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THE BIBLE AND THE IMAGINATION*

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I. Presuppositions

1. When Dean Kitagawa proposed the topic “The Bible and the Imagination” to me, I was first perplexed, then intrigued, and finally fascinated by this subject. The title is, indeed, baffling, even paradoxical. Is not the imagination, by common consent, a faculty of free invention, therefore something not governed by rules, something wild and untamed? What is more, is it not condemned to wandering about the internal spaces of what we conventionally call the mental kingdom, and does it not therefore lack any referential import, being entirely disconnected from what is really real? As for the Bible, is it not a closed book, one whose meaning is fixed forever and therefore the enemy of any radically original creation of meaning? Does it not claim to give rise to an existential and ontological commitment, one hostile to any imaginative drifting from here to there?

My most general goal in this essay will be to lay the groundwork for calling into question these opposed presuppositions.

On the first side, I want to plead for a concept of the imagination that will highlight two traits that are usually misconceived by philosophy. First, imagination can be described as a rule-governed form of invention or, in other terms, as a norm-governed productivity. This is how Kant conceived imagination in his *Critique of Judgment* by coordinating the free play of the imagination and the form of the understanding in a teleology that had no goal beyond itself. Next the imagination can be considered as the power of giving form to human experience or, to take up again an expression I used in *The Rule of Metaphor*,^{1/} as the power of redescribing reality. Fiction is my name for the imagination considered under this double point of view of rule-governed invention and a power of redescription.

Now turning to my other pole, the Bible, I would like in this essay to begin investigating two traits of reading that correspond to the two traits of the imagination just spoken of. As one part of this investigation, I would like to consider the act of reading as a dynamic activity that is

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not confined to repeating significations fixed forever, but which takes place as a prolonging of the itineraries of meaning opened up by the work of interpretation. Through this first trait, the act of reading accords with the idea of a norm-governed productivity to the extent that it may be said to be guided by a productive imagination at work in the text itself. Beyond this, I would like to see in the reading of a text such as the Bible a creative operation unceasingly employed in decontextualizing its meaning and recontextualizing it in today's *Sitz im Leben*. Through this second trait, the act of reading realizes the union of fiction and redescription that characterizes the imagination in the most pregnant sense of this term.

So this is the first presupposition of this essay, to seek *in* reading itself the key to the heuristic functioning of the productive imagination.

This presupposition, at first glance, may seem to set aside another way of approaching our subject that would consist in exploring the work of the imagination after reading, either as a personal form of the imagination—I have in mind Dorthee Sölle's fine little book *Imagination et Obéissance*—or as a collective form of the imagination—as in works on the relations between faith, ideology, and utopia, which I consider to be equally important. By placing myself at the very heart of the act of reading, I am hoping to place myself at the starting point of the trajectory that unfolds itself into the individual and social forms of the imagination. In this sense, my approach does not exclude this other wholly different approach but leads to it.

2. Within the vast domain of the form of the imagination at work in the biblical text, I propose to limit myself to one particular category of texts, the narrative texts. My reasons for this choice are as follows.

First, beginning from the side of a theory of fiction, I observe that today we possess a general theory of narratives, coming from literary semiotics, which may allow us to give a concrete meaning to the twofold idea of a rule-governed creation and a heuristic model. On the one hand, narratives may be seen as a remarkable example of rule-governed invention to the extent that their submission to narrative codes testifies to the encoded character of their invention, and where their abundance attests to the ludic character of this rule-governed generation. On the other hand, narratives offer a remarkable example of the conjunction between fiction and redescription. Narratives, in virtue of their form, are all fictions.^{/2/} And yet it is through these fictions that we give a narrative form to our experience, be it individual or communal. Stephen Crites (1971: 291-311), in a noteworthy essay, has even spoken of “the narrative quality of experience” and shown how narrative provides a discursive articulation explicitly applicable to the narrative forms of lived experience.

Next, placing myself on the side of the biblical text, I can hardly be contradicted if I recall that there the narrative kernels occupy a central place and play an exceptional role from the election of Abraham to the anointing of David by way of the Exodus, and from the narratives of the life and teaching of Jesus to those of the Acts of the Apostles by way of the accounts of the Passion. Whatever may be the destiny of those narrative theologies that some thinkers are attempting to elaborate, these narratives may be for us a favorable occasion for making our first presupposition more precise, I mean that the act of reading should be seen as the meeting point of the itineraries of meaning offered by the text as a production of fiction (in the sense given

above) and the free course (*parcours*) of meaning brought about by the reader seeking “to apply” the text to life. My second presupposition, therefore, will be that it is within the structure of the narrative itself that we can best apprehend this intersection between the text and life that engenders the imagination according to the Bible.

3. A further delimiting of my subject will follow from a third presupposition, namely that the narrative-parables (to use the terminology of Ivan Almeida [see below]) furnish the key to an enigma that I find H. Richard Niebuhr (1960) has perfectly outlined in his *The Meaning of Revelation*, the enigma of the passage from a narrative to a paradigm, which in turn governs the passage from a narrative to life, which is finally the heuristic character of narrative fiction. Whitehead, whom Niebuhr quotes favorably, wrote in *Religion in the Making*, “Rational religion appeals to the direct intuition of special occasions, and to the elucidatory power of its concepts for all occasions.”^{3/} Niebuhr says of this,

The special occasion to which we appeal in the Christian Church is called Jesus Christ, in whom we see the righteousness of God, his power and wisdom. But from that special occasion we also derive the concepts which make possible the elucidation of all the events in our history. Revelation means this intelligible event which makes all other events intelligible (p. 69).

But how does one intelligible event make other events intelligible? Here, between “our history” and that “special occasion,” is interpolated the “rational pattern” Niebuhr calls an image: “By revelation in our history, then, we mean that special occasion which provides us with an image of which all the occasions of personal and common life become intelligible” (p. 80).

