

Editorial Introduction

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The editors of *Social Imaginaries* are happy to present this tenth issue of our journal (Vol. 5, No. 2) with a strong line-up of essays. We start with a piece on imagination and praxis in Cornelius Castoriadis and Paul Ricœur by George Sarantoulas. A revealing 1985 dialogue between Castoriadis and Ricœur has allowed comparison and contrast between these two intellectual giants of the social imaginaries field for French—and, more recently, English—language audiences (Adams 2017). Many fruitful lines of inquiry can potentially arise from the Dialogue, and hopefully will. More generally, comparing and contrasting both thinkers promises great reward. In his essay “Mapping the theme of Creativity in Cornelius Castoriadis’s and Paul Ricœur’s *Social Imaginaries*” George Sarantoulas explores the problematic of action in the oeuvre of both founding figures of our field. Arguing that the emphasis on creativity is a shared concern, Sarantoulas demarcates signposts pointing towards an anti-structuralist philosophical anthropology. Stepping through a selective review of the sociology of action (including Hans Joas as a potential third interlocutor), Sarantoulas hones the reader’s attention on this philosophical anthropology. The components of action—technique and praxis for Castoriadis, reproductive and productive varieties of doing, mediated symbolically, for Ricœur—form contours of their respective theories of human creation. Sarantoulas suggests that this approach rightfully restores the imaginary and imagination as frames of agency for application in theories of action. Further elaboration of the combinations and opposites in Castoriadis’s and Ricœur’s contributions is a matter for ongoing deliberation on the inter-relation of imagination, imaginary, ideology, interpretation, and praxis. Social action has been an abiding problematic of sociology and social theory. This essay points to a different position from which to debate it further.

The question of the imagination or the imaginary in relation to the social world is extended also in relation to the natural world in the following piece on Simondon by Kristupas Sabolius. In his article, “Traversing Life and Thought:

Gilbert Simondon's *Theory of Cyclic Imagination*", Kristupas Sabolius argues that in Simondon's underappreciated theory of imagination an attempt is made to settle the seemingly irreconcilable functions of the imagination, viz., reproduction and creativity. Sabolius contends that Simondon's standpoint can be characterised as a sound alternative to a plethora of theoretical approaches, which introduce a breach between the individual subject and social imaginaries. Focusing on Simondon's lectures from 1965 and 1966, Sabolius maintains that here we come across a conception of imagination that exceeds the imagining subject in that a correlation is established between this subject and the associated milieu that conditions its potentiality. According to Simondon's radical proposal, imagination is to be attributed to all living beings and should be conceived as a function of life. That is, all organisms are affected by the forces that intervene from the background, yet they also can respond to these intervening forces. Within such a framework, the image is conceived not as a representation, but as a form of connectivity: as a mechanism of inclusion that signals the intensity of engagement within the associate milieu. Thus, Simondon's imagination should not be thought of as a kind of mental representation, but as a realm of intermediation and transition. By giving rise to a tension between the mind and its environment, imagination enables the living being to be open to the environment and allows for the information to circulate without falling into referential regime. Such a correlation between the organism and the milieu, in virtue of what Simondon calls 'metastability' and 'compossibility', implies their mutual co-determination without any kind of subordination.

If Sabolius underscores the broadening of the imagination in Simondon, Chai underscores the limits of verbal or linguistic imagination vis-à-vis what is in excess to it, requiring a non-verbal one. In our third article, "Daoism and the Meontological Imagination", David Chai discusses what he calls the Daoist imagination that approaches the 'non-image of Dao'. The 'collectivity of the universe', or Dao, as the progenitor of the myriad things, the meontological root of all oppositions, including being (you) and non-being (wu), cannot be put into images, let alone words. He contends that, according to Daoism, it can only be approached through its baring by the spirit's (shin), reaching greater depths in thought than mere words or even images employed by the mind (xin). To experience requires our retooling of our faculties to embrace the wordless and imageless. In the process Chai examines various Chinese classical texts, from the *Yijing* (Classic of Changes) to Hanfeizi's writings, to the Daoist classics of the *Daodejing* and the *Zhuangzi* and the writings of neo-Daoist Wang Bi, among others. He thus argues that the limitations of word-based or form- or image-based knowledge in attaining access to the Dao, and that the Daoist imagination is thus not fed by words or images since it is nourished by the formlessness of Dao with its endless possibilities. Both

Saboliu's and Chai's articles makes one consider how far one can draw the contours of the imagination.

