Fear and Fantasy in a Global World

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THE SITE OF INITIATIVE.
TOWARDS A HERMENEUTIC FRAMEWORK FOR ANALYSING THE IMAGINATION OF FUTURE THREATS

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In this article, I will take a first step towards a hermeneutic framework for analysing the way imminent future threats are represented. This framework will be derived from the later works of Paul Ricœur in which he relies on the concept "imagination" rather than "fantasy" (both of which terms go back to the Greek term *phantasia*). Ricœur argues for the importance of what I will call "the site of initiative". It is on the site of initiative that two types of events come together: events that happen to us and events that we make happen. Moreover, the site of initiative is constituted between two orders of imagination: the space of experience (reproductive) and the horizon of expectation (productive). To make the framework relevant for political and social theory, I will extend it by including Ricœur's analysis of ideology and utopia. This makes it possible to give a preliminary and still underdeveloped analysis of contemporary dystopias in which fears are exploited for political gain. I will argue that these dystopias have the tendency to spur a society into arbitrary and unwarranted actions that eclipse the site of initiative.

Introduction

In the third volume of *Time and Narrative* (*Temps et récit*), Paul Ricœur stated that his age was characterized by a narrowing of the space of experience and the withdrawal of the horizon of expectation.[1] In his view, the formation of social identities was increasingly dominated by an impoverished imagination of the inherited past (ideology) and an inflated imagination of a better future (utopia). In a sense this is still the case today. However, I will argue that today the inflated imagination of the future takes not only place in the utopian mode of progress (spreading democracy), but even more in the

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[1] Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome 3, le temps raconté*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985.

dystopian mode of threats (preemptive wars).[2] The possibility of threats that will materialize in the future confronts our society with the task to imagine a future that may be worse than today. At the same time, this imagination of a worse future threatens to leave us paralyzed in fear and to spur our governments into arbitrary and unwarrantable actions.

In the past decades political discourses have increasingly stressed the emergence of a new kind of threat that will materialize in the future, when it is too late to prevent it. Such political discourses appeal to exceptional circumstances that call for immediate action in the present, regardless of the consequences for human rights and individual freedom (e.g., the Patriot Act in the United States, the increasing use of closed-circuit television in both sides of the Atlantic, drone attacks on terrorist targets in areas of Pakistan that are populated by civilians). To deal with the imminent future threats of terrorism, the United States started a preemptive war in Iraq[3] and ordered the targeted killing of dozens of suspected terrorists by drones.[4] To deal with the threat of pandemics security measures were taken and countless animals were killed (e.g., the 2003 outbreak of avian influenza in the Netherlands which led to the preventive killing of 30 million birds).[5] To deal with the threat of climate change large-scale projects of geo-engineering are proposed like altering the chemistry of seawater or placing mirrors in space.[6] In all these cases threats are dealt with by acting on the future, even though in most

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[2] The English word "utopia" comes from the Greek *oú* (not) and *topos* (place), it literally means "no place". However it is often used in the positive sense of eutopia, which literally means "good place". For my purposes I want to restore the literary meaning of utopia as "no place" which covers eutopia (good place) as well as dystopia (bad place).

[3] See Melinda Cooper, "Pre-empting Emergence", *Theory, Culture & Society*, 23/4 (2006), 113-35; Brian Massumi, "Potential Politics and the Primacy of Preemption", *Theory & Event*, 10/2 (2007): https://muse.jhu.edu/journals/theory_and_event/v010/ 10.2massumi.html; Brian Massumi, "National Enterprise Emergency", *Theory, Culture and Society*, 26/6 (2009), 153-85.

[4] See Thomas Byron Hunter, "Targeted Killing: Self-Defense, Preemption, and the War on Terrorism", *JSS Journal of Strategic Security*, 2/2 (2009), 1-52; Avery Plaw, *Targeting Terrorists. A License to Kill?*, London: Ashgate, 2008.

[5] See M.A. Gerritzen *et al.*, "Slaughter of Poultry during the Epidemic of Avian Influenza in the Netherlands in 2003", *Veterinary Record*, 159/2 (2006), 39-42.

[6] Peter Irvine, and Andy Ridgwell, "'Geoengineering' Taking Control of our Planet's Climate", *Science Progress*, 92/2 (2009), 139-62.

cases the effects of these actions are uncertain and potentially disastrous.

Various authors have already shown that the imagination of imminent future threats is often used to legitimate political actions that are normally considered to be either unethical or too risky.[7] I do not aim to repeat this analysis, nor do I want to criticize concrete cases in which the imagination of imminent future threats is used to legitimate questionable political actions. Instead, I will address two related problems. The first problem is that of collective initiatives and their relation to the emergence of threats. Are threats caused by our own actions or do they happen to us? The second problem concerns the imagination of threats. Can we make a distinction between a credible and an incredible imagination of a catastrophic future that threatens us? Rather than addressing these problems directly, I will develop a hermeneutic framework that can be used to analyse the imagination of imminent future threats that call for immediate action. I will derive this framework from the later works of the French philosopher Paul Ricœur.[8] In doing this, I will combine two elements from Ricœur's

