

Utopia: the political aesthetics of Paul Ricoeur

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ABSTRACT

The aim of this article is to reveal the relevance of aesthetics in the philosophy of Paul Ricoeur, with particular respect to the concept of utopia as presented in the *Lectures* published in 1986. Utopia is relevant to aesthetics at three levels. First, utopia is a literary genre and as such it shares with the artistic sphere some formal and content-related criteria. Second, utopia is an imaginative variation of reality, therefore it shares with fiction some transformative power with respect to ordinary experience. As works of fiction, utopias are always historical, singular, and creative, therefore resist sociological reduction. Third, Saint-Simon and especially Fourier's utopias put aesthetic life at the core of their reformation project, which allows Ricoeur to emphasize the role of passions in the good life. In Ricoeur's account, utopia, for its cognitive, ethical, political, and aesthetic aspects, results in an ambivalent construct that counters the modern tendency to separate and oppose science and art.

KEYWORDS

Fiction; Imagination; Passions; Phenomenology; Utopia

1 The Place of Aesthetics in the Philosophy of Paul Ricoeur

The philosophy of Paul Ricoeur is rarely taken into account in aesthetics. This lack of consideration from the part of aesthetic scholars towards Ricoeur's philosophy might be due to a correspondent lack of emphasis on explicitly aesthetic issues from Ricoeur's part, such as aesthetic appreciation and judgement or the nature of the artwork¹. Ricoeur's lack of emphasis for aesthetics as a specific subfield of philosophy is counterbalanced by an overarching presence of aesthetic motifs and suggestions in all his philosophical investigations. Issues such as the role of imagination in the constitution of the self and the world, the role of images in the semantic innovation of metaphor, the fictional character of narrative and the importance of passions for achieving a happy life are addressed in different texts and conferences.

The role of imagination in Ricoeur's philosophy is back in the limelight thanks to the recent publication of the *Lectures on Imagination*, edited by George Taylor, Robert Sweeney and Jean-Luc Amalric (2023). The connection between these lectures, delivered at the University of Chicago in 1975, and those devoted to the concepts of *Ideology and Utopia* (1988), delivered at the University of Chicago in 1975 as well, can be easily drawn. Ricoeur refers to the *Lectures on Imagination* in the opening lecture of the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* and identifies the nexus in the issue of

¹ An interesting exception is represented by the interview conducted by Jean-Marie Brohm and Magali Uhl in 1996, retrieved and translated in English by Sweeney in 2010 for the journal *Philosophy and Social Criticism*. Here Ricoeur addresses concerning Kantian aesthetics and the role of hermeneutics in reinstating art and aesthetics in the sphere of life after their longstanding confinement in what Gadamer called "aesthetic consciousness".

cultural imagination: "The organizing hypothesis is that the very conjunction of these two opposite sides or complementary functions typifies what could be called social and cultural imagination. Thus, most of the difficulties and ambiguities met in the field of a philosophy of imagination, which I am exploring now in a separate set of lectures, will appear here but within a particular framework" (Ricoeur, 1988: 1).

In both series of lectures, at issue is the entire problematic of the relationship between reality and appearance. It is one of the highest philosophical questions, of Eleatic and Platonic derivation, before being framed, with modern aesthetics, within debates on the crisis of *mimesis* in arts and the status of representation in visual arts and media. Ricoeur retrieves the theoretical depth and breadth of the issue by situating the dialectics of reality and appearance at the primordial level of the constitution of the social bonds. Critique of ideology, as Ricoeur shows in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, has often assumed a prior separation between an objective pole of reality and an imaginative, fictional, representational regime of ideological discourse distorting the objective kernel of reality. Critique of ideology, by assuming only the negative meaning of ideology as distortion of reality, implies that reality can be attained in non-distorted manners, where "non-distorted" means, at least in certain versions of critical thinking, scientific, rational and objective². In this sense, ideological representations of reality must be detected, deciphered and deconstructed in order to reveal the actual state of things that is concealed by them. As a consequence, ideology "is described as the nonscientific or prescientific" (Taylor, in Ricoeur, 1988: XIV) whereas "reality functions on the basis of anonymous, impersonal forces; endorsement of the role of human agents is itself ideological" (*ibidem*). In other words, in the structuralist version of the critique of ideology, reality is an essence devoid of aesthetics, while the aesthetic sphere of motivations, passions, the emotional drives of human actions and the affective movements of the pre-categorical are confined into the fictive dimension of the super-structure. This is a possible version of what has been called "the positivist science" (Gregory 1978), based on prior separation between the objective and the subjective, the exact and the biased, the scientific and the aesthetic, the real and the apparent. Against the paradigm of positivist science there have been many different reactions. We must recall at least Goethe's way to science (Seamon 2005), whose "phenomenological vocation" (Vercellone and Tedesco, 2020: 18) has been noticed also by scholars of aesthetics; and philosophical hermeneutics, whose emphasis on meaning and history against their reduction to signs and structures has attired criticisms from both structuralism and post-structuralism³.

