Chapter 6

Imagination in discourse and in action

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INTRODUCTION: FOR A GENERAL THEORY OF IMAGINATION

The question considered in this essay can be stated in the following terms: Can the conception of imagination, first set out in the context of a theory of metaphor centred around the notion of semantic innovation, be expanded outside the sphere of discourse to which it originally belonged?

This question is itself part of a wider investigation of which I earlier gave the ambitious title of the 'Poetics of Volition'. The present essay represents one step in the direction of this 'Poetics':[1] the step from the theoretical to the practical. It seemed to me that the test of any claim to universality made by a theory constructed within the sphere of language would be to investigate its capacity of extension to the practical sphere.

We shall therefore proceed as follows. First, we shall review some classical problems inherent in the philosophy of imagination and shall briefly sketch a possible solution worked out within the framework of a theory of metaphor. The tie between imagination and semantic innovation, the core of our entire analysis, will therefore be proposed as the starting point for further development.

The second part will deal with the *transition* from the theoretical sphere to the practical sphere. A certain number of phenomena and experiences will be selected and ordered in accordance with their respective functions at the interesection of the theoretical and the practical: fiction helping to redescribe the action which has already taken place, fiction as belonging to an individual agent's plan of action, or fiction creating the very field of intersubjective action.

The third part will be situated at the very heart of the notion of the *social imaginary*, touchstone of the practical function of the imagination. If the key figures of *ideology* and *utopia* are heavily stressed here, this is because they echo, at the far end of the trajectory we shall follow in this essay, the ambiguities and the contradictions mentioned in the first part of our study. Perhaps it will then become apparent that these ambiguities and contradictions are not the drawbacks of the *theory* of the imagination alone but are

constitutive of the *phenomenon* of imagination as such. Only the test of generalization will give weight and substance to this hypothesis.

A philosophical investigation applied to the problem of imagination inevitably encounters from its very outset a series of obstacles, paradoxes, and checks which perhaps explain the relative eclipse of the problem of imagination in contemporary philosophy.

To begin with, the general problem of imagination suffers from the disrepute in which the term 'image' is held following its misuse in the empiricist theory of knowledge. The discredit suffered by 'psychologism' in contemporary semantics – in the eyes of logicians as well as linguists – also attaches to references to imagination in the theory of 'sense' (in this regard we have only to mention Gottlob Frege and his distinction between the 'sense' of a proposition or a concept – 'objective' and 'ideal' sense – and the 'representation' which remains 'subjective' and merely 'factual'). Behaviourist psychology is similarly anxious to eliminate images, which it holds to be private, unobservable mental entities. Then, too, the zealous pursuit of popular philosophy of creativity has to no small degree contributed to discrediting the imagination in the eyes of 'analytical' philosophers.

Behind this repugnance expressed by philosophers for welcoming the 'return of the outcast', there lies a doubt rooted deeper than a passing mood or a question of circumstances. This doubt was forcefully articulated by Gilbert Ryle in his *Concept of Mind*. Does the term 'imagination' designate a single, coherent phenomenon or a collection of experiences only distantly related? Tradition conveys at least four main uses of the term. It indicates first of all the arbitrary evocation of things which are absent but which exist elsewhere; this evocation does not imply any confusion of the absent thing with things which are present here and now.

Following a usage close to the preceding one, the same term designates portraits, paintings, drawings, diagrams, and so on – all of which have their own physical existence but whose function is to 'take the place of' the things they represent.

Stretching the meaning still further, we term images fictions which bring to mind not absent things but non-existent things. These fictions, however, range from dreams – products of sleep – to inventions possessing a purely literary existence such as dramas and novels.

Finally, the term image is applied to the domain of illusion, that is, to representations which for an outside observer or for later reflection, are addressed to absent or non-existent things but which, for the subject and in the instant in which this subject attends to them, call for belief in the reality of their object.

What then do the awareness of absence and illusory belief or the nothing of presence and pseudo-presence have in common?

The theories of the imagination handed down by philosophical tradition,

far from clarifying this radical equivocacy, are instead themselves divided over what is to be taken as paradigmatic in this wide range of basic significations. For this reason, there is a tendency to construct in each instance univocal – but rival – theories of the imagination. The range of variation found in these theories can be measured along two different axes: with regard to the object, the axis of presence and absence; with regard to the subject, the axis of fascinated consciousness and critical consciousness.

Along the first axis, the image corresponds to two opposing theories, illustrated by Hume and by Sartre, respectively. At one end of this first axis the image is referred to the preception of which it is merely the trace, in the sense of a lesser presence; all theories of reproductive imagination tend towards this pole. At the other end of the same axis, the image is thought of essentially in relation to absence, of other-than-present; the various key figures of productive imagination – portrait, dream, and fiction – all refer in different ways to this fundamental otherness.

