpreted as a mere metaphor indicating only an analogy at the functional level, or these cases give us reason to reevaluate our usual understanding of the capabilities of AI systems.

The upshot is that although imagination-based AI systems are so-called in the engineering literature, investigation is required to determine if this term is appropriate. And whether we admit imagination among AI systems might have implications for further issues regarding imagination or the capabilities of AI. For instance, in the debate over the nature of mental imagery, some hold that mental images consist primarily in propositional representations (Pylyshin)⁵⁴, while others take them to consist primarily in pictorial representations (Kosslyn)⁵⁵, and yet others hold intermediate views (Tye)⁵⁶. If AI simulations are considered instances of imagination, disputants in the imagery debate might have to account for the possibility of AI imagination in formulating their view. In particular, proponents of the pictorial view would have to explain how, while simulations are being run by an AI system, the data stored in the system's memory can be a picture-like representation.

So apart from its technical aspects, imagination-based AI also presents possible areas for philosophical exploration, with potential payoffs for other issues in the philosophy of AI or mind.

5. Conclusion

This paper aimed to highlight the imagination-based approach as a recent and relatively unknown approach to AI. Although presently less popular, imagination-based AI shares the strengths of deep learning when it comes to performance, while mitigating issues related to data requirements and explainability. And as models of human intelligence, there are reasons to think that imagination-based systems more closely resemble human intelligence than do deep learning models. The imagination-based approach thus presents a viable alternative (or supplement) to deep learning in at least some cases.

But work remains to be done to develop the imagination-based approach to AI. At present, imagination-based AI has limited applicability, and some conceptual and technical work is required to overcome this limitation and allow imagination-based AI to attain the same breadth of application as deep learning. As imagination-based systems attain human-level performance at a greater range of tasks, they might bear in new ways on familiar issues regarding the nature of imagination and the capabilities of AI systems. As an area for research, therefore, imagination-based AI provides several avenues for technical and philosophical exploration.

⁵⁴ Z. Pylyshin, «The imagery debate: Analogue media versus tacit knowledge», *Psychological Review*, 88(1), (1981) 16–45.

⁵⁵ S. M. Kosslyn, «Scanning Visual Images: Some Structural Implications», *Perception and Psychophysics*, 14, (1973). 90–94.

⁵⁶ M. Tye, *The Imagery Debate*. Massachusetts, MIT Press (1991).

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DAVID J. ROSNER¹

CAN WE EDUCATE FOR THE NOT-YET? PHILOSOPHIES OF OPEN-ENDEDNESS AND THE RECOVERY OF STUDENT CURIOSITY

Abstract

Imaginative thinking often grows out of our innate sense of curiosity and wonder about the world. Children naturally wonder why things are the way they are and how things work as they do. But soon after entering school, students find themselves being taught in boring and uninspired ways which serve to kill their natural sense of wonder and curiosity. As a result, many students lose interest in school by their teenage years. Taking my cue from Ernst Bloch's future-oriented, process-based philosophy of "the not yet", this paper links the production of imaginative thinking with five pedagogical strategies that can hopefully help recover student curiosity and improve students' overall educational achievement. It will be argued that educating for "the not yet" is important for attaining better student learning outcomes and retention rates, as well as ensuring a more productive citizenry in the next generation.

Keywords: Imaginative thinking, Ernst Bloch, Curiosity, Openness, Pedagogy, Vision.

Será que podemos educar para o «ainda não»? Filosofias da abertura e a recuperação da curiosidade dos estudantes

Resumo

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O pensamento imaginativo surge frequentemente do nosso sentido inato de curiosidade e admiração pelo mundo. As crianças questionam-se naturalmente sobre o motivo pelo qual as coisas são como são e como funcionam da forma que funcionam. Mas, pouco depois de entrarem na escola, os alunos deparam-se com um ensino aborrecido e sem inspiração, que acaba por extinguir o seu sentido natural de admiração e curiosidade. Como resultado, muitos alunos perdem o interesse pela escola na adolescência. Inspirando-me na filosofia de Ernst Bloch, orientada para o futuro e baseada em processos, do «ainda não», este artigo associa a produção do pensamento imaginativo a cinco estratégias pedagógicas que, esperamos, possam ajudar a recuperar a curiosidade dos alunos e a melhorar o seu desempenho escolar global. Argumentar-se-á que educar para «o ainda não» é importante para alcançar melhores resultados de aprendizagem e taxas de retenção dos alunos, bem como para garantir uma cidadania mais produtiva na próxima geração.

Palavras-chave: Pensamento imaginativo, Ernst Bloch, Curiosidade, Abertura, Pedagogia, Visão.

Introduction: Ernst Bloch's Future-oriented perspective: "The Not Yet"

The focus of this paper will be Ernst Bloch's concept of the open-ended future. It will argue that this idea can be used in the field of pedagogy to motivate disenchanted students, as well as to encourage curiosity, open mindedness and new pathways for problem solving. After first explicating Bloch's view of "the not yet", this paper² will discuss how the concept of "the not-yet" involves a philosophy of open-endedness which can be seen to be applicable in the following five pedagogical strategies:

1. Understanding the tentative nature of scientific findings and human knowledge generally
2. Conceptualizing learning as an unfinished and open project
3. Developing open-mindedness: Following arguments where they lead
4. Approaching teaching and learning with a spirit of intellectual humility
5. Appreciating the essential mystery and wonder of the world as the fundamental starting point of education and inquiry.

Let us now consider Bloch's views. Ernst Bloch was a Marxist philosopher who stressed the "noch nicht" - the "not yet". This term designates that which is yet to come³. Bloch saw no reason to look back with nostalgia on the past as a static and

² This paper was first presented in December 2023 at the "Invention and Imagination" conference, held at the Faculty of Social Sciences and Humanities, NOVA University, Lisbon, Portugal. Thanks are due to audience members at this conference for their helpful comments on the presentation, and also to Professors Richard Gallo (Metropolitan College of New York) and Phil Washburn (New York University) for thoughtful responses to earlier drafts of this paper.

³ Bloch discusses its role in the formation of the crucial emotion of hope, and based upon this, "dreams of a better life" in which people who have long endured dreary lives of exploitation and alienation would eventually reach the true dignity of humanity - to finally "walk with an upright gait". Bloch has long been (and perhaps still is)

unchanging source of tradition and wisdom. He wrote:

Only with the farewell to the closed, static concept of being does the real dimension of hope open. Instead, the world is full of propensity towards something, tendency towards something, latency of something, and this intended something means fulfillment of the intending⁴.

For Bloch, «There is this open dimension in people, and our dreams, plans, live within it»⁵.

Bloch therefore speaks not of the unconscious memories buried in a repressed past, as Freud did with his new science of psychoanalysis, but rather of a future-oriented “not-yet-conscious” in the human mind that corresponds to the not-yet-become in the world. The open dimension is also in things, on their leading edge, where becoming is still possible⁶.

Nina Cemiloglu summarizes this view by stating that for Bloch, human beings are in a continuous process of becoming. This means «they are as of yet unrealized possibilities...similarly the world is in a continuous process of becoming. Like humankind, it is unfinished, open and full of yet unrealized possibilities.» Bloch writes that «expectation, hope, intention towards yet-unbecome possibility: this is not only a main characteristic of human consciousness but also a main characteristic of objective reality as a whole»⁸.

Bloch as a Process Philosopher

There are clear similarities in Bloch's view here with other process-oriented thinkers like A.N. Whitehead, William James, Henri Bergson, and Robert Musil. Note that the concept of “the not yet” is conceptualized in Heidegger's future-oriented account of temporality also, and versions of process-oriented thought are present in Asian traditions as well – e.g., the Buddhist doctrine of “dependent origination”. Process philosophy in fact has a long history. It is defined as follows in *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy*:

Process philosophy is based on the premise that being is dynamic

considered a somewhat marginal figure in 20th Century Marxism, as his emphasis was not on what Marx considered the ‘scientific’ laws of historical materialism and economics (theories of surplus value, etc.), but rather on the inner, phenomenological world of daydreams, hope and imagination as the necessary preconditions for social change. He called this the emphasis on the ‘warm stream’ of Marxism rather than the ‘cold stream’. However, this paper will not focus on Bloch's Marxist political views themselves.

⁴ E. Bloch, *The Principle of Hope* trans. N. Plaice, et al., Cambridge, Massachusetts, MIT Press, 1995, p. 18.

⁵ Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, op. cit. p. 288.

⁶ *Ibidem* 288. See also N. Cemiloglu, “‘Flaschenpost’ from the Past: The Critical Utopian Pedagogies of Ernst Bloch and Paulo Freire”, *Ethos: Dialogues in Philosophy and Social Sciences*, July 2019, 12(2), p. 190.

⁷ Cemiloglu, “Flaschenpost”, op. cit. p. 190.

⁸ *Ibid.* See Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, op.cit., p. 7.

and that the dynamic nature of being should be the primary focus of any comprehensive philosophical account of reality and our place within it. Even though we experience our world and ourselves as continuously changing, Western metaphysics has long been obsessed with describing reality as an assembly of static individuals whose dynamic features are either taken to be mere appearances or ontologically secondary and derivative. For process philosophers the adventure of philosophy begins with a set of problems that traditional metaphysics marginalizes or even sidesteps altogether: what is dynamicity or *becoming*—if it is the way we experience reality, how should we interpret this metaphysically?⁹

Bloch's views are complex and his frame of reference wide-ranging, so he might have objected to this particular perhaps reductionist, classification of this thought. But he fits into the "process philosophy" category in his own unique way - his particular version is expressed in terms of "the not yet" with an emphatically optimistic, hopeful orientation towards the future and its potential for improvement over the past and the present. This perspective contrasts with, for example, that of Heidegger, whose conception of "the not-yet" is ultimately characterized by a stark emphasis on human finitude, and which also came to involve a nostalgic, radically conservative cultural pessimism. For Bloch, the future stands open before us. Everything we do is oriented in this future direction, anticipating that which is "not yet". How does our hopeful anticipation of this open future color the way we look at life? What will the future bring?