As it is well known, Ricoeur understands its own philosophical stance as a "hermeneutic variation" (Ricoeur, 1986: 25) of Husserlian phenomenology. The hermeneutic variation of phenomenology proposed by Ricoeur basically consists in an emphasis on the partiality and finitude of human understanding: intentional consciousness does not define the scope of an ideal subjectivity but is itself embodied, emotional, and shaped by history and culture. By revealing the fundamental historicity of understanding, Ricoeur aims to overcome the modern partition of, on the one hand, scientific explanation and, on the other hand, emotional relation to the world. Arguing that underlying all philosophical investigation are always extra-philosophical motifs, Ricoeur strives to highlight the relationships between the emotional sphere, always biographic and historical, and the rational inquiry, whose categories are ultimately dependent on the interests, the aspirations, and the cultural conditionings of the lifeworld. This philosophical move, among other things, implies

² See the lectures devoted to Althusser in the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia* (1988: 103-158).

³ "L'adversaire désigné est l'herméneutique et sa démarche interprétative, qui serait sous-tendue par une vérité ultime du texte à restituer. Après avoir opposé à cette démarche philosophique la logique structurale comme système de relations autonomisé par rapport à son contenu, en vient de plus en plus à préconiser l'indéfini interprétatif" (Dosse 1992 : 273).

an anti-dualistic conception of the relationship between the scientific and the aesthetic. The rapprochement between aesthetics and science is already implicit in the phenomenological concept of imagination that Ricoeur draws from Husserl. Ricoeur's notion of imagination has primarily to do with the cognitive dimension of understanding. Imagination has very little to do with the specificity of an aesthetic or artistic domain assumed as separated from knowledge and reality. On the contrary, as we shall see in the next paragraph, imagination, inevitably linked to the aesthetic ability of the individual to generate images and imageries, becomes the faculty through which cultural meanings are set, refreshed, and understood. Imagination, far from producing an enclosed (ir)reality opposed to true reality, is a constitutive element of reality as such and of the socio-cultural world in particular.

Ricoeur's stress on the linguistic character of meaning creation and rejuvenation has overshadowed the aesthetic dimension of this process. For instance, Richard Kearney, in an early essay of 1988, saw in Ricoeur's focus on "the linguistic functioning of imagination" (Kearney, 1988: 116) a significant distancing from the privilege accorded by Husserlian phenomenology to "the visual model [...] related to the primary role granted to description in the phenomenological method" (Kearney, 1988: 115). Yet, Ricoeur does not dissolve imagination into language. Quite the contrary, Ricoeur's "own linguistic turn" (Pellauer 2014) is based on the idea that imagination is a fundamental element in the creation of meaning in and through language. Meaning is not simply reproduced in the discourse; rather, in discourse, meaning can be refreshed and rephrased thanks to the intervention and the interpolation of images drawn from the lived experiences and the available imageries. Metaphors stem precisely from the intermingling of images and verbal language: imagistic associations interfere with the established meanings of words and expressions and result into new semantic possibilities which rejuvenate language. Ricoeur does not aim to reduce imagination to a linguistic process; rather, he aims to show that language is enlivened by imagination. In the linguistic process, "discursive and sensuous dimensions are intertwined" (Weichert, 2019: 65). In the Ricoeurian conceptualization of metaphor, imagination is taken seriously and literally as "a wealth of representations, as an impact of visibility" (*ibidem*)⁴. The interference of images produces a suspension of reference which is key to the creation of new meanings: the possibility of new linguistic meanings strictly depends on the possibility to operate imaginative variations on the given meanings, putting them into brackets like phenomenological epoché does with the "natural" meanings of the intentional objects. An analogous model is applied by Ricoeur to written text in the essay *The model of the text* (1973) and, more in depth, to fiction in *Time and narrative* (1983-1985). The premise of this argument is phenomenological, even if the fact that Ricoeur applies it specifically to textual items testifies of his long-lasting loyalty to the hermeneutic variation of phenomenology.

