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In search of a cultural "common denominator": metaphors, historical change and folk metaphysics

Abstract. *Numerous recent works, primarily in sociocultural history, emphasize the circulation of common meanings across class lines rather than the unilateral influence of economic conditions or intellectual ideas. This perspective has provided a means to better assess the resources enabling ordinary people to construct and change their world. One of the interesting ways to account for this folk inventiveness is to go back to its origins, that is to say, to the minds and the mainly metaphorical conceptualization that are relentlessly remaking reality. The case of the French Revolution clearly illustrates the political efficiency of a metaphorical reasoning that, in the 18th century, led to both the symbolic and the real overthrow of the king's authority. By virtue of the leading role they play in folk metaphysics, metaphors can be seen as the semantic "hooks" of the collective mentality that constitutes the lowest common denominator of a given community.*

Key words. *Collective mentality – Cultural meanings – Folk metaphysics – French Revolution – Metaphorical reasoning – New History – Symbolic change*

Sociocultural history, also called "New History", has brought into question the assumption, peculiar to the history of ideas, that the power of great minds and the weight of intellectual ideas suffice to justify the legitimacy of authority and to handle the creation of new meanings (Chartier, 1991).[1] Against the "intellicentric" gaze

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of historians overemphasizing this "vertical" model of representational "contagion", sociocultural history has shown that systematic tenets and elaborate discourses cannot immediately be translated into extended political action without first strongly resonating with popular practices and folk expectations (Le Goff and Nora, 1974). Against a more Marxist trend, it has also stressed that economic conditions, social structures and class memberships are not the only milestones of historical explanation: all these factual dimensions have to be collectively *interpreted* in a certain way in order to become a driving force of social change (Roche, 1998). In short, society is far from a static system brought to life and to history by a one-way causal relationship between an "infra-structure" and a "super-structure". Thanks to sociocultural history, the social edifice – whose foundations have been passed up and down between "cellar" and "attic", the economic and the cultural – has changed status. Society has become a dynamic network of reciprocal interactions among high and popular cultures as well as among well-established customs and previously unheard-of aspirations. As a result, the mainstream conception of ideology as an articulated and consistent system of thought has yielded to an alternative view in terms of embodied experiences, implicit presuppositions and common-sense knowledge. Ideology, in this sense, is so embedded in ordinary life that it refers more to transversally shared practices and collective mentalities than to coherent representations spread over the whole of society from the top to the bottom of the social scale.

Unlike abstract ideologies, which designate disembodied and invariant concepts sustained by a small group of individuals interested in their propagation, "embodied ideologies" underscore the determining role that implicit meanings play in human cognitive economy. At the same time, they illuminate the building-blocks of historical change: neither individual intentions nor fixed structures, but mobile meanings that ordinary agents create and renew by different means. Taking the case of the French Revolution, I will try to identify the sources of the long-term work on meanings that allowed the subjects of the monarchy to dispel the "public truths", that is to say the common illusions, they had inherited. I argue that we cannot understand the progressive transformation of the period's dreams into a "reality principle" and then into revolutionary action without analyzing the broader culture of common people – in the anthropological sense of ordinary life, cultural practices

and symbolic systems – that gave those dreams meaning. From this standpoint, the ordinary circulation of practical and abstract meanings plays perhaps a more important role in social change than the rhetorical art of the elite. Thanks chiefly to metaphors, tales, pamphlets and oral communication, the mobilization of the practical intelligence that lies in everyday ways of thinking and doing can modify the dominant world-view. By taking into account the immediate and universal logic of this practical intelligence as well as its underlying metaphysics, we will thus be in a better position to grasp the logic of historical change itself. But before launching into this discussion, we need to sketch out the basic puzzle represented by the apparently unexpected metamorphosis of the collective mentality in the middle of the 18th century.

A naive puzzle

Let us recall two great moments in French history. In 1766, Louis XV solemnly reminded the Parliament of Paris of "the sacred and immutable maxims" that "are engraved on the heart of every faithful Subject".[2] Twenty-five years later, Saint-Just delivered an eloquent diatribe to the French National Assembly in an attempt to persuade it to condemn the King of France to death for high treason against his people.

On 28 February 1766, the King was furious with the magistrates, who proposed to publish the Court's debates "to the face of the Nation". "As if it were allowed to forget that it is in my one and only person which lies the supreme Power. That it is to me alone that the legislative Power belongs, without dependence and without sharing. That the whole Public order emanates from me. That my people forms an unity with me; and that the rights and interests of the Nation, to which one dares grant a body separated from the Monarch, are necessarily bound to mine and rest only in my hands".[3] On 27 December 1792, it was a totally different kind of talk that swept the National Convention: for the first time in the history of the French monarchy, the King was called to account for his actions to his judges. Saint-Just, one of his most vindictive prosecutors, spoke in the name of the *Nation* – the Nation which the Absolute Power claimed the right to rule solely for his own advantage not so many years before. Here are the words of that great orator: "The one who said: My people, my children; the one

who said he breathed only for the happiness of the Nation, who said he was only happy about his pleasures, unhappy about his misfortunes. That one refused him his holiest rights, wavered between the people and his pride, and wanted the public prosperity without wanting what builds it up . . . That is what Louis XVI was really like, invoking heaven when he was going to shed blood; everywhere he took the Country's place, and tried winning over the affections one has to have only for It".[4] What could possibly have happened in the years that separated the excessive pride of Louis XV from the compelled humility of his heir, who whispered reluctantly "I was the master then, I did what seemed good to me"?[5] As I mentioned before, we need to stop explaining the definitive divorce between the King and his people through a "top-down" intellectualist action or a "bottom-up" materialist reaction. To get to the processes at the source of this astonishing change, we must go beyond the often homologous dichotomies that split the society in two, whether between the educated public and the uncultured folk, innovation and tradition, conscious representations and archaic habits. The linear and deterministic causalities, which treat popular culture as the passive by-product of the dominant high culture or, inversely, as the incommensurable emanation of a completely "other" way of life, have to be replaced with reciprocal exchanges. In order to explore how these exchanges have integrated different "subcultures" into the same kind of "mental apparatus", I will briefly review the prevailing interpretation of the social drama that led to the fall of the monarchy (Febvre, 1953).

According to the standard history of ideas, the King's subjects succeeded in negating the tenets of monarchy thanks solely to the enlightened members of the high culture (Habermas, 1991). Only the intellectual elite, endowed with the cognitive abilities reserved for the erudite, so the explanation goes, enjoyed the autonomy of thought and action indispensable for cultural innovation. The scenario of social alteration and progress was therefore predictable: in the 18th century, the cultivated bourgeoisie, grand literature and rational opinion managed to disseminate their innovative ideas to the passive masses of the destitute. In this unilateral pattern, the ideology of the elite was the high authority that managed to diffuse, as by contagion, its highly articulated opinions and systematic ideas to people of the most common backgrounds. But, by portraying popular culture as a mere consenting receptacle of the enlightened culture's exogenous discourses, such a framework lends credibility

to what is a very unlikely script. Historians, without necessarily denigrating the predominant role played by the "cultural heroes" who were the well-educated figures of the time, have to broaden their approach to cover other forces that also contribute to cultural change. In effect, the focus on literary culture, as well as on art and science, conceals the influence of the common people's extended culture, made up of shared mores, beliefs and practices. In so doing, it reduces the social and the cultural to abstract ideologies that short-circuit the heterogeneity of cultural appropriations and practices, and display disembodied universes in which the "thought seems without limits because without dependence" (Chartier, 1982). Instead of focusing on the artificially homogeneous corpora that relate back more to the "*thought*" society than to the *real-life* society, it is thus preferable to try to describe the "common grammar" which enables ordinary agents collectively to make sense of their world (Darnton, 1984). The distinguishing goods of the intellectually privileged are only salient, after all, because they stand out against the cultural background shared by all members of a community, despite their different class memberships.

Contrary to "history from above", which assumes the hold of kings' gestures and learned works over the silent majority, New History pays attention to common meanings that draw the line between what *may* or may not be understood in a given collectivity at a given time. By taking into account the collective background of habits and prejudices, it complements the slightly enigmatic upward movement of abstract concepts toward action with a downward movement that acknowledges all "have-nots" as having a place in history. Sociocultural history sets the society, which was precariously balanced on its head in traditional intellectual history, back on its feet again on a common ground.[6] In order to reach this common basis, we need to neglect direct accounts of authoritative opinions and go to indirect discourses such as judicial archives and clandestine literature. Veiled protests, mute dissatisfactions and all those invisible opinions that manifest themselves in sociocultural practices and yet are denied the status of public opinion because they were unsaid or badly said contribute to the change of established meanings. The spontaneous speeches and "unthought" practices, even though they were not able to crystallize into sophisticated political discourses, played an active part in the demystification of the monarch and the Church Fathers. In the shadow of the talkative elite, the evolution of common opinion made thinkable

the break between the world inherited from tradition and the "brave new world" prefigured by its more and more explicit claims. Rumors of the king's decadence, fear of despotism and the collective discovery of ordinary people's power, notably through riots, turned out to be decisive in altering the "spirit of the age". That is why we have to look, with Robert Darnton, in the farmyards and streets, everywhere where ordinary people changed their world-view, to see what their dreams, prejudices and practices were (Darnton, 1993: 19).