The 'Not- Yet' and the Tentative Nature of Knowledge (Strategy 1)

How can we educate our students for "the not-yet"? How can a perspective emphasizing an open-ended future help educators become more effective? As mentioned above, open ended-ness for Bloch is a fundamental aspect of the world itself. In light of this, Bloch criticized the traditional classroom with the instructor writing a litany of static unchanging facts on the blackboard that students must memorize and then quickly forget (resulting in an unimaginative, uninspiring educational experience)¹⁰. Of course, we have all been subject to this sort of boring approach in school and we all know how stifling and soul-crushing it is. We all have studied subjects in high school or college in which we had to memorize a bunch of "facts" which we quickly forgot right after taking the test. And we have met people who seem able to recall a great many disconnected 'facts' about any number of subjects, but who don't seem to have gained any wisdom from this knowledge or integrated the knowledge of these 'facts' into any sort of coherent, comprehensive worldview¹¹. Bloch argued against this kind of superficial, fragmented and rote

⁹ J. Seibt, «Process Philosophy», *The Stanford Encyclopedia of Philosophy* (Summer 2023 Edition), Edward N. Zalta & Uri Nodelman (eds.), URL <https://plato.stanford.edu/archives/sum2023/entries/process-philosophy>.

¹⁰ See Cemiloglu, «Flaschenpost», *op. cit.* p. 193

¹¹ See A. N. Whitehead, *The Aims of Education and other Essays*, The Free Press New York, 1967, p. 93.

learning approach to education, as well as the ethos of “the tyranny of the textbook”, in which the teacher feels pressure to ‘get through the material in the textbook’ in time for the test, rather than being able to focus more slowly and deliberately on the actual process of learning¹².

The topic of curiosity is important because the traditional model of education as “information transfer” has had a number of other very negative consequences for countless generations of students, and perhaps even for society at large. Young children exhibit a natural excitement and curiosity about everything in the world. And Bloch offers an inspiring account of childhood that is worth presenting here. For Bloch, *longing* is the most driving force in human life and this is particularly strong in childhood and adolescence. These times of life are thus oriented most emphatically towards the future. In Bloch’s account of his own boyhood, he emphasizes his longing for adventures and freedom. He writes:

The boy kidnaps himself and rides away on a fast horse into the safety of adventure.....The night is full of taverns and castles. There are weapons, fireplaces, men as tall as trees and no clock¹³

Bloch has argued that boys long for “adventures”, «audacity, color, width and height»...¹⁴. At the Mannheim Fair, he watched mermaids, magicians, cowboys and men who swallowed and regurgitated frogs. The fair consisted only of “six rows of stalls”, but it gave him an idea of “how big the world is”¹⁵). The harbor also gave him an idea of how big the world is because it was full of ships from distant countries. He loved talking to the sailors and listening to their stories. On the vast plains between the Rhine and the Neckar, Bloch and his friends used to take long walks and to act out imaginary adventures. Every stone and every tree could become the hero in a story. When they had tired themselves out, they felt the impact of the solitary landscape between the two rivers: «We were drawn into the beauty of trees, clouds, of the evening sky...»¹⁶

Also Heraclitus, «The learning of many things teacheth not understanding, else it would have taught Hesiod and Pythagoras, and again Xenophanes and Hekataios» (Fragment 16). See Burnet, *Early Greek Philosophy*, p. 134.

¹² *Ibid*, 193. Here Cemiloglu is discussing some themes from Bloch’s *Padagogica*, 1971. Bloch’s views here relate to his Marxist critique of education in capitalist societies. According to Cemiloglu, Bloch argued that the concept of “facts” is bound up with the “reification and commodification of knowledge in a capitalist society”. There is for Bloch no true objectivity in so-called “facts” because the hidden...goal of conventional education under capitalism is “to preserve the status quo”, i.e., “molding students into docile employees and consumers” (see *ibid*, pp. 192-194). However, as this paper is not about Bloch’s explicitly Marxist perspective on education – we will instead apply Bloch’s doctrine of “the not-yet” as a general conceptual framework through which to facilitate the recovery of student curiosity.

¹³ Bloch, *Das Prinzip Hoffnung*, Suhrkamp Verlag Frankfurt am Main, Verlag, 1959, p. 23. As quoted/discussed in Nina Cemiloglu, «Between Marxism and Romanticism: Childhood and Education in the Works of Ernst Bloch» *Folklor/Edebiyat*, 2018, no. 94, 217-226.

¹⁴ Bloch, *Prinzip Hoffnung*, *op. cit.* 1959, p. 29, as quoted/discussed in Cemiloglu., «Between Marxism and Romanticism», p. 219.

¹⁵ Bloch, *Literarische Aufsätze*, 1965, reprint 1985, p. 405. See Cemiloglu «Between Marxism and Romanticism», p. 220.

¹⁶ Bloch, *Spuren*, 1930, p. 70 as discussed in Cemiloglu, *ibid*, p. 220. Cemiloglu’ also offers the caveat here that

For Bloch, the essence of the world is the urge and energy to create... The child is thus motivated by curiosity and expectation. Bloch emphasizes the natural 'hunger' for knowledge and for new and novel experiences. In his account of childhood, Bloch focused on imagination and daydreams. Daydreams, far from being a waste of time, are "like windows through which we can see the... world of realizable possibility." Daydreams can help change our lives and the world we live in in a positive direction. Daydreams contain the seeds of utopia...¹⁷ Bloch claimed that the young have an affinity to 'What Is Becoming'. They are themselves full of a "Not-Yet-Conscious" and a "Not-Yet-Become".¹⁸ Bloch argued that "this Not-Yet-Conscious, Not-Yet-Clearly-Known, Not-Yet-Become connects youth with change".¹⁹

This sense of wonder and excitement is, again, unfortunately extinguished in many kids by the time they get to high school. Many promising students from all kinds of backgrounds - students who could possibly have been inspired to excel in school and make valuable contributions to the state of knowledge and society - have instead been bored to death and turned off to the whole enterprise, resulting in much wasted potential and lost opportunities. We submit that teaching and learning should also emphasize the open, unfinished and tentative nature of human knowledge, which in turn could motivate students to learn more about the subjects at hand and to try to envision new ways of solving problems. This increased level of motivation might also help improve the widespread retention deficits that plague many institutions of higher learning today.

What then is involved in the recognition of the tentative nature of human knowledge and how is this relevant to Bloch's more open-ended (and future-oriented) perspective? Explanation is often a temporary condition in the sciences, as new evidence might suggest different conclusions. Many scientific theories that were long thought true have now been incorporated and to some degree superseded by newer theories. Many of the results of Aristotle's biological investigations have since been found problematic. Newton's theories have been expanded, built upon and in some aspects superseded by Einstein's. So here we come back to the question just considered: were Aristotle and Newton's views simply 'wrong,' or rather were they necessary stepping-stones to what is now thought to be true, which itself may change later with new discoveries? Our current theories are the best explanations we can formulate at present, given all of what we know now, i.e., the most current state of our knowledge. The "not-yet" perspective reminds us that new information may always be discovered in the future. We should therefore always be prepared to revise our theories at any time, and even to envision new, more comprehensive, explanatory frameworks to better account for new data.

This raises other questions that have been debated in different contexts within

«like many thinkers of his generation, Bloch's ideas are gender biased: the 'child' appears to be identical with 'boy' in his works» p. 226. In 2025, some might think this problematic, but on the other hand, writers are products of their times and it might also be somewhat unfair to judge them too harshly by the standards of other, later times.

¹⁷ N. Cemiloglu, «Between Marxism and Romanticism: Childhood and Education in the Works of Ernst Bloch» *op.cit.* p. 220.

¹⁸ Bloch *Pädagogica*, *op.cit.* p. 55, see Cemiloglu, *ibid.*, 225.

¹⁹ See Cemiloglu, 225.

contemporary epistemology and philosophy of science. If discovery is a continuously unfolding process, can some theories be truer than others? Are there degrees of truth, more closely approximating the truth, with truth discovered by approximation and the process of inquiry conducted by ‘standing on the shoulders of giants’?

It appears that there are some objective truths that we can speak about (mathematical truths such as $2+2 = 4$ have traditionally been presented as examples of objective truth). But what exactly makes a proposition true? Some philosophers have argued for a ‘correspondence’ theory of truth in which propositions are true if they correspond to the way the world actually is, while others argue for a ‘coherence’ theory in which propositions are true insofar as they cohere and integrate with other propositions within the relevant explanatory framework.

Science progresses through the continuous gathering of new evidence and changes in perspective. What might be some of these changes in perspective? One involves cultivating the humility to believe that there appears to be no theory that is absolutely and eternally “right”, but rather that some theories and answers are shown to be more or less right than others, and that we can only hope over time to more comprehensively approximate the truth (or at least how it is currently conceived). This is how we move forward in our understanding of the world’s mysteries. There is no need to be (or prove that one is) completely “right” all the time because basically no one is right in any sort of final, absolute sense.

Note that this view is not to be confused for or conflated with a relativism that concludes “there is no truth” or that “no one can know the truth”. It is not arguing that truth is merely a matter of subjective opinion or personal preference, or that it varies all over the map depending on time and place. It is rather that discovery is a continuous and open process, and that the answers to life’s questions are most often not something fixed in solid, fixed unchangeable stone. We must always be open to receiving new information every day and possibly changing our perspectives in light of new data. Moreover, this process should be seen as an exciting challenge and a necessary part of a larger, open adventure in inquiry, rather than a frustrating experience in which we continuously must attempt to overcome a seemingly never-ending series of roadblocks.

Conceptualizing Teaching and Learning as an Open, Unfinished Process (Strategy 2)

If teaching and learning are seen as open, unfinished and continuous processes, how can recognizing this motivate students to learn more? One of the destructive tendencies of a ‘test-oriented’ educational culture is its myopic focus on finding the right answer, with this constituting the end of the inquiry, even though foundational questions may yet still remain. Bloch as a process-oriented thinker went so far as arguing that reality is not made up of ‘facts’, but rather of ‘processes’²⁰: He writes:

²⁰ See Cemiloglu, ‘Flaschenpost...’, p. 194.

