

TEORIAS DA IMAGEM E DO IMAGINÁRIO

ORGANIZADORAS

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CAPÍTULO 17

SOME VECTORS ON THE IMAGINAL TRAJECTORY

Samuel Mateus

1 INTRODUCTION

“Poseidon sat at his desk doing figures. The administration of all waters gave him endless work (...). What irritated him the most – and it was this that was chiefly responsible for his dissatisfaction with his job — was to hear of the conceptions formed about him: how he was always riding about through the tides with his trident. When all the while he sat here in the depths of the world-ocean, doing figures uninterruptedly, with now and then a trip to Jupiter as the only break in the monotony — a trip, moreover, from which he usually returned in a rage. Thus he had hardly seen the sea — had seen it but fleetingly in the course of hurried ascents to Olympus, and he had never actually traveled around it (...). Poseidon became bored with the sea. He let fall his trident. Silently he sat on the rocky coast and a gull, dazed by his presence, described wavering circles around his head” (Kafka, 1995: 402).

In a small piece of prose named Poseidon, Kafka offers us an example of the close relationship between society and literature. Here Poseidon, the Great god of the Seas of Greek mythology is portrayed as a resentful manager of the waters, one clerk on the dull administration of the oceans, a simple servant of the seas. His job consists mainly in the business account of the waters where an infinite numbers and figures have to be estimated. He does not even know the Oceans, nor has he traveled the sea since rarely he went out of his office. In fact,

in this kafkian version, Poseidon became uninterested in the sea and has abandoned his most iconic symbol, the trident. Where is the mighty Poseidon, the God of the Sea, the Earth-Shaker and lover of many consorts like Amphitrite and father of countless children such as Theseus? In this prose we are far from the mythic and classical imaginary of Poseidon. In fact, we face a revolution in the mythology and the social imaginary of the God of the Sea.

Kafka offers us, thus, an example of the powerful dynamic of the imaginary and the formations and deformations between new and old imaginaries. The demythologization concurs with the remythologization. Understanding this plural interaction on the imaginary enable us to accept that mythic capacity of construction of meaning and world renovation (Barros, 2012: 103). The imaginary is a plural concept and a set of divergent, sometimes opposed- notions. He is the battlefield of a conflict between an arché (order) and caos (disorder), between concurring perspectives on the living world, between symbolic images and stereotypical images. From one side, we have the potential to settle and attempter the images; from the other side, the potential to transform and contest. The imaginary follows the Myth of Gaia, the deity who battle caos through arché, the divinity of dreams (oneiric images) and fecundity who at the same time nourishes and devours her offspring. Like Gaia, the Imaginary make the opposites to coincide. It takes a paradoxical form in a perpetual fight between symbolic pregnancy of images and their deconstruction or symbolic deflation.

What needs to be appreciated is the transition of these two dimensions, in other words, we must attend to the plasticity of the concept of imaginary (particularly relevant in today's societies). It can, for instance, entitle a personal imaginary but also a collective one. It can refer to prescientific conceptions and at the same time to religious beliefs (the Christian imaginary), political

ideologies (the Communist imaginary) or artistic productions (The Star Wars imaginary for example). The only common referent is the connection to images and symbolic figurations. Nevertheless, may it be seen as phantasy, dream or unreality, may it be considered as a broad category encompassing the totality of things imagined (imaginary summing up all the imaginations), these kind of approaches exposes themselves to the same critique: both perspectives, by deficit or by excess, depreciate the imaginary (Barros, 2010: 126). Comparing it to a simulacrum or attributing the imaginary to all kinds of image results in the same conceptual vacuum.

2 TWO MAIN GENERAL PERSPECTIVES ON THE IMAGINARY

Actually, we can distinguish two central standpoints in the understanding the imaginary. One, present in Pascal and Sartre, which reduces the symbolic charge of images in the name of an abstract rationality and where the imaginary is assimilated with imagination (Mateus, 2013: 40). It conceives imagination as a productive faculty that alienates man, anesthetizing its rational capabilities. It describes the mode how consciousness and imagination blend to create an unreal, made-up, world. While perception considers the object as an existent, the imagination, tells Sartre (2004: 125), puts it as necessarily something absent, therefore, something non-existent to consciousness. Consequently, the imaginary is rooted on the conscience of nothingness (*néant*). Moreover, it refers to the static ensemble of contents produced through imagination (seen as a faculty) carrying the tendency to acquire a certain autonomy and by recurrence tends to form a coherent aggregate (Wunenburger, 2003 :12).