However, as was recently noted, the model of the imaginative variation implying a suspension of the taken-for-grantedness of meaning describes the functioning of aesthetic experience as such. According to Roger Savage: "The work's ontological vehemence, by which I mean the significance a work has when, by subverting congealed conventions and established habits of thought, it sets out a manner of inhering in the world that only it expresses, is the mark of the work's worlding power" (Savage, 2021: 3). In his work, Savage makes the effort of situating Ricoeur's aesthetic insights in the right perspective. First, the aesthetic gesture is based on phenomenology, because it follows the pattern of the epoché. Second, the aesthetic domain encompasses both representation and language, and concerns precisely the interrelationships between them, bringing together the attention towards texts typical of hermeneutics and the phenomenological emphasis on the visual.

4 The relationships between image and language in Ricoeur's theory of metaphor has been deeply explored also in Alberto Martinengo's extensive work on the history of metaphor in Western thought, *Filosofie della metafora* (2016).

Third, the secret kernel of aesthetics is the role it plays in pursuing the ideal of emancipation and reconciliation of humanity. The practical goal of achieving a more human, more free and more equal society, where self-fulfillment and self-recognition are not in contrast with mutual recognition and social flourishing, is no longer the implication of reason in the shape of the regulative ideal of a kingdom of ends, like it was in Kant. Rather, at least in the young Ricoeur, it is the object of a poetics: "The vision of a reconciled humanity [...] in Paul Ricoeur's nascent philosophy of the will is the intended object of a poetics" (Savage, 2021: 1). Perhaps the difficulty in identifying a full-fledged aesthetics in Ricoeur depends on his clear conviction that aesthetics must be integrated into a philosophical anthropology that has the ambition of gathering together different sides of the human experience and aiming at their unification. The unification of the *cogito* is no longer a metaphysical or transcendental given, proven by reason: after Freud, it becomes a task to be achieved. However, with the complete achievement of such task remains unattainable. This is why utopia, with its aesthetic and imaginative power, and even in its unattainability, plays an important role in Ricoeur's philosophical anthropology.

The unattainability of utopia, already implied in the very etymology of the term, must not be confused with mere irreality. On the contrary, the "non-place" of utopia represents "a pristine vantage point for evaluating the status quo" (Einsohn, 1995: 105). The "non-place" of utopia has nothing to do with Marc Augé's "non-places" (1991), characterized by lack of emotional quality, standard realization throughout the world regardless of the specificities of the construction sites, lack of narrativity. The "non-places" of Ricoeur's utopias are fictional works endowed with strong and distinctive personalities. Even if historical lifeworlds are inherently aesthetic, in that they are constituted by socio-cultural imagination, in those "utopian non-places" there is more aesthetics than in the "real" world. Utopia's place in Ricoeur's thought is just next to metaphor, fictional narrative and artworks in the sense described by Savage. Utopia concerns hermeneutics as, according to Ricoeur, utopia is first of all a literary genre, where the fictional moment is somehow prevailing on the cognitive content of philosophical treatises. It shares with metaphor and fiction the phenomenological basis and method, for utopias suspend the validity of the given socio-political order by means of an imaginative variation that is taken to be more desirable and preferable. It plays a key role in the anthropological understanding of Ricoeur as it reveals the part played by affects, passions, and emotions in the realization of human's reality, and counters any attempt to reduce it to a flow of impersonal structures devoid of aesthetic value.

2 Utopia Between Phenomenology, History, and Critique

Ricoeur addresses utopia and ideology together, following the insight of Karl Mannheim in his 1929 book *Ideology and Utopia: An Introduction to the Sociology of Knowledge*. Ideology and utopia must be envisaged in the same conceptual framework for they are both figures of "a theory of cultural imagination" (Ricoeur, 1976: 17). Imagination is not only a faculty of individuals: it is a connective fabric through which reality takes on both aesthetic and affective values and cognitive meanings. Ideology and utopia are both figures of imagination, in the first case, imagination provides a community with its distinctive symbols, which allow for self and mutual recognition; in the second, imagination elaborates an unreal world characterized by a social order that is taken to be preferable to the real one. By means of ideology and utopia, imagination is responsible of both the conservation and the transformation of reality (assumed that utopia can be a vector of transformation, as we shall see in what follows).

