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Introduction

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Introduction

Jean-Luc Amalric

Everyone is now willing to recognize that the question of imagination occupies a central position in Ricœur's work. Not only does the Ricœurian theory of the imagination develop an innovative analysis of the practical and poetical functions of the imagination, one of its greatest contributions resides precisely in its original theorization of the social and political imaginary, the meaning of which this issue sets out to delimit. The issue also endeavours to explain what is at stake in this original theorization.

If, in *History and Truth*, Ricœur had already talked about an "ethico-mythical creative core" of cultures, and if *The Symbolism of Evil* had already emphasized the importance of the symbolic imaginary at the heart of our cultural memories, the fact remains that it was only from the 1970's and 1980's onwards (in *Ideology and Utopia* and in *From Text to Action*) that Ricœur would develop a genuine theory of "the social and cultural imaginary" with the intention of thinking about ideology and utopia, those two antagonistic modes of the collective imagination, in a way that serves to bring them together.

Firstly, what makes this new concept of the "social imaginary" important is that it casts a new light on certain basic problems in the philosopher's work, that is, on the one hand, it outlines an original theory of social motivation that extends and transforms the theory of individual motivation worked out in *Freedom and Nature: the Voluntary and the Involuntary*; and on the other hand, it develops an analysis that proceeds from the opposing relationships of ideology and utopia to the phenomenon of power, permitting a re-interpretation of the "political paradox," which was initially set out in *History and Truth*.

Secondly, the development of a theory of the social and cultural imaginary positions Ricœur on the terrain of social theory, cultural anthropology and political thought; it also leads him to re-develop a series of dialogues with thinkers—notably Marx, Weber, Mannheim, Habermas and Geertz—that will play an important role in his work from the end of the 1970's onwards. If, from the *Philosophy of the Will* to *The Conflict of Interpretations*, Ricœur's work developed, at least for the most part, within the framework of a phenomenology of the individual act, the elaboration of a theory of the social *imagination* lays the foundation for thinking about intersubjectivity and for a hermeneutics of our historical condition that will occupy Ricœur from *Time and Narrative* to *The Course of Recognition*.

Finally, it seems that the Ricœurian conception of the social imaginary leads to a decisive broadening and deepening of the Ricœurian theory of the imagination. So, we must not forget that it is during the same timeframe—the year 1975—that Ricœur delivers a course, in Chicago, on ideology and utopia (a text already translated into French and published in France in 1997 thanks to the essential work of re-transcription carried out by George H. Taylor) and a course on the imagination (the French translation of which is due to come out with Éditions du Seuil in 2015). What all of this shows is that having sketched out a theorization of the practical function of the imagination in *Freedom and Nature: The Voluntary and the Involuntary*, having worked out a philosophical anthropology centred on a conception of the "heart" and of imaginative mediation in *Fallible Man*, and having set out the basis for a theory of the symbolic imagination in *The*

Symbolism of Evil, Ricœur completely reworks his theory of the imagination within the new framework of a hermeneutics of texts and of a hermeneutics of human action.

In that sense, there is no doubt that a direct correlation exists between the Ricœurian theory of the poetic imagination, developed in *The Rule of Metaphor* and in *Time and Narrative*, and the theory of the social imaginary, expounded in *Ideology and Utopia* and in *From Text to Action*. Indeed, it is in one and the same movement that Ricœur examines the linguistic creativity of the poetic imagination and the question of the originally symbolic constitution of the social bond. Furthermore, it is a task, for those commenting on Ricœur's work, to try to think about the links between the Ricœurian theory of the critical and inventive power of metaphor and his conception of the subversive power of utopia, as this is also a task of thinking about the relationship between the prefiguration of our practical experience, described in *Mimesis I*, and the Ricœurian conception of ideology. There is, even beyond that correlation between the theory of the poetic imagination and the theory of the social imaginary, the relationship between the Ricœurian theory of ideology and utopia and his conception of the collective memory, developed in *Memory, History, Forgetting*; this latter relationship remains to be examined.