It is no accident that Niebuhr develops this idea in a chapter entitled “Reasons of the Heart,” which he opposes to the “evil imagination” evoked by Genesis. Yet his central affirmation seems to be more the formulation of a problem than the enunciation of a solution. How does a history or story become an image, a paradigm, a symbol for . . . (and not just a symbol of . . ., to take up a distinction of Clifford Geertz’s [1973:118])? Niebuhr does do a good job in showing us the trajectory from history become an image to life, but he short-circuits the elevating of history to an image. Here is where a third presupposition intervenes, namely that the narrative parable is the type most favorable to investigating the link between a narrative and an image because the metaphorization process of a simple narrative is contained in the text itself by virtue of its literary form. To put it another way, the narrative-parable is itself an itinerary of meaning, a signifying dynamism, which transforms a narrative structure into a metaphorical process, in the direction of an enigma-expression (once again this is Almeida’s term), the Kingdom of God, an expression that orients the whole process of transgression beyond the narrative framework while at the same time receiving in return a content of provisory meaning from the narrative structure. Here we may have, it seems to me, the most complete illustration of the biblical form of imagination, the process of parabolization working in the text and engendering in the reader a similar dynamic of interpretation through thought and action.

Someone may object, perhaps, that this third presupposition condemns us to taking as our paradigm one too narrow form of narrative, a form that we might even see as an exception rather than as exemplary. To show that the choice of narrative-parables is pertinent to our investigation

of the biblical form of imagination, we would have to demonstrate that the operation of parabolization is not limited just to the narrative-parable, or that it does not appear here alone, but that it is implicitly at work everywhere else.

This is where a fourth presupposition comes in, a presupposition that will furnish the most restrictive delimitation of this inquiry but also the guiding thread of the whole study.

4. To ask what makes the narrative-parable a paradigm and not an exception, is to look for what makes the metaphorization at work in this type of narrative a process capable of other applications without becoming an interpretation that does violence to its text. In this essay, I have sought a key to this new enigma in an operation that the French structural school of text semiotics has brought to light, namely *intertextuality* or the work of meaning through which one text in referring to another text both displaces this other text and receives from it an extension of meaning.

Allow me to note that this recourse to the semiotics of texts does not imply any judgment, positive or negative, concerning the—currently dominant method of historical-critical exegesis. It is a question of another technique which found its first application in the domain of fairy tales and folklore. (The historical-critical method itself is transposed from classical philology as applied to profane texts.) What is specifically different about the semiotic study of texts is that it does not ask about the history of redaction of a text or to what setting the successive authors of their respective audience might have belonged. Instead it asks how a text functions as a text in its current state. If one identifies exegesis with the historical-critical method, the semiotic analysis of texts is not a form of exegesis.

Yet in drawing upon the semiotics of texts, I find that I am not enclosing myself into structuralism's abstract combinatory devices. To the contrary, the notion of intertextuality will appear in what follows in this essay, not just as one complement to the structural analysis of narratives, but as an important corrective insofar as it dynamizes the text, makes meaning move, and gives rise to extensions and transgressions—in brief, insofar as it makes the text work.

A complete demonstration would include three steps. I shall only be able to develop the first one here.

The first step consists in showing that intertextuality is indeed the operation that assures the metaphorization of the simple narrative in the case of the parables. If this analysis is successful, I will have justified my third presupposition that the parable is not an exceptional literary genre, rather parabolization is a general procedure of the narrative form of imagination.

The second step would consist in showing that the restricted intertextuality, visibly at work in the case of the parables, works as well in the case of non-parabolic narratives. Two possible examples could be the intersection between narratives and laws in the Old Testament, and the over-all intersection between the Old and New Testaments. If this demonstration can be shown to be satisfactory, we shall have rejoined the conditions of the first Christian hermeneutic, which was effectively engendered by the intertextuality between “the one and the other testament,” to use the title of a work by Father Paul Beauchamp. By passing in this way from

the restricted intertextuality of the parables to the generalized intertextuality of the whole Bible considered as a single book, we may hope eventually to regain the level of our second presupposition that revelation is the transfer from *this* history to *our* history, as suggested by H. Richard Niebuhr.

Finally, the third step would consist in showing that this phenomenon of intertextuality, brought in this way to its highest level, is indeed the key to the rule-governed imagination which, by the privileged way of narrative, invites the reader to continue, on his or her own account, the Bible's itineraries of meaning. If this analysis can one day be carried through, we shall have recovered the level of our first presupposition that the biblical form of imagination is indivisibly a narrative and a symbolic form of imagination. By beginning this process today, while having in mind some notion of where we must go from here, we shall have begun to do justice to the second interpretation of the theme Dean Kitagawa has proposed, that of Dorothee Sölle in *Phantasie und Gehorsam* (1968), and that of those other authors who have worked on the relationships between faith, ideology, and utopia. But, as I have already indicated, the present essay is limited to showing the rootedness of the imagination (that comes after reading) in the imagination that is the very act of reading.

II. Intertextuality and Metaphorization in the Narrative-Parables

Why begin with the parables? Why not? By flattening out every text, semiotics gives me the right to begin from any fragment. This is how a *book* is made, it puts all its parts in synchrony, in a space that can be traversed in any direction, between the two covers, and beginning from any center. We shall reascend the succession of our presuppositions, therefore, by first applying ourselves to the fourth one that intertextuality is the key—or one of the keys—to the metaphorical transfer suggested by the famous clause: “The Kingdom of God is like . . .” I must admit that this aspect of the problem completely escaped me in my earlier work on the parables published in *Semeia* (1975: 29-148). I got trapped there by the question, “what makes us interpret the narrative as a parable?” I did not see the resources for responding to this question offered by the too easily overlooked trait that the narrative-parables are narratives within a narrative, more precisely narratives recounted by the principal personage of an encompassing narrative. Therefore I am going to try to show now by drawing on the work of Ivan Almeida, a professor at the Catholic University of Lyon, that the structure embedding one narrative in another narrative is the fundamental framework for the metaphorical transfer guided by the enigma-expression “Kingdom of God.”⁴ The effect of this embedding is twofold: on the one hand, the embedded narrative borrows from the encompassing narrative the structure of interpretation that allows the metaphorization of its meaning; in return, the interpretant (to use an expression taken from C.S. Pierce) is also reinterpreted due to the feedback (*par choc en retour*) from the metaphorized narrative. Metaphorization, therefore, is a process at work between the encompassing narrative and the embedded narrative.

Therefore there are two errors to avoid in the interpretation of a narrative-parable: first, to consider only the primary narrative, neglecting its anchorage in another narrative; then one does not understand the phenomenon of metaphorization characteristic of the parable. Second, to reduce the parable to the speech act of the personage whose story is recounted in the encompassing narrative without taking into account the transforming action exercised by the

primary narrative on the encompassing narrative. Of course we have learned from Jeremias's marvelous work on the parables that Jesus does something in telling the parables, but the parables in their turn are productive of meaning at the level of the narrative of the life of Jesus. We must understand therefore, says Almeida, not just "how this personage produces something with this narrative, but how this narrative produces something in the story of this personage" (p. 130).