The inevitable metaphorization of the social

From the perspective I have chosen to adopt here, the term "people" refers to the cultural reality of a common lifestyle as well as to the economic reality of a station in life that excludes the wealthy without being synonymous with extreme poverty (Garnot, 1990). So many historians and sociologists agree that the implicit presuppositions, collective representations and cognitive categories shaping the common sense of ordinary people can count as *a popular mentality* – something very different from a class consciousness, which is highly unlikely in such a mixed milieu (Ferrone and Roche, 1997; Rioux and Sirinelli, 1997). Beyond the various and distinctive uses of culture, there exist numerous everyday practices that are universally shared, like curing, learning, laughing, playing, dying, celebrating, speaking or dressing (de Baecque, 1998). In many ways, therefore, the anthropological concern with the culture of common people joins the ethnomethodological focus on the "member's competence" that all individuals enjoy, regardless of their disparity of means and education (Garfinkel, 1967). The competence in question, learned in the main with the mother tongue, is independent of the social distribution of knowledge and hierarchy of powers. It relies on the basic skills and immediate comprehension necessary for the pre-reflexive command of the course of actions as well as of their collectively intelligible accounts. In an unnoticed and endless process requiring a great deal of practical intelligence, "ordinary members" of the community resort to the meaningful but implicit resources at their disposal in order to make sense of each concrete and peculiar situation (Quéré, 1996). As a result, *the* member can be significantly treated as an indefinite singular: he or she is identified only from the angle of the artful diligence that he or she and his or her own

kind display in the relevant and accurate shaping of everyday activities. From this "anthropo-ethnological" point of view, ordinary people can no longer be considered as "cultural or judgmental dopes" (Garfinkel, 1967: 67): the institutional structures, although they have taught everyone how to behave, could not survive without the imaginative and "ad hoc-ing" practices that work for their (re)production.

Popular culture, understood here less through its social base than through the repertory of the themes, acts and skills driving it, is characterized by a practical intelligence that is adept at taking advantage of incidental and tangible facts of existence. One major feature of this "art of opportunity" is that it overcomes the cognitive and juridical partitions between private and public, mores and laws, fiction and reality, family and politics (de Certeau, 1984). In order to master the course of events, ordinary agents are indeed accustomed to infringing the normative boundaries of a priori separate domains of knowledge. The endless metaphorical connections between varied kinds of reality that differ in ordinariness, rigidity or strangeness are able to overcome their supposed imperviousness, wrongly assumed by the cognitive and social division of modern thought. These metaphorical blends are based on a "seeing-as" procedure, which draws a natural and cultural "family resemblance" between a well-known "source domain" and an unknown "target domain" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980; Wittgenstein, 1981: §67). The cognitive bridges that reduce unfamiliar events or entities to common patterns of meaningful experience reveal the ordinary ability to make sense of the unknown and thereby give an insight into the universal common sense of community members. In fact, metaphorical associations, far from being floating, poetic and free associations of ideas, structure the cognitive frameworks that people, whoever they are, live by. If we follow George Lakoff and Mark Johnson, metaphors are anything but the abstract figures of speech they are usually considered to be: deeply embedded in *bodily* experiences and *phenomenological* convictions, they are the main cognitive devices at the disposal of human minds (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Thanks to metaphorical reasoning, the elementary bodily bearings that locate individuals in their environment (down, beside, inside, behind, in front of, part–whole, center–periphery) are projected onto more abstract domains so as to make them more understandable, if not familiar. For instance, ordinary people commonly use their gestalt perception as well as the topographic maps governing their visual field in order

to design their conscious intentional states. So the metaphor ''more or better is up, less or worse is down'' blends a qualitative judgment with the sensorimotor experience of verticality, while the metaphor ''knowing is seeing'' assumes a ''mind's eye'' grasping the ''mental staples'' in a space open to inspection (Sweetser, 1990).

These kinds of heuristic mapping could well be the ''milestones'' of the mundane world-view that is, let us recall, made up of the shared abilities and commonalties representing the ''lowest common denominator'' of a given community – and, partially, of humanity as a whole. In fact, to Lakoff and Johnson human brains share the biological aptitude for gathering up different ''inputs'' into the same system of ''basic-level categories'' and ''spatial-relations concepts'' – a system that therefore constitutes the common ''source domain'' of any knowledge (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 14). This basic-level cognition, acquired through the selective evolution of species, comprises the motor program concepts (walking, talking), natural kinds (lion, water), functional artifacts (knife, shelter), basic social actions (fighting, arguing) and primitive emotions (satisfaction, fear) necessary for survival (Lakoff, 1987). Human minds constantly refer to these primary spontaneous categories to elaborate their reasoning, to plan their actions or to make others understand their intended meaning, at least in neutral contexts. Within our cognitive architecture, basic categories like chair, rabbit or family thus come *before* the superordinate abstract categories such as furniture, mammal or state. Basic-level concepts, which have the proper format to bring on a mental image, to remain in the memory and to be easily learned or recognized, are the stable and common source of folk knowledge.

The universality of source domains, which are primitive in the architecture of human brains, allows us to specify, at least to some extent, the content of the ''lowest common denominator'' of ordinary people. The cognitive shared ''unconscious'', grounded in sensorimotor experiences, constitutes the ''hidden hand'' of our understanding of the world and gives shape to our folk reasoning at different levels of complexity and abstraction (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 14). Besides primary metaphors, which stem from basic patterns of gestalt perception and bodily manipulation, there are ''secondary metaphors'', which are the relatively stabilized result of successive and increasingly abstract mappings. In the political domain, for example, the elementary bearings used by

individuals to deal with other persons, such as intentions, beliefs, judgments, field of action and responsibility, tend to be projected onto more conceptual domains, like the target domain of the term "public opinion". The shaping of "public opinion" into the intentional pattern of mental states and first-person authority rationalizes the complex and abstract phenomena that are general interest, public powers and juridical institutions. The personification process represented in public opinion is a means of intellectually impinging on strange and incomprehensible events by imputing to them an intentional cause – in this case a collective subject that feels emotions and plans actions. Public opinion, once seen as a collective individual, lends itself to an *intentional stance* that enables ordinary agents to make their a priori opaque and undetermined behaviors understandable and predictable (Dennett, 1987). The intentional stance indeed allows ordinary interpreters to explain, for instance, the anger of an unknown person in front of the closed door of a bakery in terms of his desire for bread and his belief he could find it in this place at this time. In the same way, the intentional stance enables ordinary interpreters to make sense of the whole society by apprehending it *as if* it were an intentional system governed by psychological determinations and rational purposes. By projecting the natural resources of folk psychology onto non-human entities, technical devices, impersonal relationships or institutional artifacts, ordinary members regain the normal and normative pattern of individual behaviors and hence their attendant intelligibility.

The metaphorical use of intentional dramaturgy, which leads to statements such as "public opinion is the spirit of the nation" or "the state is a person", shows the blending processes are not, despite appearances, irrational. On the contrary, they rationalize incomprehensible notions or unreachable structures by linking them to the spontaneous categories that fill the everyday environment with familiar persons, objects or animals (Hoggart, 1957). This rationality, insofar as it is not grounded in objective similarities, is nevertheless more "imaginative" than descriptive. It resorts to the basic and mostly unconscious cognitive schemas, which put a priori in common human minds and provide them with experiential metaphors whose absence would make the world amazingly silent. These are therefore metaphors that give frame and contents to naive metaphysics, which is made up of all that people *admit* as existing. Without knowing it, community members populate their

universe with abstract entities that have emerged from the spontaneous metaphorical associations omnipresent in elementary inferences as well as in sophisticated conceptual reasoning. Folk metaphysics, by taking the automatic and unconscious products of the "unreflective common sense" for a primitive and genuine reality, ignores the fact that the reality in question depends on unconscious metaphors (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999: 13). By thriving on the uneven and sometimes shaky entities brought to life by unconscious metaphors, it somewhat strains the ideal "agreement" between knowledge and the real world. But the metaphorical dimension of this metaphysics offsets the lack of objective truth by a worthwhile gain in intelligibility. The cognitive weight of the shared source domain is salient enough to set up a phenomenological and referential complicity enabling ordinary agents to recognize, by provisional agreement, "what it is like" and "what it is about". But the mainstays of this complicity, which starts not from the facts themselves but from the gestalt perception and intuitive experience these facts arouse, are necessarily *stereotypical*: in the mind-dependent reality, any occurrence can be identified as the normal or typical example of a pre-established cognitive category.