The productive imagination and even the reproductive imagination, to the extent that it includes the minimum initiative consisting in evoking the absent thing, also both lie along a second axis, where the distinguishing factor is whether or not the subject of imagination is capable of assuming a critical awareness of the difference between the imaginary and the real. Theories of the image then take their place along an axis – noetic this time instead of noematic – where the variations are ordered according to the degree of belief involved. At one end of the axis – that defind by a complete lack of critical awareness – the image is confused with the real, taken for the real. Here we see the power of lies and errors decried by Pascal; it is also *mutatis mutandis* Spinoz's *imaginatio*, infected with belief as long as a contrary belief has not dislodged it from its primary position. At the other end of the axis, where critical distance is fully conscious of itself, imagination serves instead as the instrument of the critique of reality. Husserlian transcendental reduction, as the neutralization of existence, is the fullest illustration of this. The variations in meaning along the second axis are no less ample than those mentioned above. What is common to the *state of confusion* characterizing a consciousness which inadvertently takes as real something which for another consciousness is not real and the *act of distinction*, possessing a high degree of self-awareness, by which a consciousness posits something at a distance from the real thereby producing otherness at the very heart of its experience?

This is the knot of contradictions which appear when we survey the shambles of the theory of the imagination today. Do these contradictions betray a weakness in the philosophy of the imagination or do they denote a structural trait of the imagination itself which philosophy will have to account for?

IMAGINATION IN DISCOURSE

What new approach to the phenomenon of imagination does the theory of metaphor offer? What it offers is first of all a different manner of putting the problem. Instead of approaching the problem by way of perception and asking if and how we can move from perception to image, the theory of metaphor invites us to relate the imagination to a certain type of language use, more precisely, to see in it an aspect of *semantic innovation* characteristic of the metaphorical uses of language. This shift in attack is considerable in itself, as so many prejudices were linked with the idea that the image is an appendix to perception, a shadow of perception. To say that our images are spoken before they are seen is to abandon what we initially – but mistakenly – take for granted, namely, that the image is first and foremost a 'scene' being played out on the stage of a mental 'theatre' for the benefit of an internal 'spectator'; but this also means giving up a second point we also mistakenly assume, namely, that this mental entity is the stuff out of which we construct our abstract ideas, our concepts, the basic ingredient in some sort of mental alchemy.

But if an image is not derived from perception, how can it be derived from language?

An analysis of the poetic image, taken as a paradigmatic case, will provide the germ of a reply. The poetic image is something that the poem as a certain work of language sets out in certain circumstances and in accordance with a certain procedure. The procedure involved here is reverberation, to use an expression which Gaston Bachelard borrowed from Eugene Minkowski. But to understand this procedure we first have to see that reverberation comes not from things seen but from things said. The question which must be treated first, therefore, concerns the very circumstances of discourse which serve to generate the imaginary.

I have studied elsewhere how metaphor functions and the important consequences this has for a theory of the imagination. I showed that this functioning is thoroughly misunderstood if metaphor is considered as simply a deviant use of names, a deviation in denomination. Metaphor involves instead a deviant use of predicates in the context of the sentence as a whole. We must therefore speak of metaphorical *utterance* instead of names used metaphorically. The question then turns around the discursive strategy governing the *use of unusual predicates*. Along with certain French and English authors, I want to stress predicative non-pertinence as the means of producing a sort of shock between different semantic fields. It is in answer to the challenge stemming from this shock that we produce a new predicative pertinence which is the metaphor. In its turn, this new appropriateness which is produced at the level of the sentence as a whole provokes, at the level of the individual word, the extension of meaning by which classical rhetoric identifies metaphor.

The value of this approach lies in shifting our attention from problems of change of meaning at the simple level of denomination to problems of restructuring semantic fields at the level of predicative use.

It is precisely at this point that the theory of metaphor is of interest to the philosophy of imagination. The tie between the two theories has always been regarded with a certain suspicion, as is witnessed by the very expression *figurative* language and *figure* of style. It is as if metaphor gave a body, a contour, a face to discourse. But how? It is, in my opinion, in the instant when a new meaning emerges out of the shambles of literal predication that the imagination offers its own special mediation. In order to understand this, let us begin with Aristotle's famous remark that to 'make good metaphor . . . is to perceive the similar'. But we should be mistaken as to the role of resemblance if we were to interpret this in terms of the association of ideas, as the association through resemblance (in contrast to the association of contiguity which governs metonymy and synecdoche). Resemblance is itself a function of the use of unusual predicates. It consists in the *rapprochement* in which the logical distance between farflung semantic fields suddenly falls away, creating a semantic shock which, in turn, sparks the meaning of the metaphor. Imagination is the apperception, the sudden view, of a new predicative pertinence. This could be called *predicative assimilation* in order to stress the point that resemblance itself is a process of the same nature as the predicative process itself. None of this then is taken from the old association of ideas as it relates to the mechanical attraction of mental atoms. Imagining is first and foremost restructuring semantic fields. It is, to use Wittgenstein's expression in the *Philosophical Investigations*, 'seeing as . . . .'.