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[7] See Louise Amoore, "Lines of Sight: on the Visualization of Unknown Futures", *Citizenship Studies*, 13/1 (2009), 17-30; Ben Anderson, "Preemption, Precaution, Preparedness: Anticipatory Action and Future Geographies", *Progress in Human Geography*, 34/6 (2010), 777-98; Cooper, "Pre-empting Emergence", 113-35; Marieke de Goede, "Beyond Risk: Premediation and the Post-9/11 Security Imagination", *Security Dialogue*, 39/2-3 (2008), 155-76; Marieke de Goede, "The Politics of Preemption and the War on Terror in Europe", *European Journal of International Relations*, 14/1 (2008), 161-85; Brian Massumi, "The Autonomy of Affect", *Cultural Critique*, 31 (1995), 83-109; Massumi, "Potential Politics"; Massumi, "National Enterprise Emergency", 153-85; Annie McClanahan, "Future's Shock: Plausibility, Preemption, and the Fiction of 9/11", *Symploke*, 17/1 (2009), 41-62.

[8] Paul Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome 1, l'intrigue et le récit historique*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983; *Temps et récit. Tome 2, la configuration du temps dans le récit de fiction*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1984; *Temps et récit. Tome 3, le temps raconté*; *Du texte à l'action*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1985; *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, New York: Columbia University Press, 1986; "L'Identité narrative", *Esprit*, 7/12 (1988), 295; *Soi-même comme un autre*, Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990; *Time and Narrative. Volume 1*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990; *Time and Narrative. Volume 2*, trans. Kathleen McLaughlin and David Pellauer, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990; *Time and Narrative. Volume 3*, trans. Kathleen Blamey and David Pellauer, Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1990; *From Text to Action: Essays in Hermeneutics II*, Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1991; "Life in Quest of Narrative", in *On Paul Ricœur: Narrative and Interpretation*, ed. David Wood, London: Routledge, 1991, 20-33; *Oneself as Another*, trans. Kathleen Blamey, Chicago: The University of

thought. (1) The basic contours of the framework will be derived from Ricœur's theory of historical imagination. In this theory, the present is defined as a site of initiative that is determined by a tension between the reproductive imagination of the past (space of experience) and the productive imagination of the future (horizon of expectation). (2) The proposed hermeneutic framework will be further extended by incorporating Ricœur's theory of social imagination. According to him, society is the result of an imaginary construction that always oscillates between the imagination of an existing society (ideology) and the imagination of a future society that does not yet exist (utopia).

The imaginary construction of a history
In the first part of this article, I will derive from Ricœur a theory of historical imagination. In his as yet unpublished *Lectures on Imagination*, Ricœur gives an extensive analysis of the problem of imagination and its various alternative designations.[9] He traces the history of this concept from the Greek *phantasia* (Aristotle) and its Latin translation, *imago*, through the German notions *Einbildung, Darstellung, Vorstellung* (Kant) and *Phantasie* (Freud), to its English equivalents "fancy", "fantasy" and "imagination". According to Ricœur, this competition between words points towards a cluster of problems that can only be adequately addressed by a philosophy of imagination that combines various perspectives on the problem of the image. The Freudian notion *Phantasie*, for instance, only covers the involuntary and illusory aspects of the image;[10] it does not take into account the creative and active side of the imagination. Ricœur writes, "what we call imagination is in fact a space of variation according to several ranges of possibilities".[11] For Ricœur , this space of variation includes but is not limited to *Phantasie* (or one of the other, more specific terms).


Chicago Press, 1992. All my references are to the original editions of Ricœur's works. After a quote I will refer to the original edition, but add the pagination of the English translation after the slash (except when the original is in English).

[9] I thank George H. Taylor for giving me access to these unpublished lectures. See also George H. Taylor, "Ricœur's Philosophy of Imagination", *Journal of French Philosophy*, 1/2 (2006), 93-104. In footnote 3 of this article, Taylor gives an explanation of the genesis of the transcript of these lectures.

[10] See Paul Ricœur, "Introductory Lecture", in *Lectures on Imagination* (given in 1975). Unpublished.

[11] *Ibid.*

Ricœur tries to order the ranges of possibilities of "imagination" by mapping them on two axes. The first axis concerns the distinction between a productive imagination that refers to an already existing original (trace, portrait) and a productive imagination that does not refer to an original, but creates its own reference. The second axis has to do with the difference between a critical distance to reality (novels that function as a social critique) and a non-critical involvement in it (illusions/deceptions). In a diagram:

Critical
distance

• *Novel*

• *Portrait*

Reproductive
imagination
Productive
imagination

• *Trace*

• *Illusions/
deceptions*

Non-critical
involvement
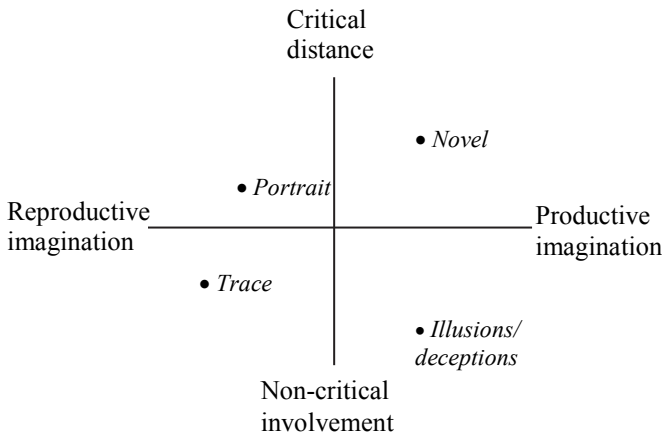
It is on this diagram that Ricœur grafts his theory of historical and social imagination. The two axes provide criteria to distinguish between healthy forms of imagination that are reliable (critical distance) and potential unhealthy ones that need to be questioned (non-critical involvement). Moreover, it shows that the imagination oscillates between two orders: a reproductive one that refers to an already existing reality and a productive one that imagines new realities and shapes the world in a new way.

In relation to threats, the imagination is free from the immediate fear that these may invoke. According to Ricœur, the imagination gives us a certain amount of freedom in the sense that it has the power to free us from the overpowering force of our affections. At this point, Ricœur cites Aristotle: "when we think something to be fearful or threatening, emotion is immediately produced, and so too with what is encouraging; but when we merely imagine we remain as unaffected as persons who are looking at a painting of some dreadful or encouraging

scene."[12] Although the imagination can be used to exploit emotions, it differs from these emotions and is independent of them. This indicates again that there is nothing illusory in the imagination as such, but that it can give rise to a non-critical involvement with reality (escapism, paranoia) as well as a critical evaluation of it (alternative scenario's, inventive counter-measures).

Imagination and time

In his *Time and Narrative* (volumes 1-3), Ricœur connects his theory of historical imagination to the problem of time. According to him there are two opposing perspectives on time: a cosmological and a phenomenological perspective. (1) The cosmological perspective is Aristotelian in origin and sees the present as a cosmological instant that marks the boundary between the past and the future on a timeline. Time as a whole is seen as a natural phenomenon that is constantly progressing into the future. In this cosmological conception time has a linear course. (2) The phenomenological perspective is Augustinian in origin and focuses on the way we experience time. Our experience of time is not structured as a line, but is constantly switching between perceptions of the present, memories of the past and expectations of the future. This threefold present constantly shatters the unity of time.[13]

In Ricœur's view the cosmological and the phenomenological perspective are mutually exclusive. Only within a poetics of narrative can we find a structure in which both perspectives are combined: that is, in the plot. On the one hand, the plot organizes occurrences in linear episodes. On the other hand, it creates an overarching structure that relates the various episodes to each other. The plot combines linearity and fragmentation in a temporal unity that is neither linear nor fragmented. In this way a new temporal structure is invented: a narrative time. Moreover, Ricœur points out that a narrative not only refigures time through a plot, but also expresses and shapes "characters" whose lives are structured into a succession of meaningful episodes. For this reason, Ricœur claims, it is within the

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[12] Aristotle, "On the Soul", in *The Complete Works of Aristotle: The Revised Oxford Translation. Volume 1*, ed. Jonathan Barnes, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1984, 49 (427b23-427b25).
[13] Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome 3*.

interplay between narratives that personal and collective identities are made and unmade.[14]

By appealing to narrative theory, Ricœur tries to find a middle way between the one-ness of the timeline and the fragmentation of historical experience. However, he is acutely aware of two reductions that threaten to undermine his project from the outset. First, the reduction of history to a frozen past that has lost its connections with the present and the future (historiographical reduction). Second, the reduction of history to a totality which preserves within it all the previous stages it has gone through (the Hegelian reduction). To overcome these reductions, Ricœur adopts two categories that were first introduced by Reinhart Koselleck:[15] the space of experience and the horizon of expectation. The space of experience is the gathering together of past events that we observe from the perspective of the present, for that reason these past events are constantly reinterpreted in the light of the present (reproductive imagination). The horizon of expectation indicates the hopes and fears, the wishes and desires that direct our actions towards futures that we want to realize or that we try to prevent (productive imagination).[16]

For Ricœur , however, there is something missing that connects the space of experience and the horizon of expectation with each other. For that reason he introduces a third category: initiative. To highlight the parallelism between this third category and the other two, I will call it "the site of initiative". Ricœur introduces the site of initiative to emphasize that the present is a site of observation as well as action. On the one hand, we are part of a history that we have not made but that we can observe. On the other hand, we are actively involved in the unfolding of a history that is made by our actions, but that we cannot observe as a "history". With this dynamic between a received history that we observe and the making of a history of which we are the agent, Ricœur overcomes the historiographical and the Hegelian reduction without losing the possibility to give a narrative unity to large periods of time.

With the introduction of the site of initiative, Ricœur has developed a flexible analytical framework to analyse the historical

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[14] Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome 1*; Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome 3*.

[15] Reinhart Koselleck, *Futures Past: On the Semantics of Historical Time*, trans. Keith Tribe, New York: Columbia University Press, 2004.