Due to the "phenomenological embodiment" of folk ontology, linguistic and cognitive constraints can no longer be imposed by the world-in-itself, as claimed by the realist theory of truth conditions. These constraints can be only imposed by the world *under a common description*, a world that means henceforth, as Eve Sweetser puts it, "our experiential picture of the world" (Sweetser, 1990: 5). If we follow Lakoff and Johnson, such constraints, even when shifted from the world to the mind, are nonetheless restrictive: embodied in the conventional cross-domain mappings that are implemented in neuronal circuits since childhood, they reside literally in the flesh. The simultaneous associations or "conflations" between a source and a target domain, for instance the sensorial experience of warmth and the feeling of affection, can give rise to a neuronal implementation. The anatomical imprint of conceptual blends can thus be considered, in our own terms, as the neurological traces of *socialization* – a socialization itself submitted, however, to a strong cognitive restriction. Actually, in virtue of the fact that, to Lakoff, cultural mappings *derive* from the sensorimotor system, metaphors are underlain by an asymmetrical and irreversible one-way relationship that gives logical and ontological priority to the

primary concrete domains over the abstract ones. Because of this unidirectional asymmetry, primary metaphors are the relatively rigid building-blocks of complex metaphors whose use, flexible without being loose, reflects the anthropological commonalties of human bodies, brains and experiences as well as culturally acquired associations (Lakoff, 1994).

So far, we can infer three important conclusions from the preceding paragraphs. First, ordinary knowledge, far from being a disinterested desire for truth, feeds on common truths brought to life by the *co-referenciation process* that enables the community's members to refer together to the same "object" of the world, whether real or fictive. Second, ordinary meanings, insofar as they always rely on an unconsciously pre-categorized experience, can only bear "an embodied realism" and therefore a "non-literal ontology" that depends closely on bodily patterns committing individuals in a straightaway meaningful world (Lakoff and Johnson, 1999). Third, metaphorical blends enable common people, notably the culturally and economically underprivileged not used to abstract thinking, to make sense of faraway and unfamiliar universes by submitting them to the immediate and universal logic of their own experience. We will come back to both first statements in our last part, but now it is time to illustrate our third and main proposition.

After pleading for the inevitability of metaphorical uses in the social world, we need to illustrate the metaphorical *know-how* of common people and its role in remaking reality and discovering new meanings. In this respect, the 18th century is a superb example: at that time, metaphors obviously had many political implications, whether they took part in the gross expression of humble people or in the alternative model of society elaborated by erudite thinkers. Circulating in a broad network of polymorphous communication, metaphors primarily gave an explicit expression to the latent subversion that the progressive separation of people from the "institutions of belief", as Michel de Certeau calls them, had already made possible (de Certeau, 1985). Folk theory of politics was very strongly marked by bodily and familial metaphors, which reversed the meanings of symbols before going on to reverse the sense of history. In fact, these bodily and familial metaphors, at first actively involved in the tenets serving the monarchical legitimation, were little by little turned upside down by satires and farces trivializing the sacrosanct body of the King. The pivotal cogs of this trivialization,

which is inversely proportional to the idealization of the future Nation's body, seem to have been deeply embedded in the cognitive unconscious of the inhabitants of the Ancien Régime. The "skeleton" of this unconscious became amazingly explicit in the pre-Revolutionary context of social and political struggles, as if subversive discourses were attempting to create a new collective sense by starting from the only common ground that remained available to everyone. That is, at least, the hypothesis we are going to examine in the following pages.

From the body of the King to the body of the Nation

To common people, for whom there is no great History but only small stories, politics appeared only implicitly in the clandestine literature that blended all discursive styles apt to promote countervalues and overthrow the established hierarchies, such as mockery, scorn, critical reason, pornography and irreligion (Darnton, 1982, 1995). If "public curiosity was not a character trait, but an act which brought each and every individual into politics", this initiation into the obscure mechanisms of power seems then to have passed not through the big door of Parliaments or Councils harboring the State's reason, but through the small door of the royal palace alcoves (Farge, 1995: 197). In the seditious writings that circulated around Paris, it was not the Parliamentary debates nor the state of finances that were gibed at, but the personal intrigues, the private animosities, the sexual caprices that distracted the King from his duties to the nation and bankrupted the public treasury. The irreverent discourses of the pamphleteers insistently populated the mythological land of royal politics with lascivious duchesses, homosexual priests, impotent princes and shameless ministers (Darnton, 1982). Admittedly, these discourses gave more importance to the revelation of the ridiculous trivialities hidden behind the political scenes than to the denunciation of the actual machinery of political power. But as a result popular common sense succeeded in reassessing the previous mysteries of politics and even in demystifying the symbolism of a power that claimed the mystery of transcendence.

In order to understand the emotional break of ordinary people with the political and linguistic dogmatism of the monarchy and, particularly, with the king who embodied it, we need to treat common sense as being much more than an absent-minded and

blind conformity to the collective mentality. While mentalities are definitely, as Jacques Le Goff put it, "the conjunctive webs of the spirit of societies", these webs are not comprised merely of internalized principles and unthought reflexes (Le Goff, 1974). Against the implicit background of silent common skills, some thematic figures, or *topoi*, take shape that are the explicit snatches of the shared world-view, the thinking "skeleton" of mentalities. In the 18th century, the collective reconfiguration of these very *topoi*, mainly through mental devices such as metaphors, changed the common judgment on the *res publica* in a progressive and rather *internal* way. Even after the major outbreak of 1789, many traditional thematic cores, like bodily and familial metaphors, remained so prevalent that the new narratives seemed to make do with shifting the inherited lines between the natural and the artificial, the necessary and the contingent. These remaining *topoi*, to the extent that their customary roots related them deeply to the "pre-shaped" meanings of Ancien Régime society, had the great advantage of making immediate sense of the new events. Among the persistent meanings that previously supported the political piety required by the absolutist regime before they came to sustain republican worship, the body is one of the most salient topics.

In fact, within the monarchical society, the royal entourage as well as the common people were concerned mainly about the fecundity of the king, whose health and offspring were synonymous with wealth for the realm. The seminal power of the "two bodies of the king", that is, the physical body and the sacred, political body he incarnated, was the symbol of national prosperity (Kantorowicz, 1957). The organic metaphor associating the different plebeian organs with the abstract and spiritual head of the realm made the empirical succession of descendants responsible for the perpetuation of the "meta-physiological" principle of sovereignty. "The king who never dies" was a nourishing Father who procreated and hence ensured the renewal of the monarchical power's three inalienable components: the perpetuation of the Dynasty, the corporatist character of the Crown and the immortality of Royal Dignity (Kantorowicz, 1957). The majesty of the Political Body, whose founding metaphor was the phoenix, a mythical self-generated bird rising from its ashes, depended closely on the health of the natural body in charge of its succession. The intermingling of personal and supra-personal aspects of the king thus imposed many trivial physiological requirements on the abstract physiological

fiction that was supposed to govern the monarchy. For the sovereign could not afford the risk of defective procreation: he had to guarantee the uninterrupted chain of natural royal bodies if he did not want the superb phoenix to be "skewered" in the public square.

From this perspective, one better understands why the king's body was an affair of state that demanded the control of the highest authorities and the supervision of the most renowned physicians (de Baecque, 1993). One also better understands the political chaos created by the broad diffusion of the king's counter-portrait in the seditious lampoons and the bawdy engravings. The endless comments on the physical and moral "nullity" of the monarch, unable to give birth to a heir and thus to generate a State, transformed the ritual ceremony of the royal bed into a farcical comedy greeting the dignity of official discourse with derision. The meticulous narratives of the moral depravity and physical weakness of the king gradually reduced his double body into one *single* banal body that was no longer anything more than a toy in the hands of his "whores" (Louis XV) or a grotesque body suspected of impotence (Louis XVI). Little by little, the slightest sign of the monarch's defection, the narrowest breach in the royal intimacy, became the pretext for a common judgment that "privatized" the only public figure of the State. By mocking the shameful mores and the ridiculous impotence of the world "on high", the obsession of public rumor with the body compromised the monarchy's mystery that endowed the king with an interior illumination, necessarily obscure and incomprehensible to his subjects (Walzer, 1974). The topic of the physiological failure of the royal body, unable to conceive, ridden with disease and impotence or simply compelled by the most trivial habits, was indeed a very powerful means to belittle a power previously inaccessible to the rank and file.