To understand this work of meaning, we must first have taken into account the structures of the narrative following the semiotic method. My analysis presumes this analysis, but does not confine itself to it. Furthermore, it assumes that this analysis is done in a way that allows us to go further than ordinary structural analysis does, toward the transformation of the narrative-parable by the encompassing text. In what way? In a way that already notes the dynamism at work in the narrative in order to understand how this dynamism is transgressed by the embedding. To understand a narrative dynamically is to understand it as the operation of transforming an initial situation into a terminal situation. The most elementary function of a narrative, in this regard, is to account for this transformation. To read a narrative is to redo with the text a certain "line" or "course" (*parcours*) of meaning.

I stress this theme of a "course" which connotes the transforming dynamism of a narrative. In a way, it is the first form of imagination we encounter. A form of imagination incorporated into a transformation. A rule-governed form of imagination, encoded, yes, but authentically productive of meaning. It is because a narrative involves such a dynamism that it can be taken into the encompassing dynamism of the text within which it is embedded.

Not just any analysis of the primary narrative, consequently, can lend something to the work of metaphorization. Only the one that puts the accent on the course of meaning brought about each time by each parable. The phenomena of intersection are subsequently grafted on to those micro-universes where something happens, where something takes place.

I am adopting here A.-J. Greimas's model of analysis as used by Almeida. This is, as I said, a semiotic approach to texts completely distinct from the historical-critical method. It takes the text in its last state, just as it has been read by generations of believing and nonbelieving readers, and it attempts to reconstruct the codes that govern the transformations at work in the narrative. Such an analysis makes a semiotic organization appear in the narrative-parables that does not differ from the elementary grammar at work in popular folktales. This grammar is not uninteresting, however, if we know how to discern not just the paradigmatic character of these codes, as Lévy-Strauss does, but their *productivity*, that is, their aptitude for engendering transformations. In truth, the two aspects are linked, for if a code is a system of constraints—as are the phonological code, the lexical code, and the syntactical code at the level of *langue*—these constraints are at the same time the conditions for producing new narrative courses, just as the constraints of *langue* are also conditions for engendering new sentences. This is why the narrative form of imagination is both constrained and free at the same time.

I shall consider, as Almeida does, the example of two parables in Mark, the wicked husbandmen and the sower. Besides being the only parables common to the three synoptic Gospels, their position—the one near the beginning, the other near the end of that other course of

meaning which, at the over-all level of the Gospel, is the incarnate word's march toward death—will constitute below an important indication of the intersection we are looking for between these two narrative-parables and the encompassing narrative.

1. The Narrative-Parable of the Wicked Husbandmen

Let us begin with “The Wicked Husbandmen.” The personages are few in number: the vineyard owner, the tenants, and the successive envoys, the last of which is the son. An “object-value,” the vineyard, circulates among them. To this must be added its fruits, which do not circulate, and though the owner sends for them it is in vain. The actions are also few in number, involving only a few verbs: to plant, hedge, rent, go, send, kill, etc. The actants, object-values, and segments of action make up a narrative insofar as a dynamism runs through all of them—from the planting of the vineyard to the refusal to hand over its fruits, from the departure of the owner to the murder of the son. We may represent this small drama as a conflict between two “narrative programs” (Greimas), that of the owner of the vineyard who wants to reap the fruits of the vineyard he has rented out, and that of the tenants who defeat this program. This dynamism, seen from the point of view of the owner, is a dynamism of progressive defeat. In semiotic terms, it is a dysphoric course, that is, one that fails to unite its subject to its object. As we shall see, the inverse case applies in the case of the sower.

But the semiotician does not stop here. He notes that this narrative takes place in relation to three stable themes which he calls isotopies, that is, semantic invariants.

The first isotopy is quite evident. It is the vegetation: vines, fruit, wine. More precisely, it is a vegetation-economic isotopy: a location, a harvest, an inheritance. This vegetative course from planting to fruit and the harvest will have its counterpart in a similar course in the parable of the sower, from the sowing to the harvesting of the grain. What they have in common, and what we have called an object-value, is an object with a dynamic, not a static value: it sprouts, grows, and does or does not bear fruit. The narrative transformation follows the potentialities of this object which Almeida characterizes as “an object with a surplus value” (*objet à plus-value*). What is more, it is these potentialities that release the quest that is the basis for the narrative: to go get some of the fruits. The whole narrative process may be summed up in a locution that is the theme correlative to the plot: from the initial lack created by the departure to the defeat of its redress.

The second isotopy is the one common to the actions of departing, sending, and above all fighting and killing. It concerns the life and death of a body. We shall not rediscover this isotopy in the sower where it will have been replaced by another isotopy which stands in a significant contrast to it—this will be the isotopy of the word.

The third isotopy is the one that runs the greatest risk of passing unperceived and that only a semiotic analysis can clearly recognize. It concerns the relations among places. The semiotician is attentive to it insofar as the narrative is a course. We will call it the spatial isotopy. Indeed, it is noteworthy that the entire continuation of the narrative from the sending of the first messengers to the murder of the last one—the son of the departed man—roughly constitutes a movement toward the inside of the enclosed vineyard. It is only within the enclosed

vineyard that Mark has the son die. The dramatic movement from life to death is thus staked out by a spatial movement from outside where the owner has departed to, to inside where the son is killed./5/

Before turning to the second parable, let us already note the power of metaphorization initially contained in the three isotopies. Let us provisionally set aside the third isotopy, that of the places. It does not immediately reveal its metaphorical power. Particular attention must be paid to the places of Jesus' preaching and of his march toward death—from Galilee to Jerusalem, then to the Temple, then to the empty tomb—to register a similarity of movements from outside to inside. Louis Marin's (1971) work on the "Topic of the Passion" prepares us for the idea that the Gospel places are not geographical, that is, amenable to an empirical type of verification, but topological places, or, if one prefers, semanticized places which get their signification in relation to the dramatic course. In this sense, the spatial isotopy is not purely geometric. The places are capable of signifying more than just places for bodily movements. And in this sense, they are eminently metaphorizable./6/