[16] Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome 3*.

condition of human experiences. On the one hand, this framework can zoom in on to analyse specific individual actions. On the other hand, it can zoom out to analyse collective actions that define a society as a whole or even an entire era (e.g., the Middle Ages). Because of his flexibility in zooming Ricœur can highlight the constantly changing, dynamic relationship between past, present and future without losing the possibility to think the continuity of history. Within this framework it is the site of initiative that is most important to Ricœur. It is there that human actions interfere with the course of the world and will either change its direction or be changed by it.[17] As I will show, the site of initiative is determined by two factors. (a) The entanglement of "events that we make happen" (acting) and "events that happen to us" (suffering). (b) The tension between two orders of historical imagination: the "space of experience" (reproductive imagination of the past) and the "horizon of expectation" (productive imagination of the future).

The entanglement of acting and suffering
To understand the nature of the threats we are dealing with today, we first need to unravel the entanglement of human initiatives that make events happen and the course of events that happen to us. Only then can we determine which initiatives are causally related to the emergence of a threat and how we can ascribe these initiatives to concrete agents. Moreover, only then will it be possible to understand if this threat is an intended or an unintended consequence of these initiatives. Ricœur gives an extensive and nuanced account of the various aspects of the entanglement of man and world. Here I will not be able to do justice to this account; I will have to restrict myself to four brief comments.

The most basic entanglement of acting and suffering can be found in the human power to act. Ricœur situates this ability in the human body that is simultaneously a physical object in the world and a subjective perspective on the world. As physical object my body is passively affected by circumstances; as subjective perspective it has the ability to actively intervene in the world and react to or anticipate on these circumstances. My combined knowledge of my circumstances and abilities creates the human power to act.[18]

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[17] Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome 3*; Ricœur, *Du texte à l'action*.
[18] Ricœur, *Du texte à l'action*; Ricœur, *Soi-même*.

The structure of action is the second element that is of importance to Ricœur. He points out that we have to live life forward (doing), but can only comprehend it backwards (seeing). Ricœur argues that we cannot be an agent of initiative and an observer of that initiative at the same time. As the agents of our own actions we produce events that we cannot directly observe, but that will only become visible gradually. For that reason action has a paradoxical structure. On the one hand, the action can be ascribed to an agent. On the other hand, the action will have unforeseen consequences that were never intended by this agent.[19]

An even more complex entanglement of acting and suffering can be found in the interweaving of causality and intentionality. Following Georg von Wright, Ricœur argues that a human action is a cause as well as an intention.[20] As a cause it intervenes in the world, as an intention it is directed towards the actualization of a goal. This interweaving of causality and intentionality makes it hard to analyse human actions. If the analysis only focuses on "action as a cause" it threatens to reduce it to an event that simply happens but is not made to happen. However, if the analysis only focuses on "action as an intention" it threatens to reduce it to a psychological fact that has no impact on the course of the world. As long as the initiative is still going on and belongs to the present, Ricœur argues, it is not possible to connect causality and intentionality. However, when the initiative has come to an end and belongs to the past, it is possible to combine these two perspectives. Ricœur calls the interweaving of causality and intentionality a form of quasi-causality. Quasi-causality makes it possible to evaluate intentions not only in terms of aims but also in terms of consequences.[21] The entanglement of acting and suffering also becomes clear in the way our actions are directed towards the world. Ricœur shows that actions can be directed towards "a knowable world that already exists" (space of experience) or towards the actualization of an "unknown world that does not yet exist" (horizon of expectation). Ricœur is aware of the mutual implication of

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[19] *Ibid.*; *ibid.*
[20] G.H. von Wright, *Explanation and Understanding*, Ithaca, NY: Cornell University Press, 1971.
[21] Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome 1*.

these two directions of action. However, he still argues that it is important to distinguish them from each other.[22]

An action that is directed towards a "knowable world that already exists" (space of experience) can be explained by looking for an implicit justification that grounds the action. When after a long walk a man runs to the tap, we can explain his action by describing it in terms of means (drinking water) and ends (satisfying his thirst). To explain this action we do not need to ascribe it to an agent. However, Ricœur emphasizes that a description of this action becomes misleading if it is not acknowledged that this action is part of an orientation of an agent. This agent recognizes himself as the subject of his own actions.

An action that is directed toward the actualization of an "unknown world that does not yet exist" (horizon of expectation) cannot be explained in the same way. Take for instance the strategy of targeted killing that the United States has implemented to annihilate members of terrorist groups like the Taliban and Al-Qaeda in Pakistan, Yemen, etc. This strategy is based on new tactics and techniques (e.g., drones) that will have unknown consequences. For that reason it would be misleading to evaluate it solely in terms of means and ends. Even though the United States have the means (drones or UAVs) to reach their end (annihilate a particular terrorist group), it still may not be a good idea to use a strategy of targeted killing; it could very well have unintended consequences that only make the situation worse.[23] The strategy of targeted killing has to be evaluated from the perspective of the intention that underlies it. This means that it cannot be evaluated in terms of truth, but only in terms of veracity. Is the intention behind this strategy really in accordance with the way it is implemented? And is this intention really in agreement with the other intentions that are formulated by the American government (e.g., human rights, justice, etc.)? The silence and secrecy surrounding the strategy of targeted killing suggests otherwise.