It appears to us that, in this sense, the issues raised in a reflection on the links between the Ricœurian conception of the social imaginary and his general theory of the imagination are quite decisive for understanding the unity of Ricœur's work. Indeed, if one accepts the hypothesis that the question of imagination constitutes one of the main themes of the philosopher's work, one is then obliged to recognize that the ultimate sense of this philosophy of the imagination has its place in an interpretation of the social imaginary as conflicting and dynamic *imaginative practice*. Not only does Ricœur make the *critique of the social imaginary* the necessary precondition of every theory of the imagination from then on, he also stipulates that it is only "within this labor on the social imaginary that the contradictions a simple phenomenology of the individual imagination has to leave as an aporia are mediated."¹

It is precisely on these presuppositions and the crucial importance of this work of the mediatization of contradictions constitutive of the social imaginary that we reflect in the opening text of this issue. The hypothesis that we tried to sketch out is that the Ricœurian idea of a *dynamic mediatization* of the social imaginary presupposes an *original correlation* of ideology and utopia which can itself be understood only from the *instituting event of a constituent social imaginary*.

In this issue, the first pair of articles that follow this inaugural contribution deal precisely with the implications of the Ricœurian conception of ideology and utopia, both from the standpoint of the constitution of a critical authority and from that of an imaginative constitution of memory, both poetical and practical. Peggy Avez's contribution is chiefly interested in the critical dimension of the Ricœurian theory of the social imaginary; wondering how Ricœur can at the same time confer a constituent status on the social imaginary and make of it an instrument that is critical of the real. Thinking about this anthropological foundation of the critical authority within the conflicting dialectic of the social imaginary, the author then proposes a correspondence between the critical force of utopia and the Ricœurian conception of "freedom in the light of hope" developed in *The Conflict of Interpretations*. Esteban Lythgoe's article, which follows after that contribution, has the merit of tackling a question that is rarely addressed in Ricœur studies, that of the relation between imagination and memory in both its individual and collective dimensions. The author analyses the role, at once poetical and practical, that Ricœur assigns to the imagination, as much from the cognitive standpoint of memory recognition as from the pragmatic standpoint of memory exercised in its uses and abuses. This he does in order

ultimately to demonstrate the significance of the productive imagination inside the critical function, which history performs with regard memory.

A second pair of contributions is interested in the more specifically political implications of the Ricœurian theory of the social imaginary. The first article by Darryl Dale-Ferguson is centred on the question of ideology in its relationship with political evil; it proposes a re-reading of the Ricœurian interpretation of the “political paradox,” expounded in *History and Truth*, in light of Ricœur’s theory of ideology. The author’s thesis is that, in its integrative and critical function, ideology is capable of mitigating political evil in as much as it contributes towards the formation of a political community and mediates the exercise of authority as well as aiming at the good within this community. The second article by Carlos Alfonso Garduño Comparán offers a critical comparison of the conceptions of power and authority found in Arendt and Ricœur’s political writings. Starting from Ricœur’s re-appropriation of Arendt’s theory of power in the seventh study of *Oneself as Another*, the author shows that the conception of political action, developed by Arendt, is limited due to the fact that she does not pay enough attention to the question of the symbolic mediation of action. From this perspective, Ricœur’s theory of the three functions of ideology is significant because, in setting out the thesis of a symbolic instituting of the social, it seems better positioned to lead us to think in a more satisfactory way about authority and the relationship between the social and political spheres.

In the final article of this thematic issue, Samuel Lelièvre explores the possibility of applying the Ricœurian theory of the poetic imagination and the social imaginary to cinema. While drawing the attention of readers to a little known text of Ricœur’s (i.e., his “Preface” to André Gaudreault’s *Du littéraire au filmique*), which is probably the only text that the philosopher explicitly dedicated to cinema, the author analyses what it is that makes cinematic narrative distinctive in its relationship to image and time. He then proceeds to ponder over the possibility of a critical ratio of cinema to the social imaginary.

Before concluding this introduction, I wish to express my gratitude to everyone who contributed towards the production of this thematic issue. In this regard, I should like to thank Eileen Brennan and Johann Michel who assisted me throughout the process of producing this issue. I should also like to thank all the members of the editorial committee who were involved in reviewing and choosing the articles.

In January 2015, I am going to take over from Johann Michel as co-editor of this review. I want to pay tribute to him and to thank him, not only for his assistance with this issue, but for the quality of the work he did as a founding member of *Études Ricœuriennes/Ricœur Studies* and for his generous contribution to a review that has now won full international recognition.

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(Translation : Eileen Brennan)

- ¹ Paul Ricœur, "Imagination in Discourse and in Action," in *From Text to Action, Essays in Hermeneutics II* (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991), 187.