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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

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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(ological) 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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