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[22] Ricœur, *Du texte à l'action*; Ricœur, *Soi-même*.
[23] See Mia Bloom, *Dying to Kill: The Allure of Suicide Terror*, New York: Columbia University Press, 2007; Audrey Kurth Cronin, *How Terrorism Ends: Understanding the Decline and Demise of Terrorist Campaigns*, Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2009.

The tension between two orders of historical imagination

According to Ricœur, the site of initiative is not only defined by the entanglement of acting and suffering, but also by a tension between the two orders of historical imagination mentioned above. It is because of this tension that we can distance ourselves from the existing reality and direct our gaze to a future that will be different than what we have experienced before. This tension between the space of experience and the horizon of expectation can be fruitful, but it can also turn into a harmful schism. In that case the distance between the two poles becomes either too great or too small. Ricœur formulates two imperatives to determine whether a fruitful tension has turned into a harmful schism.[24]

Ricœur's first imperative simply states that we have to prevent the space of experience from becoming too narrow. This happens when we perceive the past as something that is closed and necessary instead of a living tradition that is still connected to a site of initiative. In that case we are no longer able to recognize the unrealized possibilities of the past that will reopen it towards the future.[25] Concerning threats, this means that we have to investigate the connection between the imminent future threat that calls for immediate action and our experience of the past. In relation to terrorism, for instance, it has often been noted that terrorists did not appear out of nowhere. On the contrary, not infrequently they emerged in the wake of power politics by the United States and its allies (e.g. supporting Sadam Hussein in the Iran-Iraq war of the nineteen eighties).[26] This could mean that a specific military project in the past has become part of a chain of reactions that in the end has led to an act of terrorism. This information is relevant because it shows something about the unintended consequences of past actions. It could be a sign to stop with these kinds of actions and to develop other military strategies to deal with foreign enemies.

Ricœur's second imperative states that we have to keep our horizon of expectations from running away from us. We can do this by means of "a series of intermediary projects that we can act upon".[27] Without

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[24] Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome 3*.

[25] *Ibid.*

[26] See, for instance, Joost R Hiltermann, *A Poisonous Affair: America, Iraq, and the Gassing of Halabja*, Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2007.

[27] Ricœur, *Temps et récit. Tome 3*, 312/313.

this connection the horizon of expectation is running away from us and turns into a delusion. This happens when we get lost in dreams or nightmares that are no longer directed towards "a determined future, outlined in terms of distinct, discernible steps".[28] In that case we project our ideals or anxieties into an abstract future, while we lack a practical path that can bridge the gap between the present situation and the imagined future that we want to realize or prevent. In relation to catastrophic future threats that call for immediate action, we have to investigate if this catastrophic future can really be connected to the present. If not, then we have to ask ourselves if we can determine a way to anticipate this future that is not completely arbitrary. If it turns out that arbitrary actions are our only option it makes no sense to act upon the future.

The imaginary construction of society
In the second part of this article, I will incorporate Ricœur's theory of social imagination in the proposed hermeneutic framework. Ricœur develops this theory in *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia.* First I will present Ricœur's interpretation of ideology and utopia. Then I will show how Ricœur places these two opposing orders of social imagination in a fruitful tension with each other. This will make clear that ideologies constitute the space of experience of a society; whereas utopias constitute its horizon of expectation. The site of initiative of a society is thus defined by the tension between these two orders of imagination. The incorporation of ideology and utopia in the proposed hermeneutic framework provides it with a critical apparatus, which can be used to formulate a critique on the social imagination of imminent future threats. Moreover, it also makes clear how a society can imagine a worse future without being spurred into arbitrary actions or being paralyzed by fear.

Ideology: between integration and distortion
The social imagination of threats is not easy to criticize because it always gets trapped in what Clifford Geertz dubbed "Mannheim's paradox".[29] This paradox can be formulated as follows: if every position reflects a biased ideology that is influenced by hidden

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[28] *Ibid.*, 312/313.
[29] Clifford Geertz, *The Interpretation of Cultures: Selected Essays*, New York: Basic Books, 1973, 194-98.

interests and desires, then this also holds for anyone who tries to criticize such an ideological position. Or, as Paul Ricœur has it: "if everything that we say is bias, if everything we say represents interests that we do not know, how can we have a theory of ideology which is not itself ideological?"[30] In the light of Mannheim's paradox, a critical analysis of the social imagination of threats can easily be dismissed as just another ideological position that itself tries to push a political agenda. Ricœur suggests that we can avoid this paradox by questioning the premises on which it is build. "Perhaps", he writes, "the problem of Mannheim's paradox lies in its epistemological extension of a Marxism founded upon the contrast between ideology and science".[31] Ricœur rejects the implicit opposition underlying Mannheim's paradox between a biased standpoint that is imaginary (ideology) and a neutral standpoint that is real (science). In his view ideology has to be contrasted with praxis – what I have called the site of initiative – and not with science. Science strives for truth (*vérité*) and neutrality, but this is not what is at stake in the social sphere. The social sphere is always already mediated by imaginary constructions; for that reason we cannot escape ideology and can only aim at veracity (*véracité*, being true to oneself). It makes no sense to criticize ideology solely from the perspective of science, that is, truth. Instead, we should focus on the relation between ideology and praxis, that is, veracity.[32] On the one hand, as Ricœur argues, ideology can have a positive, integrative function. This happens when the ideology in question is in agreement with the site of initiative it mediates (it fruitfully configures the space of experience). In that case ideology constitutes the social sphere and ensures the preservation of individual and collective identities. On the other hand, however, ideology gets a negative, distortive function when it is no longer true to itself (that is, it narrows the space of experience). In that case it does not stand in opposition with science, but with its own site of initiative. The initiatives that are taken in the name of this ideology are not in conformity with it, but rather contradict it. This happens "when the integrative function becomes frozen, when it becomes rhetorical in the bad sense, when schematization and rationalization prevail".[33] In other