As for the second isotopy, that of the body and death (Almeida's somatic isotopy), it is set in motion toward metaphorization by the text's conclusion: "And they tried to arrest him (Mk 12:12). Here the metaphorization plays directly between the content of the narrative (what is said) and its author (the speaker), who signifies himself through what he says. In other words, the destiny of the speaker is figured in what the narrative says./7/

As regards the first isotopy, that of the vineyard and its fruits, which we have called the vegetation-economic isotopy, the listener cannot miss its metaphorization that calls to mind Isaiah 5: "My beloved had a vineyard For the vineyard of the Lord of Hosts is the house of Israel" We can here catch a glimpse of how a narrative-parable is embedded in an encompassing narrative by means of the quotation that is the most explicit and most remarkable effect of intertextuality. Let us note in passing that this effect corrects the structuralist notion of an isotopy as a univocal level of discourse. Plurivocity is already present on the level of the primary narrative which is capable of being metaphorized.

The two beginnings of metaphorization that we have indicated, on the side of the body and on that of the vineyard, are also tightly interlaced with each other through the progress of the narrative. Something happens, in effect, in the narrative in that the tenants not only refuse to hand over the fruits but seize the first servant, beat him, and send him away empty-handed. The beaten servant is sent back *instead of* the requisite fruits. In this way, the dying body becomes the substituted and inverted sign of the refused object-value, the fruits of the vineyard. He is not just the owner's envoy, but detained *like* the refused fruits and sent back *in place of* them. "Like," "in place of," here is the beginning of a metaphorization that is inscribed as follows: so that the fruit may increase, life must decrease. We could speak here of an inverted metaphor. This rapprochement is a creation of the narrative which, at this moment, takes an odd turn. The messenger becomes something other than and more than a messenger, the "antimetaphor" of the object-value, the fruit of the vineyard (p. 165). The seizing of the body occurs *in place of* the seizing of the fruits postulated by the logic of the narrative. The narrative form of imagination, which prepares the way for the metaphorical form, is already notable in this transgressing of the expectation created by the sending of the messenger who was supposed to seize some of the

fruits, not be captured in his own body. The servant was sent empty-handed and returned “empty-handed”—as the text simply says—which makes an antithesis to the expected plenty from the harvest.

It is not just the isotopies in terms of which the acts are unfolded that can be metaphorized. The actants can also. Greimas distinguishes the most general actantial roles (subject, opponents, helpers) and their thematic investments—here a landlord, his sharecroppers, servants, and son. Each of these roles possesses a polysemy that makes possible, on the narrative plane, the explicit metaphorization through their context. Further, within the narrative itself, the man who planted the vineyard is revealed to be a father after having acted as the owner of the vineyard and the sharecroppers’ landlord. At the same time, the vineyard goes from being simply the soil for producing fruit to an inheritance. It is the progression of the narrative that makes these successive investments of the actantial roles into their thematic roles take place. *Then* the sharecroppers posit themselves as substitute heirs: “Let us kill him, and the inheritance will be ours” (12:7). We could well speak here of the “odd logic” that guides this drama. In my earlier analysis of the parables in *Semeia*, I emphasized narrative extravagance as their common trait. It is through this narrative extravagance—that the deceived landlord becomes a father who sends his son and thereby brings the narrative to its critical point, what Aristotle called the *peripeteia* which is answered by the denouement. In this case it is the refusal to recognize the son, his death in the vineyard, the interior that ought to have been the place of fructification and therefore of life: “And they took him and killed him, and cast him out of the vineyard” (12:8). The inside of the vineyard instead of being just a place is qualified by the action that occurs there. It is this action that makes the equation between the interior and death.

One last remark concerning the preparation, on the simple narrative plane, for the metaphorical transformations that are the principal object of our inquiry. The narrative ends with a segment outside the narrative (*un hors-récit*) where the listener is questioned: “What will the owner of the vineyard do? He will come and destroy the tenants, and give the vineyard to others” (12.9). This segment is outside the narrative first in the sense that the dysphoric climax is annulled by an action which is not spoken of as past, but which is posited as in the future as the response to a question. This action signifies the defeat of the defeat and the liquidating of the opponent. We shall see below how, in virtue of intertextuality, this postscript corresponds to the postscript to the whole Gospel. This segment is outside the narrative in the second place in the sense that it creates a new *vis-à-vis* to the master: “he will give the vineyard to others.” At the same time, new roles for the master are created. These are not thematized but simply suggested by the indeterminateness of these “others.”

As for the vineyard object-value which circulates among these actants, we do not know what it will produce once “given to others.” Here the narrative, after having been closed on a definite defeat, is reopened to indefinite possibilities, thanks to the rhetorical device of the question, “what will the owner of the vineyard do?”^{8/} By marking the intrusion of the narrator into the narrative through a summons addressed to the listeners, this question also marks the anchoring of the narrative-parable in the weft of the narrative that encompasses it and opens the way to the parabolization we are going to talk about. It marks this anchorage in another fashion by the allusion—which is equivalent to a quotation—to the parallel text of the “Song of the Vineyard” in Isaiah: “And now I will tell what I will do to my vineyard” (Is 5:5). In this way,

the wicked husbandmen are again made ready to be metaphorized. If the one who “will come”—according to the postscript to the narrative—obliquely signifies the narrator himself, the wicked husbandmen begin to signify the listeners themselves: “for they perceived that he had told the parable against them” (Mk 12:12). But here we have already exited the narrative and taken the path of metaphorization. It has been helpful, I believe, to have seen—how this metaphorical process is in a way woven into the narrative course.

The explicit metaphorization is further guided by the device of quotation in verses 10 and 11. At first, this quotation seems odd since it does not limit itself to evoking a defeat, or even the defeat of a defeat, but a victory with an “Easter” meaning: “This was the Lord’s doing.” This expression, placed at the hinge linking the narrative-parable and the encompassing narrative, designates the meaning vector of the entire metaphorical process, exactly as the enigma-expression “kingdom of God” does elsewhere. Now this quotation only functions to metaphorize what is outside the narrative if it contains symbolic resources that the quotation extracts from it. The quotation *transforms* the vineyard and its fruits (the vegetative isotopy) into a “head of the corner stone” (or architectural isotopy), by means of, may we venture to say, the whole entourage of stones in the course of the parable: the wine press in a pit, the surrounding and enclosing hedge, the tower that is erected. All these are terms that move from plant to stone. Whatever the case may be concerning this metonymic (press, enclosure, tower, corner stone) and metaphoric (the transfer from the vineyard to the head of the corner stone) game, it is capital that the signification wrested from the quotation is already a fact of intertextuality. Thanks to the criss-crossing between the narrative and the other texts, the vineyard—which is at stake in all the actions—does not stop signifying something more. Having been the bearer of fruits and an inheritance, it has become, on the spatial plane, the circumference within which, on the body plane, the murdered son’s destiny is fulfilled. It is the narrative that extracts all this signifying power from the vineyard.