As Mikhail Bakhtin puts it, the adoption of a "corporal point of view" challenged the dominant gaps between the high and the low, the close and the far, the private and the public, the temporal and the spiritual (Bakhtin, 1968). The "crude physiologism" peculiar to popular culture submitted the abstraction of royal tenets and edicts to a logic of proximity incompatible with the codified and solemn form that "ceremonial information" tried to impose on the monarchy's word (Fogel, 1989). The sense of Majesty, which paradoxically blended the closeness of "the little people's Father" and the distance of "He-who-must-not-be-named", could not survive the continual integrating of the sovereign into daily life. Once it

was privatized in the intimate sphere of folk experiences, the representation of the king was condemned to forsake the frightening glory of public ceremonies as well as the mysterious shadows of a parallel and unknown world. The shared illusions, which trapped the people in the "absolutist cave" and made the oversized projections of power out to be the reflection of a genuine majesty, were all the more undermined as Louis XVI himself seemed to have lost the sense of "monarchic fabulousness" (Bloch, 1973). The monarch, by abandoning the major religious ceremonies and the thaumaturgic ritual that consisted in laying hands on the sick or by having adulterous affairs with mistresses of lowly condition, had forgotten the duties attendant on his rank. In so doing, he laid himself open to the leveling imposed on him by a popular realism that was no longer fooled by the artificial grandeur of the "King of representation" (Marin, 1988).

The public laughter raised by the obscene pamphlets thus meant much more than the inconsistent outbursts of a plebeian sphere inevitably blinded by the lights coming from the top of the social scale, whether the court or the educated elite (Beaud and Kaufmann, 2001). It marked the deterioration of the "ontological model" of a collectivity that absorbed the particular into the mystical body of the realm, symbolized by the sovereign (Merlin, 1994). For "grotesque realism", by replacing all spiritual, ideal and abstract things with embodied experience, proclaimed a new cosmological principle: the people's body is the unique and generic guardian of the ultimate power, which is nothing other than the reproductive and regenerative power of Nature (Bakhtin, 1968: 28, 469).[7] Recourse to a principle as universal as the "material principle" was thus not only the reminder of the royal family's common or inferior humanity, it was also a means to metaphorically remind all concerned of the vital importance of the body's lower part, which is made up of the genital and digestive organs as well as of their matching behaviors, like intercourse, pregnancy, childbirth, absorption of food and so on. Of course, at that time the "bearer" of this vital principle was neither an individual biological organism nor the selfish nobility, but the *people* – a people directly connected to the pivotal images of the bodily life such as sex, fertility, growth and abundance. The election of the people announced the transfer of the seminal power from royal sex to "patriot sex", which was the only force able to invest the vital body of the Nation with the "political semen" that would change the miserable condition of its

citizens. The pre-republican bodily *topoi* promised the end of the "copulation between Mr Third-Estate and Mrs Nobility, celebrated by His Grace the Clergy" in favor of the single Third Estate, which thereby got rid of its third, inferior position to extend to the totality of the Nation (de Baecque, 1993: 116–18).

The "common third", though declared to be the future indivisible principle of the Nation, nevertheless preserved the absolutist pattern of politics, grounded in the symbolic transcendence of collectivity and fed on the fear of betrayal and the criminalization of dissent. Once the social order related to a people considered as a collective individual whose will had to be naturally unanimous, individual wishes looked like the immoral, destructive and corrupted parts of the social body. In other words, when the bodily metaphors passed from the political language to a therapeutic one, they became as politically dangerous as they were cognitively effective. Indeed, by making disagreement and discord synonymous with the collapse of the social body, the revolutionaries tended to take literally "the physiological arguments" and behaved as physicians who had the duty to diagnose and cure their patient's pathologies. The challenging task of these healthful social forces was thus to perform a "revolutionary regeneration" by eradicating the moral vices and physical defects against which even education seemed ineffective (de Baecque, 1993: 194). By naturalizing politics, the *literalization* of bodily metaphors led to "the generalized anthropophagy" of the Terror. The intervention of a physiological program in the political domain transformed the interpretative inferences contained in metaphors into an outright *ideology*, in the double sense of an ideal intensification of experience and a naturalization of a political abstraction.

This naturalization process is obviously efficient: by grounding the justification of the social order in nature, it cements the architecture supporting the edifice of collective beliefs and public "truths". In effect, if we follow Mary Douglas, naturalization due to the homology between the formal structure of institutions and "the formal structures of natural species" is an efficient means of cognitive control (Douglas, 1986). Naturalized ideological links have the great advantage of being a source of legitimacy familiar to everybody and impervious to human action: by reactivating spontaneous basic-level categories, they facilitate the miniaturization of the new world-view in individual minds. At the time of the Revolution, the growing "naturalism" of public meanings was still too unstable

and capricious to be synonymous with the non-action that generally stems from the apparent immobility of official truths. On the contrary, bodily and familial metaphors, whose intelligibility was guaranteed by humankind's experiential realism, tended to open a new field of practices and actions for future citizens. During the Revolution, the new field of practices opened by physiological metaphors had serious consequences because it led to the breach of the taboo on regicide: a healthy body, even if only political, could not be bicephalous without running the fatal risk of entropy. After endlessly embroidering on the impotence of the "Royal Veto", on the monstrosity of a two-headed society and on the quasi-cannibalism of "the Austrian Harpy", the Herculean force of the Collective-Citizen, the "Giant-with-strong-arms", had to achieve the pure and unanimous body it deserved (de Baecque, 1993: 196). The patriotic reappropriation of bodily *topoi* and the institutionalization of an "acephalous" Republic thus entailed a decisive "acting out", starting with the disappearance of the king's political and natural bodies.

The political resources of folk metaphysics

According to our analysis, bodily metaphors, endowed with stereotypical features that enjoy provisional agreement between scattered individuals, function as a "universal operator of exchanges" and an "interactional resource" (Semprini, 1994). Thanks to their phenomenological roots, but also to their previous political use in the monarchical regime, they allowed a gestalt switch from the waning figure of the King to the rising figure of the Nation. This gestalt transformation based on an anthropomorphic conception of society made "the beginning of the beginning" claimed by the revolutionaries less terrifying and more predictable.[8] From the point of view of ordinary semantics, bodily metaphors counted on the practical sense anchoring humble people to ordinary life and its naturalistic aspects, such as the perception of corporal boundaries or physiological needs. The embedding of metaphors in this phenomenological background made their narrative derivations acceptable straightaway, every single individual being able to project what he or she knew "from the inside" onto the complex and apparently exogenous functioning of collective life. From the point of view of political semantics, physiological metaphors of the Nation's body maintained the naturalistic and organicist aspects

that sustained the metaphysical value of the political King's body. But this maintenance was henceforth masked by a new metaphorical intelligibility, based on the mundane obviousness of ordinary life: this latter, melting all divisions and hierarchies into universal bodily experiences, made close what was far away, linking what was mutually ruled out and infringing upon traditional notions. The use of the "grotesque canon", which promoted the awareness of the "cheerful relativity of truths and authorities in power", gave rise to the credibility crisis of the whole political system (Bakhtin, 1968: 19). Actually, by separating the "mere body of the King" from the symbolic body of the collectivity, the "grotesque canon" emptied the royal word of its substance, namely the people itself, for which it could formerly stand, with a "we, France" having the force of law. In other words, if ridicule did not kill, at least not immediately, the real body of the future "chopped-off-Capet", it surely killed his political body by shattering the last bits of his majesty.

In a historical context where the people measured the gap between its own destiny and the integrity of the sickly body of a king who apparently was struggling to merge into the perpetual body of the monarchy, the final blow was dealt by the royal infringement of people's natural rights. In 1774, the monarch attempted to set up a "Court capitalism" that submitted all foodstuffs, including flour and daily bread, to the "law" of the free market (Kaplan, 1982). But numerous hunger riots and the decisive "Flour war" reminded the "nurturing Father" of the sacred pact that had committed him to guarantee his people's subsistence (Bouton, 1993). By increasing the price of flour and submitting bread to arbitrary mercantilist rules, the liberalization of commerce infringed on the elementary and natural right to survive. The materialism of the popular ethic defending the free and inalienable access to public and common goods has all the moral and political implications that characterize claims made in the name of the equality of humankind. According to Thompson, the notion of the untouchable and irrevocable right to subsistence is embedded in the cognitive frames and the normal expectations that weave the weft of "the moral economy of the poor" (Thompson, 1991). "The popular political economy" is notably characterized by a "moral sameness" requirement, the failure to satisfy which gradually contributed to the replacement of the noble figure of the "Baker" by the despotic figure of "the Starver", "the greedy pig" grown fat at his offspring's expense. The king, by

venturing into this "unnatural" undertaking, became an "apostate sovereign" who speculated on the people's vital needs, "a Wheat dealer" who took the daily bread away from his people or, worse, a "Herod" who fed on his own children's blood (Kaplan, 1982). In short, the sovereign, while he was "the mother who gave the breast, the gardener, the physician who cured", was increasingly construed as "the eater of the people", the one who "devoured" the people (Bakhtin, 1968: 446).