Nothing could be altered in accordance with wishes if the world were closed, full of fixed, even perfected, facts. Instead of these there are simply processes, i.e., dynamic relationships, in which 'the Become' has not completely triumphed²¹.

The question whether 'facts' exist as actual 'things' that make up the contents of the world has a long tradition in analytic philosophy (i.e., the field of ontology). And of course, one might justifiably take issue here with Bloch's pronouncement here. For example, one might convincingly argue that it is an unalterable, incontrovertible fact that the inauguration of King Charles III occurred in Westminster Abbey in London, England, on May 6, 2023. However, I believe Bloch has a valid point here nonetheless - in mathematics, for example, merely finding the solution to a problem (although this is what is stressed in most educational settings) is not the only thing that is important. While it is clearly necessary for students to learn how to find the solution to the problem, teachers should also be encouraging students, after finding the solution, to try to better understand this problem-solving process and its applications - what if this state of affairs holds or that?²² How can the reasoning used in solving this specific problem be extrapolated and applied to other situations? Why is x the solution and not y ? Tunnel-vision directing students only to finding the answers to prescribed problems may stifle a larger curiosity and a more far-reaching line of inquiry about the subject matter.

What exactly are the aims of education, and at what point can these aims be considered achieved? Consider the following interesting topic posed by Atli Hardarson: «Are educational aims objectives that can be attained, reached or completed?» Hardarson distinguishes between some aims that are "objectives that can be reached or completed" (which he calls "closed") and those "open aims that are ideals that we work towards, although the tasks cannot be completed".²³ Regarding the latter, Hardarson asks:

When has a student understood gravity? When she has learned to do simple calculations based on Newton's formula? Is able to explain how massive objects affect space-time? Has mastered the concepts used to describe black holes? Knows what the long search for the Higgs-Boson was all about? Can participate in debates about the differences between gravity and other fundamental forces of nature?

Hardarson concludes: «understanding gravity is an endeavor which, arguably, cannot be completed».²⁴ The more one understands this open-ended aspect of inquiry and the more one studies the subject in question, e.g., gravity, the more one learns about it. Focusing only on the closed aims, e.g., finding the specific answer to a particular prescribed test question, can in its own paradoxical way, function to effectively shut down the learning process itself. The laser focus on finding

²¹ *Ibid.* See Bloch, *The Principle of Hope*, p. 196.

²² See E. Knuth, «Fostering Mathematical Curiosity» in *Mathematics Teacher*, 95(2), 2002, pp. 126-130.

²³ A. Hardarson, «Aims of Education: How to Resist the Temptation of Technocratic Models», *Journal of the Philosophy of Education*, vol. 51, no 1, 2017, p. 65.

²⁴ *Ibid.*

right answers can thus stunt the questioning of deeper assumptions about the subject, with the student thus missing out on some of the more far-reaching aims of the educational process.

Open-Endedness and Open-Mindedness: Following the Arguments Where They Lead (Strategy 3)

The considerations above also shed light on the notion of learning as a disinterested search for knowledge. According to Aristotle, «all men desire to know».²⁵ But if one desires knowledge then one should be prepared to accept the conclusions of relevant scientific investigations, even if such conclusions contradict one's previously held assumptions²⁶. The goal of scientific and philosophical inquiry is not the confirmation of our preexisting biases and convictions. All views, even deeply held ones, are subject to revision in light of new information – and of course, new information coming to light is always possible given the fundamentally open nature of reality.

In the scientific method, theories or hypotheses are formulated to explain or account for the 'facts' that have been heretofore discovered. If new facts are discovered by way of experiment which the theory cannot explain or which somehow call it into question, the theory or hypothesis will have to be amended or discarded, as facts cannot just be ignored or cherry picked in order to fit into previously held theories. New and innovative ways of thinking may sometimes be required to envision and conceptualize new hypotheses and more comprehensive explanatory frameworks.

But is such disinterestedness even totally possible? F.H. Bradley said: «Metaphysics is the finding of bad reasons for what we believe upon instinct; but to find these reasons is no less an instinct»²⁷. This echoes Hume's famous argument that reason is but the slave of the passions. Is disinterestedness impossible and even if so, should it still exist as an ideal to be striven for?

Thomas Kelly in his paper "Following the Argument Where it Leads" directly examines this philosophic ideal of disinterestedness in detail. Kelly discusses the this philosophic ideal as follows:

Even if it is conceded for the sake of the argument that everyone will inevitably fall short when it comes to "following the argument where it leads", that alone has no tendency to show that this putative ideal—however exactly we should understand it—is not a genuine one. Among other things, even if all of us will inevitably fall short of the relevant standard, it might nevertheless be possible to do a better or worse job of approaching or approximating it. Indeed, it would be surprising if this were not the case. That is a familiar point about ideals, and one which I take to apply to norms of belief no less than to norms of behavior.²⁸

²⁵ Aristotle, *Metaphysics*. Book 1, Part 1, page 1.

²⁶ See T. Kelly, «Following the Argument Where it Leads», *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition*, vol. 154, no. 1, pp. 105-124.

²⁷ F. H. Bradley, *Appearance and Reality*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 1969, p. 169.

²⁸ T. Kelly, «Following the Argument Where it Leads» in *Philosophical Studies: An International Journal for*

However, developing and embracing this sort of open-minded, process-oriented perspective is not as easy as it might seem. There are complicated psychological reasons why open-endedness is difficult for many to sustain. We know that people may hold on to the correctness of their views and theories because of personal pride, stubbornness or the ‘sunk-cost’ fallacy. But there are deeper psychological mechanisms at work here as well. There is evidence from social psychology that our brains seek closure in the face of open questions and that people are naturally uncomfortable with situations left unfinished or ambiguous. They want tentative situations resolved and open cases closed, now rather than later. Situations that are left unfinished are anxiety producing for many, and therefore people will naturally resist the “reality as process” view.²⁹

This “ambiguity intolerance” can lead to a tendency towards selective perception, which can shut down inquiry and impede scientific (and other sorts of) progress³⁰. In this connection, Richard Grallo, clarifying a point from Bernard Lonergan, discusses “process bias” as “a systematic exclusion of further relevant questions and insights on a particular topic” and writes further that this might actually constitute a “flight from understanding”.³¹ Such “process bias” may originate due to a number of psychological motivations, including “intolerance of uncertainty, a demand for immediate answers, an unwillingness to suspend judgment as evidence is gathered”, etc.³² Given its clear relevance to contemporary political discourse and the dangers therein, an increasingly large body of work is currently being initiated on this and related topics.³³ Bloch is in my view correct in his insistence upon the open-ended nature of reality and the need for us to do justice to this in our thinking, teaching and research. But this mindset is not easy to maintain nor does it come naturally to us. We have to work to resist the natural psychological tendencies that may impede it.

Educating for ‘The Not-Yet’ and the Place of Intellectual Humility (Strategy 4)

Becoming an effective educator requires humility and a willingness to change one’s mind. For example, admitting ‘I don’t know’ to student questions, or changing one’s mind after considering the available evidence, is not necessarily a shortcoming or a sign of incompetence, but rather an honest stance that also ideally can constitute an invitation for more sustained reflection. Bloch also argued «teachers and students should regard knowledge as being in process and developing.»³⁴ According to Cemiloglu, “Bloch has urged teachers and lecturers not to assume or pretend to know everything there is to know in their fields of study.”³⁵ What are some actual practical ways of conveying this humbler theoretical stance to students? This question has also

Philosophy in the Analytic Tradition, vol. 154, no. 1, pp. 105-124.

²⁹ See Kruglanski, Arie, and Webster, Donna, «Motivated Closing of the Mind: Seizing and Freezing», *Psychological Review*, 103:2 (1996), 263-83.

³⁰ Quassim Cassam, *Vices of the Mind: From the Intellectual to the Political*, Oxford University Press, Oxford, 2019.

³¹ R. Grallo, «Questioning as a Cognitive Process» *Symposium XVI* (1), (2009) p. 17

³² *Ibidem*, *ibid*, p. 19

³³ See Q. Cassam, *Vices of the Mind*, *op. cit.*

³⁴ See Cemiloglu, «Flaschenpost», *op. cit.* p. 194

³⁵ *Ibid.*

been taken up in the educational literature, e.g., Michael Chalukian's *Pedagogy of Curiosity*:

The teacher plays a vital role as a model for collaborative humility. He or she must rethink the traditional role of the content expert and answer giver.... evolving into a facilitator of student exploration, inquiry, and discovery. To encourage and illustrate this concept a teacher can:

- ask questions to understand and challenge students thinking and conclusions.
- say “I am not sure. How can we find out?”
- admit confusion and mistakes
- acknowledge the vulnerability in being unsure and not knowing in the class and group setting.
- reason and think aloud with groups and in class discussions³⁶.

One way of viewing this is that Chalukian is offering practical advice regarding how instructors can help create, in Heidegger's term, a ‘clearing’ (or the opening up of an intellectual space) for the recovery of student curiosity. Chalukian is advocating for the instructor stepping back from the traditional teaching mode of actively imparting information to passive students. He suggests framing the classroom environment more as an open space for the shared process of collaboration and exploration, in the face of what is for all of us as learners, a (still) mysterious world. The teacher is therefore stepping back from ‘teaching’ and is now encouraging and facilitating the deeper pedagogical process that Heidegger famously referred to as ‘letting learn’³⁷.

One might argue, however, that the above viewpoint implies a lessening of instructor authority. After all, instructors have spent a lifetime studying and learning about a subject and in most cases know much more about it than the students. Otherwise, why should students listen to and respect their instructor? But this objection rather misses the point. Generally, these bullet points above offer practical suggestions on how to encourage a more curious and inspirational classroom, instead of offering a top-down, boring (and perhaps even pointless) educational experience, where information is often presented, memorized in rote fashion and quickly forgotten.