Even though ideology and utopia play both a very important role in the symbolic constitution of the lifeworld, Ricoeur acknowledges a certain disproportion "between the number of lectures

devoted to ideology and those devoted to utopia" (Ricoeur, 1988: 269). The philosopher relates this disproportion to the situation in the secondary literature: there were huge debates revolving around ideology, especially in the Seventies, but much less on utopia. The complete lack of consideration for the concept of utopia in the last book of Roger Savage about the power of imagination in Ricoeur's thought epitomizes a similar situation with respect to today literature on Ricoeur's philosophy. In 2018 ERRS – the Journal of Ricoeurian Studies – has devoted a special issue to the *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*. In that occasion, Ricoeur's notion of utopia has been discussed in relation to its phenomenological background (Ascarate 2018), its contribution to the critique of ideology (Marcelo 2018), modern history and the notion of horizon of expectation that Ricoeur borrows from Koselleck (Lubelska 2018), and in relation to the deepest ethical goals of humanity (Furia 2018). All these perspectives on utopia make essential contributions to understanding its various layers and nuances of meaning; nonetheless, in all these accounts, the aesthetic character of utopia remains somewhat overshadowed. Still, if the aesthetic nature of utopia is not properly understood, there is always something missing from the big picture. For instance, the revelation of "the role of phenomenology in [Ricoeur's] philosophy of imagination" (Ascarate, 2018: 56) is key to understand the way in which utopia, as a kind of fiction, fosters a renovation of the lifeworld by means of the neutralizing and suspensive power of imagination. Nonetheless, in this account, utopia's aesthetic quality is entirely traced back to fiction: the specific character of that kind of fiction called utopia remains partly obscure. Phenomenology attains the transcendental level that makes utopia, as imaginative variation, possible. However, this condition is, so to say, the structural moment of utopia: what makes it possible in principle. This kind of understanding must be put into practice by means of a closer encounter with singular utopias.

In the perspective adopted by Lubelska, Ricoeur's notion of utopia is linked to the epistemological issues concerning history. The question is why a specific literary genre called utopia is emerged within the end of the XVIII century, apart from the early experiments of the late Renaissance. The answer lies in the transformation of both the sense and the science of history fostered by the modern revolutions, when new categories of people have abruptly entered the world play with their spaces of experience and horizons of expectations. The horizons of expectations emerging from a given space of experience can be either conservative or transformative. In the first case, one can speak of ideology; in the second case, of utopia. If phenomenological imagination represents the transcendental condition of possibility of ideology and utopia, modernity is the historical precondition that made both possible. This account of utopia reveals Ricoeur's open attitude towards modernity⁵, unlike Heidegger, whose anti-modern stance is broadly acknowledged. By focusing on utopias, and specifically on those utopias that embody the aspiration for the realization of a new, rational order based on a decisive overcoming of traditional rules and privileges – utopias which are modern by definition –, Ricoeur shows that hermeneutics does not necessarily entail a critical attitude towards modernity and its emancipatory projects. At the same time, if utopia is an instantiation of cultural imagination, its rationalistic character must be faded. In the light of the connection between modernity and utopia, understood as an imaginative variation of the historical reality, modernity itself ceases to be identified with rationalistic ideas of progress, scientific and technologic improvement, and secularization. On the contrary, the scope of the modern era is defined by the range of spaces of experiences and horizons of expectations it releases: and imagination plays a central role in determining the horizons of expectations of social classes and categories on the basis of their greater or lesser satisfaction with the given spaces of

5 Johann Michel talks of a "paradoxical modernism" of Paul Ricoeur (2004): even if insensitive to the "great narrations" of Western rationalism, the French philosopher has not abandoned the emancipative project of Enlightenment and the quest for "the self" that have been typical of modernity.

experience. Since the discrepancies between different horizons of expectations becomes stronger with modernity, socio-cultural imagination splits in two: ideology, that is the socio-cultural imagination of those who are in charge and who need to legitimate their power by means of a complex of ideas and images endowed with an at least potential symbolic hold on people; and utopia, that is the socio-cultural imagination of those who are oppressed within a certain order and use their imagination to challenge it. In both cases, we have to do with the work of imagination: utopic progress is not based on a superior rationality, but on the symbolic constitution of the horizon of expectation of the oppressed. However, this is what Ricoeur thinks of the utopias at the beginning of the XIX century. His reading of utopias is anti-rationalistic, even if he is perfectly aware of the pre- (and proto)-positivist character of those utopias. But Ricoeur, who strives to continue the emancipatory project of Western modernity in the contemporary, after the crisis of the *cogito*, cannot share the pretension to found it on pure reason. Utopias, precisely as products of socio-political imagination, become interesting again only when the emancipatory project of the Enlightenment can be returned to its imaginative source, that is, when the alleged superior rationality of social science and critique has been demasked, at the end of the great narrations of modernity.