Given such a metaphorical reversal, it is clear that the symbolic dismissal of the king prefigured the "patriot laughter" raised in 1791 by the sad figure of "Big Louis", the "Pig-King", who would end up in "Holy-Blood-Sausage" during revolutionary feasts. In fact, the "bestialization" of the king seems to be the peak of the stereotyping process that definitively destroyed the fiction of a superior royal race, endowed with the sacred attributes of the supernatural (Duprat, 1992). The scornful description of the sacred figure of the king as a pig ejected him from the sphere of reasonable creatures and set upon him the stamp of the infamy reserved for "subnatural" beings. The gap thereafter separating the monarch and his people, whether it was shown by the pathetic lot of an ordinary man or by the transformation of the king into a degrading animal, prevented reconciliation between the "Father and his sons" (Hunt, 1992). The definitive collapse of the paternal figure of the king thus completed the fatal work of the bodily metaphors that wove together folk micro-history and the macro-history of the State. For, apart from the sensory facts of bodily experiences, ordinary individuals also resort to familial experiences and to unconscious collective images of the familial order, such as the father–son, husband–wife and parent–child relations. As Lynn Hunt shows, the change in the leading "family romances" enabled the revolutionary political constructions to break with the patriarchal ideology of absolutism and thereby promise the patriotic rule of fraternal solidarity within the "Mother-nation".[9] In the successful narratives, novels and tales of the 18th century, the Father-patriarch figure declined in favor of the autonomization of the action field of children whose orphan or foundling status no longer prevented their carving out a place in the social world. The ultimate murder of the father, the regicide, can be seen as the "punitive communion" of sons in a "religious festival" that destroyed paternal authority and exorcized the collective guilt impeding the building of the future republic (Hunt, 1992: 57–60). Such an "original sin" marked the

start of a time when revolutionaries obsessively celebrated collective history by means of family history: births and marriages were constantly used to commemorate the unity of both family and nation in such a way that divorces or separations were considered as a real mourning for the nation (Ozouf, 1988).

To sum up our argument: crude realism, moral economy and family fantasies provide ordinary agents with plentiful shared co-referents, meaningful fictions and commonplaces which create a sociopsychological gain – not to say a semantic surplus. Folk obsession with natural needs and bodily metaphors, though somewhat carnivalesque, is thus far from deserving the contempt of the erudite, as expressed by Voltaire, for "a heap of impertinent and rude filth" (Garnot, 1990: 86). In fact, the popular comic, whom the guardians of cultural and esthetic rules likened scornfully to a "poor man's backside", managed to turn the world upside down. The "top", referring traditionally to the sky and its high values, was annexed to the "productive bottom", constituted by the soil, the belly, the breast – in short, anything synonymous with birth and regeneration (Bakhtin, 1968: 27). This reversal clearly indicates the subversive consequences of the "principle of material and corporal life" which brings the "history-from-above" approach into question. Recognition of the "politics of the stomach" as the unique legitimate politics in a fraternal world affected the heart of a political power that was based not only on physical violence but also on the "symbolic capital" due to the supposed rarity or merit of the ruling elite (Bourdieu, 1990). As Pierre Bourdieu put it, the holders of this symbolic capital could maintain the credence and trust given by the collectivity only if they kept the power to make others recognize their power, mainly by reproducing their own representation of the public order (1990). The monopoly of representation that made the king the titular head of collective intentionality was jeopardized precisely by his final enrollment in a sort of underworld. By increasingly displaying a social order that was egalitarian not only in "soul" but also and above all in "body", folk culture succeeded in turning the dogmas of the regime against itself, thereby foiling the dominant mental habits.

In other words, the cosmological metaphysics that established a difference in nature between the divine monarch and his subjects gave way to a folk metaphysics that relegated the king to the profane world of humankind, not to mention the impious world of beings

"without qualities". At least discursively, this metaphysics sent the ruling people to the "bodily hell" already familiar to the dominated class. In fact, two main aspects can be used to characterize this folk metaphysics grounded in the generic equality of human beings in the face of death, illness or sexuality. First, it distilled the certainty of a common nature whose "timeless themes" referred to "a moral economy of mortal remains" from which nobody, not even the king, could escape (Boureau, 1988: 44). This intrinsically egalitarian "bodily economy" emphasized the material impossibility of the so-called royal miracle, each single body being doomed to disappear from the temporal world. Second, folk metaphysics had its own conception of freedom and universal equality, represented by the precept "everybody has the right to live" (Gauthier and Ikni, 1988: 23). From a quite different perspective, popular culture, by drawing its political demands from the common background of all human beings, reached the same conclusions as the intellectual elite. Admittedly, the elite's thinking led to the aspiration for equality and freedom through quite another web of metaphors, clearly more abstract, because they referred either to justice, rooted in the judgment seat of history and the bar of public opinion, or to the Republic of Letters, conceived as a model of critical thought and humanist sensibility. But those powerful and elaborated metaphors, while grounded in a cultural sphere that developed an art of civility and a concern with the law that are not comparable with unleashed and rude popular rumors, did not have exclusive rights to political thought. Although the ordinary logic of the common people was certainly less reflexive than the extraordinary logic of enlightened circles, it was also fed on the moral expectations and mutual respect governing the company of the people from the same world. Previously reviled by the high culture because of its primitive and naive "biologism", the increasingly purposive crowd contributed gradually to extending the sense of this sameness to the "We" of the whole collectivity.

Beyond class memberships, this alternative "We" thus opposed to the absolutist dogmatism the "feeling of common humanity" that the political structures would henceforth have to take into account. Banking on the subversive potential lying in the intuitive insights of ordinary life, such a feeling enjoyed the "taken-for-granted" postulate that sustained the natural ground of bodily and familial experiences. Thanks to these natural foundations, the republican utopia

could reverse the latent mythology that marked the absolutist boundaries between the speakable and the unspeakable, the imaginable and the unimaginable. In a gestalt inversion reached by different metaphorical channels, the new mythology highlighted the moral sameness of all human beings, whose natural rights to equality would nevertheless have to compromise with the artificial structures necessary for the institutionalization of the new social order.

The semantic "hooks" of common people

Given the above, folk reasoning, even when it is focused on themes as apparently ill-suited to emancipation as Machiavellian conspiracies or the sexual mores of the mighty, could hold up its own conception of universality against that supposedly embodied in the royal authorities. This rival universality, ensuring that many meanings *could* be shared, even if they were not *actually* shared, sparked the communion of minds necessary for the social bond and, in the revolutionary context, for the new collective definition of what "counted as" the public interest or the common good.[10] In our example, the cognitive frames and conceptual blends characterizing human minds offer an alternative basis for the critical thinking usually associated with argumentative rationality. All human beings are naturally endowed with the capacity for "imaginative rationality" and, as Hannah Arendt put it, with the anthropological ability for the "pre-comprehension" of a common sense that constitutes the "political sense" *par excellence* (Arendt, 1979, 1982). Common sense, embedded in phenomenological constants, can thus be seen as a kind of sixth sense that has a natural propensity for a broadened mentality whose anchors are the mundane experiences of everyday life. This additional sense has a universal ground ensuring the intercommunication of heterogeneous individuals and allowing potentially, thanks to the "good sense" drawn from experiential facts, the rejection of what progressively appear as arbitrary dogmas and artificial institutions.

If this sixth sense can be flexible enough to tolerate metamorphoses like the gestalt switch from the King's body to the body of the Nation, it has some properties in common with the other senses. Although it is, so to speak, the cultural extension of the five perceptive senses, it is acquired through the processes of

communication and socialization at such an early age that the neuronal conflations implementing it have become second nature. As a result, common sense is in many respects more conservative than subversive, more stereotypical than truthful: it expresses the unconditional practical adhesion to a pre-meaningful world in which any member of the community is entangled, whatever social status he or she holds. Metaphorical mappings bring about the extension of such a practical adhesion to the abstract cogs of the political apparatus and intangible moral values by projecting familiar commonplaces onto them. For instance, new ideological systems can gain immediate intelligibility in virtue of the hermeneutic, or rather the phenomenological, circle linking them to a widespread set of experiential meanings. By stirring up the "field of experience" and the "horizon of expectation" of ordinary agents to their advantage, ideological systems gradually transform a former unrealistic and impossible world into a possible, or even familiar, world (Koselleck, 1985). Reinhardt Koselleck's method of "historical semantics" seems particularly suitable for making the conceptual bridges of this transformation explicit.

According to Koselleck, the prevailing concepts of a given era provide at least partial access to the current collective mentality because they synthesize a whole set of political and social meanings and experiences (1985). The concepts of "nation", "revolution" and "human rights", as well as conventional associations like "the state is a person", "public opinion is the mind of the nation" and " man is a wolf", are a way of encapsulating and stabilizing specific meanings. Thanks to their phenomenological "anchoring" in the real-life society of ordinary people who suffer, laugh and imagine, these concepts do not lapse into an intellectualist version of history. Far from being disembodied ideas, they are sufficiently engaged in common aspirations and experiences to be an accurate means to grasp the way in which "the agents of history are inhabited by the collective" (Boureau, 1989). Involved primarily in real-life practices, concepts testify, at the linguistic level, to concrete and unconscious roots of the "work on meanings" performed by the ordinary inhabitants of a past world. In the absence of such roots, the concepts would be the simple remains of a dead language unable to account for its time. Historians therefore cannot content themselves with simply displaying the semantic field of the conceptual interdependencies governing a world-view. In dealing with serial sources,

oral rumors and pamphlets, they have to check whether the pervasive official descriptions of the social world definitely reflect the sensibility and practices of the whole community. In this regard, metaphors are very interesting tools: by definition they bridge the possible gap between the "conceptual auto-articulation" of the society that Koselleck speaks of and the field of experiences and expectations that go beyond linguistic utterances.