Another objection might be raised here to the whole topic of this paper, as some might consider the entire issue of rekindling student curiosity a problem for “privileged” classrooms only. Students from poor, underserved populations might not have the time or wherewithal to “wonder about the world” because they must first deal with more pressing questions of economic survival, desperate living conditions, etc. While there is some truth to this, a number of important artists, scientists, writers, inventors, philosophers, etc., have come from very humble beginnings. Moreover, many students from privileged backgrounds, though perhaps better prepared academically, often lack curiosity themselves and are motivated more

³⁶ M. Chalukian, *Pedagogy of Curiosity*, Scholarworks, UMass Boston, 2015.

³⁷ M. Heidegger *What is Called Thinking?* trans. J. G. Gray, New York, Harper & Row, 1968, p. 15

by receiving good grades than by a genuine desire to know. Such students may end up as competent, well-paid professionals, but not necessarily as innovators who will push the needle forward in any significant sense, and the world needs these original thinkers even more. The problem of ineffective, boring pedagogy is therefore a problem across the board.

Education and the Fundamental Mysteriousness of the World (Strategy 5)

At the end of an academic course, students should be left wanting to learn more about the subject, realizing that there is still much they have yet to learn. Rabbi Abraham Joshua Heschel said the starting points for religion are awe, wonder and mystery.³⁸ It is the same for science, philosophy and art as well. Thus, Whitehead wrote of “romance” as the starting point of educational inquiry, and we also can refer here to the famous quote attributed to W.B. Yeats - «Education is not the filling of a bucket but the lighting of a spark». As we have seen, one major problem is that education has traditionally been conceived as “information transfer” (See Freire, Bloch and others). The current emphasis on testing and assessment seems to accept this assumption, and focuses on means towards more effective information transfer. Education certainly involves acquiring factual information, but this is perhaps not its most important aspect. So much more about this world remains unknown than known. Teachers are only human themselves and obviously do not know all (or most or even many) of the answers. And ironically, many instructors themselves can sometimes get lost in the mechanics of their job (paper grading, publication deadlines, committee work, department meetings, etc.) and lose sight of that which motivated them to pursue graduate study and a career in education in the first place. We therefore submit that recovering a sense of humility in the face of the world’s mysteries (and the constant unfolding of our knowledge still to come) needs to be more universally communicated by instructors – not as an obstacle or a depressing roadblock to student learning, but rather as an active stimulus enjoining and motivating a more future-oriented spirit of curiosity, collaborative inquiry and wonder within a likeminded community of learners.

Conclusion

Leveled-down, uninspired pedagogical approaches like rote memorization and teaching to the test have often had the unfortunate consequence of discouraging imagination and curiosity in the classroom. Ernst Bloch’s conception of “the not-yet” can be applied through the pedagogical strategies 1-5 above to help recover and/or sustain the wonder and curiosity in students that are a crucial part of effective education. This improved motivation in the classroom will help achieve an important goal – graduating better educated students who can more effectively envision new

³⁸ See A. J. Heschel, *Between God and Man*, The Free Press, New York, 1967.

ways to solve problems. Thus “educating for the not-yet” can help ensure a more productive citizenry in the long run.

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RECENSÕES

Sara Brill – Catherine McKeen (eds.), *The Routledge Handbook of Women and Ancient Greek Philosophy*, Routledge, New York – London 2024. 649 pp.; ISBN: 9781003047858; DOI: <https://doi.org/10.4324/9781003047858>.

Observando a história da filosofia, parece incontornável a conclusão de que o conhecimento considerado válido foi maioritariamente de autoria masculina. *The Routledge Handbook of women and Ancient Greek Philosophy* é uma coletânea de artigos onde se reflete sobre o papel da mulher e de outras classes marginalizadas na história da Filosofia antiga.

O objetivo de Sara Brill e Catherine McKeen é que os 40 textos que compõem a coletânea promovam interpretações alternativas e que denunciem e desconstruam situações discriminatórias, provocando no leitor um exercício crítico reflexivo quanto à influência feminina, ou a falta dela, na História da Filosofia e em outros domínios científicos. Temas como a teorização de género num contexto de opressão, a parcialidade na valorização do trabalho intelectual ou a utilização do conhecimento como instrumento de dominação masculina constituem a pedra-de-toque desta obra, que abre novas perspetivas para o estudo dos textos antigos (p. 3).

A coletânea divide-se em 5 partes. A primeira parte estuda o legado de autores pré-socráticos do período entre os anos 700 e 400 a.C.. Nesta parte, destaca-se o inspirador artigo de Chelsea C. Harry sobre a poesia erótica de Safo de Lesbos. A segunda e a terceira partes são dedicadas ao período entre os anos 400 e 200 a.C.: a segunda parte contém uma análise dos diálogos platónicos e a terceira parte das obras de Aristóteles. É notável o artigo de Malin Grahn-Wilder sobre Hiparquia de Maroneia. A quarta parte, por sua vez, aborda o feminino na tradição pitagórica, estoica e neoplatónica, entre os 200 a.C. e 700 d.C. Por fim, a quinta e última parte estuda a receção dos textos antigos do Renascimento até à atualidade.

Revela-se particularmente interessante o artigo de Emily Hulme, *Plato's argument for the Inclusion of Women in the Guardian Class: Prospects and Problems* (p. 165), no qual se analisa a posição de Platão sobre o feminino. No quinto livro do diálogo *República*, Platão defende que as mulheres podem integrar a classe dos guardiões da cidade ideal, desde que sejam naturalmente habilitadas para essa tarefa. Por causa desta posição, Platão poderia ser considerado um «proto feminista» (p. 523). O princípio da especialização (*protos logos*), fundamental para a consecução da cidade justa, abarcaria as mulheres e outras classes historicamente segregadas. Contudo, o argumento da especialização parece não ser suficiente para asseverar que as mulheres também possam ser guardiães da cidade. Sócrates reflete acerca da possibilidade de concretizar esse plano e conclui que, face ao “costume presente”, tais intenções pareceriam ridículas. Hulme discute diversas passagens dos diálogos platónicos com o objetivo de entender até que ponto Platão reconhecia o potencial das mulheres. A posição platónica nem sempre é positiva. No diálogo *Timeu*, Platão afirma que a reencarnação da alma num corpo de mulher é um castigo: a mulher seria, nestes contornos, tomada como inferior ao homem. Contra a tese de Gregory Vlastos, Hulme observa que, pela análise dos diálogos platónicos, não se pode concluir que Platão seria um defensor dos direitos das mulheres. Afirmar que as mulheres também podem ser guardiães da cidade não é o

mesmo que afirmar que as mulheres são iguais aos homens ou têm os mesmos direitos que aqueles (p. 174). Hulme conduz, assim, o leitor à seguinte questão: o que podemos aprender ou que vantagens podemos retirar destes textos para solucionarmos questões contemporâneas? A resposta de Hulme é a de que ainda hoje homens e mulheres não são considerados equitativamente aptos para os mesmos trabalhos (p. 177).

Particularmente interessante é, também, o artigo de Alexandra Michalewski, *The place of Women in the Neoplatonic schools* (p. 482), sobre o papel da mulher na filosofia neoplatónica. De acordo com a autora, os seguidores de Platão, cientes das posições contraditórias sobre a mulher presentes nos diálogos platónicos, esforçaram-se por harmonizar estas posições. Proclo, comentador atento das obras platónicas, procurou resolver estas contradições através de uma peculiar caracterização da alma humana (p. 487), recorrendo a conceitos metafísicos para defender que as almas humanas são sexuadas. As almas masculinas e femininas diferenciar-se-iam na composição. As almas femininas, caracterizadas pela natureza do ilimitado e do múltiplo, orientariam a atividade contemplativa para o sensível, enquanto a atividade contemplativa das almas masculinas, caracterizadas pela natureza do limite e da unidade, estariam orientadas para o inteligível (p. 487). No sistema filosófico de Proclo, a mulher encontra-se associada ao múltiplo, ou seja, a alma feminina está mais afastada da unidade. Michalewski observa, porém, que Proclo acreditava ser possível redirecionar a alma feminina na direção do Uno através da educação (p. 488). No sentido de concretizar esta possibilidade, Proclo procurou promover a educação das mulheres, considerando que existiam mulheres que poderiam ser excecionais.

O volume coletivo de Sara Brill e Catherine McKeen é um excelente ponto de partida para refletir acerca do papel que a mulher e outras classes marginalizadas desempenharam no pensamento antigo. O volume permite fazer uma reconstrução genealógica das práticas discriminatórias do feminino e de outros grupos sociais e mostrar como estas práticas se mantêm presentes na atualidade devido à influência das teses de Platão, de Aristóteles e de outros autores antigos. Além disso, o volume contribui de forma notável para o enriquecimento dos debates contemporâneos nos mais variados domínios, tais como as questões de género, os direitos humanos, a política e a ética.

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Robert Pippin, *The Culmination: Heidegger, German Idealism, and the Fate of Philosophy*, Chicago, The University of Chicago Press, 2024. 256 pp.; ISBN 978-0226830001.

Na sua mais recente obra *The Culmination: Heidegger, German Idealism, and the Fate of Philosophy* (2024), Robert Pippin desenvolve uma crítica ao projeto filosófico do idealismo alemão. Definindo o idealismo como a posição que defende a capacidade da razão pura para determinar integralmente a inteligibilidade do real, Pippin centra as suas críticas na filosofia de Hegel, adotando, no entanto, um olhar mais matizado sobre Kant. Tal crítica de Pippin ao idealismo alemão integra, com efeito, influências explícitas da filosofia de Heidegger, sobretudo no que concerne à ênfase na finitude humana, à historicidade e à crítica das pretensões totalizantes da metafísica tradicional.