In this sense, Marcelo is right to emphasize another connection that is key to modernity: that between utopia and critique. In the first instance, the author acknowledges that “the critical function is more clearly on the side of the utopia because if the ideology reinforces the belonging through repetition and legitimization, it is up to the utopia to introduce a distanciation and to criticize the given reality” (Marcelo, 2018: 35). Nevertheless, utopia does not completely overlap with critique: in fact, according to Ricoeur, both utopias and ideologies “admit a distinction between constitutive and pathological forms” (*ibidem*). Utopias can be too static, obsessed with detailed and meticulous descriptions of how the “non-place” of utopia must be, turning the fictional variation into an allegedly rational picture of how reality should be: following Raymond Ruyer (1950), Ricoeur argues that: “It may be that the specific disease of utopia is its perpetual shift from fiction to picture” (Ricoeur, 1988: 295). Thus, following Lewis Mumford (1922), Ricoeur also shows how some utopias are devoid of practical impact when they are just disconnected from reality. These “utopias of escape” (Ricoeur, 1988: 270) are the evidence of a malaise that they cannot fight, because they are expression of a radical, pathological separation between reality and imagination. Imagination, in its correct functioning, develops new possibilities and inspire concrete change by suspending the taken-for-granted meanings of reality, not by denying common reality. Utopias are not imaginary worlds tailored on the private fantasies of the escapers. If they are reduced either to private fantasies (imagination without reality) or frozen pictures (fall of imagination into the hyper-rational), utopias cease to perform a critical function and become the object of criticism. Utopia can be part of a critical project only insofar as it conjoins reality and imagination: on the one hand, by showing that social reality is always and from the beginning symbolically mediated; on the other hand, by revealing the ontological and “wordling” power of imagination in projecting new possible ways to build the social world.

The rapprochement of utopia and critique is an aspect of that conjunction of aesthetics and rationality that is sought by those philosophical trends unsatisfied with positivist (and modernist) partition of science and art. But still, it is not sufficient to understand utopia in its aesthetic character. The confrontation with phenomenology allowed us to detect the transcendental condition of utopia in the very structure of imagination; the discussion about history made us recognize the concrete and contingent conditions of utopia in the modern world; the rapprochement with critique shows us the normative side of utopia, that is fully operative only if it does not lock itself into the fanciful sphere of the impossible dreams. These vantage points on utopia are all important and must be related to each other to achieve a complete picture of what

utopia is and why it attracts the interest of a representative of phenomenological hermeneutics like Ricoeur. Nevertheless, the phenomenological, historical, and normative relevance of utopia must be completed with a specific focus on its aesthetics.

3 The Aesthetic Senses of Utopia

Ricoeur's concept of utopia concerns aesthetics under several respects. First of all, utopia is "a declared genre, not only declared but written" (Ricoeur, 1988: 269). This simple remark makes the difference between Ricoeur and Bloch's attitudes towards utopia. The emphasis on the literary character of utopia makes it part of the history of narratives, a move consistent with Ricoeur's hermeneutical stance. With Bloch, utopia crosses the domains of ornament, architecture, music. In the effort of revealing the spirit of utopia, Bloch deals with Impressionism, Cezanne, Cubism, Van Gogh (Bloch, 2000: 31-33). The entire aesthetic field, if authentic, is utopic: it speaks of possible states of the world that are neglected today, but can actually be achieved tomorrow. Artistic gestures express the "still not" of the "non-place" of utopia: authentic utopias are always in progress, just as aesthetics is not about contemplating the present or commemorating the past, but it is directed to the realization of a better future. The aesthetic enthusiasm of the young Bloch seems at odds with the colder, "textualist" approach of Ricoeur. Thus, it has been noted (Sarcinelli, 2013) that Ricoeur has largely ignored Bloch's contribution to the philosophical understanding of utopia. In Ricoeur's view, before being a spirit, an energy, an aesthetic force, utopia is a kind of literature, characterized by recurrent patterns and topics. This does not make of utopia something devoid of aesthetic interest. Literature is in itself an aesthetic fact, as it belongs to the sphere of artistic production; and fictional literature, for its strict relation to the variations of imagination, is endowed with an even stronger aesthetic character. But the one concerning utopia's belonging with a literary genre is only a first sense of the relation between utopia and aesthetics, and not the most specific one. At this point, utopia is aesthetic only insofar as it consists in a type of art. As fiction, utopia is relevant to aesthetics, just as fiction is relevant to politics: "The fiction has the capacity to shatter reality [...] Ricoeur is explicit that the fictions that remake reality include the 'practical fictions' that are utopias" (Taylor, 2015: 21). However, only by taking into account the contents of utopias, without limiting oneself to the formal consideration of utopia as a literary genre, one can access to the specific contribution of utopia to aesthetics, and to a kind of aesthetics that is useful in the framework of a philosophical anthropology.