In this we find what is essential to the Kantian theory of schematism. Schematism, Kant said, is a method for giving an image to a concept. And again, schematism is a rule of producing images. Let us set aside the second assertion for the moment and concentrate instead on the first. In what sense is imagination a method rather than a content? In that it is the very operation of grasping the similar, in the predicative assimilation which answers the initial semantic shock. Suddenly we are 'seeing as . . .'; we see old age as the close of the day, time as a beggar, nature as a temple or living pillars, and so forth. Of course, we have not yet accounted for the quasi-sensorial aspect of images. But at least we have introduced Kantian productive imagination into the field of language. In short, the work of the imagination is to schematize metaphorical attribution. Like the Kantian schema, it gives an image to an emerging meaning. Before it is a faded perception, the image is an emerging meaning.

The transition to the image's quasi-sensorial aspect, usually quasi-optical, is then easily understandable. The phenomenology of reading offers us a sure guide here. It is in the experience of reading that we surprise the phenomenon of reverberation, of echoing or resounding, by which the schema produces images in its turn. In schematizing the metaphorical attribution, the imagination radiates out in all direction, reanimating earlier experiences, awakening dormant memories, spreading to adjacent sensorial fields. As Bachelard before him, Marcus Hester remarks in *The Meaning of Poetic Metaphor* that the sort of image evoked or stimulated in this way is less the free-floating image treated in the theory of association than the 'bound' image engendered by 'poetic diction'. The poet is an artisan working in language, who creates and gives form to images through the medium of language alone.

The effect of reverberation, resonance, or echo, is not a secondary phenomenon. If, on the one hand, it seems to weaken and scatter sense in the case of daydreams, on the other hand, the image introduces into the entire process a note of suspension, an effect of neutralization, in short, a negative moment thanks to which the entire process is placed in the dimension of unreality. The ultimate role of the image is not only to spread meaning over diverse sensorial fields but to hold meaning suspended in this neutralized atmosphere, in the element of fiction. Indeed, it is this element which will appear again at the close of our study under the name of utopia. But it already seems that the imagination is really what we all mean by this term: a free play of possibilities in a state of uninvolvement with respect to the world of perception or action. It is in this state of uninvolvement that we try out new ideas, new ways of being in the world. But this 'common sense' belonging to the notion of the imagination is not fully recognized as long as the fecundity of the imagination has not been connected to that of language as it is exemplified in the metaphorical process. For we then forget this verity: we only see images in so far as we first hear them.

IMAGINATION AT THE INTERSECTION OF THEORY AND PRACTICE

The heuristic force of fiction

The first – and most general – condition for *applying* the semantic theory of imagination outside the sphere of discourse that is semantic innovation is already, within the limits of metaphorical utterance, an *ad extra* application, that is, has a *referential* dimension.

Now this is not self-evident. It may even seem that in its poetic usage language is concerned only with itself and thus has no reference. Did we not just stress above the neutralizing action performed by the imagination in regard to positing existence? Could the metaphorical utterance then have a sense without possessing a reference?

In my opinion, this assertion only tells half the truth. The neutralizing function of the imagination with respect to the 'thesis of the world' is only the negative condition required to free a second-order referential force. An analysis of the affirmative force deployed by poetic language shows that is is not just the sense which is split in the metaphorical process but the reference

as well. What is eliminated is the ordinary language reference applied to objects which correspond to one of our interests, our primary interest in controlling and manipulating. By holding in abeyance this interest and the sphere of meaning it governs, poetic discourse allows our deep-seated insertion in the life-world to emerge; it allows the ontological tie uniting our being to other beings and to Being to be articulated. What is articulated in this way is what I call second-order reference and which in reality is the primordial reference.

The consequence for the theory of imagination is considerable indeed. It concerns the transition from sense to reference in *fiction*. Fiction has, so to speak, a double valence as to its reference: it is directed elsewhere, even nowhere, but because it designates the non-place in relation to reality as a whole, it can indirectly point to this reality by means of what I should like to call a new 'reference effect' (in the way that some people speak about 'meaning effects'). This new reference effect is nothing other than the power of fiction to *redescribe* reality. Later we shall see the virulent force of this redescription in the key figure of utopia.

This tie between fiction and redescription has been forcefully stressed by certain thinkers working in model theory and hence outside the field of poetic language. There is a body of work which strongly suggests that models are to certain forms of scientific discourse what fictions are to certain forms of poetic discourse. The feature common to both models and fiction is their *heuristic* force, that is, their capacity to open up and unfold new dimensions of reality, suspending our belief in an earlier description.