A tese apresentada nesta obra tem dois momentos principais: o primeiro consiste na interpretação do tema central da filosofia de Heidegger como significado (*meaningfulness*), no sentido de valorização, importância, ser significativo; o segundo diz respeito a uma exploração da natureza finita do humano e às consequências epistémicas da primordialidade dessa limitação. Estes momentos estão intimamente ligados. Começemos pelo primeiro momento. Para Pippin, a questão pelo sentido do ser é interpretada como uma questão acerca do significado dos entes. O significado dos entes refere-se a uma relação pré-ontológica e pré-discursiva com os mesmos – uma relação que precede e fundamenta qualquer abordagem conceptual ou científica. Dessa forma, a metafísica tradicional transforma-se numa antropologia a priori, isto é, numa investigação das condições estruturais da existência humana que condicionam o uso discursivo da razão e delimitam os seus limites. No entanto, importa notar que Pippin sugere que esta interpretação heideggeriana é, em certa medida, viciada no que respeita à leitura de Kant. Heidegger, ao tentar sublinhar como Kant teria recuado perante a primordialidade da imaginação, teria, segundo Pippin, menosprezado o facto de que, para Kant, o entendimento é já limitado pela receptividade sensível. Ou seja, Kant reconhece que a razão pura não é autónoma, pois está condicionada pela experiência sensível que molda os seus conteúdos.

Esta crítica não conduz Pippin a rejeitar o essencial da “crítica de Heidegger a Kant”; pelo contrário, Pippin defende que uma filosofia primeira, no sentido mais estrito, deve ter como base a imaginação, entendida como a faculdade que torna os entes acessíveis ao sujeito. Em suma, a finitude metafísica do ser humano decorre de uma antropologia a priori, à luz da qual a possibilidade de uma ciência do puro pensar é contingente. A interpretação do ser como inteligibilidade depende, assim, da abertura prévia de um horizonte de significado, o que torna impossível a ideia de absoluto – entendida como a possibilidade do pensamento puro que, em autoconsciência, se torna conteúdo de todo o pensar e alma de todo o ente.

A tese secundária desta obra de Pippin afirma que a interpretação do ser como inteligibilidade é assumida desde, pelo menos, Platão, marcando, assim, o início do esquecimento da pergunta pelo sentido do Ser, pergunta essa que se perde para a metafísica, que não mais a coloca. A filosofia de Hegel representaria, para Pippin, a culminação desta tradição: Hegel seria o filósofo que explicitamente determinaria a totalidade dos entes como pensamento pensando pensamento (não os entes como entes particulares, pois os entes seriam apenas conhecíveis enquanto existentes mas não na sua quiddidade: o espírito sabe o

que um organismo seja, mas não o que seja este organismo particular enquanto particular, justamente). Heidegger, por sua vez, na sua tentativa de ultrapassar esta culminação, faria metafísica no sentido originário do termo.

Em nosso entender, a tese de Pippin de que a interpretação do ser como inteligibilidade é a assunção básica da tradição metafísica é ou um erro ou uma simplificação. Vejamos: para Heidegger, a interpretação do ser que domina o avanço do primeiro início é “ser como presença” e esta interpretação é ela própria distorcida por Platão, vertendo o ser naquilo que é comum, a aparência externa (embora sempre capturada a priori) dos objetos: a ideia. Isto não significa que Platão transforme o ser do ente em pensamento, nem é isso que Heidegger pretende sublinhar. O que está em causa é que o pensamento inceptual pré-platónico é invertido, e a presença confunde-se com o que está presente e o ente torna-se no único horizonte da questão pelo ser.

Em segundo lugar, a reconstrução histórica proposta por Pippin tende a desvalorizar o papel de Nietzsche no desenvolvimento da metafísica. Pippin diz pouco a esse respeito, limitando-se a observar que, para Heidegger, Nietzsche fracassou na sua tentativa de superar a metafísica. Mas, na verdade, Heidegger propõe que, com Nietzsche, o ser é decisivamente interpretado como vontade de vontade, vontade que procura munir-se com meios, que se potencia; é a vontade de vontade que está na base do domínio mundial da maquinação (*Machenschaft*). Este menosprezo em relação ao pensamento de Nietzsche, tal como realizado por Pippin, impossibilita que o tema do niilismo seja devidamente considerado e avaliado (o niilismo enquanto esquecimento do esquecimento do Ser): com efeito, Pippin toca levemente neste tema, definindo equivocadamente o niilismo como consequência do duplo velar, e não como o próprio duplo esquecimento.

The Culmination apresenta um relato insatisfatório da história do Ser, o que seria desculpável se este fosse um livro apenas acerca do Heidegger pré-*viragem* (*Kehre*), mas Pippin insiste na continuidade entre Heidegger I e Heidegger II, servindo-se de excertos de Heidegger II na sua argumentação. Pippin traduz aquilo que designa como *Heideggerês* para a linguagem de *Ser e Tempo*, e traduz a linguagem de Heidegger I para *Pippinês* – ora, tudo isto faz parecer que Heidegger seja um filósofo obscuro e rebuscado. Todavia, ninguém explica um filósofo melhor do que o próprio, e Heidegger é um exemplo perfeito de um pensador extremamente meticuloso na sua “escolha” de palavras, apresentando-se perfeitamente claro aos seus leitores. O *Heideggerês* é bastante superior ao *Pippinês* e, obviamente, mais útil para quem quer entender o pensamento de Heidegger. Sem tomar a obra da Heidegger na sua totalidade, não é possível compreender a posição de Heidegger em relação a Hegel, tal como não é possível compreender exatamente o que metafísica significa para Heidegger e em que sentido Hegel pertence a esta história. Tudo isto seria nulo se Pippin apenas procurasse apresentar uma posição influenciada por Heidegger, mas não é disto que se trata. E é, pois, necessário contrapor as teses centrais de *The Culmination* com o pensamento heideggeriano enquanto tal.

A posição segunda a qual a questão acerca do sentido do ser é uma questão pelo significado dos entes está assente no sentido particular que Pippin atribui a ‘significado’. Significado é aqui um composto de sentido (*Sinn*) e significado (*Bedeutsamkeit*), referindo-se à maneira específica como os entes estão sempre já descerrados no mundo; este modo é sempre pré-ontológico e, como tal, pré-conceptual. Este descerramento é interpretado por

Pippin como algo pragmático: para Pippin, o que Heidegger propõe é que ser é importar, ser importante, ter valor, ser significativo (para evitar confusões, *meaningfulness* será traduzido a partir de aqui como ‘importância’ e *Bedeutsamkeit* como ‘significado’).

Esta posição apresenta dois problemas: um relativo a *Ser e Tempo* e o outro a Heidegger II (ou ao Heidegger na totalidade da sua obra). O primeiro problema diz respeito à universalização do significado: o significado é a estrutura essencial da mundanidade, e concerne ao carácter mundano dos entes com os quais *Dasein* se comporta – mas, há que sublinhá-lo, o significado não é a forma do descerramento de todos os fenómenos (nem todos os fenómenos são *πρῶγμαῦτᾶ*). O sentido do ser em si não se refere à mundanidade dos entes. Mesmo que se aceite uma versão mais fraca da tese de Pippin, que distingue mas relaciona o significado dos entes e o sentido do ser, o ser-no-mundo permanece uma estrutura fundamental do *Dasein*, que não pode ser simplesmente perdida. Pippin argumenta que a valorização moderna da inteligibilidade – isto é, da capacidade de compreender o mundo conceptualmente – acaba por obscurecer o carácter fundamentalmente pragmático da ciência. Esta crítica, porém, ou equivale a uma “perda do mundo”, algo impossível ao humano, ou trata-se apenas de uma preocupação conceptual sobre a natureza da verdade proposicional. De qualquer modo, mesmo se a ciência for entendida como essencialmente pragmática, a sua valorização continua a ser uma valorização de entes no mundo enquanto *πρῶγμαῦτᾶ* – isto é, enquanto coisas com utilidade ou função no horizonte prático da existência. Esta valorização da inteligibilidade, se conduz à desvalorização da própria experiência de importância e significado, implica um duplo encobrimento do ser. Caso contrário, essa valorização seria apenas uma preocupação teórica, limitada ao âmbito da verdade proposicional.

Um segundo problema, mais profundo, diz respeito à tendência de responder à questão do ser através de uma reflexão sobre os entes enquanto tais – ou seja, de reduzir a questão do ser à investigação das propriedades dos entes. Isso equivale a reabsorver Heidegger na tradição metafísica que ele precisamente tenta ultrapassar. Esse gesto não seria, por si só, problemático, não fosse o facto de assentar numa leitura inadequada da relação de Heidegger com a metafísica. Com efeito, qualquer tentativa legítima de apropriar-se da filosofia heideggeriana teria de confrontar e talvez até destruir a sua própria interpretação da tradição – e não simplesmente desconsiderá-la.

O pensamento de transição (*Übergängliche Denken*) de Heidegger não se limita a um ser-afectado pelo significado ou importância dos entes. Trata-se, antes, de um o ater-se àquilo que deve ser pensado (a falta, o duplo esquecimento do ser). Ao concentrar-se quase exclusivamente na razão discursiva, Pippin revela-se incapaz de pensar a relação íntima entre linguagem, pensamento e Ser. Para Pippin, a metafísica corresponde, em larga medida, à assunção de que a inteligibilidade é o valor supremo. Quando o ser é interpretado sobretudo em função da inteligibilidade, o pensamento filosófico tende a desaguar na lógica – entendida como ciência do puro pensar. Neste percurso, Hegel aparece como o ponto culminante de uma leitura do ser que, desde o início, limita a totalidade do ser aos entes enquanto inteligíveis e, com isso, reivindica o direito a uma ciência total do ente. Uma vez que a importância se torna primária em relação à inteligibilidade, então também a errante metafísica da tradição é condicionada por uma possível antropologia a priori. Pippin sobrestima a centralidade desta antropologia no pensamento de Heidegger e, desta forma,

subjetiviza-o.