The following two articles deal with concrete imaginaries to which the imagination relates. In Farhad Khosrokhavar's contribution on the "Western Imaginary of Jihadism", social imaginaries are understood as crucial contexts for the understanding of social action. In the case of Jihadism, the imaginary dimension of political mobilisation refers to the availability of a chiliastic utopia, which offers a passway to a better, otherworldly world of believers. Khosrokhavar focuses on the imaginary in relation to political subjects and to subjectivity, as a principle of self-empowerment and self-promotion, and as not merely related to a specific collective's self-identity. In the article, he discusses how the principle of self-government attracts various persons of immigrant origin, not only those pertaining to lower social classes, but also middle-class youth. The secularised and meaningless nature of the society (in particular in France with an important culture of secularism [laïcité]) that surrounds such people is replaced by the imagination of a cohesive community of believers. Khosrokhavar stresses how such imagination is part of a process of 'subjectivisation', which engages with individual mobilisation. The author further stresses differences in the interpretation of the Jihadist utopia, from an emphasis on transgression of social norms as means to salvation to a search for redemption in a soulless society. The article contributes importantly to an anthropological approach to social movements and political mobilisation by stressing the imaginary dimensions of the construction of subjective realities.

Yulia Prozorova's article, "Religio-Political Nexus and Political Imaginary in Russia", invites us into an historical sociological exploration of Russia's political imaginaries, as they are cast through the religio-political nexus. Bringing to theories of political theology, relevant and applicable insights from Arnason's reconstruction of the connection of politics and religion, she examines the imaginary creation of scared rulership in Russia's past. Powerful perspectives from Durkheim, Weber, Eisenstadt, Assmann, and Arnason enrich an inventive articulation of the institution of autocracy in and through Russia's political imaginaries. Although Prozorova examines a critical assessment of the concept of caesaropapism and brings into question frameworks of political theology, she ultimately determines that both are indispensable to a rich social scientific understanding of the principal components of the Russian constellation. This is a theoretical and substantive contribution from a major researcher in a lively current of Russian scholarship on state formation, multiple modernities, and intercivilisational encounters. Finally, Prozorova's essay adds a modest case study contribution to the study of political imaginaries originally inspired by Castoriadis and Lefort (both of whom she references).

And we end this volume with a short varia piece by Johann Arnason himself on the diagnosis of our time, including the Anthropocene. "Theorising

the Present: Notes on Diagnoses of our Times” demarcates the genre of diagnosing the present in the human sciences. For Arnason, there are some outstanding thinkers in this regard, who can fruitfully be known as the classics of social theory. They are ‘classical’ not because they have been canonised in sociology, history, or philosophy (much less, because they are older). Rather, they matter and can provide further insight into our times for two different reasons. First, they interact in a two-way relationship with a larger theoretical corpus of work. Second, they achieve analytical and interpretive purchase on their times through ‘long-term historical perspectives, complex but open and adaptable conceptual frameworks, and critical awareness of emerging problems’. Marx, Durkheim, and Weber are familiar figures in almost all lists of foundational perspectives. With the discriminating approach Arnason argues for, he adds less frequently named thinkers: Elias, Parson, Touraine (on one reading of him), Czech sociologist Miloslav Petrusek, and Blumenberg. Their power of critical diagnosis and general mode of inquiry are reasons to reference them for anyone reconsidering our times. Fashions of recent decades such as postmodernism, post-structuralist versions of post-colonialism, and risk sociology (once Beck’s more original insights are suspended) are no substitute for the potential in this body of thought. With this diagnosis of the diagnoses, Arnason proffers some notes for further discussion of the crises of our times. This vitally includes climate change, where noting the trends, he asks us to interrogate the metaphor of the Anthropocene. Critically thinking about the categories and metaphors of social thought and action is as obligatory as systematic analysis from a social imaginaries perspective. Equally, this is an ongoing field of discussion, debate, analysis, and action.

In closing, we would like to thank our publisher Zeta Books and our readers and subscribers for a fruitful first six years of the journal’s time with Zeta Books.

References

- Adams, S 2017, *Ricœur and Castoriadis in Discussion: On Human Creation, Historical Novelty, and the Social Imaginary*, London, Rowman and Littlefield.