Another non-specific sense according to which utopia can be connected to aesthetics is its constitutive relation to imagination. In this sense, utopia and ideology are concerned with aesthetics for they both have the same root in socio-cultural imagination. Reality is a process, a movement, a *dynamis*⁶: imagination, by producing the symbols through which reality becomes meaningful at both the biographic and societal level, is a fundamental engine of the *ontology of dynamis* that Ricoeur has in sight. This claim has more philosophical importance than the mere recognition of the belonging of utopia to the history of literary genres. Ultimately, it is about recognizing the aesthetic constitution of human reality and human environments: an idea that ends up disqualifying any attempt to reach an illusory hard, non-narrative and non-aesthetic kernel of

⁶ See the last chapter of *Oneself as Another*: "What Ontology in View?" (1992: 297-353).

reality⁷. Nonetheless, here too we trace the aesthetic quality of utopia back to the aesthetic quality of imagination, hence to social reality itself understood in its dynamic processuality. The argumentation is correct, but it does not exhaust the problem. The aesthetic character of utopia can be fully brought into focus only when the role of aesthetics is evaluated with respect to the contents of those particular literary works that are traditionally recognized as utopias. This is, at least, the path chosen by Ricoeur, and with very good reasons that we will now expose.

Ricoeur devotes the last lectures on ideology and utopia to Saint-Simon and Fourier. Socialist utopias do not occupy a remarkable role in Mannheim's sociological approach and have been criticized by Engels, who coined the expression "utopian socialism" in order to distinguish it from "scientific socialism" (1880). The imaginative quality of utopia cannot comply with the criteria of scientificity and rigueur sought by the great systematiser of European Marxism. In line with a positivist mindset, Engels views utopias as pre-scientific and theoretically immature. They see the irrationality of the inherited social order, but they believe that "society could change on the basis of reason alone" (Ricoeur, 1986: 287). Utopian reason, therefore, is indifferent to the historical conditions that provide the basis for revolution to be achieved. A mature, scientific socialist theory must reconnect reason and history, in coherence with a stance that is both Hegelian and Marxian. The alleged rationality of utopia, disconnected from an actual assessment of the productive forces and their relationships, is rather seen by Engels an exercise of "social poetry" (*ibidem*). Ricoeur, in his renunciation to any form of *savoir absolu*, including the one sought out by Engels, rejects the dogmatic stance of orthodox Marxism and vindicates the positive meaning of utopia as social poetry. After the crisis of scientific socialism, Ricoeur reconsiders the role of utopia precisely as a product of socio-cultural imagination. So, Ricoeur's choice to focus on Saint-Simon and Fourier is also a way to take a position in a historical controversy. By taking the side of Saint-Simon and especially Fourier's social poetry, Ricoeur replies against those approaches that are ready to sacrifice imagination on the altar of some sort of absolute rationality. Ricoeur has the philosophical goal of overcoming the modern fracture between science and imagination. The historical controversy between scientific and utopian socialism successfully epitomizes the philosophical contrast between the rational and the aesthetic.

As a matter of fact, Ricoeur does not completely stand on the side of Saint-Simon and Fourier. The philosopher is available to recognize the shortcomings of their utopias. The first utopian work of Saint-Simon, *The Letters of an Inhabitant of Geneva to His Contemporaries* (1803), is deemed representative of a "fully rationalist orientation" (Ricoeur, 1986: 288). Ricoeur notes that "this utopia

⁷ The idea that reality is inherently aesthetical and that aesthetics should shift its emphasis from the sphere of art to the human world in general has been more and more explored in the last few decades in everyday aesthetics and environmental aesthetics. For an introduction to everyday aesthetics, see the book *Everyday Aesthetics* of Yuriko Saito (2007). Environmental aesthetics overlaps with everyday aesthetics when it focuses on the aesthetic qualities of everyday environments and lived spaces. See, for instance, the book of the Finnish philosopher Arto Haapala *Aesthetics in the Human Environment* (1999) and the book of the Italian philosopher Elisabetta Di Stefano, *Che cos'è l'estetica quotidiana* (2018). The basic idea of these recent developments is that aesthetics plays a constitutive role in everyday experiences and practices and it is fundamental in order to build the sense of the self and the sense of the circumambient world. Much research in everyday aesthetics has pragmatist, rather than phenomenological basis: this is also why the issue of imagination, key in the tradition of phenomenology, results, after all, less decisive for everyday aesthetics than for Ricoeur's approach. In general, everyday aesthetics is less concerned with issues of constitution than aesthetic experience as such. In a sense, Ricoeur's approach is more exigent, as it does not concern with aesthetic experience as such, but it points at revealing the transcendental conditions for the entire sense of reality (the world) to emerge. However, Ricoeur's philosophy, via the role of imagination, and the current trends in everyday and environmental aesthetics agree on the idea that aesthetic experience is not limited to the experience of artworks, but that the entire reality is accessible aesthetically and results inherently endowed with aesthetic qualities and values.