Once the historical investigation is extended to the metaphorical rationality of all ordinary agents, intellectual and erudite discourses can no longer be considered as the "generic" thought form exhausting the whole range of the "thinkable" in a given society (Boureau, 1989). The particular thinking found in the scholarly products of high culture, exemplary though it may be in many respects, does not have a monopoly on the symbolic screening that unifies the heterogeneous feelings and expectations scattered around the social space. Folk concepts emerging from a long story of successive translations of historical and anthropological experiences are also capable of revealing the main "thinking materials" of a society. Concepts, which are indeed nothing but complex metaphors, are thus akin to the "public utterances" that Alain Boureau speaks of: they are the salient snatches of the matrix of beliefs situated at the intersection of subcultural universes. The historical account of this kind of salience, like "Vox populi, vox Dei" or "the king has two bodies", can encourage the reconciliation of intellectual history with social history around the same concern. Both kinds of history, providing they allow for all types of cognitive resources, including religious and judicial formalizations but also allegorical mottoes and oral tales, aim at the reconstruction of the public utterances "hooking up the agents to the same designations of real" (Boureau, 1989: 1501). In this framework, the sociocultural history of common ideas, given its awareness of the metaphorical "flesh" of the social skeleton, can legitimately claim to capture the collective self-interpretations that inhabitants of the past used to make sense of their life. These public self-interpretations, by virtue of their inseparable phenomenological and abstract dimensions, reveal bit by bit the fabric of mentalities. They are indeed the visible "handles" of folk mentalities whose structure is difficult to grasp as such because it is situated, as Le Goff says, at the meeting point between the long-term and the everyday, the unconscious and the intentional, the marginal and the general (Le Goff, 1974).

Although such an approach holds out the prospect of reaching indirectly the implicit grammar that characterizes the folk metaphysics of a past era, it could nevertheless raise a significant objection. Collective utterances allow us to describe the "things that are good to *think* and to say" which populate the arena of history, but they have not yet disclosed the things that are good to *believe*. The consonance of language and thought, revealed by the public sharing of emblems, mottoes and tenets, indicates the semantic poles on which everyone has to rely if they want to take part in the discursive game of their time. As a result, the "restricted history of mentalities", charged by Boureau with describing the semantic "hooks" that attach scattered minds together, is perhaps too restrictive. While these hooks provide access to the mental activities of the community taken as a whole, and therefore to what Vincent Descombes calls the "objective spirit of institutions", they do not give access to the way in which individuals are related to this very spirit (Descombes, 1996). In other words, this approach can uncover the rationality of institutions by relating the diversity of social practices to the intelligibility principles that ensure their intellectual cohesion. But these conceptual building blocks, despite the privileged link they have with the phenomenological background and the competence of ordinary community members we have talked about, are not necessarily the object of a real adhesion. In fact, since rules and dogmas are not able to determine the content and the intensity of individual beliefs, ordinary agents do not necessarily believe in what their culture induces them to say and to do (Boureau, 1988: 23). If public utterances and institutional rituals definitely reveal the political limits of the public domain of the "believable", they are not bound to tally with the space of the actual "believed". As Paul Veyne put it, the cultural representations available in the official orthodoxy can prompt many "behaviors without belief" to which the agents half-subscribe out of duty and even as a joke (Veyne, 1988a). Counter to the a priori hypothesis of "a behavior which would itself believe in what it is doing", it is important to separate, at least analytically, cultural creations and instituted practices from private beliefs and the self-involvement of subjective minds.

It is exactly this separation that Boureau has in mind when he points out that the famous theory of the king's two bodies did not, since the 14th century, if ever, result in the *effective* sacralization of the royal body by common folk. According to him, this theory

was above all a discursive construction legitimating the monarchical power with the help of theological, legal and philosophical fictions, which consisted merely of dogmatic mainstays without any causal effect on the empirical reality of beliefs (Boureau, 1988: 19). The people were not completely gullible as to the sacred duality of the king, whose weakness and concupiscence would remind anyone who still doubted it that he was a tangible and trivial man rather than the incarnation of an idea. Moreover, the official reminder of political transcendence was restricted mainly to liturgical contexts such as funerals, where the supernatural was limited to the evocation, all in all ordinary, of the Christian soul's survival. In spite of many ceremonial attempts to give an experiential content to this political abstraction, it seems that the illusion of the dual indivisible body never took shape apart from the automatic reflex of fawning language. This fictional status, while completing the elegant theoretical edifice of the State, forsook "the beheaded kings' bodies in the communal grave, as if the kings had been recruited themselves for a fiction having hardly more consistency than the Phoenix" (1988: 19).

This innovative analysis reminds us that fictional constructions, even if they absorb all available idioms into a single public discourse, do not involve effective adhesion to official institutional discourses, which are rarely taken literally. Collective macro-metaphors delineate the range of potential assents by setting up the doctrinal frontiers of the political battlefield, like the dogma of "the king's double body", or by focusing the common people's fears on emblematic rumors, such as the groundless but powerful *droit de cuissage* (Boureau, 1998). But metaphorical public utterances, whether they portray the perpetuity of the public institution or latent resistance to it, have no causal power as such. Their investigation, while highlighting the semantic hooks of a given society and hence the outline of the collective mentality, thus risks neglecting one of the major features of folk metaphysics. The feature in question is the differential way in which the social "imprints" its presence on minds and, therefore, the differential attitude ordinary agents adopt toward cultural representations. To numerous authors, it indeed seems that individuals should have a cognitive architecture sophisticated enough not to merge their sources of information, more particularly the physical and the social domains, and consequently not to confuse elementary facts and complex metaphors. Mythological associations (Man is Sun) as well as institutional connections (Time is

Money) do not interfere with the basic truths of ordinary life because they take part in a parallel reality. As Paul Veyne put it, although the members of Greek society placed the gods in heaven, they would have been astounded to see them appearing in the sky or to learn that Hephaestus had just got married or that Athena was much older (Veyne, 1988b).

In other words, human cognition, firmly grounded in the "embodied realism" that Lakoff and Johnson speak of, would be aware of the ontological distinction between the familiar reality of everyday life and the faraway reality of cultural constructions.[11] Thanks to the "one-way dependency" relationship that gives priority to the physical domain at the expense of the social domain in "experiential cognition", institutional and legendary worlds cannot be believed in the same way as perceptive and non-metaphorical realities (Sweetser, 1995). Individuals do not mistake their lover for the sun, their god for a real bearded old man or their time for a banknote because they know perfectly well the difference between imaginative blends and foolish amalgamations. As a result, social, political, economic and religious institutions, though they enjoy the *social* status of undoubted reifications that are "no less real than trees, tables, or rocks", are endowed with an exceptionally prudent and restrained *cognitive* status (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 181). For Dan Sperber, cultural representations are even bracketed between circumspect "quotation marks", which provide them with a rational safeguard preventing their direct implication in the inferences and actions linked to the tangible and indubitable reality of the physical world (Sperber, 1975).[12] Non-referential representations are thus shielded from blind and irrational use by the quotation marks that comment implicitly but lucidly on their symbolic and partly fictional dimension (Sperber, 1996).

And yet, relevant as this collective clear-headedness may be for a folk metaphysics at last released from cultural blindness, it perhaps too quickly places all complex metaphors on the same side of the invisible cognitive barrier separating experience from its interpretations. One could well imagine, in fact, that some of these interpretations are so embedded in daily life and common practices that they manage to cause one to suspend the disbelief ideally underlying the cautious ratification of "beliefs between quotation marks". This very argument is going to allow us to outline the main features of a folk metaphysics that could be naive enough to take literally what

would only deserve, from a normative point of view, a distrustful stance.

The "literal" attitude of cultural believers

The assumption that the cultural impulses upholding institutions are mainly metaphorical supposes that ordinary members of the community, owing to the nature of their brains and innate abilities, have the structural ability to keep their distance from the social world around them. The assumption of this potentially skeptical distance between minds and institutions neglects, however, another process that also typifies human understanding. This other process is the literalization of cultural metaphors: cognitive primacy of experience and minimal accuracy of reference often yield to unconditional deference to scientific and political authorities. In September 1793, for instance, the revolutionary fundamentalists who took literally the physiological arguments of the nation's body probably removed the quotation marks warning against the unwary use of public utterances. By depriving the cultural representations originally considered as metaphorical of their quotation marks, this kind of literalization changes their cognitive status, for by placing them in the basic-level source domain they allow them to be carelessly used as bearers of truth and patterns for action.