At the end of this analysis, we understand in what sense we could have said in beginning that the codes are not inert constraints but generate a structuring dynamism which is all ready for metaphorical transformation.

2. The Parable of the Sower

For the narrative-parable of the sower I will limit myself to those traits which, in a semiotic analysis, correspond to those of the parable of the wicked husbandmen. In this sense, we are entering into the process of intertextuality—the parables, in effect, should be read together. Together they constitute a universe of meaning in which the symbolic potentialities of one contribute, by means of their common context, to making the potentialities of another explicit.

A first inspection reveals a narrative process as euphoric as the preceding one was dysphoric. Its bearer is the very act of sowing with all its meaning potentiality that is connected with fecundity: planting, growing, yielding. This act of growing encounters three successive opponents: the birds, the sun, the thorns. The parable tells of the success of this operation despite three successive defeats. And the final success is itself drawn up in three ascending degrees: thirtyfold and sixtyfold and a hundredfold. All this is well known. The most

interesting contribution of a semiotic analysis consists in the identifying of the planes of discourse or, in our vocabulary, the isotopies at play here. Here is where the most remarkable correspondences to the preceding parable spring forth.

It is clear that we again have the vegetative (or economic-vegetative) code of natural growth. The grain corresponds to the vines, eating to drinking. Do we also rediscover the spatial code? Its least significant occurrence is the progression from the periphery of the field to the good soil, which vaguely resembles the movement toward the inside of the course of the wicked husbandmen. More significant is the initial note: "Listen! A sower went out to sow." The field, understood as a whole, is the outside. It is this outside that is the place of the euphoric course.

But if we rediscover the two vegetative and spatial codes, we do not find the body and death code, represented in the preceding parable by the servants and son who are attacked and killed. What might correspond to it here? As the whole tradition has recognized, it is the word, that is, exactly the saying as projecting itself into what is said. This is what immediately makes the narrative a parable insofar as the metaphor which transports the fecundity of the grain into that of the word is inscribed in the narrative. The narrative in a way narrativized the fecundity metaphor. The text suggests this in different ways. First, through the immediate framing of the narrative: "*Listen!* A sower went out to sow" (4:3). "And he said, 'He who has ears to hear, let him hear'" (4:9). The Gospel of Mark puts this warning in Jesus' mouth, therefore in the encompassing narrative. It therefore ties it to the telling of the parable by attributing it to the speaker. The Gospel tells what Jesus tells. Several semioticians have emphasized the kinship of this procedure to that of *The Thousand and One Nights*. In the same way, the speaker signifies himself or herself as inside his or her narrative, and the same holds for the two groups designated as 1) "those who asked him concerning the parables" to whom Jesus declared, "To you has been given . . ."; and 2) those whom Jesus speaks about in saying "but for those outside . . ." (which implies that the first group is the "inside"). Through the feedback of this discourse by Jesus on the narrative, the first group, "you" (who are "inside"), is narrativized as being the actors of the euphoric process, the second group ("those outside") as the actors of the dysphoric process.

We shall return below to the complete sentence, "To you has been given the secret of the kingdom of God, but for those outside everything is in parables." It turns on the enigma-term "Kingdom of God," which belongs to the encompassing text and which introduces a new opposition between "the secret is given" and "everything is in parables," where "is in parables" signifies only in parables, that is, in an opaque figure, heard but not understood. That we have here a fact of intertextuality is underlined by the quasi-quotation of the Old Testament in the following verse: ". . . so they may indeed see but not perceive . . ." (cf. Is 6:9-19). This is a segment outside the narrative that the following verse (Mk 4:13) reinserts into the narrative weft through the use of a question: "Do you not understand this parable? How then will you understand all the parables?"

We see here how semiotic analysis differs from historical-critical exegesis which deliberately severs the explication that follows the parable from the parabolic narrative properly speaking, with the idea of isolating an original kernel that eventually would constitute the *ipsissima verba* of Jesus and risks ascribing the added explication to the redactors (and the ecclesial community they stem from). For semiotic analysis, the incorporation of the narrative

and its interpretive commentary into one text is an irrecusable textual fact. So the task of this analysis is to disclose the isomorphisms between the narrative and the interpretation that contribute to the parabolizing of the narrative. It is the resemblance between the narrative courses (thirty, sixty, one hundred grains) on the one hand, and the sequence: understand, be converted, be forgiven, on the other. It is this isomorphism that allows the narrative's fiction to cross its borders and be oriented toward the enigma-expression, "Kindom of God," that polarizes it over-all. This effect is obtained through the criss-crossing of the vegetative and the verbal isotopies.

It appears, therefore, that the function of the sequence 4:10-13 is to insert into the meaning of what is said something about its being said and its reception. The destiny of the sowing which is lost three times then which finally fructifies in abundance, is signified as the destiny of the very word (*parole*) that tells the narrative. A progression of abundance, similar to that of the grain harvest (thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold), is indicated on the level of the diffusion of the terms "to understand," "to be converted," "to be forgiven." Thus the incomprehension of some—those "outside"—and the progress in understanding of others "you" is narrativized after the fact through the interpretation. To the extent that the destiny of the sowing is metaphorized as the destiny of the word, the destiny of the word is narrativized as the destiny of the sowing. This presupposes that what we have called the vegetative isotopy was not univocal. I mean, it was not just a question in the narrative of seeds and a harvest in the agricultural sense. A meaning potential in the language—that is, in the things already said—is liberated through the entangled twofold process of metaphorizing the narrative and narrativizing the metaphor.