Para Heidegger, aquilo que está na essência da metafísica (no sentido da tradição metafísica – Heidegger não enfatiza a distinção entre uma metafísica no sentido próprio e uma metafísica errante tal como Pippin faz) não é um esquecimento da diferença ontológica. Tal diferença ontológica pode muito bem existir na metafísica – o que Heidegger afirma, sim, é que metafísica nasce da tentativa de pensar o Ser através dos entes, transformando o Ser na entidade dos entes (Seiendheit). A diferença ontológica é apenas uma pista e um trilho para o Ser (Seyn). Aquilo que está na base desta interpretação de Heidegger é a forma como o Ser acontece no primeiro início, isto é, como presença: a presença é já o ser tal como é pensado no pensamento inceptual (anfänglich denken) grego. Heidegger procura repensar esta interpretação do ser, avaliando-o como recusa e preparando a transição para um outro início. Platão não é acusado por Heidegger de transformar o ser em inteligibilidade, mas antes de o tornar representação, de o tornar em presença de novo, e com isto, embora não imediatamente, abrir as portas para a transformação de ἀλήθεια em rectitudo e, subsequentemente, em certitudo. Para Heidegger, cada uma destas transformações corresponde a um obscurecimento dos entes e a um prevalecer do juízo, sendo a etapa final a situação em que os entes apenas estão presentes na sua conexão com a vontade humana, ou seja, apenas porquanto são significantes ou valiosos – assim, o Ser perde-se na vontade de vontade.

A “crítica” de Heidegger a Hegel é então compreensível apenas desta forma: a fenomenologia do espírito culmina na vontade de vontade; a interpretação do Ser como espírito absoluto pertence sempre à metafísica, constituindo o ponto final do domínio da representação, onde o espírito se certifica de si mesmo, e com isto, paradoxalmente, prepara o caminho para a livre atividade da consciência natural (Heidegger afirma, inclusivamente, que o positivismo é consequência do idealismo alemão). Por conseguinte, Heidegger acusa Hegel de abrir a porta para a hegemonia da vontade de vontade ao absolutizar o sujeito.

A insistência por parte de Pippin nas palavras “meaningful” e “meaning” traduz um elemento negativo do seu livro. O argumento segundo o qual Heidegger propõe que o ser é importância é, na verdade, uma inversão do pensamento heideggeriano: importância, valor, ser significativo – tudo isto pertence à entidade do ente na forma com esta se essência contemporaneamente, a vontade humana. Mesmo quando concebida fenomenologicamente, como o ser-no-mundo do Dasein, a importância – tal como é entendida por Pippin – nunca pode constituir a essência do Ser. Haveria muito a ganhar se todas as instâncias da palavra “meaning” fossem apagadas da obra e substituídas por um espaço em branco: notar-se-ia a falta no que diz respeito a Ser e Tempo, mas, pelo menos, cada leitor poderia imaginar algo mais apropriado. *The Culmination* mostra, assim, que, no que concerne à complexa relação entre Heidegger e Hegel, as únicas obras que são verdadeiramente significativas (e que devem ser lidas) são as de Heidegger e Hegel.

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García-Marzá, Domingo & Calvo, Patrici. (2024). *Algorithmic Democracy – A Critical Perspective Based on Deliberative Democracy*. Philosophy and Politics – Critical Explorations, Vol. 29., Springer International Publishing. ISBN: 978-3-031-53014-2.

O modo como os algoritmos têm vindo a transformar o espaço público das sociedades democráticas contemporâneas preconiza um conjunto de desafios de ampla escala e complexa cartografia. Com efeito, os problemas de natureza social, política e económica que gradualmente têm ocupado a boca de cena revelam que a aparente neutralidade dos algoritmos não é, afinal, assim tão neutra, repercutindo-se na desconfiança em torno da capacidade de as instituições democráticas responderem aos problemas emergentes. Nesse sentido, os autores do livro de que aqui damos conta procuram fornecer um importante contributo para a reflexão crítica acerca das alternativas viáveis à atual tendência regressiva da democracia, sublinhando a importância de recuperar espaços de participação democrática efetiva, face à revolução algorítmica que tem promovido, nomeadamente, o aparecimento de formas de expressão autocráticas e de ‘tecnopopulismos’.

Domingo García-Marzá, é Professor Catedrático de Ética na Universitat Jaume I de Castellón (Espanha), tendo aprofundado os seus estudos sobre Política em Frankfurt (Alemanha), e sobre Ética Económica em St. Gallen (Suíça), na Universidade de Notre Dame (Estados Unidos da América) e no Magee College of the University of Ulster (Irlanda do Norte, Reino Unido). Patrici Calvo é Professor do Departamento de Filosofía y Sociología da Universitat Jaume I de Castellón (Espanha), tendo realizado períodos de investigação em Uehiro Center for Practical Ethics of the University of Oxford (Reino Unido), no Dipartimento di Sociologia «Achille Ardigò», no Dipartimento di Sociologia e Diritto dell’Economia dell’Università di Bologna (Itália), na Fundación ÉTNOR (Espanha) e no Instituto de Filosofía del CSIC – Madrid (Espanha). Ambos com interesses de investigação nos domínios da Ética, da Filosofia Social e Política, e da Hermenêutica Crítica, os autores reuniram esforços na produção da presente monografia que resulta da Investigação Científica e concomitante Projeto de Desenvolvimento Tecnológico: “Cordial Bioethics and Algorithmic Democracy for a Hyperdigitalised Society” (PID2022-139000OB-C22), e “Applied Ethics and Trustworthiness for an Artificial Intelligence” (PID2019-109078RB-C21), que contaram com o financiamento do Ministerio de Ciencia, Innovación y Universidades del Gobierno de España. Não obstante, o trabalho desenvolvido no seio do Research Group of Excellence CIPROM/2021/072, da Conselleria d’Innovació, Universitats, Ciència i Societat Digital de la Generalitat Valenciana, revelou-se essencial para o aprofundamento científico desta edição que conta com a chancela da Springer International Publishing.

A obra encontra-se subdividida em três partes interligadas por um fio condutor que enriquece a sua inteligibilidade, viabilizando: 1) a compreensão do enquadramento da problemática, 2) a problematização da democracia algorítmica e das suas repercussões negativas, e 3) a apresentação de alternativas que permitam colmatar a tendência regressiva das sociedades democráticas contemporâneas. Os doze capítulos que compõem a obra estão assimetricamente distribuídos pelas

três partes constitutivas, apresentando cada capítulo, respetivamente, um *abstract* ilocutório, uma súmula de palavras-chave essenciais para a identificação dos conteúdos trabalhados, e uma bibliografia integral das referências citadas ao longo do corpo do texto, seguindo a norma bibliográfica APA. Além disso, os autores estabelecem relações profícuas ao longo da obra entre os vários capítulos (Cf. p. 19, p. 36, p. 53, p. 56, p. 74, p. 84, p. 139, p. 140, p. 155, p. 171, p. 178, p. 179, p. 203, p. 212, p. 228, e p. 243), o que permite o aprofundamento da reflexão em torno dos fundamentos éticos que devem sustentar a democracia.

A primeira parte – “*Part I – Framing Algorithmic Democracy*” – apenas é composta pelo primeiro capítulo, cuja matriz eminentemente introdutória permite ao leitor contextualizar a problemática, fornecendo-lhe, ademais, o mapeamento dos conceitos fundamentais que estarão presentes no decurso dos restantes capítulos. Paralelamente, o fenómeno político do populismo é referido como uma das primeiras fragilidades que resulta da colonização algorítmica do espaço público democrático (Cf. pp. 6-9, e pp. 9-12), cuja resposta deverá passar pela valorização do modelo deliberativo (Cf. pp. 10-12, pp. 14-16, e pp. 18-20).

A segunda parte – “*Part II – Ethical and Political Challenges of Algorithmic Democracy*” – é composta por seis capítulos nos quais os autores procuram aprofundar a problematização em torno da algoritmização da democracia, tornando-se, por isso, necessário proceder à conceptualização da noção de “algoritmo” (Cf. pp. 25-26). Uma vez reunidas as condições necessárias à problematização da perversão da democracia em função da colonização algorítmica do espaço público democrático, são apresentados os riscos que dimanam da apropriação política e económica que algumas entidades fazem das plataformas tecnológicas e digitais, cujo âmbito de atuação poderia tender para a promoção de uma participação democrática plural e eficaz.

A este propósito, o fenómeno digital da hiperconectividade surge como elemento de charneira na consideração da dataficação (datafication) da sociedade (Cf. pp. 30-31), uma vez que é através da recolha, seleção e armazenamento de dados que se dá a “algoritmização” da democracia (Cf. pp. 31-36). Para isso, os autores consideram essencial que a sociedade civil seja capaz de criar esferas de confiança que proporcionem espaços de construção e ação democráticas, baseados nas diferentes esferas de justiça integrantes (Cf. pp. 12-13, p. 15, p. 17, p. 19, p. 140, p. 159, p. 214 e p. 244).

Posto isto, o fenómeno da transformação digital, associado à adoção de soluções digitais que se assumem como pretensos instrumentos promotores de uma maior coesão social e política, emerge como justificação para a crescente pressão exercida por modelos baseados na Inteligência Artificial (Cf. pp. 41-42, e p. 44) – algo que é secundado pelo recurso a Inteligência Artificial Generativa e tecnologias avançadas do tipo NLP-Natural Language Processing (Cf. pp. 44-51) – enquanto instrumentos com características algorítmicas próprias como: objetividade, moralidade, representatividade e neutralidade aparente (Cf. pp. 51-52), mas que levam a uma conceção distorcida da realidade e da própria democracia (Cf. pp. 53-58).

Não obstante, os autores abordam a possibilidade de algumas tecnologias

poderem contribuir positivamente para uma “democracia melhorada” (augmented democracy), nomeadamente através do recurso a tecnologia ‘blockchain’ (Cf. pp. 64-71). Este mesmo assunto é retomado em capítulos posteriores (Cf. pp. 127-128, pp. 131-132, e pp. 239-243), uma vez que os autores também procuram identificar um conjunto de linhas de orientação que possam preconizar boas-práticas democráticas a serem desenvolvidas em nome de uma maior justiça social.