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[30] Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 8.
[31] *Ibid.*, 9.
[32] Ricœur, *Soi-même*.
[33] Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 266.

words, when an ideology is no longer directed towards the integration of a community but is used to dominate it.

Ricœur finds in the notion of legitimacy the turning point between the neutral concept of ideology as integration and the political concept of ideology as distortion. Following Max Weber he emphasizes that "legitimacy can be ascribed to an order only by reference to the beliefs and representations held by those acting subject to it".[34] This means that the ruling authority can never legitimate itself, but need the consent of the people under its rule. For Ricœur this is the root of the problem of ideology. This problem consists of three elements: (a) the ruling authority's claim to legitimacy must be answered with the citizens' belief in this legitimacy. However, the spontaneous belief of the citizen will never entirely overlap with the claim to legitimacy of the ruling authority. This has to do with the fact that the motives and intentions of the people under a given rule are never completely in agreement with that of the rulers. (b) It is the role of ideology to bridge the gap between the claim to legitimacy of the ruling authority and the lack in consent of the people under its rule. (c) Ideology bridges this gap by adding a supplement to the people's spontaneous consent. For Ricœur this supplement indicates "that there must be something more in the belief than can be rationally understood in terms of interests, whether emotional, customary, or rational".[35] This "something more" is the product of social imagination and is always directed towards the preservation of the collective identity through time.

When a group organizes itself in a certain structure that gives it shape, it already implies a distinction between claim and belief. The initiatives of the group are grounded in the consents of its members, however the individual members of the group will not always agree with these initiatives. Ricœur argues that this lack of consent can be supplemented by an ideology that provides a belief in the group as a whole. From this perspective ideology can be seen as a narrative that integrates several individual perspectives in a collective identity that can be ascribed to larger groups or even a society as a whole. As long as this identity is the outcome of the integrative function of ideology it has a positive impact on the group. This identity is never frozen, but

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[34] *Ibid.*, 189.
[35] *Ibid.*, 201.

constantly adapts to the difference between its group members by way of a struggle for recognition.

Quite often a group not only organizes itself, but also creates a hierarchical order in which rulers and ruled are differentiated. The initiatives of the group are still partly grounded in the consent of its members, but now there exists a hierarchical distance between the ruling authority and the people under its rule. In that case the order of the group is no longer the product of a collective effort, but is at least partly imposed by rulers who ask for obedience and conformity. According to Ricœur, this will widen the gap between the ruler's claim to legitimacy and the spontaneous belief of the people in this legitimacy. Ideology bridges this gap and supplements this spontaneous belief. However, in this process of legitimation ideology can easily turn into a form of domination. In that case ideology becomes distorted and gets a negative function.

Ricœur suggests that distortion is the outcome of "a lack of reciprocity between claim and belief. The claim does not rely on the belief, but the belief is extorted by the claim".[36] Ricœur mentions the example of the contractual relation between employer and employee that replaces the unequal relation between master and slave. Marx already analysed that the industrial powers legitimized their power with the help of this contractual relation. Here the belief is extorted by the claim. The legitimacy is not based upon the acceptance of a rule that is the outcome of a struggle for recognition; on the contrary, it is the outcome of a struggle for power in which the winning side proclaims the rules that the losing side just has to swallow. Ricœur contrasts the claim to legitimacy with the belief in it – supplemented by ideology – to highlight that the problem of ideology can only be understood in relation to real individuals under definite conditions. Orthodox Marxism ignores this dimension and interprets ideology in terms of abstract devices (*dispositifs*). In this way, as Ricœur indicates, it reduces the site of initiative to an anonymous zone of forces. The possibility of domination comes even more to the fore in the state. The state is not only organized in a hierarchical structure, but also has the monopoly on the use of legitimate violence against individuals. The legitimation of this violence can again easily degenerate in a process of domination.

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[36] *Ibid.*, 212.

To conclude, Ricœur claims that ideology can have a positive, integrative function as well as a negative, distortive function. In the first case, ideology gives a configuration of the collective space of experience that connects it with the site of initiative. In the second case, ideology narrows the space of experience in order to extort the people's belief in the legitimacy of the existing order. I will argue that imminent future threats that call for immediate action can be easily used as an instrument of extortion. However, this will only become clear when ideology is placed in tension with utopia.