It is here that the opposing philosophical tradition concerning images offers stubborn resistance; this is the tradition which holds the image to be a faded perception, a shadow of reality. The paradox of fiction is that striking out perception is the condition for heightening our vision of things. François Dagognet demonstrates this in great detail in *Ecriture et Iconographie* (1973). Every icon is a graphic figure which recreates reality at a higher level of realism. This 'iconic increase' occurs through the use of abbreviations and articulations, as is shown by a careful study of the main episodes in the history of painting and of all types of graphic inventions. Applying the vocabulary of the second law of thermodynamics, we can say that this reference effect amounts to scaling the entropic slope of ordinary perception, inasmuch as perception tends to level out differences and soften contrasts. This theory of the iconic element agrees with Nelson Goodman's theory of generalized symbols in *The Languages of Art* (1968): all symbols – in art and in language – have the same referential claim to 'remake reality'.

Any transition from discourse to praxis stems from this initial extension of fiction outside itself, following the principle of iconic increase.

Fiction and narrative

The first transition from the theoretical to the practical is close at hand. For what certain fictions redescribe is precisely human action itself. Or, to approach the same thing from a different angle, the first way man tries to understand and to master the 'diversity' of the practical field is to provide himself with a fictional representation. Whether this is ancient tragedy, modern drama, novels, fables, or legends, the narrative structure provides fiction with the techniques of abbreviation, articulation, and condensation through which the iconic increase effect is obtained; this, we have noted, has been described elsewhere with regard to painting and the other plastic arts. This is basically what Aristotle had in mind in the poetics when he tied the 'mimetic' function of poetry – that is, in the context of his treatise, of tragedy – to the 'mythical' structure of the fable constructed by the poet. This is a great paradox: tragedy 'imitates' action only because it 'recreates' it on the level of a well-structured fiction. Aristotle is therefore able to conclude that poetry is more philosophical than history which is concerned with the contingent, with the ordinary course of action. Poetry goes straight to the essence of action precisely because it connects *mythos* and *mimesis*, that is, in our vocabulary, *fiction* and *redescription*.

To generalize, may we not extend this remark to any kind of 'recounting', of 'telling a story'? Why have all peoples invented so many apparently strange and complicated stories? Is it merely for the pleasure of playing with the various combinations afforded by a few simple action segments and by the basic roles which corresponds to them – the traitor, the messenger, the saviour, and so on – as structural analyses of stories seem to suggest? Or, based upon this very type of structural analysis, should we not extend the dialectic of fiction and redescription to narrative structure as well? If this comparison is valid, we have to distinguish between the act of narration and the story strucuture, in order to then discern in the narration what is characteristic of an act of disclosure as such, with its fundamental illocutionary and referential force. This referential force consists in the fact that the narrative act, through the narrative structures, applied the framework of an ordered fiction to the diversity of human action. Between what could be a logic of narrative possibilities and the empirical diversity of action, narrative fiction interposes its schematism of human action. By mapping out action in this way, the storyteller produces the same reference effect as the poet who, in Aristotle's terms, imitates reality in his mythical reinvention. Or, to use the terminology of model theory mentioned briefly above, we may say that the story is a heuristic process of redescription in which the heurisitc function stems from the narrative structure and redescription has the action itself for referent.

This first step into the practical sphere is still, however, of limited significance. Inasmuch as fiction is restricted to mimetic activity, what is

redescribed is an action which is *already there*. Redescription is still just a form of description. A poetics of action calls for something more than a reconstruction with only descriptive value.

Now in addition to its mimetic function, even when applied to action, imagination also has a projective function which is part of the dynamics of action itself.

Fiction and the capacity to act

This function is clearly shown by the phenomenology of *individual* action. No action without imagination, so to speak. And this is true in several ways: from the viewpoint of projects, from that of motivation, and from that of the very capacity to act. In the first instance, the noematic content of the project – what I formerly called the *pragma*, that is, the thing to be done by me – includes a certain schematization of the network of ends and means, which could be termed the schema of the pragma. It is, in fact, in the anticipatory imagining of action that I 'try out' different possible courses of action and that I 'play' – in the literal sense of the word – with practical possibilities. It is here that pragmatic 'play' overlaps with the narrative 'play' mentioned above; the function of the project, turned towards the future, and the function of the narrative, turned towards the past , exchange schemata and frame-works, the project borrowing the story's structuring capacity and the story receiving the project's capacity for looking ahead. Next, the imagination shares something of the motivational process as well. It is the imagination which provides the milieu, the luminous clearing in which we can compare and contrast motives as different as desires and ethical demands, which in turn can range from professional rules to social customs or to strictly personal values. The imagination provides the mediating space of a common 'fantasy' for things as diverse as the force which pushes as if from behind, the attraction which seduces as if from in front, reasons which justify and establish as if from underneath. It is in a form of the imaginary that the common 'dispositional' element is represented practically, marking the difference, on the one hand, between a physically constraining cause and a motive and, on the other hand, between a motive and a logically constraining reason. This form of the practical imaginary has its linguistic equivalent in expressions such as: I could do this or that, if I wanted. Language limits itself here to transporting and expressing in the conditional the sort of neutralizing, of hypothetical transposition which is the condition of figurability, permitting desire to enter the common sphere of motivation. Here, language is second in relation to the imaginary unfolding of motives in what has been termed metaphorically a luminous clearing. Finally, it is in the realm of the imaginary that I try out my capacity to do something, that I take the measure of 'I can'. I ascribe my own capacity to myself – as the agent of my own action – only by picturing it to myself in terms of imaginative variations on