The other main perspective claims a symbolic overcharge where images take man into other realms. In this case, reality is enriched through the

formation, trans-formation and de-formation of images. “We always think of imagination as the faculty that forms images. On the contrary, it deforms what we perceive; it is, above all, the faculty that free us from immediate images and changes them” (Bachelard, 2011: 1). Imaginary’s imagining action is, then, an open and poetic ability humans have that enables them to see beyond immediate reality. “In first place, images, far from being passive nocturnal residual perceptions, present themselves as representations containing a potential to signification and energy capable of transformation” (Wunenburger, 2003: 19). In this tradition the imaginary is associated with an autopoietic dimension that open itself to successive innovation, decomposition and recomposition. The imaginary as a general poetics and as a constant fabrication.

It is this late perspective on imaginary that will be developed throughout this chapter. It argues a communicational approach to the concept is needed In order to assess the multiple trajectories of the imaginary. The imaginary is no seen as a collection of images but as a symbolic organization of society’s images. He is a series of images but also a series of relations to images (Barros, 210: 129). It mobilizes verbal but also iconic codes to convey meaning and disseminate it. Endorsing Wunenburger’s definition (2003: 10), we call the imaginary all the mental or material productions based on visual images (illustration, photography, cinema, etc) and verbal images (metaphors, narrative, etc) that form a coherent and dynamic symbolic realm.

It is because the imaginary is am complex of relations that he is such an interesting concept to communication theory. Trying to draft a communication theory to the Imaginary, we will intersect the imaginary with publicity and use the term Imaginal. The Imaginal consists in the possibility of an open, complex, plural, public and eclectic collective imaginary. We argue imaginal is composed

by a variety of diverse imaginaries, so we must think about just how those dissimilar imaginaries are juxtaposed together in society.

The imaginal is - like communication- central in the symbolic reproduction of societies and must be faced as a sphere where people become attached and involved in relational processes. Having in mind these premises we will discriminate some of the vectors or markings involved in imaginaries'' juxtapositions and social motions we call the imaginal trajectory.

3 A COMMUNICATIONAL THEORY ON THE IMAGINARY

The influence of Descartes took many authors to conceive the imaginary from a rigid and inflexible angle¹, when the concept, as showed by Gilbert Durand (1995), has to be seen as malleable and pliable concept. In fact, there is a close association between the imaginary and the symbolic, the imaginary and the lived experience or the imaginary and culture. Every image contains a representative dimension as well as an emotional or affective dimension. "The imaginary is closer to the perceptions which affect us than to the abstract notions that inhibit the affective sphere" (Wunenburger, 2003: 10). The Imaginary comprises of a variety of symbolic operators to express emotions, ideas, values, affections. It is a realm of complex representations whose creative dynamics and semantic pregnancy are effective ways to individual and collective praxis.

The imaginary as a dynamic system working on the organization of images, as an imaginal revelation of social world's thickness and intricacy. This is why Henry Corbin (1964) argues the imaginal faculty as a capacity to disclose reality, to reach it beyond its figurations or images and see the invisible traits.

¹ Castoriadis (2006) takes the imaginary as an infra-structure and as a major force of revolutions. But because he gives it such a prominent role in the social action, Castoriadis does not concede any autonomy to the imaginary.

The imaginal not as an extension of imagination. But as a mid-realm between the intellectual and the sensible or between the rationalization and the affections.

It encompasses the dynamic organization of the symbolic grounding of all human activity: the imaginal seen as an itinerary, a path of images comprising the rational and the emotional, the knowledge and the feeling the images-text (visual or linguistic), the works of imaginations but also the (re-)creational uses of plural imaginaries by individual and collective agents. The imaginal as a vigorous agency of reality, a creative practice of imaginary's diversity. So, the imaginal relates to an active imaginary where individuals jointly partake in the circulation of sensible forms (cf. Sodr , 2009: 24). The imaginal world point to, therefore, a communicational dimension where the plurality of the imaginary takes place. Space of collective inheritances and performativity, it assumes a form of gigantic symbolic dam, a communal background from which a common and shared life may be erected.