Does not the same thing happen to the spatial isotopy (the outside of the field, its periphery, and its interior)? Between "those to whom the secret has been given"—a relation of intimacy—and those who remain "outside—a relation of exteriority—the distance is no longer quantitative but qualitative. The euphoric process and the dysphoric process now depend upon these opposed values concerning proximity to the speaker of the word. Therefore these places are more than empirical sites and the degrees of distancing are more than measurable distances. The spatial plane is itself also metaphorized insofar as the word is recognized as the "empty case" around which are organized the figures of this discourse (Almeida, p. 223).

It is this whole interplay, which is narrative and symbolic at the same time, that allows us to say that the word in the narrative-parable of the sower holds the same places as does the body in the narrative-parable of the wicked husbandmen.^{9/} This rapprochement that is also an opposition is authorized by the fact that the two other isotopies, the vegetative and the spatial ones, are common to the two narratives. And this inclines me to say that the vineyard in the first parable is to the sowing in the second what the inside in the first is to proximity in the second, and finally what the mortal body in the first is to the living word in the second. If we allow these rapprochements, a still more striking one proposes itself which will be the source of the great metaphor exhibited by the intersection of the two parables not just with each other, but with the principal narrative. We have said, in effect, that the narrative-parable-of the wicked husbandmen has a dysphoric course and the narrative-parable of the sower a euphoric one. May we not say then that if the word is to increase, the body must decrease? This would be the great metaphor encompassing these two parables.

This recourse to context is therefore inscribed in the parable itself in two ways: on the one hand, on the side of what is said, through the metaphorical potentialities of the semantic fields that narrative semiotics encounters at the level of the narrative's large isotopies; on the other hand, on the side of the speaker, through the use of enigma-expressions such as "the secret of the kingdom of God" and "(only) in parables," which at the same time sort out the listeners and identify them respectively with the agents of the euphoric course (the fecundity of the sowing in the outside of the seeds) and the dysphoric course (the death of the body at the interior of the vineyard). The parable of the sower is exemplary in that it reunites these two processes, thanks to the exchanges between the speaking word and the spoken narrative. In this sense, it reveals the central operation by which the narrative becomes a parable.

3. Metaphorization through Intertextuality

We may now concentrate our attention on the second process, the metaphorization that occurs through the intersections of discourse within the encompassing narrative. It, more than any other, is what exercises the reader's productive imagination.

In sum, the whole meaning of my essay is contained here. A parable, the sower, contains in the perimeter of its pericope a first criss-crossing between the vegetative plane of fecundity and the more verbal one of communication of the message. This first criss-crossing produces the metaphor of a sown word or of a sowing that becomes a message. Then two parables taken together, the wicked husbandmen and the sower, created a second degree criss-crossing, this time within the micro-universe of the parables. This criss-crossing between the euphoric process of the word and the dysphoric process of the body's march toward death in turn prepares the way for a still more fundamental intersection between the two parables taken together and the narrative, which tells of the one relating the parable, that encompasses both. Finally, it is the same process of embedding that we try to follow in writings other than the Gospels, then between the Gospel and these other writings. In this series of embeddings, the same process of metaphorization is at work to guide the reader and to engender in him or her the capacity to pursue the movement of metaphorization beyond his or her reading.

Someone may object that, by saying this, I am abusing the notion of metaphor which, in classical rhetoric, only designates a transfer of the meaning of words. But I have shown in *The Rule of Metaphor* (1977: 65-100, 125-33) that the thought process of a metaphor has its initial support in the sentence, that is, in the operation of predication. A metaphor is first and essentially an "odd" predication that transgresses the semantic and cultural codes of a speaking community. The theory of intertextuality allows us to take another step and to call not just the collision between two semantic fields in a sentence a metaphor, but also an intersection between texts both of which carry their own semantic codes. The analysis of narrative-parables allows us to take this step and to extend the process of metaphorization to the widespread semantic conflicts instigated by the fact of intertextuality.

We may now approach by itself the phenomenon of parabolization through intertextuality that we have had to anticipate in order to account for the very dynamic of the narrative. I shall now take the two expressions parabolization and metaphorization as synonyms, it being

understood that a metaphor can occur not only between words, but between whole sequences of sentences. The isotopies play a role at this discursive level comparable to that of the semantic fields that enter into interaction in metaphor-sentences. *Parabolization is the metaphorization of a discourse*. In the case of the narrative-parables, it consists of the metaphorization of a narrative taken as a whole. Intertextuality thus becomes an extension and, consequently, a particular case of the interaction I have placed at the center of my theory of metaphor. In this I follow I. A. Richards, Max Black, Monroe Beardsley, and others. These authors perceived that the semantic clash between significations does not occur without an interaction between contexts. It is this interaction that we are now going to consider.

The decisive point brought to light by Ivan Almeida is that the intersection among contexts is a phenomenon of *writing*. It is an operation of the *text* considered as a living work. Because the sequences have been written down together within the limits of one text—here a Gospel—they constitute a network of intersignification, thanks to which the isolated texts signify something *else*, something *more*.

This is how I understand the transition between semiotic explication and interpretation that has its fulfillment in the thought, action, and life of interpreting individuals and communities. We are leaving the structure (or sense), but we are not yet at the application or appropriation (the reference). We are accompanying *the interpretive dynamism of the text itself*. The text interprets before having been interpreted. This is how it is itself a work of productive imagination before giving rise to an interpretive dynamism in the reader which is analogous to its own.

I will limit myself here to sketching some of the relations of intertextuality through which our narratives, in becoming parables, give rise to a certain dynamism in the semantic system of the Gospel of Mark considered as a whole. We may arrange these procedures according to an increasing scale of intimacy in textual interaction and, consequently, in the synamization of one text to another. We will begin with (a) structural similarities between the englobing text and the embedded text. These isomorphisms are still external similarities compared to those we shall consider under (b) and (c).

The structural similarities play successively 1) on the contrast between the euphoric course and the dysphoric course in the two parables analyzed (placed respectively toward the beginning and the end of the Gospel); 2) on the interplay of isotopies sometimes common to the two parables (the vegetative and spatial isotopies), sometimes peculiar to each one (the corporeal isotopy in the one, the verbal isotopy in the other); and 3) finally on the explicit or implicit quotations which guide the references to other texts.