the theme of 'I could', or 'I could have done otherwise had I wanted'. Here again, language is a good guide. Extending Austin's brilliant analysis in his famous article on 'Ifs and Cans', we can say that in expressions of the form, 'I could, I could have if . . .', the conditional provides the grammatical projection of imaginative variations on the theme 'I can'. This form of the conditional belongs to the tense logic of the practical imagination. What is essential from a phenomenological standpoint is that I grasp the immediate certainty of this power only through the imaginative variations which mediate this certainty.

There is thus a progression from the simple schematization of my projects, through the figurability of my desires, to the imaginative variations of the 'I can'. This progression points to the idea of imagination as a general function of what is possible in practice. It is this general function which Kant anticipates in the *Critique of Judgement* under the term of the 'free-play' of the imagination.

It remains to be seen, with regard to the freedom of the imagination, what the imagination of freedom might possibly be. A simple phenomenology of individual action, however, is no longer sufficient here. This phenomenology has, of course, outstripped the bounds of the purely mimetic function of the imagination. But it has not gone beyond the limits set by the individual character of human action at this stage of the investigation.

Fiction and intersubjectivity

We shall make a decisive step towards the social imaginary by meditating on the conditions of the possibility of historical experience in general. The imagination is implicated here inasmuch as the historical field of experience itself has an analogical constitution. This point deserves careful elaboration, for it is here that the theory of the imagination transcends not only the literary examples of fiction applied to action but even the phenomenology of volition as a principle of individual action. The starting point is found in the theory of intersubjectivity set out by Husserl in the *Fifth Cartesian Meditation* and in Alfred Schütz's development of this theory. We can speak of an *historical* field of experience because my temporal field is connected to another temporal field by what is termed a relation of 'pairing' (*Paarung*). In accordance with this pairing, one temporal flux can accompany another. What is more, this 'pairing' seems to be only a cross-section of an all-encompassing flux in which each of us has not only contemporaries but predecessors and successors as well. This higher order temporality carries with it its own intelligibility involving categories which are not just extensions of the categories of individual action (project, motivation, ascribing an act to an agent who can do what he does, and so on). The categories of common actions make specific relations between contemporaries, predecessors, and successors possible, and among these is found the transmission of traditions to the extent that this forms a tie which can be broken or renewed.

Now the inner connection belonging to this all-encompassing flux we call history is subordinated not only to these categories of common action (which Max Weber discusses in *Wirtschaft und Gesellschaft*), but to a higher order transcendental principle which plays the same role as the Kantian 'I can' which is held to accompany all my representations. This higher principle is the principle of analogy implied in the initial act of pairing diverse temporal fields, those of our contemporaries, those of our predecessors, and those of our successors. These fields are analogous in the sense that each of us, in principle, can exercise the function of *I* just *as any other* and can ascribe his experience to himself. It is here, as we shall see, that the imagination is involved. But first it must be recalled that the principle of analogy has, unfortunatley, most often been mistakenly interpreted in terms of an argument, in the sense of reasoning by analogy; as if in order to ascribe to another the power of saying 'I', I had to compare his behaviour to mine and to employ an argument using the proportional fourth term based on the purported resemblance between the behaviour of others observed from outside and my own experienced directly. The analogy implied in the coupling is in no way an argument. It is the transcendental principle establishing the other as another self like myself, a self *like* my self. The analogy here involves the direct transfer of the meaning 'I'. *Like* me, my contemporaries, my predecessors, and my successors *can* say 'I'. It is in this way that I am historically related to all the others. It is also in this sense that the principle of analogy between the various temporal fields is to the handing down of traditions what the Kantian 'I think' is to the causal order of experience.

Such is the transcendental condition under which the imagination is a fundamental component in founding the historical field. It is not by accident that Husserl, in the *Fifth Meditation*, bases his notion of analogical apperception on that of imaginative transfer. To say that you think as I do, that you experience pleasure and pain as I do, is to be able to imagine what I should think and experience if I were in your place. This transfer in the imagination of my 'here' to your 'there' is the root of what we call empathy (*Einfühlung*), which can be hate as easily as love. In this sense, the transfer in imagination is to analogical apperception what schematism is to objective experience in Kant. The imagination is the schematism belonging to the constitution of intersubjectivity in analogical apperception. This schematism functions in the same way as the productive imagination in objective experience, namely, as the genesis of new connections. The task of this productive imagination is, in particular to keep alive all sorts of mediations which make up historical ties and, among these, institutions which objectify the social link and increasingly transform the 'us' into 'them', to use Alfred Schütz's expression. This anonymity of mutual relations in a bureaucratic society can go so far as to simulate causal connections on the level of objects. This systematic distortion of communication, this radical reification of the social process, thus tends to

abolish the difference between the course of history and the course of things. It is then the task of the productive imagination to fight against this terrifying entropy in human relations. To express this in the idiom of competence and performance, the imagination has as its competence preserving and identifying the *analogy of the ego* in all relations with our contemporaries, our predecessors, and our successors. Its competence therefore lies in preserving and identifying the difference between the course of history and the course of things.