From a communicational perspective we can better understand how the imaginary may today be promoting new and original social relations while a frozen (and stationary) view of the imaginary as a sum of various imaginations may no longer be meaningful. Take, for instance, the social affections transacted by people in social media, media particularly suitable to deal with symbolic images and where an eminent sociability is slowly emerging. The imaginal points, not to a stock of representations but especially to a social conscience and to a partaken reality. Imaginal forms in permanent communicational transit and, consequently, in perpetual appropriation, remaking, decomposition and recomposition. The imaginal is an active imaginary (Sodr , 2009), a lieu of confluence and meeting. We can now realize how a communicational perspective on the imaginary send us, as well, to the affinity between publicity and imaginary. Since the imaginal world is a world of encounter between the

sensible and the rational but also between individuals, since it is home of concourse and negotiation between contending meanings, the imaginal directs us to the public problem of society. The imaginal is a public imaginary as long as it is assumed it functions as a collective and strategic imaginary, as a site of a continuous de-territorialization and re-territorialization. The imaginal are those public imaginaries, those active imaginaries where the potential to community is always in debate and (re-)generation.

The imaginal as a domain where publicity and the imaginary meet, a common event of a social imagining. It crosses many fields (knowledge, cultural, social and religious practices, beliefs, etc). The imaginal has a complex definition nonetheless, its images have a social efficacy. The communicational phenomenon makes possible the public promotion and circulation of countless imaginaries, affecting them, transforming them, performing them. The publicity of communication that “puts in common” (the latin *communio*) may be thought as an attempt to give a meaning to the world and the imaginal, while encompassing the symbolic motion of different imaginaries, is a key factor in this process. Indeed, the concept of imaginary is inseparable from the mental or material works enabling each conscience to build the sense of its life, actions or experiences (Wunenburger, 2003: 29). The value of a notion like the imaginal lies in the possibility of considering not only the productions of the imaginary but mostly, the opportunity to ponder the social and public uses of the imaginary.

Taking further a communicational approach to the imaginary, the imaginal encloses, accordingly, the imaginary’s constructions of image-texts and how they are used, shared and re-created in meaningful(symbolic) activities. We can observe the role of communication in the public definition of the imaginary, for instance, attending to the case of the celebrity culture. This “culture”

comprehends a social imaginary based on the idea of superstar has evolved since the early 20th century to become a central example of the power of imaginary in contemporary societies. Although the imaginary of celebrity accompanies man through the times (take for example, Herostratus, that arsoned the Temple of Artemis, in 365 BC, in order to see its name immortalized), the contemporary celebrity imaginary descends in many ways from the enormous power of media (mainly, television in 20th century and internet in 21th century). We can say celebrity is just one of the numerous imaginaries that circulate in contemporaneity. It is mainly based on the communicative dimension of society's imaginary.

4 THE IMAGINAL TRAJECTORY : PUBLICITY, SENSIBILITY, INTENSITY

Gilbert Durand (2008) used to employ a very curious and useful notion: *trajet anthropologique*. The anthropological trajectory described a bijective influence or a symbiotic correspondence between elements of two sets. By that notion Durand understood “the incessant exchange that exists in the imaginary between subjective and assimilative impulses and objective intimations emanating from the cosmic and social environment” (2008: 38). It labeled a reciprocal genesis where symbols, moving between subjective and objective motivations, gain sense. Images are formed by the interaction of individual with the material and social environment.

Inspired by this idea, we will be talking about an Imaginal Trajectory which is the path of a moving and supple plurality of imaginaries, travelling along publicity (in the sense of publicness) in the immense field of communication and mediatization. It defines the conjunction of individual and

collective forces in the modelling, formation and transformation of images-texts, of symbolic images, and the appropriation of its uses in different practices. The imaginal trajectory concept deals with the possibility to acknowledge a collective and intersubjective process where open and volatile imaginaries collide in the junction of intellectual and sensory representations. The image as a true gateway to signification (and communication) where linguistic and iconic representations are juxtaposed as dynamic parts of the same process of signification.