This literalization procedure thus introduces a gestalt change different from the switch, peculiar to metaphorical innovation, from a discrete ground to a salient figure, such as the nation and its incarnation or the nurturing Mother-Land and the authoritative Father-King. This gestalt modification tends purely and simply to cancel the figure status of metaphors, merging them into the primitive common background that is always "what we talk about" but "never what we say" (Descombes, 1986). Thanks to this gestalt shift, some allegorical statements, from "God created the world in six days" to "the king is from another world" including "the nation is sacred", can indeed enter the literal ontology normatively reserved for states of affairs. By committing the believers to the existence of representations whose prior metaphoricity is thereby completely forgotten, these kinds of primary social metaphor signal the final achievement of ideology. Let us bear in mind that ideology, more or less devoted to the mastery of the common market of meanings, aims at "enchanting" the institutions by arousing the "infra-

political bond'' of a ''taking-for-granted'' stance synonymous with tacit obedience (Bourdieu and Wacquant, 1992).

Given the naturalization and embodiment of ideological meanings in individual frames of mind, the allegedly one-way relationship between concrete primary domains and abstract secondary domains that Lakoff and Johnson speak of requires further clarification. This univocal and asymmetric relationship, which justifies the maximal generalization of metaphors as the unique procedure of cultural understanding, disregards the inverse movement, namely ideological literalization. The long-running work on meanings done by ordinary agents, but above all by the self-interested experts on public ''truths'', could very well naturalize the prevailing stereotypes enough to surreptitiously insert them into the stable and common source of folk knowledge. Once the literalization process is taken into account, the assumption that the second level of cultural cognition is ever derived from the ''basic-level concepts'' and primary experiences appears too straightforward. Moreover, in order to dispense with the standard dichotomy between literal and metaphoric, this assumption draws another dichotomy, just as embarrassing: it splits human minds into two levels of cognition that a rigid neuronal path prevents from functioning as a real phenomenological circle. Due to the unidirectionality and irreversibility of metaphorical connections, the initial source domain does not evolve over time, which means that a significant part of experience remains impervious to its individual and collective interpretations.

Admittedly, as Lakoff and Johnson assume, the ''spatial-relations concepts'' that refer to corporeal landmarks could tie in with a universal background indifferent to conscious insights and cultural patterns. But ''basic-level categories'', unless they consist merely of an insignificant remnant, are necessarily affected by the ongoing and unrestricted ''seen as'' process as well as by the feedback of cultural metaphors: for instance, in a metaphor like ''man is a wolf'', the wolf, which is the source domain, ends up more human than it was before (Black, 1955). Even the so-called ''pure'' real-life experiences are, at least partially, the by-products of prior ''ways of seeing'' that shape and restructure in turn, in a kind of ''hermeneutic circle'', the experiential domain they have been drawn from (Taylor, 1985). The cognitive hierarchy between the primary domain, generic and genuine, and the secondary cultural domain, rewarding and misleading, is hard to rigidly maintain because society is a ''supra-individual'' reality, but one that is

''given in the experience'' (Durkheim, 1995). In other words, cultural meanings such as traditional habits and social rules are not only the ''second-hand'' result of metaphorical mappings, they are also their starting basis, providing individuals with implicit instructions that make a given metaphorical use relevant and understandable within a specific context (Quinn, 1991).

The ''literal'' part of cultural metaphors, which breach their cognitive destiny by invading the source domains of understanding, interestingly highlights a phenomenological dimension that does not rely on first-person experience – contrary to Lakoff and Johnson's hypothesis, which emphasizes perceptual and motor aspects of one's own body. Cultural concepts, once ''literalized'', leave the supposedly faraway ''people'' of social entities to enter the field of experiential meanings. In virtue of their collective weight, these concepts gain a persistent cognitive inertia that is due to what Descombes calls a ''phenomenology 'for us'" (Descombes, 1991). Within a ''We-phenomenology'' that deals with the point of view of the social subject, individual perceptions, sensations and appropriations are no longer the ultimate source of meanings. The final origin of meanings is the collectivity itself, that is, the generic phenomenal community whose ''laws of ideological refraction'' impose themselves on each of its members (Bakhtin, 1977: 34). Considering the logical priority of the ''We'' over the ''I'', conceptual systems can hardly be based on first-person phenomenology, extended thereafter to institutions through metaphorical mappings. Insofar as metaphorical processes derive from a set of collective practices and shared meanings, the individual way of construing standard and imaginative uses of language turns out to be greatly limited. The predominance of the ''We-phenomenology'' over the ''I-phenomenology'' drastically reduces the experiential domain escaping from collective interpretations.

Such an observation strongly questions the cognitive dualism of Lakoff and Johnson's model. But for all that it does not call into question the idea of a universal and basic-level human ground that would serve as a rallying point for disparate individuals and heterogeneous cultures. Moreover, our ''We-phenomenology'', far from invalidating the analytical importance of metaphors, makes them still more relevant: thanks to their simultaneously conceptual and phenomenological dimension, metaphors actively feed the collectively framed ''self-interpretations'' allowing individuals to make sense of their own experience (Taylor, 1985). Last but not

least, we have seen that the tricky status of effective or "as-if" beliefs engendered by metaphors gives rise to the intriguing issue of folk attitudes to cultural representations. But this issue does not endanger the possibility of accessing collective mentality via public utterances and common concepts – in accordance with a "semantic history" extended to folk metaphors. Although some cultural representations disclose fewer actual beliefs than public and institutional meanings, they nevertheless reveal the "thinkable" of a given community. Furthermore, the "thinkable" in question is partially embodied, thanks mainly to metaphors which play a major role in the collective hermeneutic and phenomenological circle connecting feelings and meanings – embodied enough, at least, to reflect the phenomenological certainties, shared categorizations and relational commonalties which constitute the symbolic armature of a collectivity.

In other words, language, metaphors and symbols do not control individual minds in a direct way that would allow them to "cause" actual beliefs. But language, metaphors and symbols do impose limits to what a given We can conceive as possible or intelligible, thereby capturing a significant part of social reality. Metaphors are very good candidates for capturing such a reality because they represent, so to speak, the missing link between implicit background and explicit formulations, phenomenological experiences and semantic utterances. Moreover, metaphors are not only good candidates for highlighting the common denominator of a given society. Beyond the tacit common agreement that consensual metaphors marking out public discourses can reveal, antagonistic metaphors disclose rival interpretations of the social world as well. In fact, the common building-blocks of folk metaphysics our "anthropo-ethnomethodological" point of view has insisted on are far from exhausting the complexity and heterogeneity of social reality. For instance, the metaphor of "common humanity" underlying the concepts of "Nation" and "People" at the time of the French Revolution is subject to strange interpretations when concrete interests are at stake. The ideal and consensual invocation of the "People" yields to a fierce political and symbolic battlefield as soon as takeover by concrete and scorned "small people" becomes a real risk for all those who aspire to power (Duprat, 1998). But the political shifts that are thus imposed on the empirical occurrences of cross-cutting concepts, like Nation, People and Public Opinion, could not be grasped without the prior semantic account

of these very concepts. The abstract referents of such concepts outline common metaphorical forms whose concrete determination is synonymous, for the groups, classes and individuals working on them, with mutual differentiation.

Conclusion

It seems that historians and sociologists must relinquish a "revisionary metaphysics" that tries to normatively correct the too approximate concepts typifying natural languages and ordinary worldviews (Strawson, 1992). Instead of promoting a supposedly better conceptual structure, they have to take seriously the ordinary stance of social agents by adopting a "descriptive metaphysics" that accounts for the effective frames and contents of their thoughts. For this purpose, the analyst has to renounce the third-person posture of the erudite metaphysician, focused on the things that actually exist, and needs to adopt the internal point of view of the ordinary metaphysician who assumes certain things to exist. By addressing the conceptual structure that constitutes the skeleton of minds, this approach places the traditional issue of socialization under the new auspices of the cognitive and phenomenological apparatus enabling people to maintain and create meanings. Such a descriptive metaphysics tends to individuate the whole society as a milieu consistent enough to operate over and above the disparity between social backgrounds. In accordance with sociocultural history and ethnomethodology, this approach brings out the collective mentality buried in the micro-level of daily framing and tacit assumptions but made partially "graspable" through public utterances. This anthropological stance, concerned with the common space of reference allowing individuals to dwell in a world known in common with others, discloses symbolic boundaries and cultural building-blocks shared by all class universes (Roche, 1997). In so doing, it gives itself the means to apprehend the main impulses of social change and symbolic creation, via the everyday comprehension that lies eventually less at the bottom of the social scale than at the back of ordinary minds. Thereby supplied with the benefits of an "experiential realism", sociocultural history can replace the linear and quasi-causal relationships that materialist and idealist histories have drawn between subcultural worlds with the internal relation-

ships binding together members of the same phenomenological community.

