

CALL FOR PAPERS

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Utopian Imaginaries

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The French term *l'imaginaire*, as opposed to the traditional concepts of “imagination” and “fantasy”, is a seminal concept in the investigation of cultural, literary and artistic representations (see Braga, “*Imagination, imaginaire, imaginal. Three French Concepts for Defining Creative Fantasy*”, *Journal for the Study of Religions and Ideologies*, vol. 6, no. 16, 2007, ISI indexed journal, <http://jsri.ro/ojs/index.php/jsri/article/view/425>). The modern concept of “the imaginary” was founded in the mid-20th century, through the works of Gaston Bachelard, Henry Corbin, Gilbert Durand (*Les structures anthropologiques de l'imaginaire*, Paris-Bruxelles-Montréal, Bordas, 1969) and other prominent philosophers. While “imagination” defines the human faculty of creating random mental images, with no correspondent in the outside reality, that is, false, chimerical representations, the French term *imaginaire* designates the imaging or the imagining function of the psyche, its capacity to create new representations. For Jean-Jacques Wunenburger, it designates the “inner creative force of imagination” (J.-J. Wunenburger, *L'imaginaire*, Paris, PUF, 2003).

As an anthropological concept, “the imaginary” pervades all human practices. It applies to a vast range of domains, from sociology and religion to literature and the arts. Social imaginaries comprise narratives, mythical events, historical characters, and collective symbols that enable us to make sense of history, to organize the cultural memory and to configure the future. Charles Taylor defines “social imaginaries” as follows: “By social imaginary, I mean something much broader and deeper than the intellectual schemes people may entertain when they think about social

reality in a disengaged mode. I am thinking, rather, of the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations” (*Modern Social Imaginaries*, Durham and London, Duke University Press, 2004, p. 23). Images of the self (*autoimages*) and of the other (*heteroimages*) (the “other” being conceived as an individual or as a collectivity), worldviews and outlooks on nature, the universe and God, representations of geography, history, society and culture, literary and fine arts fantasy, theatre and cinema, music and dance, advertising and media, etc. are all products and instruments of the imagining function. Even the most common and current attitudes of everyday life bear the imprint of collective habits and representations.

Researchers also talk about malfunctions and pathologies (“*dérives pathologiques*”) of the collective imagination (J.-J. Wunenburger, *Imaginaires du politique*, Paris, Ellipses, 2001). When they are no longer spontaneous and creative, collective images become stereotypes and clichés. Guided by ready-made representations, people no longer react individually to social stimuli, but engage in induced irrational attitudes, which lead to prejudices and conflicts and allow for manipulation and control. Social and cultural imaginaries are a common patrimony that could, on the one hand, consolidate and enhance clichés and behavioural inertia, and, on the other hand, reorient and transform recollections, expectations and hopes, projects and utopias. The imaginary is ambivalent: it can both prevent or put a stop to change and inspire or prompt new developments.

Since their creation, utopias have been designed as imaginary – *in vitro* – explorations of alternative worlds and societies. Utopian authors used them in order to make and unmake the current reality, to propose alternative models for the existing state of European civilization, and to investigate “les possibles latéraux” (Raymond Ruyer) of the history. With postmodern relativism and “irrealism” (Searle, Goodman, Putnam, Maturana), not only the human capacity of constructing ideal societies and perfect cities, but the concept of reality itself has been questioned and deconstructed. Possible worlds are becoming as real as everyday reality in literature, films, and the arts. These parallel worlds are either superior to the one we are living in (which is a terrifying place, like in *The Matrix*, *Dark City*, etc.), or inferior, describing a nightmarish world we are heading to. Many dystopian (science-)fiction works imagine a future in which a disaster has already affected humanity.

All this leads to a new *partage du sensible*, within the context of an altered status of image and text as extensively analysed and illustrated in studies and books of the last decade belonging to such writers as Jacques Rancière, Jean Luc Nancy, Derrida, Georges Didi-Huberman, Slavoj Žižek, Alain Badiou, etc. The micro-politics of the image interferes with the narrative in search of its own status between the real and the utopian. Utopian thinking becomes a powerful instrument in exploring, exposing and modelling the challenges of our contemporary society, the concerns, fears, hopes and projects targeting topics such as climate change, natural ecosystem decline, global resource depletion, our planet's homeostasis, new social dynamics, migration and diaspora, fluid societies, race, gender, class, religious minorities and all forms of discrimination, the IT revolution, transhumanism, etc.

Topics might include:

- Utopian social or literary imaginaries
- Utopian modelling of natural and social systems
- Utopia vs. Dystopia: assessing secondary worlds
- Fictional worlds : utopias as “possibles latéraux” (Raymond Ruyer)
- Minoritarian (sexual, racial, natural) utopian / dystopian imaginaries
- Climate changes and ecocatastrophes
- Gaia hypothesis and Earth homeostasis
- Critical utopias / dystopias in contemporary pop culture

Proposals should be sent to: USS2023@yahoo.com by November 30, 2023.

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