Communications is frequently dealt as if it was a purely natural, physical phenomenon: a transposition of meaning from a sender to a receiver. In the informational model (for example, Shannon and Weaver's), communication is the process of transferring data from one part to another through space or time. In this transmission model, the imaginary tends to be assimilated to imagination: a mental production where images are mere vehicles to convey the intended meaning. Contrasting to this standard and measurable model of communication, the imaginal presupposes a unity of signification in the imaginary's productions. Because there is a message, that does not necessarily make a communication. Images are not just carriers of meaning but a unity of meaning themselves. Imaginary's symbolic image is not a linguistic function but an act. The symbolic is made through human praxis. The body or the material world are, for instance, agents of symbolization. Durand (2008) alerts us to the fact that symbolization must be thought outside language, beyond the concept. While language wants to mediate a communication, Bachelard explains (2011), the symbol directly communicates. The image-symbol may extract from the visible an invisible sense. In this case, the symbolic image precedes the concept. It contains an excess that invites us to contact a hidden or absent meaning dimension (Wunenburger, 1995: 16). So, the symbolic present in the ever floating and

endlessly flowing of the imaginal - seen as complex and mutual imaginaries present in society- is revealed.

This suggests we apprehend the imaginary as an imaginal course, ever in motion, in de-formulation and reformulation on the rich communicational tissue of societies. The imaginary as a web of meanings, therefore, of relations between individuals: that is the imaginary as an evolving communicational realm.

Considering the imaginary as a double bijective response - subjectivity and objectivity, individual and collective, iconic and verbal- takes us to a dynamic and communicational perspective. So we call the imaginal the always under construction and renovation structures of society's symbolic organization. The imaginal as a something which can only be followed by its trail, by its many figurations and representations. From a communicational study of the imaginary we would say we can see the imaginal by its traces, that is, by the numerous frames that each imaginary leaves. Since the imaginary is given in a continuum (as an Imaginal) and it is in constant motion, mutation and transfiguration, we can approach it only through its evidences. From a communicational point of view it is best to apprehend Imaginary's plurality in contemporary societies through a segmentation of the different positions each Imaginary occupies in the Imaginal continuum. That's why we refer to an Imaginal trajectory: to the orbit each single imaginary takes on society's the public life.

Compared with psychology, philosophy, hermeneutics or literature, for example, communication studies are particularly suitable to appraise the Imaginary since it is only through the movement of the symbolical images that we realize the imaginary. Communication studies, it is believed, can better trace how public imaginaries evolve in society. Its liability and trans-disciplinary

nature represent a major advantage to follow the path, the course and the many routes each single social imaginary can take. Given the communicational nature of the Imaginary, the communication sciences surely detain a privileged position to capture as a still photograph the consecutive sequences of its motion, or the Imaginal (considered primarily as Imaginary's movement).

There are, at least, three key factors of the Imaginal trajectory. They are to be perceived as vectors or major forces shaping the succession of the Imaginary in Society. Vectors are here taken on the sense of molecular biology: a vector is a DNA molecule used as a vehicle to artificially transport foreign genetic material into another cell where it can be replicated². So, in the case of the Imaginary, its vectors function as stimulators or influences on the Imaginal trajectory and that can be used to disseminate or replicate imaginary's activity.

The first vector has already been mentioned: Publicity.

The Imaginal trajectory is substantially swayed by common partaking. Let's mention the ancestral necessity to share experience and the contemporary communicative practices that are grounded in this compulsion: social media, digital social networks but also the television or the press. The constitution of a web of interrelated individuals is what drives publicity, a social dimension of communality (or, to say it better, community³) and the common world.

Publicity as a vector of the Imaginal's trajectory means the order among different social imaginaries. They all circulate on society and it is this capacity of imaginaries to make themselves conspicuous that requires us to consider them in conjunction to publicity. We observe with strong acuity in communicative processes, a robust imaginal, and panoply of imaginaries permeating societies

² To those interested in biochemistry there are four main types of vectors: plasmids, viral vectors, cosmids, and artificial chromosomes.