In conclusion, the possibility of an historical experience in general lies in our ability to remain open to the effects of history, to borrow Gadamer's category, *Wirkungsgeschichte*. We are affected by the effects of history, however, only to the extent that we are able to increase our capacity to be affected in this way. The imagination is the secret of this competence.

SOCIAL IMAGINARY

The fourth and final step in the study we have placed at the crossroads of theory and practice may possibly have led us too far too fast. Of course, the capacity, mentioned in our conclusion, which delivers us over in the imagination to the 'effects of history' is indeed the basic condition of historical experience in general. But this condition is buried so deeply and has been so neglected that it constitutes nothing more than an ideal of communication, an idea in the Kantian sense. The truth of our condition is that the analogical tie which makes every man another like myself is accessible to us only through a certain number of *imaginative practices*, such as *ideology* and *utopia*. These imaginative practices are broadly defined as mutually antagonistic and as representative of two different pathologies which completely mask the positive function of each, that is, the contribution made by each in establishing the analogical tie between myself and my fellowman. As a result, the productive imagination mentioned above – and which we considered the schematization of this analogical tie – can be restored to itself only through the *critique* of the antagonistic and semi-pathological figures of the social imagination. Mistaking the unavoidable nature of this detour is what I meant above by going too far too fast. We must therefore consider a twofold ambiguity, that which results from the polarity *between* idelogy and utopia and that resulting from the polarity *within* each of these between its positive and constructive side and its negative and destructive side.

With regard to the first polarity, that between ideology and utopia, we have to admit that since Karl Mannheim's *Ideologie und Utopie* in 1929, it has seldom appeared as the object of study. There is indeed a Marxist and post-Marxist critique of ideologies, forcefully developed by K.O. Apel and Jürgen Habermas in line with the Frankfurt school. But, on the other hand, we find a history and a sociology of utopia only loosely connected to this *Ideologie Kritik*. And yet Karl Mannheim had paved the way by showing the difference between these two phenomena on the basis of a common criterion of *non-*

congruence with respect to historical and social reality. In my opinion, this criterion presupposes that individuals as well as collective entities (groups, classes, nations, etc.) are primarily and without exception related to social reality in a manner other than that of direct participation, in accordance with the key figures of non-coincidence which are precisely those of the social imaginary.

The sketch which follows will be limited to drawing the basic traits of this imaginary which point up the analogical constitution of the social tie. The investigation will not be pointless if it re-establishes at the end of its course the initial ambiguities and contradictions of the meditation on the imagination.

I have attempted, in another study, to discern the levels of meaning which form the phenomenon of ideology. I upheld the thesis that the ideological phenomenon could not be limited to the role of distortion and dissimulation, as a simplified interpretation of Marxism would have it. We could not even understand that ideology is capable of conferring such true effectiveness on an inverted image of reality if we have not first acknowledged the constituting nature of the social imaginary. The latter operates at the most primitive level, as is described by Max Weber at the start of his great work when he characterizes social action as meaningful behaviour which is mutually oriented and socially integrated. It is at this radical level that ideology is constituted. It seems related to the need every group has to give itself an *image* of itself, to 'represent' itself, in the theatrical sense of the word, to put itself on stage, to play itself. Perhaps no social group can exist without this indirect relation to its own being through a representation of itself. As Lévi-Strauss forcefully affirms in his introduction to the work of Mauss, symbolism is not an effect of society but society an effect of symbolism. The nascent pathology of the ideological phenomenon arises from its very function of reinforcing and repeating the social tie in situations that occur after the fact. Simplification, schematization, stereotyping and ritualization arise out of the ever-widening distance between actual practice and the interpretations through which the group becomes aware of its own existence and practice. The condition of the production of social messages seems indeed to be a certain kind of non-transparency of our cultural codes.

In the same analysis, I try to show that the function of dissmulation clearly surpasses that of integration when ideological representations are monitored by the system of authority in a given society. Every authority, in fact, seeks to make itself legitimate. Now it seems that if every claim to legitimacy is linked with people's belief in this legitimacy, the relation between the authority's claim and the belief which answers to this is basically unsymmetrical. The claim coming from the authority always contains more than the belief which is accorded this authority. It is here that ideology mobilizes its forces to fill the gap between the demand from above and the belief from below.