A sensibilidade dos autores é fortemente pautada pela influência do pensamento de Jürgen Habermas (Cf. pp. 81-102), cuja clarividência permite antever algumas implicações que derivam da modulação tecnológica das tradicionais esferas de participação democrática (Cf. pp. 83-85). Com efeito, a criação de perspectivas fabricadas que distorcem a própria realidade (Cf. pp. 85-87), seja de um ponto de vista algorítmico intencional ou não, tende a contribuir negativamente para a dissolução da própria capacidade deliberativa (Cf. pp. 89-93), precisamente através da artificialização da sociedade civil que promove fatores como: 1) popularidade, 2) capacidade de influência da opinião pública, e 3) interferência em órgãos de comunicação (Cf. pp. 94-95). Neste sentido, os autores apelam a uma reflexão crítica que devolva a boca de cena às pessoas elas mesmas, e não aos algoritmos que se outorgam na posição de legítimos tradutores dos seus ensejos.

Conforme é referido no início da obra, a democracia algorítmica não pode ser vista como um modelo (Cf. p. x). O que significa que não pode haver possibilidade de substituição ou de cooptação em função de um determinado conjunto de parâmetros, mais ou menos, favoráveis. E face ao perigo de a democracia se diluir numa autocracia sustentada pela falsa crença de que a humanidade depende inexoravelmente da IA e dos seus algoritmos (Cf. p. x, p. 36, p. 105, p. 116, p. 175 e p. 177), urge retomar o modelo deliberativo como forma de contrabalançar o poder cada vez maior que as Big Tech têm vindo a conquistar (Cf. p. 98).

De modo a começar a integrar uma variedade de perspectivas e diferentes metodologias para formar uma ética da democracia de matriz deliberativa, moralmente autónoma, os autores sintetizam algumas das tentativas já desenvolvidas que procuraram internalizar valores morais selecionados na IA (Cf. pp. 111-115). Não obstante, os riscos que a IA preconiza (Cf. pp. 116-120) tendem a pintar um fundo soturno mesmo diante de projetos sociais e políticos construtivos e com propósitos bem fundamentados. O que tende a dever-se, maioritariamente, aos fatores económicos que permeiam um determinado conjunto de decisões e que acabam por se traduzir em desafios éticos emergentes (Cf. p. 126, pp. 131-135, e p. 140).

A terceira parte da obra – “*Part III – Against Algorithmic Democracy: Scope and Ethical-Discursive Perspectives for na Expansion of Deliberative Democracy*” –, composta pelos últimos cinco capítulos, concentra a argumentação dos autores na defesa da democracia bidirecional (*two-way democracy*) (Cf. p. 204, pp. 208-209, p. 214, e p. 243) enquanto maior contributo do modelo de democracia deliberativa (Cf. p. 244). Neste sentido, os autores começam por tem em conta a deliberação enquanto pedra de toque para a transformação dialógica da dimensão ética que permeará a participação democrática (Cf. p. 148 e p. 244), de modo a permitir que uma ética renovada dos

fatores de discursividade possa orientar racionalmente os objetivos e o comportamento dos agentes envolvidos em torno da argumentação e do diálogo (*Cf.* p. 150).

Posto isto, os autores sublinham a importância de desenvolver uma perspectiva crítica que forneça os meios necessários à clarificação da estrutura material da ideologia algorítmica (*Cf.* p. 167, e pp. 169-171), de modo a esclarecer os fatores de manipulação e de alienação atinentes à intervenção humana por detrás da criação de um algoritmo (*Cf.* pp. 171-173). Assim, os autores consideram possível aferir de que forma os próprios algoritmos se transformam, eles mesmos, em fatores geradores de cultura (*Cf.* p. 175), bem como permitem compreender como é que a democracia assume uma natureza eminentemente procedimental em função da mineração e quantificação de dados recolhidos a partir dos utilizadores (*Cf.* pp. 176-178) (salientando-se o uso do termo “utilizador” que vem substituir a dimensão do cidadão, da pessoa, enfim, do humano).

Face à emergência de formas de expressão de matriz autocrática que ameaçam a democracia mesmo na sua legítima capacidade de afirmação, (*Cf.* pp. 185-187), os autores consideram que a aposta na definição, identificação e seleção de dados que devem ser fornecidos pode ser um instrumento de retração dessas mesmas dinâmicas que estão tendencialmente associadas a um determinado conjunto de interesses específicos, desde logo, para a contínua geração de algoritmos (*Cf.* p. 193, e p. 242). Desta forma, e na senda do pensamento kantiano (*Cf.* pp. 200-202), consideram possível tornar mais transparente um processo que tende para a nebulosidade, sem comprometer a necessária e efetiva participação democrática que deve servir como eixo de ação complementar ao exercício deliberativo em torno de problemas comuns (*Cf.* p. 199, p. 202, e p. 243).

A reflexão de grande fôlego que os autores nos apresentam reveste-se, por isso, de ampla pertinência e atualidade, contribuindo para o debate público em torno desta temática tão pertinente nos dias que correm. Esperamos com todo o entusiasmo e interesse uma possível tradução e edição da obra em língua portuguesa, de modo a fomentar a discussão crítica mais alargada dos argumentos honrosamente esgrimidos pelos Professores Domingo García-Marzá e Patrici Calvo.

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Christoph Schuringa, *A Social History of Analytic Philosophy: How Politics Has Shaped an Apolitical Philosophy*, New York: Verso Books, 2025. 336 pp.; ISBN 9781804298411 (pb); 9781804292099 (hb).

O segundo livro de Christoph Schuringa em apenas um ano (acompanhado de *Karl Marx and the Actualization of Philosophy*, pela Cambridge University Press) promove uma ampla intervenção na forma como a história da filosofia analítica e os seus cânones devem ser interpretados. Visando desmontar os argumentos fundacionais da escola anglo-saxónica enquanto produtora de pensamentos alheios à política e às forças sociais que moldam as ideias de cada tempo, Schuringa analisa a estrutura ideológica que sustenta e reproduz a trabalhada autoimagem da tradição. Valendo-se do método negativo—o foco deliberado nas dimensões desiguais e opressoras da sociedade—o autor expõe a inversão concreta da alegada universalidade e da lógica cristalina dos discípulos de Russell, Moore e outros membros da sociedade *The Apostles*, grupo do qual Keynes, Wittgenstein e até mesmo Eric Hobsbawm fizeram parte.

Contrapondo-se às obras dedicadas aos desenvolvimentos lógicos e paradigmáticos da filosofia ocidental—como *A History of Western Philosophy* (1945) do alvo principal do texto, Bertrand Russell, ou outros compêndios tais como *The History of Philosophy* (2019) de A. C. Grayling e o clássico *The Story of Philosophy* (1926) de Will Durant—Schuringa ecoa textos de investida crítica contra mitos ideológicos liberais, como o fez Howard Zinn face ao excepcionalismo estadunidense no seu *A People's History of The United States* (1980).

Essa perspetiva de cariz marxista, continental e materialista talvez torne o livro “*a tough pill to swallow*” para muitos colegas de departamentos puristas, cujo contacto com a filosofia social é limitado. Estas reações, tão comuns em conferências e cursos universitários onde a linguagem continental e os seus problemas recebem a pecha de “místicos” e “obscuros,” ilustram o paradoxo que sustenta o desenvolvimento do texto: a tradição anglo-saxónica opera como “uma tradição que logra pensar a si mesma enquanto não sendo uma tradição” (p.1)¹.

Uma pureza ilusória, que busca fundamentar um certo internalismo causal no desenvolvimento da filosofia enquanto disciplina, isola a tradição analítica num idealismo burguês e aristocrático que nega a correlação empiricamente verificável entre o nosso posicionamento social e as forças políticas que moldam as nossas subjetividades. Schuringa argumenta que esse movimento apresenta o método analítico como a forma neutra de inquérito, acima da crítica e antes da sociedade—um ponto de vista privilegiado que obscurece o verdadeiro privilégio dos seus autores. Considerando a âncora ideológica da filosofia analítica no liberalismo burguês do século XVIII—explicitada tanto na exaltação do indivíduo enquanto detentor de faculdades racionais suprassociais quanto no empirismo que situa o conhecimento como derivado das experiências sensoriais passivas—torna-se difícil para qualquer leitor do pensamento ocidental não conceber tal correlação.

Os temas primários do cientismo, o recurso ao senso comum e o impulso terapêutico

¹ Todas as traduções foram feitas pelo autor desta recensão.

dos britânicos influenciados por Wittgenstein estabelecem o enquadramento da obra, contra os quais Schuringa aplica a sua crítica ao mito da neutralidade avançado pelo grupo de Cambridge no começo do século XX. A soberba da assimilação dos métodos científicos, talvez mais matemáticos, revestiu a filosofia europeia do papel de guardiã das práticas epistemológicas humanas, ao mesmo tempo que o recurso às crenças autoevidentes do sujeito comum achata a diversidade e a fricção inerentes ao mundo social. Logo, o sentido terapêutico da tradição distancia-se como nunca da dimensão prática e disruptiva que o próprio liberalismo obteve nos séculos passados ao influenciar revoltas sociais e transformações políticas profundas.

Schuringa volta-se, no segundo capítulo, para a desconstrução de tais mitos ao expor a “rebelião contra o idealismo” (p. 25) encabeçada por G. E. Moore e Bertrand Russell. Extraíndo do lastro social desses e doutros grandes nomes de Cambridge, Schuringa procura demonstrar que a rebelião foi menos uma rutura contra o idealismo e mais uma reação comedida contra as figuras específicas de F. H. Bradley e J. M. E. McTaggart. Em termos práticos, as três abstrações ideológicas identificadas anteriormente—cientismo, senso comum e impulso terapêutico—são apresentadas como decorrências das realidades sociais e das personalidades das três figuras dominantes do cenário filosófico daquele tempo.