shifts powers to intellectuals and scientists" (*ibidem*), in line with a long history of utopias which stretches back to Thomas More and Francis Bacon⁸. Not only the scientists who are in charge in Saint-Simon's utopia must be competent in natural sciences, but also in social sciences: the theoretic result may be immature, as argued by Engels, but the scientific ambition that will be proper of Marxism has been set. A sign of modernity in Saint-Simon's conception of both knowledge and power is that it must be held by scientists in conjunction with industrialists. In Saint-Simon there is a shift of emphasis from an aristocratic conception of knowledge to an engaged and practical kind of science, which measures its own success on its capacity to trigger concrete advancements at the material and social level. Perhaps the link between scientists and industrialists is the major element of continuity between the first utopia of Saint-Simon and the last one, *Nouveau Christianisme* (1825), the new element of this latter being the claim for the essential role of artists in maintaining and realizing the social order. Ricoeur is clearly more interested in the last work of Saint-Simon: here he finally meets the specific aesthetic meaning of utopia. Often viewed as either hyper-rationalist or fanciful and escapist, utopia ultimately results in an attempt to integrate science and art in the realization of the good social order. The importance of the artists in the last work of Saint-Simon is not due to criteria drawn from the inside of the artworld: Saint-Simon is far away from any autotelic ideal of art. On the contrary, the artist owes its centrality in Saint-Simon's utopia to her knowledge of passions. It is still a matter of knowledge: but it is clearly a different kind of knowledge from physicalist reductionism or cartesian separation of the emotional and the intellectual. The commonsensical partition is: the scientist is about objective knowledge, whereas the artist is about subjective expression. Saint-Simon's claim is that only the artist can be an "authority on sentiment" (McWilliam, 1993: 44), and precisely as artist, by means of an intense, direct, engaged, thorough acquaintance with passions. Ricoeur comments on Saint-Simon's last utopia with words that remind one of the mottoes of 1968: artists are necessary to society for they "bring with them the power of imagination" (Ricoeur, 1986: 292). Imagination is taken to be a universal character of people: artists, as experts in imagination, understand the ultimate ends of people and, through her works, propagates her knowledge for the benefit of all humanity. The ultimate goal of the artist, according to the utopist, is "to impassionate society" (Ricoeur, 1986: 296): the assumption, here, is that the society that Saint-Simon's utopia aims to reverse and overthrow lacks of both imagination and passion. In Ricoeur's view, Saint-Simon's utopia is interesting because it brings to the fore: "the need for a political aesthetics, where the artistic imagination will be a motivating force politically" (*Ibid.*).

In the lecture devoted to Fourier, Ricoeur describes the paradox represented by a utopian work that, on the one hand, is entirely focused on the necessity of grounding human society on the liberation of passions and, on the other hand, tends to freeze the picture of the fulfilled utopian

8 Nell Eurich, in his *Science in Utopia* (1967), is one of the sources to which Ricoeur relates in the last lectures. He makes a convincing point in differentiating Thomas More's *Utopia* and Francis Bacon's *New Atlantis*. In Bensalem, the utopian island narrated by Bacon, a prestigious role of guidance is attributed to the *House of Salomon*, the primary end of which remains the quest for knowledge: "The End of our Foundation is the knowledge of Causes, and secret motions of things" (Bacon 1974: 239). However, Bacon highlights the practical and technical relevance of the pursued knowledge by focusing with great detail on the manifold activities taking place in the House of Salomon: "Salomon's House appears to function as a giant scientific and technological research institute, with funds and capability to construct and manage mines ("six hundred fathoms" deep), towers (half a mile high), lakes, farms, orchards and gardens, as well as "houses" of one sort or another, all for research purposes" (Lucas, 2018: 116). In Bacon's utopia, knowledge is steadily transforming from metaphysics to modern science, thence it follows its stronger connection with technical improvements and the material organization of labor. Ricoeur considers Bacon a precursor of the socialist utopias because of the emphasis he puts on everyday life, an emphasis that hints to the possibility for his utopias to be actually realized, contrary to the merely literary utopias descending from Thomas More.