The nowhere of utopia

In his interpretation of utopia Ricœur primarily focuses on the imagination of a better future (eutopia or "good place"). In order to make room for the notion of threat, I will emphasize that the concept of utopia also covers the imagination of a worse future (dystopia or "bad place").[37] The two manifestations of utopia are interrelated; every eutopia implies a worse future that it wants to prevent, whereas every dystopia implies a eutopia that it wants to realize. Nevertheless, I think it is important to distinguish these two manifestations of utopia from each other; it will make us more conscious of the rhetorical dimension that underlies political discourses that appeal to imminent future threats. Moreover it provides us with a critical apparatus to resist a false rhetoric of threats and makes it easier to answer this rhetoric with an alternative.

Ricœur starts his investigation of utopia with "the kernel idea of nowhere implied by the word utopia".[38] It is from this *nowhere* or *no place* that "an exterior glance is cast on our reality, which suddenly looks strange, nothing more being taken for granted".[39] Ricœur is not so much interested in literary utopias – like Thomas More's *Utopia* – that formulate an alternative to present reality, even though this alternative is not realizable. Ricœur redefines the concept of utopia and detaches it from its literary origin. For him utopias serve as collective horizons of expectation that formulate alternative versions of the present reality and are directed towards the realization or prevention of this alternative. In this sense utopia has a positive

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[37] Ricœur would probably not deny this, but his characterization of utopia shows that he is primarily focused on the imagination of a better future.

[38] Ricœur, *Lectures on Ideology and Utopia*, 16.

[39] *Ibid.*, 16.

function. It is the imagination of a future that may seem impossible under the present conditions of reality, but that can become possible in the future if a series of concrete steps is taken in order to realize a better future or to prevent a worse future. For Ricœur a utopia "introduces a sense of doubt that shatters the obvious"[40] in order to make room for a new perspective on what presently exists.

Although utopia has a broader range than just the political domain, Ricœur claims that it is the problem of power that is ultimately at stake in utopia. It is in relation to power that we find a similar turning point between the positive and the negative functions of utopia, as we found earlier in ideology. Utopia is not only the exploration of the possible, but it also presents an alternative to the ruling power. In this way, it can reveal the supplement that ideology constructed to bridge the gap between the claim to legitimacy and the spontaneous belief of the people in this legitimacy. When this ideological supplement has a positive, integrative function, utopia will only reveal that its legitimacy is contingent and can be disputed. However, when this ideological supplement has a negative, distortive function, utopia will unmask its claim to legitimacy as being an unjust form of extortion. In both these cases utopia will have a positive effect on society.

However, when utopia's alternative is nothing more than a leap in the impossible, it will get a negative function and will turn into a form of escapism. Ricœur describes this escapism in terms of a disjunction between social reality and the utopia that aims to transform it. "This disjunction", Ricœur writes, "allows utopia to avoid any obligation to come to grips with the real difficulties of a given society".[41] In Ricœur's view this escapism has a paralyzing effect that eclipses the collective site of initiative.

I propose to extend Ricœur's negative evaluation of unrealizable utopias to the dystopian notion of imminent future threats that call for immediate action. Ricœur does not address the impact of dystopian calls for action. I suggest, however, that they can have a similar negative impact on society as the escapist dream of an ideal, unrealizable society. The notion of an imminent future threat appeals to a logic of necessity. The suggestion is: there is no time for deliberation, we have to act now before it is too late. In this way the proposed action is presented as an unavoidable fact, instead of a

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[40] *Ibid.*, 299.
[41] *Ibid.*, 17.

choice that is informed by a specific ideological position. This logic of necessity is the exact opposite of the flight in escapism, but it has a similar effect: it eclipses the site of initiative.

Today we see this logic of necessity at work in the way unknown threats are used to legitimate collective initiatives. The legitimacy of these initiatives is not build upon the beliefs of the people, but it is extorted by appealing to future threats that call for immediate action. Here we see that a distortive ideology and an unrealistic projection of the future reinforce each other. The best example of this is probably the American invasion of Iraq. This invasion was legitimated by appealing to a dystopian threat (weapons of Mass destructions) in combination with a eutopian aim (spreading democracy). In the build-up to the war the collective site of initiative was shattered by presenting an imminent threat that could only be prevented by starting a preemptive war. Here a dystopian vision of the future is used to appeal to a logic of necessity and to strengthen the force of ideological extortion. Another example can be found in the way Western societies handle the series of economic crises that threaten to culminate in a devastating "financial meltdown". This dystopian threat of a financial meltdown is often used as an ideological supplement that can bridge the gap between the claim that it is legitimate to break down the welfare state and the people's spontaneous belief in this claim.

A false rhetoric of imminent future threats cannot be countered by simply ignoring the possibility of such a threat. Instead, we have to take this possibility seriously and try to develop dystopian scenarios that sketch concrete and specific steps to prevent a worse future from happening. In these scenarios we need to imagine a future that may be worse than today, but in which the common good of all the people in a society is still the leading idea. This will reveal that none of the proposed actions are necessary; they are always the outcome of a conscious or unconscious choice that is made on a site of initiative as defined by the tension between ideology and utopia.