I think that the Marxist concept of ideology, with its metaphor of 'turning

the real on its head' in an illusionary image, can be set against this double background. For how indeed could illusions, fantasies, or phantasmagoria have any historical significance if ideology did not have a mediating function in the most basic social tie, if ideology were not contemporaneous with the symbolic constitution of social ties themselves? In truth, we cannot speak of a real activity which would be pre-ideological or non-ideological. We could not even understand how an inverted representation of reality could service the interests of a ruling class if the relation between domination and ideology were not more primitive than the analysis based on social classes and were not capable of even outliving the class structure. All that Marx contributes which is new and unquestionably valid stands out against this initial background of the symbolic constitution of social ties in general and of the relation of authority in particular. His own contribution concerns the legitimizing function of ideology with respect to the relations of domination stemming from the division into classes and the class struggle.

Finally, however, it is the polarity between ideology and utopia which makes both its founding role and its specific pathology intelligible. The difficulty inherent in the simultaneous study of utopia and ideology lies in the fact that utopia, unlike ideology, forms a definite literary genre. Utopia knows itself as utopia. It clearly calls out its name. Then, too, its literary status, at least since Thomas More, allows us to approach its existence by way of its writings. The history of utopia is staked out with the names of its inventors, in direct contrast to the anonymity of ideologies.

As soon as one tries to define utopia in terms of its *content*, one is surprised to find that in spite of the continuity of certain themes – the status of the family, the consumption and the appropriation of goods, the organization of political life and of religion – it is not difficult to class diametrically opposed projects under each of these terms. This paradox will lead us later to an interpretation in terms of imagination. But we can already at this point begin to suspect that if utopia is the imaginary project of another society, of another reality, this 'constituting imagination', as Desroche calls it, can justify the most conflicting choices. Another family, another sexuality can mean monachism or sexual community. Another type of consumption can mean asceticism or conspicuous consumption. Another relation to property can mean direct appropriation in the absence of law or detailed artificial planning. Another relation to the government of the people can mean employee-run enterprises or submission to a virtuous and disciplined bureaucracy. Another relation to religion can mean radical atheism or festivity.

The crucial point in the analysis consists in tying all these thematic variations to the more fundamental ambiguities inherent in the *function* of utopia. These functional variations parallel those of ideology. The layers of meaning to be found here must be set out in both cases with the same sense of complexity and paradox. Just as we had to resist the temptation to interpret ideology in terms of dissimulation and distortion alone, we must also resist

the temptation to construct the concept of utopia on the sole basis of its quasi-pathological expressions.

The central idea should be that of *nowhere* implied by the word itself and by Thomas More's description. For it is beginning with this strange spatial extraterrestrialness – this non-place in the literal sense of the word – that we can take a fresh look at our reality, in relation to which nothing can henceforth be taken for granted. The field of the possible now extends out beyond the real. It is this field which is staked out by the 'other' ways of living mentioned above. The question, then, is knowing whether the imagination could have a 'constituting' role in this leap outside. Utopia is the mode in which we radically rethink what family, consumption, government, religion, and so on are. From 'nowhere' springs the most formidable questioning of what is. Utopia therefore appears in its primitive core as the exact counterpart of our first concept of ideology as the function of social integration. Utopia, in counterpoint, is the function of social subversion.

In saying this, we are ready to pursue the parallelism one step further, following the second concept of ideology as the instrument for legitimizing a given system of authority. What is in fact at stake in utopia is precisely the 'given' found in all systems of authority, namely, the excess of the demand for legitimacy in relation to the belief held by members of the community. Just as ideologies tend to bridge this gap or to hide it, utopias, one might say, reveal the unstated surplus value attaching to authority and unmask the pretension inherent in all systems of legitimation. This is why all utopias, at one time or another, offer 'other' ways of exercising power in the family, in economic, political, or religious life. This 'other' way can mean, as we have seen, things as diametrically opposed as a more rational or more ethical authority or the complete absence of power if it is true that power as such is ultimately considered radically and inalterably evil. That the question of power is the central question of every utopia is confirmed not only by the description of the literary-type social and political fantasies but also by the different attempts to 'realize' utopia. This basically takes the form of microsocieties, whether passing or permanent, ranging from monastery to kibbutz or hippy commune. These attempts do not attest solely to the seriousness of the utopian spirit, to its capacity for instituting new modes of life; but also to its basic aptitude to come to grips with the paradoxes of power.

The pathological traits of utopia result from this *mad* dream. Just as the positive concept of ideology contained the seed of its negative counterpart, so, too, the pathology specific to utopia can already be glimpsed in its most positive aspects. It is in this way that the third concept of ideology corresponds to a third concept of utopia.