³ Take as example, Facebook's "community of users".

striving for public recognition. We can number the literary imaginary, or the scientific imaginary but also a Christian or a Jew imaginary for example, but there are, of course, many others.

More, publicity enables us to think about the public process of the social constitution of imaginaries, not just in a historical manner (the medieval imaginary, the baroque imaginary) but also in synchronic manner, i.e. on the confluence of dissimilar imaginaries at the same time. It is this synchronicity that lies behind many of contemporary social manifestations (the live television, the media events as Mandela's Funeral). Synchronicity implies the absolute time where past and future collide on the present. As if time suffered a concentration and all society converged into something that cannot be foreseen or even provoked. Publicity tends to synchronize society's activities (ex: the Olympic Games constitute a perfect example of a public event where, thanks to its mediatization, the collective attention converges). Publicity, thus, contributes to the Imaginal course multiplying a common time-space and proving a common context to communication. In consequence imaginaries get to be participated, adopted and shared.

The second vector on the Imaginal movement we want to discuss is Sensibility.

Some theories on the communication highlight the sensory in the relation between communication and society. Sodr  (2006: 70) claims sensible strategies can bring to media and politics more fruitful hypothesis about transformations of personal and collective identities. Martin-Barbero (2005), argues for the reintroduction of the mediations of sensibility on the technical rationality. Bringing these communicational perspectives to the Imaginary, we can recognize an aesthetical reasoning what Maffesoli (2005) calls "sensible reason"

(raison sensible). In the sensibility vector of the Imaginal's trajectory we find aesthetics to be a major influence on the social development of the Imaginary's plurality. The Imaginal relates to aesthetics in the fact that both the sensibility is not just a material form of the imaginary; it is also a potency to be in common, an irrepressible power that nourishes social life. The Imaginal is modeled by this collection of emotion the sensible arises and the spontaneous sentiment of a belonging community. It is in this sense that the image serves as pole of aggregation. In respect of video-text, television, sociability at the distance of a computer, touristic events or some dress codes (ex: punk, emo, etc), we discover on its base an imaginal sharing (Maffesoli, 2007: 112). The imaginal world is thus composed of an aesthetics capable of binding people together. The sensibility vector acts in the way of a magnet to which individuals respond on a much emotional basis. Maybe we can even think the Imaginal's trajectory involves a movement of its own, a kind of motion that cannot prevent itself of becoming an emotion. Motions give rise to emotions. So, the Imaginal is also aesthetics and the sensible is one of its driving forces.

Stemming from the sensibility we encounter the third vector: Intensity.

The binding aesthetics that encompass is developed in the construction of social ties. The imaginal reflects a great concentration of collective images, publicly available to a joint partake. It acts as a symbolic strength reuniting people around different imaginaries. By the successive juxtapositions of imaginaries, the imaginal makes the present seem interminable, its intensity diffusing through the reality of a common body.

Intensity must be understood mainly as a tension, ie. a balanced relation between strongly opposing elements or an interplay of inconsistent elements. Like society, and even the idea of publicity, the imaginal is composed of

dissenting imaginaries. In other words, it is characterized by strained relationships or interplay of potential contradictory elements. Let's not forget the Imaginal is the name we call to the succeeding positions each imaginary occupy on the global context of a public and social sharing of symbolic images. So, each imaginary exists in tension with one another. It is not rare to see this internal competition to a given imaginary trying to gain supremacy over other (ex: the soviet imaginary during Cold War). Over time, a given imaginary can be putted aside by another. Think how the domestic imaginary (the house-wife and mother of children being its supreme images) has given place to a professional imaginary where women look for self-realization on work at expenses of raising a family (the women's suit and high heeled shoe). It's easy to see this tension in the imaginal just by looking into the images-text of some of the television series (like *Sex and City*, HBO, 1998).

So, in intensity we see how instability is an inherent attribute to the Imaginal. Barros (2012: 98) alerts us to imaginary's instable ontology. In effect, the imaginal has a wobbly surface; it manifests itself when symbolic waves spin its own density, when conflicting images-text fight for supremacy. Intensity as growing tension, as regulation of clashing elements.