Beginning with the contrast between the euphoric and dysphoric courses, we can trace two homologous inverted courses on the level of the Gospel. Moreover, we can refer one to the *word* and the other to the *body*. In effect, what progressively happens in the Gospel is the *recognition* of Jesus as being the Christ. We can say in this regard that the Gospel is not a simple account of the life, teaching, work, death, and resurrection of Jesus, but the communicating of an act of confession, a communication by means of which the reader in turn is rendered capable of performing the same recognition which occurs inside the text./10/

This recognition, this knowledge concerning the narrator of the parables, progresses across the parables told by Jesus and about Jesus, his gestures and those ascribed to him, thereby engendering a sorting out of various groups: the crowd, adversaries, friends, and disciples who are thereby placed in variable relations of proximity to the person of Jesus. This sorting is aimed at constituting the community of those close to him who hear and understand.

This advance of the word is paralleled by a decline of the body, if we consider that the success of Jesus the miracle worker on the bodies of those he heals at the beginning of his ministry leads to the defeat of Jesus' body in death.

In this way, we see spring forth a certain parallelism between the over-all narrative structure of the Gospel and that of the two parables taken together. It is this parallelism instituted by the text—by the “texture” of the text—that makes a place for the process of mutual parabolization of the encompassing narrative and the embedded ones. This is the structural similarity that results from the mirror relation between the large and small narratives, apropos principally of the contrast between the euphoric course of the word and the dysphoric course of the body. The parable of the wicked husbandmen, in effect, simulates the dissemination and growth of the word. Perhaps here we should also refer to the transfiguration, the declaration before the High Priest, and the centurion's confession. The power of the metaphor is already present in this simple structural similarity where something *passes* from one text to another. A relation of intersignification is established between the large narrative and the small one. A new signification springs forth from this relation of intersignification as in the case of any live metaphor. The encompassing narrative and the embedded narratives seem to say together that the life of the word occurs through the death of the body.

The places, as we have seen, are also not foreign to this type of relation, both in the parables (the “outside” of the seeds, the “inside” of the vineyard) and in the encompassing narrative (the sending of the disciples, the empty tomb). In this regard, we must repeat again that the biblical places are eminently metaphorizable (the opposition between Galilee and Jerusalem is a semanticized space), and their metaphorization is promoted by the superimposition of relations of proximity between Jesus and another group of actors in the drama onto the properly spatial relations./11/

The text gives rise equally to a certain affinity between the theme of eating and drinking in the large narrative (the ears of grain plucked on the Sabbath, the miraculous multiplication of bread and fish, the bread and wine of the last supper), and the two parables' vegetative isotopy (the vineyard and the sowing). The superabundance of bread and fish miraculously multiplied, for example, is joined to the grain in the parable by means of the parallel metaphorization of both of them as a sign of the word which, in effect, is shared without being exhausted. We ought also not forget the leaven of the Pharisees and that of Herod (Mk 8:15) which become synonyms of the vineyard within which the son is killed by the wicked husbandmen.

(b) But parabolization is not reduced to an isomorphism that would leave the encompassing and embedded texts intact. The narrative-parable is not only the homologue of the large narrative, it signifies the destiny of the one who tells the parables and whose life is told by

the Gospel. The exchange occurs between the personages of the embedded narrative and the person of the one who tells it. The bond between the encompassing narrative and the embedded narrative is made tighter here thanks to this remarkable trait of the narrative-parable that it is told by the personage of another narrative which encompasses it. Thus Jesus himself signifies the diminution of his mortal body in telling of the wicked husbandmen and he signifies the growth of his living word in telling of the superabundant fecundity of the grain.

In the same movement, the listeners are obliquely intended and analogously sorted out, following the models of the wicked husbandmen or the “bad” and “good” soil. (Let me remark in passing that this implication of the speaker in what is said in the narrative-parable in no way leads us back to the old discussions about Jesus’ “messianic conscience.” The problem is not psychological, but semiotic, in the sense that it is the belonging to one text and the work of the text as such that produce this reverberation of the narrative-parable on the person who tells it.)

(c) To the extent that the encompassing narrative and the embedded narrative penetrate each other, we catch sight of the role that enigma-expressions such as the “Kingdom of God” may play in this work of parabolization. The bond of these enigma-expressions, introduced by the encompassing narrative, to the immanent meaning of the narrative is infinitely more intimate than any isomorphism or even than any insertion of the illocutionary force of the utterance into the very weft of the spoken narrative. We may certainly still speak of an isomorphism to designate the correspondence we may observe between the enigma-expressions that the evangelist has put into the prologue which precedes the narrative of Jesus’ ministry and into the epilogue of his resurrection, expressions through which the kerygmatic meaning of the whole Gospel is anticipated (Son of God, Lord, Christ). It is a question, however, of much more than an isomorphism for we can no longer speak here of an isotopy in such expressions, even if we speak of a religious isotopy with the semioticians.¹² It is rather a question of limit-expressions, as I said in my article in *Semeia*, or, to use an expression of Jean Ladriere’s (1975:116-41), of the horizon of structuration of the religious symbolism taken as a whole. If we may still speak of parabolization with regard to such limit-expressions, it is to the extent that a limit-expression’s meaning, without being signified by any action or personage in a narrative, is signified by the movement of transgression that transports the narrative outside the customary logic of narratives. In this sense, the Kingdom of God is not what the parables tell about, but what happens in parables.

In my *Semeia* article, I attached this final process of parabolization to the aspect of the narrative’s extravagance on the narrative plane. What landowner, in effect, would be so foolish as to send his son after his servants had been killed? What sowing could return thirtyfold, sixtyfold, a hundredfold? In this manner, the narrative metaphorizes itself by transgressing its own narrative structure through an “odd” usage of the art of narrating.

This metaphorizing relation runs in two directions. The expression “Kingdom of God” is in its turn referred to its enigmatic character by the movement of transgressing the narrative. Without this movement, these expressions risk falling to the rank of frozen religious representations. In this way, the expression “Kingdom of God” left to itself, could become nothing more than a dead image with some vague political content. It is the extravagance of the narrative that, by bursting out of the mundane meaning of the narrative, attests that “my kingdom

is not of this world,” that is, does not belong to any specific project of human action and remains, in the strong sense of the word, impractical like some utopia. The expression-enigma, under the pressure of the extravagance of the narrative, thus becomes a limit-expression which breaks open the closed representations.