Russell, nascido em seio aristocrático e de grande influência política, foi fruto de uma criação repressora e religiosa em Pembroke Lodge. Moore, descendente de uma família da alta burguesia *quaker*—os Sturge—esposou a filosofia enquanto análise e delineada em termos conversacionais e devocionais. Por fim, Wittgenstein, com o peso da sua herança industrial da mais abastada família da Áustria do século XIX, concebeu a filosofia enquanto exorcismo de confusões conceptuais, revelando a natureza linguística dos seus problemas.

Além do paroquialismo da elite de Cambridge, o terceiro capítulo situa o Círculo de Viena e o positivismo lógico dentro do ambiente disruptivo da Áustria do período entre-guerras. O modernismo e o inflamado cenário político da época fundamentam a visão estratégica de Schuringa: ao contrário da melancolia e da dissociação política dos britânicos, os interesses do Círculo bebiam diretamente das lutas políticas que agitavam a *Rotes Wien* dominada pelos social-democratas entre 1918 e 1934. Essa aliança entre o liberalismo austríaco e o radicalismo marxista—ilustrado por Otto Neurath, que escreveu extensamente sobre economia e Marx—surgiu como resposta aos populismos e irracionalismos dos movimentos de massa do período. Ao contrário dos ingleses, os vienenses atuaram ativamente contra o antisemitismo e buscaram, como demonstra Schuringa, possíveis colaborações com os investigadores de Frankfurt. Essas tentativas, entretanto, viram-se frustradas pelos ataques viscerais de Max Horkheimer contra o positivismo lógico e a aversão de Neurath ao subjetivismo da teoria crítica.

O foco é alterado no capítulo seguinte, dadas as reorganizações de Oxford no pós-guerra. A cultura institucional da universidade, tomada por intelectuais refugiados de inclinação à esquerda, soma-se à transformação radical do pensamento do Wittgenstein das *Investigações Filosóficas*. Schuringa identifica na figura de Gilbert Ryle a renovação intelectual ali vivida: a profissionalização da filosofia na recém-criada pós-graduação e o acolhimento de inúmeros estudantes oriundos dos Estados Unidos. O maior contributo

deste período, segundo o autor, é ilustrado pelo notável grupo de filósofas mulheres após 1945: nomes de peso como Elizabeth Anscombe, Philippa Foot, Iris Murdoch e Mary Midgley transformariam não apenas a ética, mas também a literatura e dariam os primeiros passos para um novo centro de gravidade na tradição—os Estados Unidos.

No quinto capítulo, encontramos a tese central do livro, ou seja, a filosofia analítica não é uma tradição unificada e forjada anteriormente à Segunda Guerra Mundial, mas sim um fruto da sua institucionalização nos Estados Unidos. Ali, a identidade profissional e o clima ideológico são elementos cruciais na exposição de Schuringa, que invoca a repressão do Red Scare de McCarthy. A filosofia analítica assume para si o desafio de se tornar uma empreitada meramente intelectual num contexto sociopolítico de entrelaçamento entre autores como W. V. O. Quine e Reichenbach, que, além de comprometidos com a tese neoliberal exposta no colóquio de Walter Lippmann em 1938, atuaram como consultores na RAND Corporation—*think tank* fundado pelo departamento de defesa dos EUA, onde outros filósofos analíticos trabalharam em teoria dos jogos e teoria da escolha racional contra influências marxistas europeias.

Esta apropriação ideológica foi facilitada por mecanismos institucionais, como a ‘captura editorial’ de publicações prestigiosas como *The Philosophical Review*. O prefácio da antologia de 1948 *Readings in Philosophical Analysis*, editada por Herbert Feigl e Wilfrid Sellars, é apresentado como um documento-chave, enquadrando explicitamente o seu projeto como uma fusão de tradições que criou algo novo: “(...) uma viragem decisiva na história da filosofia” (p. 123). Tendo consolidado o seu poder institucional, a filosofia analítica passou então a definir-se contra os seus rivais, construindo um “outro” externo para solidificar a sua própria identidade.

Schuringa interpreta a divisão entre as tradições analítica e continental como fantasia, construção ficcional que engloba diversas tradições—fenomenologia, existencialismo, etc.—numa artificialidade monolítica contraproducente. No sexto capítulo, somos introduzidos à polémica de A. J. Ayer. Os seus ataques ferozes a Sartre e Heidegger procuravam sustentar que estes pensadores eram pontífices da irracionalidade e caricaturas de um estilo que beirava a poesia e não o rigor analítico da tradição anglo-americana. Neste caso, o autor dá especial destaque à rusga entre Derrida e Searle: o conflito sobre o legado da teoria dos atos de fala de J.L. Austin é simbólico desse conflito. Enquanto no texto Searle é apresentado como defensor máximo da ortodoxia analítica contra o estilo exploratório de Derrida, soma-se à crítica política de Schuringa as reacções pouco simpáticas de filósofos como Iris Murdoch contra os movimentos estudantis de maio de 1968.

A ironia dessa postura reside na ênfase dada à linguagem entre os analíticos. Nos últimos capítulos da obra, Schuringa explora como a cisão entre o social e a análise assume níveis cada vez mais formais com o programa davidsoniano de produzir uma teoria do significado no estilo de Tarski para a linguagem natural. Segundo o autor, tal deve-se à importância de Frege, que serviu um papel institucional crucial. Schuringa argumenta a favor da virada linguística impulsionada por Wittgenstein no *Tractatus*, pois ali reside a versão da filosofia enquanto “crítica da linguagem”—o mundo é uma estrutura lógica em si mesma; não há ponto de vista fora da linguagem que nos possibilite analisar a sua conexão com a realidade. Por fim, a lógica modal e o extensionalismo subsequentes, nos

anos de 1970, orientam o resto do texto. Este retorno à metafísica dentro da filosofia analítica é explicado em termos de uma derradeira disputa palaciana e ideológica no seio da própria lógica. Esta orientação, historicamente interpretada pelo autor, demonstra que o contexto hegemónico do campo ortodoxo vinha perdendo força contra as forças progressistas na tradição, forças essas já anunciadas por Putnam, quando este afirma que a filosofia se tornou demasiado especializada, sem qualquer contacto com questões humanísticas e debates concretos sobre a maneira como desejamos viver.

Schuringa conclui com uma crítica a este legado. A metafísica analítica contemporânea, argumenta o autor, encontra-se num estado de confusão metodológica, caracterizada por uma dependência sem princípios de “métodos de poltrona” e “ontologia especulativa”, fazendo apelos não fundamentados ao “raciocínio a priori sobre matérias sintéticas de facto” (p. 228) ao mesmo tempo que carece de uma “boa epistemologia da metafísica para oferecer” (p. 229), misturando, ainda, apelos ao senso comum e deferência à ciência sem escrutínio metodológico.

Nos capítulos finais, Schuringa regressa ao cerne da sua crítica, isto é, à questão do uso acrítico das intuições como sintoma do dogmatismo prevalecente da técnica. A imaginação filosófica é novamente apresentada como empobrecida e recalçada de ideologias das classes que a praticam. Invocando o “método de casos”, e o modo como a filosofia analítica se serve do recurso a experiências mentais para falar sobre o mundo, o autor revela a racionalidade calculista e masculinizada que sustenta tais exercícios. Ninguém está imune a esta crítica: Gettier, Frankfurt e os trolleys, bem como toda a matemática moral por detrás do *effective altruism*, são apresentados como técnicas desumanizadoras. Para Schuringa, estamos diante de um quadro sintomático de um esquema conceptual empobrecido e aplainado.

Nas últimas páginas, o livro debruça-se sobre aquilo que designa como “*columbização* da filosofia”. A ideologia liberal da filosofia analítica, agora completamente despida—o rei está nu!—busca neutralizar e apropriar-se de correntes críticas como o feminismo e a *Critical Race Theory*. As recentes viragens sociais na filosofia analítica, ao invés de dialogarem com aquilo que é produzido em termos de crítica imanente, depuram-nas da sua complexidade, padecendo de *columbização*—tal como Colombo que acreditou ter chegado à Índia, muitos dos “novos paradigmas” que surgem dentro de uma determinada tradição são, na verdade, apenas redescobertas de ideias já conhecidas noutros contextos. Essa descoberta de ideias alheias e empacotadas numa nova embalagem constitui para Schuringa, um gesto tático de neutralização da força política. Assim, o autor busca revelar o paradoxo de uma tradição que se julga neutra e atemporal, mas cuja pretensão universal apenas dissimula a sua origem de classe.

Acredito que, enquanto crítica, a obra *A Social History of Analytic Philosophy* oferece um tratamento histórico convincente da filosofia analítica. Documentos históricos são referidos e controvérsias não são ignoradas. No entanto, duvido do impacto real que o texto possa ter entre historiadores da filosofia analítica e da sua introdução em programas curriculares. A ambição de Schuringa em expor os meandros sociais e de classe que alimentaram o desenvolvimento da tradição estará limitado pela forma de exposição: a forma pela qual instruímos os nossos estudantes no pensamento da escola anglo-saxónica consiste, ainda, numa exposição dos

problemas da filosofia, e não a sua história social. O paradoxo está, creio, na limitação que Schuringa aponta à nossa crença, enquanto filósofos analíticos, de que as meta-análises constituem formas substanciais de produção de conhecimento. Trata-se, claramente, de um poderoso e rigoroso argumento a favor da crítica imanente na nossa tradição (como aponta Alice Crary em *Wittgenstein Goes to Frankfurt*, 2018), mas o tom geral no qual os argumentos são apresentados pode ser refratário a um acolhimento mais caridoso por parte de analíticos mais ortodoxos.

Não obstante, o livro constitui um impressionante e necessário contributo à história da filosofia e uma leitura necessária aos proponentes da viragem social e contextual no nosso contexto académico. Este livro de Schuringa inaugura, sem pedir licença, um promissor caminho relativo a abordagens mais conscientes da sociologia e da antropologia na filosofia da linguagem e na metafísica.

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