To conclude, Ricœur claims that utopia can have a positive function as well as a negative one. In the first case, utopia provides a collective horizon of expectation that can be connected with the site of initiative. This utopia can resist an existing ideology by offering an alternative, but it can also enrich it by opening up new possibilities within this ideology itself. In the second case, utopia projects an unrealistic future that cannot be connected to the site of initiative. I

have suggested that such utopias can have a negative impact on society in at least two forms. First, in the form of a eutopia that projects an ideal future that is unrealizable and leads to escapism. Second, in the form of a dystopia that projects a disastrous future that calls for immediate action and appeals to a logic of necessity. In both these forms of utopia the site of initiative is eclipsed.

The tension between ideology and utopia

In Ricœur's view we are not completely captured by our own historical conditions, but have the capacity to reflect on it. After the rise of totalitarianism (extensively analysed by Hannah Arendt), ideologies and utopias were increasingly viewed as unhealthy and oppressive constructs.[42] Ricœur argues, however, that the social sphere will always be constituted by ideologies and utopias, regardless of our attempts to substitute the social imagination for science. He would argue that we have to embrace the social imagination, rather than reject it. Only then will it become possible to combine the positive effects of the social imagination with a critique of its negative effects. According to Ricœur, we are always caught in the circle of ideology and utopia, the only thing we can do is to turn this circle into a productive spiral. This only works when we are conscious of our own biased position, without becoming too afraid to formulate such a position in the form of an ideology as well as a utopia.

Ricœur thinks that the double perspective of ideology and utopia can avoid Mannheim's paradox, because it opposes two orders of imagination rather than imagination and science. Ideology is defined as a "model of" an already existing reality. It is an imaginary construction of the space of experience and has a preservative function. Utopia is a "model for" a future reality that we want to realize or try to prevent. It is an imaginary construction of the horizon of expectation and has a disruptive function.[43] The tension between these two imaginary constructions makes it possible to criticize ideological and utopian positions from the perspective of each other. Ricœur writes that

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[42] See Hannah Arendt, *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, New York: Harcourt Brace Jovanovich, 1973.
[43] *Ibid.*, 311.

> we must try to cure the illnesses of utopia by what is wholesome in
> ideology – by its element of identity, which is once more a
> fundamental function of life – and try to cure the rigidity, the
> petrification, of ideologies by the utopian element.[44]

We can only do this from the perspective of the site of initiative. It is
there that we have to judge if an ideology is true to itself or has
become distorted by extorting its own legitimacy. This will come to
light in the initiatives that are started in the name of this ideology. It is
again on the site of initiative that we have to determine if a utopia is
the imagination of a possible future or an unreal chimera. This will
become clear by examining the concrete steps that are proposed to
realize or prevent this utopia.

Conclusion
Given the limited space of this article, I have not been able to
undertake a full evaluation of the imagination of imminent future
threats. My only aim was to develop a hermeneutic framework that
can be used towards such an end. At the heart of this framework lies
what I have called the site of initiative. On the basis of my reading of
Ricœur, I have suggested that the site initiative is determined by two
factors. The first factor is the entanglement of acting and suffering.
Our actions produce events that we can only adequately observe when
the unintended consequences of these actions have become clear. This
is why it is so difficult to determine whether threats are somehow
caused by our own actions or simply happen to us. The second and
most important factor concerns the role of the imagination. I showed
that Ricœur defines this imagination as a tension between two orders.
In relation to the past, the reproductive, historical imagination
constitutes a space of experience; in relation to the future, the
productive imagination constitutes a horizon of expectation.
According to Ricœur, however, the tension between these two orders
of imagination can easily turn into an unhealthy schism. This happens
when one of the two orders of imagination (or both) is cut off from the
site of initiative. In that case, the imagination is running wild and will
provide a false and misleading orientation for action. In this way, fears
can be exploited and used for political gains that are no longer healthy
for the society as a whole. All these aspects together can be integrated

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[44] *Ibid.*, 312.

into a dynamic framework. This framework can zoom in to individual sites of initiative that have a limited time-span or zoom out to collective sites of initiatives that extend over long periods of time or even over entire eras.

To make this general hermeneutic framework relevant for political and social analysis, I have proposed to incorporate Ricœur's conception of ideology (as a configuration of the space of experience of a society) and utopia (a configuration of the horizon of expectation) in it. According to Ricœur, ideology will have a positive function as long as it integrates the diverging perspectives of single individuals in a belief in the community as a whole. However, ideology becomes harmful when the legitimacy of ideological decisions is extorted by misleading claims about what is good for the community as a whole. In a similar manner, eutopias and dystopias will have a positive function as long as they formulate alternative futures that can be connected to the site of initiative. However, they will have a negative influence when the social imagination loses itself in unlikely and unfounded scenarios that eclipse the site of initiative. These scenarios will either lead to escapism (eutopias) or will introduce a logic of necessity (dystopias). In light of the contemporary discussion about imminent future threats, I have especially focused on dystopias that offer an imagination of a worse future. By placing ideology in tension with utopia, Ricœur offers a way to evaluate the harmful effects of the one in terms of the other. His suggestion is that distortive ideologies can be cured by valuable utopias, whereas inflated utopias can be unmasked by critical ideologies.