society by means of a number of rigorous (and rigid) codes, classifications, and combinations. From the point of view of Fourier, the paradox is only apparent: in order to implement a politics of the passions, it is important to know how to combine them just like a chemist knows how to combine elements to forge new and more complex materials. Even if Fourier's approach may seem reductionist *prima facie*, the kind of rational knowledge of passions he seeks represents a moral rediscovery of nature, whose universal laws tend to be obliterated by the artificial habits, customs, and rules of non-utopian societies. The universal law of nature, that should be put at the basis of society as well, is the "attraction passionnée", sketched in the books *Théorie des quatre mouvements et des destinées générales* (1808) and *Théorie de l'unité universelle* (1822-1823). Fourier aims at "liberating emotional potentialities which have been concealed, repressed, and finally reduced in number, strength, and variety" (Ricoeur, 1986: 304). The artificial laws of society are not based on nature: the evidence of their artificiality is that they must be implemented through repression. The laws of nature do not need social repression to be implemented; if repression is removed, passions will be able to arrange themselves and combine with each other in order to produce something like a "free order". In utopia, the aesthetic motives of action and the necessity for a superior order are not in contrast, like in Hobbes's politics. Fourier's approach is anti-Kantian: the distinction between a "pathological affected will" and a "pure will" (Kant, 2002: 30) is replaced with the opposition between a repressed and a liberated will. The liberated will is, at the same time, pathological, because of its dependence on passions and desires, and rational, because a socio-natural order based on the universal law of attraction can develop from such liberated will. But Fourier's stance is anti-Hegelian as well: in fact, the French utopia replaces the ethical state founded on the institution of marriage with a utopia founded on free love. The scandalous nature of Fourier's utopia consists in the idea that the fair social order can only arise from the emancipation of passions, which includes the liberation of sexual desire and love from social conventions. The laws of universal attraction regulating natural processes and phenomena, according to the Newtonian worldview, are charged with moral and political significance. The link between the natural and the spiritual is the sphere of human passion. The socio-political order derived by such spontaneous combination of passions has immediate motivational power. The aesthetic character of such socio-political order is testified by the word chosen by Fourier to describe it: harmony. It is not about an abstract kind of harmony, which stems more from the idealization of nature than from a real, empirical, sensuous contact with it. The sensuous can be harmonic and the rationality of both social bonds and political order emerges from the liberation of the sensuous. Classicism and romanticism converge into a single aesthetic-political ideal which, in non-utopian contemporary society, is far from being achieved.

Fourier's utopia was an inspiration for the movements of the Sixties: "Soixante-huitards, eager for precedents to a radical doctrine of free love, elevated Fourier to the position of a high 'priest of paneroticism'-a precursor not just to Freud but to a Freudian Marxism attuned to the libidinal dimensions of political economy" (Hsiung, 2021: 787). The emphasis on emancipation from repression renders Fourier's utopia an important source for Herbert Marcuse, who shortly discusses it in *Eros and Civilization*. Interestingly enough, Marcuse points out the same paradox remarked by Ricoeur with respect to Fourier's utopia. On the one hand: "Fourier comes closer than any other utopian socialist to elucidating the dependence of freedom on non-repressive sublimation" (Marcuse, 1955: 217); but, on the other: "in his detailed blueprint for the realization of this idea, he hands it over to a giant organization and administration and thus retains the repressive elements" (*ibidem*). Ricoeur does not speak of the repressive elements implicit in Fourier's implementation of the utopian project, but highlights the tension between the emotional charge of utopia and the obsessive rationalism of its realization. Ricoeur's assessment of Saint-Simon and Fourier's utopias remain ambivalent. However, what interests Ricoeur most is the "religious aspect" (Ricoeur, 1986: 305) of Fourier's utopia. It is not about the organized religion of the clergy, considered as part of the

repressive apparatus of society. Liberation of emotions, love, and even sex has a religious side because "for Fourier attraction is a divine code" (Ricoeur, 1986: 307).

Ricoeur does not take an explicit stand on the feasibility of such utopia, even if his criticism towards Fourier's obsession with detailed and scrupulous execution suggests that, for Ricoeur, the weakest side of utopia actually is its pretension to be realized. What matters the most, according to Ricoeur, is the capacity utopia has to shed light on the lack of satisfaction, social frustration, and lack of fulfillment that are typical of the contemporary humans. The last suggestion of Ricoeur is that, now that the obsession for obsessive rationalist realization of utopias has been revealed in all its vanity, it is time to retrieve utopia. What we would like to add to this picture is that utopia owes its force of seduction to its aesthetics. This may not be a general characteristic of all written utopias; but it definitely is an important feature of the utopias chosen by Ricoeur in his *Lectures*.

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