Because utopia stems from a leap into somewhere else, into nowhere, it develops the unsettling features which are easily discerned in the literary expressions of utopia: a tendancy to hold reality in the throes of a dream, a

fixation on perfectionist designs, etc. Certain authors have not hesitated to compare the logic developed by utopia to that characteristic of schizophrenia: the logic of all or nothing, standing outside the workings of time; a preference for schematizing space; a disdain for intermediary degrees and a total lack of interest in the first step to be taken to move towards the ideal; blindness to the contradictions inherent in action – either that these make certain evils inescapable in the pursuit of certain desired goals or that they point up the incompatibility of equally desirable goals. To this clinical tableau of flight into dreams and into literature, we can also add the regressive features of the nostalgia for a lost paradise hidden under the guise of futurism.

The time has come to account for this twofold dichotomy in terms of imagination, first, the dichotomy between the poles of ideology and utopia and, second, that within each of the terms between the poles of their ambiguous variations.

We must first try, it seems to me, to think of ideology and utopia together in terms of their most positive, constructive and, if we may say so, healthy aspects. Starting from the concept of non-congruence in Mannheim, it is possible to construct both the integrative function of ideology and the subversive function of utopia. At first glance, these two phenomena are simply the inverse of one another. At a closer look, they dialetically imply one another. The most 'conservative' ideology, by which I mean that which exhausts itself in repeating the social tie and reinforcing it, is an ideology only through the gap implied in what we could call, in memory of Freud, the 'consideration of figurability' inherent in the social image. Conversely, the utopian imagination seems merely excentric. This is only an appearance. In a poem entitled 'A Step Outside the Human', the poet Paul Celan refers to utopia in these terms: 'Inside a sphere directed towards the human, but excentric.' We see the paradox here. It has two sides. On the one hand, there is no movement towards what is human which is not first excentric; on the other, elsewhere leads here.

This criss-crossing of utopia and ideology appears as the play of two fundamental directions of the social imagination. The first tends towards integration, repetition, reflection. The second, because it is excentric, tends towards wandering. But neither exists without the other. The most repetitive, the most reduplicative ideology – to the extent that it mediates immediate social ties – the ethical, social substance Hegel would say – introduces a gap, a distance, and consequently something which is potentially excentric. On the other hand, the most errant form of utopia to the extent that it moves 'inside a sphere directed towards the human' remains a hopeless attempt to show what man basically is in the clarity of utopia.

This is why the tension between utopia and ideology is insuperable. It is often even impossible to decide whether this or that mode of thinking is ideological or utopian. The line can be drawn only after the fact and then on the basis of the success of the enterprise – a criterion which, in turn,

can be questioned inasmuch as it rests on the supposition that only what was successful was just. But, what of aborted attempts? Will they not return one day, and will they not then obtain the success history has refused them in the past?

This phenomenology of the social imagination gives us the key to the second aspect of the problem, namely, that each term of the pair involves its own specific pathology. If imagination is a process rather than a state, it becomes comprehensible that there is a specific dysfunction corresponding to each direction of the process of imagination.

Ideology's dysfunction is distortion and dissimulation. We showed above that these pathological figures constitute the foremost dysfunction grafted onto the integrative function of the imagination. A primitive distortion, a primordial dissimulation are quite inconceivable. It is in the symbolic constitution of the social tie that the dialectic of hiding and showing originates. The reflective function of ideology can be understood only on the basis of this ambiguous dialectic which already possesses all the features of non-congruence. It follows from this that the tie denounced by Marxism linking the process of dissimulation to the interests of the ruling class is only one aspect of this phenomenon. Any 'superstructure' whatsoever can function ideologically: science and technology just as well as religion and philosophical idealism.

The dysfunction characteristic of utopia is no less understandable on the basis of the pathology of the imagination. Utopia tends towards schizophrenia in the same way that ideology tends towards dissimulation and distortion. The pathology is rooted in the excentric function of utopia. It develops in caricature the ambiguity of the phenomenon which oscillates between fantasy and creativity, flight and return. 'Nowhere' may or *may not* give us a new orientation with respect to the 'here and now'. But who knows whether this or that errant mode of existence is not a prophecy concerning man to come? Who knows even whether a certain degree of individual pathology is not the condition for social change, inasmuch as this pathology brings to light the sclerosis of worn out institutions? To express this in a more paradoxial fashion, who knows whether the disease is not at the same time the remedy?

These troubling remarks at least have the advantage of directing our gaze towards an irreducible feature of the social imaginary, namely, that we reach the social imaginary only through the figures of false consciousness. We can take possession of the creative power of the imagination only through a critical relationship to these two figures of false consciousness. It is as if, in order to cure the madness of utopia, it were necessary to call upon the 'healthy' function of ideology and as if the critique of ideology could only be made by a consciousness capable of looking at itself from 'nowhere'.

It is in this *work* on the social imaginary that the contradictions, which a simple phenomenology of the individual imagination has to leave in their state of contradiction, can be mediated.

NOTE

1 A French version of this article, written in honour of Mgr Henri Van Camp, first appeared in *Savoir, faire espérer: les limites de la raison*, (Publications des Facultés Universitaires Saint Louis, Bruxelles, 1976).