But here is another sense of intensity. It is not just a building tension between the interplay of imaginaries (many of them heightened by mass media). In the Imaginal intensity means also

a mutual arena where individuals are exposed to the same symbolic images and bear the same consequences. Intensity, in this case, tells a social matrix or an emotional environment. Maffesoli says the imaginary comports an atmosphere (2001: 75), some sort of an aura. When we discuss Imaginal's intensity vector, we are highlighting a spiritual force or a mental construction

that, although may not be tangible, it surely is perceptible and acknowledgeable by individuals.

Returning to the Star Wars imaginary, there us a surplus, an aura only individuals taking part in the several conventions around United States can explain and where the movie character's masks bring a special ambiance, an intensity and singularity to the participants. As if in these events, the imaginal's trajectory slowed down and for a while became fixed, still, intense. However, it is clear it is not the Star War imagerics that produce the imaginary. In fact, it is the opposite. An Imaginary's existence determines the presence of a set of images. But the image is not the support, the instrument or the trigger; it is the result of the Imaginary (Maffesoli, 2012: 76).

Intensity indicates a tension but also an intension that is also some form of vibrancy, a common thrill or a synchronized pulsation. The intensity vector functions, in the Imaginal Trajectory, as a collective vision where images are the beginning of common practices. Affections become effective and emotions swarm around overcoming the rational or verbal argument. The intensity vector is crossed by a tuned discourse, a harmony line given, not by audio stimulus but by the sharing of symbolically pregnant images-text.

5 CONCLUSION

The imaginary, while a domain of publicity, sensibility and intensity, is always communication. While being a world as public commitment and space of circulation of image-texts, the imaginal world happens in a social trajectory, in-between the circulation of signs. So, the imaginal trajectory covers all the little dispositions, all the given insertions of different imaginaires. As a

communicational act, the imaginary may best be apprehended in its displacements.

That's why we sought in this paper to advance some notes in order to build a map or the curve of the imaginal trajectory. The three vectors presented above – publicity, sensibility and intensity - although not fully yet developed, may be useful tools to improve one of the possible mappings in one of the many trajectories the imaginal world gives rise. The prolegomena to this charting of the plural imaginary, as it is quite clear, was initiated in a very particular way of thinking an epistemology of the imaginary. Indeed, the approach to it differs from the hermeneutical, phenomenological, literature, psychological or sociological ones, in that it summons communicative practices. It deals with communication, not as a collateral issue, but as a central and autonomous theme in the questioning of the imaginary and, above all, of its imaginal trajectory. Communication is taken not only as a central aspect in the theories of the imaginary; it is also taken as a remarkable method of assessing the imaginary. Since the imaginary is, in its symbolic essence, communication, the communicational perspective brings to the imaginary studies the possibility to gauge the concept in its innate dynamism, mutational, conflicting features. It must be add, communicational perspective of the subject can potentially disclose the communality, partaking and vibrant dimensions. In other words, a communicational approach enables us to consider the imaginal trajectory through its publicity, sensibility and intensity vectors.

The imaginal trajectory argument is not an ontological one. Nor does he configure an objective social phenomenon. Though it may be conceived through individual or collective lenses, the idea of an imaginal world and its trajectories is a critical one. It certainly stems from the power of contemporary media and its iconic, simulacral images (3D modelling, for instance). And it is presented as a

tool to shape future critical investigations in the way people experience the imaginary through different (mediatized) forms. Yet, it is always an atmosphere, a collective ambiance of mutual feeling. The imaginal trajectory reflects a relational quality by referring to those symbolic images that emerge in intersubjective transactions. This is, so to speak, the bijective or symbiotic correspondence Durand envisioned with its *trajet anthropologique*.

And here we conclude where we began. A communicational theory on the imaginary must attend to communication: to the ceaseless exchange and the reciprocal genesis of symbolic (verbal and iconic) activity. Consider the imaginal trajectory is one of the possible methodological attitudes we dispose to mark the full path of the Imaginary regarded as a plural and communicational notion.

As Kafka's Poseidon seems to imply, the imaginary has many faces. Since it is not a monolithic concept, we must devise it in its own motion, that is, in the uses and adaptations societies do in the course of the imaginal world.

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