We have attained the point where it is no longer intertextuality as such that is at work, but where it is carried beyond itself by the meaning vectors of the enigma-expressions. To continue our analysis, it would be necessary to change methods and to show how these enigma-expressions mobilize in the reader opaque and mute expectations concerning liberation from evil and the regeneration of the “evil imagination.” These limit-expressions, in effect, would be nothing more than hollow words if, on the one hand, human beings did not have some experience of limit-situations such as evil and death and the strong desire to be freed from them. It is these fundamental experiences that the enigma-expressions come *to configure*. But they would still only be words, if, on the other hand, they were not preceded by religious representations borne (*charriées*) by an older culture which these limit-expressions come to correct. It is the task of hermeneutics to correlate what these limit-expressions intend with human experience in its religious quality and with the available representations already qualified as religious by our culture. In brief, it is in configuring the most tenacious and most dense human hope, and by rectifying traditional religious representations, that limit-expressions continue their course beyond a narrative. As Almeida says, we leave the structural analysis of isolated sequences for the interpretation that is at work in the text as a whole. We are now leaving the interpretation internal to the text for a hermeneutic of the text’s *referential intentionality*. But the passage from the text to life, which governs the passage from the semiotic phase of interpretation to its existential phase, is still guided by something that takes place in the text which, with Ladriere and Almeida, I have called the text’s horizon of structuration. The new configurations of people’s religious experiences and the rectifications of their representations are still accompanied by the new restructuration that the expression-enigma “Kingdom of God” and others similar to it impose on the signifying dynamism working in the narrative-parables. In short, it is still the parabolizing of the narrative, brought to its highest degree of incandescence, that gives rise to the transition from semiotic interpretation to existential interpretation. Here is where we pass from the work of imagination *in* the text to the work of imagination *about* the text.

And here is where our inquiry guided by the idea of intertextuality must end, at least for the moment.

NOTES

/1/ Ricoeur (1977:216-56).

/2/ Metz (1966:333-43). “Tout récit a pour conséquence immédiate d’irréaliser la chose racontée.”

/3/ Niebuhr (1960:69), quoting Alfred North White head, *Religion in the Making* (Cleveland: The World Publishing Company, 1960), p. 31.

/4/ Almeida (1978:117). He defines a parable as follows: “Un récit-parabole est un récit

raconté par un personnage d'un autre récit qui l'englobe.”

/5/ I will set aside that to which structural semiotics attaches the most importance, the possibility of representing every narrative maneuver on a semiotic square. I am somewhat doubtful about Almeida's thesis (p. 169) that, “through a whole series of narrative ‘maneuvers’ which might appear to us to be aleatory, an implacable semantic logic is expressed through the determining of the courses that the transformation algorithm will be forced to follow.” I am much more attentive to the fact that it is because the narrative does follow a certain course that we can *after the fact* project the poles, the axes of contrariety, the schemes of contradiction, and the relations of implication onto an immobile figure. In any case, it is more important to note that in the series of messengers there is a progression to the inside of the vineyard than to stop with the fixed polarities of its movements. The second servant in this sense signifies *more* than the first one and the son *still more* in this two-fold progression on the planes of the body and space. If it is true that the narrative course is inscribed on the figure of the semiotic square, it is on the condition that the narrative *advances* and constitutes a *course*. The course, in this sense, engenders the structure.

/6/ “As has been said, the places function in the text as a semantic element not determined by the dictionary but easily contaminated. They are impregnated with significations left to them by the transforming actions and thus serve to fix the semantic continuity of the sometimes disparate events” Almeida (1978:178).

/7/ Almeida (1978:166) is willing to recognize that we cannot reach the end of a structural analysis here without anticipating the metaphorical effects. Conversely, he is correct to emphasize “the structural condition of this movement of metaphorization.”

/8/ It is here that structural analysis runs the greatest risk of leaving aside what is essential. By projecting all the courses on the famous semiotic square, it requires them to satisfy a logic that closes the square. The liquidating of the opponent gives the diagram “the course that the square lacked” Almeida (1978:188). I would emphasize instead that it is the interplay of metaphors that, by producing meaning, allows the square to be closed and that gives the semiotician the conspicuous satisfaction of having “buckled up the semantic course” (ibid.). Yet can we, within the same system, both close the square and open the narrative to something—outside the narrative? The distinction borrowed from Greimas between the topical narrative and a correlated narrative conceals the difficulty rather than resolving it.

/9/ I am hesitant about calling this plane of the word an isotopy in the same sense those of space and vegetation are. To the extent it is the “empty case” and only narrativized after the fact, we may not consider it an isotopy belonging to the narrative itself, something Almeida does not recognize sufficiently.

/10/ We could consider as the encompassing narrative in relation to the narrative-parable the narrative of the days of Jesus' life that end in his passion and death, therefore from the calling of the disciples to the women's fear at the tomb. We could then take as adjoined narratives (“correlated” narratives in A.-J. Greimas's sense), the framing narratives throughout which the text posits and in a way proposes in advance the meaning that the narrative properly speaking

must produce, the prologue Mk 1:1-13, the epilogue Mk 16, along with the sequence on the death of John the Baptist (Mk 6:14-29) which anticipates the meaning of Jesus' death. This is why I speak of recognition to designate the confession professed by the very personages in the Gospel narrative, culminating in the centurion's confession. The narrative of the life and death of Jesus is organized in such a way that the knowledge unveiled right at the beginning should be appropriated by the actors themselves and, beyond them, by the reader. It is the work of the text to do this.

/11/ Let me recall again my doubt concerning the possibility of a structural analysis independent of these implicit or explicit processes of metaphorization. In effect, the isotopies are immediately and directly metaphorized. It is only through an abstraction that we constitute them as isotopies, that is, as univocal levels of discourse.

/12/ Here I disagree with Ivan Almeida who, to remain as long as possible in accord with Greimas's structural analysis, extends the categories of that analysis into a region of meaning where we can decidedly no longer speak of an isotopy in the rigorous sense of the term. If, as the author so well puts it, these expressions are *expressions-énigmes*, they do not designate any determined object, but the horizon of structuration, the dynamizing pole, the vanishing point of the whole process of parabolization. Consequently, we may no longer speak of an isotopy, which would assume the stability of one theme running through all the relevant terms of a single semantic field. This is why I hesitate to speak of a "religious isotopy" in the sense we have spoken of a vegetative, spatial, and verbal isotopy. Indeed, we have already seen the notion of an isotopy vacillate due to the effect of metaphorization which affects almost all the terms of a narrative-parable.

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