Of course the inquiry stressing the common grammar that enables and restricts the collective field of thought and action outlines only one cultural "face" of individuals. By emphasizing the space of cultural reciprocity within which the distinction strategies are possible, folk metaphysics gives priority to community of language and practice over class, ethnic, religious or institutional membership. Nonetheless, this insistence on common culture does not prevent the analyst from dwelling on the interrelations that link but also divide class subcultures. On the contrary, such an insistence represents a first analytical step: by giving the principle of unity that binds members to a shared form of life, it also gives the principle of differentiation ensuring the breakdown of this very unity in various social groups. The focus on the common world-view of a given community and its metaphorical hooks is thus far from banishing the other descriptions focused on social memberships. The analysis can legitimately deal with different levels of description, on the condition that it gives up determining once and for all the ontological unity of the society – whether it be the social class, the whole community or the self-reliant rational agent. One can adopt the ideological focus peculiar to the history of ideas by apprehending the social pyramid from its top and giving priority to the advantages the elite has over the underprivileged of the social order (Grignon and Passeron, 1989). One can also adopt a culturalist analysis: this consists in abandoning the exclusive focus on the upper classes, revealing how ordinary people re-interpret belligerently the mandates of the structures and accounting for the internal coherence of practices and meanings that typify all subcultures – included so-called low culture (Grignon and Passeron, 1989). Lastly, one can adopt an anthropological stance concerned with the common space of reference that brings together disparate individuals and hierarchically heterogeneous subcultures.

Let us take for example Carlo Ginzburg's miller, Menocchio (Ginzburg, 1980). The strange cultural blends that Menocchio makes, mixing erudite literature, Catholic dogmas and popular common sense, can be seen as the acknowledgement of the legitimacy of the Church and high culture (ideological reading). But these cultural blends can simultaneously be seen as the denial of this very legitimacy, because Menocchio invents his own and coherent cosmology (cultural reading). Finally, such cultural blends can be

seen as a testimony to the omnipresence of Catholic referents and narratives in a religious world (anthropological reading). Although the selected level of description puts forward a specific cultural dimension, it does not mean that the analyst is suddenly faced with a multiple reality. He or she faces one single reality, which he or she can illuminate from several angles of analytical amplitude. Thanks to such analytical angles, it is possible to emphasize, by turns and depending on the demands of the investigation, the dissimilarity splitting the class cultures and the likeness integrating them in the same form of life.

Social-group individuation and cultural heterogeneity are not the only kinds of differentiation that the new descriptive metaphysics has to take into account. We have already suggested another principle of differentiation, which moderates the ''all-metaphorical'' conception of cultural cognition: the differentiation of stances that common people can adopt toward cultural representations. Beside the metaphorical ''as-if'', which makes sense of social and political entities without real ontological commitment, there is a literal ''taken-for'' that tends to suspend the cautious quotation-marks status of collective metaphors. Thanks chiefly to the ideological work, collective constructions can be naturalized to the point where they become the omnipresent and unnoticed part of the everyday source of knowledge.

But there is a very important second principle of differentiation: the differentiation of attitudes that analysts have to adopt toward the public utterances and common metaphors they try to describe. In fact, once the social and historical investigation has allowed for the ways in which members weave their co-references to the cultural beings peopling their world, it has to change its level of description to avoid the blind adoption of folk grammar. So as not to lapse into a radical relativism that leads to a ''dereferentialist conception'' of sociohistorical reality, improperly reduced to its present and past folk conceptualizations, the inquiry needs to organize the different social truths into a hierarchy (Zagorin, 1999). This exogenous hierarchy is the only means of showing that some social descriptions are less ideological than others or that certain metaphors correspond more accurately to the reality of actual political processes than their rivals. For instance, the assessment of institutions according to folk psychology can mislead ordinary agents by projecting a causal intentionality onto a social apparatus whose effective reality has nothing to do with the intentions of a collective individual.

Without falling back into a revisionist metaphysics, social and historical approaches have thus to keep a minimal distance from naive metaphysics that is all the more difficult to maintain as the cognitive unconscious shapes the ontology of everyone, including scientists. In other words, the "extraordinary" knowledge of experts about what the world is or was has to illuminate the building-blocks of ordinary knowledge, but without restricting the reality of the social world to the mental realm of its inhabitants. That is the difficult challenge of social and historical approaches, simultaneously concerned with what really happened at a given time and what it was really like to be an inhabitant of this same time.

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Notes

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2. Louis XV, "Réponse faite par le Roi le 28 février 1766 à propos des remonstrances du Parlement", *Fonds Joly de Fleur*, vol. 22098, dossier 45 (translated by the author).

3. Idem.

4. Louis Antoine Saint-Just, "Sur le jugement de Louis XVI (2ème discours) Prononcé devant la Convention le 27 décembre 1792" (translated by the author). Cf. Soboul, 1988.

5. Louis XVI, "Interrogatoire à la Convention, 27 décembre 1792" (Cited in Walzer, 1974, translated by the author).

6. Contrary to what one might think, the history of ideas is still quite influential, even if it now takes more sophisticated forms. For instance, Mark Bevir (1999) proposes an individualistic and intellectualist approach to ideas: ideas cannot be

separated from the mental context from which they emerge, namely the author's mind. The history of ideas has to account for the meanings that such or such an individual, given his or her own web of beliefs, intended to express. For Bevir, any impersonal history of concepts, such as Koselleck's "semantic history", is irrelevant for the good reason that the contents of a given concept vary according to the intentions of the person using them. In contrast to a theory granting partial autonomy to concepts, Bevir stresses the role of individual "agency" and elite culture in the processes of meaning-creation and social change. For further discussions on these issues, see Richter (1990) and Guilhaumou (2000).

7. I need to specify here that I apply to the 18th century what Bakhtin says about Rabelais and the Middle Ages. This transfer is not that anachronistic: though popular culture was the object of a domestication in the 17th and 18th centuries, it tended to keep the main features of carnival excesses. Daniel Roche, for instance, describes the "Rabelaisien world" of the miller Jacques-Louis Ménétra plunged into plebeian debaucheries of alcohol and sex that arouse a fraternal comradeship that the revolutionary slogan will consecrate alongside freedom and equality. See Ménétra (1982).

8. The new political piety, while appropriating most of the former bodily metaphors, nevertheless introduces an important difference. The ultimate power of the Republic is the General Will, so that the nation's body cannot act on its own: only the power of the mind, namely the General Will, can endow it with the intentionality necessary to act. Although the new anthropomorphic version of politics theoretically recognizes all creatures as having the capacity to think, to want and to act, the General Will refers less to the sum of individual opinions than to a mysterious collective mind, embodied in public opinion or public spirit. The metaphor of the nation's body thus had the advantage of semantic ambiguity. Indeed it vacillated between a juridical sense that saw the nation as an abstract totality of subjects of the law and hence a mere political being, a social sense that saw the nation as a heterogeneous gathering of different members and, last but not least, a metaphysical sense that saw the nation as an extra-social unity and a legitimate part of the ontological furniture of the world – like natural species.

9. The term "familial romance", used by Lynn Hunt, comes from Freud's terminology referring to the neurotic fantasy of children who have a poor opinion of their real parents and replace them by fictive, adventurous and prestigious parents. As the child feels underestimated, he or she invents other parents whose social status is high enough to change his or her own position. Of course Hunt extends and modifies this strict Freudian sense because the political unconscious that she speaks of is far from being neurotic: on the contrary, the collective version of the familial fantasy is positively connoted, enabling the invention of a new structure of authority.

10. The use of the expression "counted as" is far from innocent. The philosopher John Searle uses it to describe the process of institutionalization that enables a group of individuals to endow brute facts, which are a priori meaningless, with a social value that is totally meaningful (Searle, 1995).

11. Lakoff and Johnson's claim about the one-way dependency between basic-level concepts and social complex metaphors is thus strangely contradicted by their insistence on the phenomenological inextricability of social and physical reality. Moreover, this phenomenological argument takes, I believe wrongly, an ontological turn when they claim that "what is real" for the ordinary agent is the product of

both his or her social reality and his or her experience of the physical world, which makes the central philosophical distinction between ontology and epistemology "go out the window" (Lakoff and Johnson, 1980: 146). In fact, even if folk reality is indisputably mind-dependent, it does not entail the elimination of the analytical differentiation between the ontological issue of "what things are" and the epistemological issue of "what they look like", for without such a differentiation the analyst would lose the ability to unfold the diverse reference-fixing mechanisms, such as explicitly defining, dubbing, pointing and stereotyping, that bind common people to heterogeneous beings which have neither the same cognitive weight nor the same sort of reality.

12. I use here Sperber's notion of cultural beliefs within a metaphorical framework that is not his; he seems indeed to deny his "beliefs between quotation marks" a metaphorical status, but without further explaining his reasons for this option.

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