Irish Journal of Anthropology

Volume 10 (2) 2007

Engaging Imagination: Anthropological Explorations in Creativity

Edited by Stuart McLean and Steve Coleman
Irish Journal of Anthropology is the organ of the Anthropological Association of Ireland. As such, it aims to promote the discipline of anthropology on the island of Ireland, north and south. It seeks to provide coverage of Irish-related matters and of issues in general anthropology and to be of interest to anthropologists inside and outside academia, as well as to colleagues in a range of other disciplines, such as Archaeology, Cultural Studies, Development Studies, Ethnology and Folk Studies, Gaeilge, Irish Studies, and Sociology.

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The Irish Journal of Anthropology appears twice a year, in May and November.

Annual Subscriptions: Members: Waged – €30/£20; Student/Retired – €15/£10

Orders, accompanied by payment, should be sent to Irish Journal of Anthropology, c/o Department of Anthropology, NUI Maynooth, Maynooth, County Kildare, Ireland. Telephone: +353 1 708 3984; fax: +353 1 708 3570; e-mail: anthropology.office@nuim.ie

Members of the AAI receive the journal as part of their membership subscription. Information about membership can be found on the AAI web-site: www.anthropologyireland.org

Advertising Rates: Full Page: €100; Half Page: €60; Quarter Page: €40
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Editor’s Notes

We are particularly happy to publish the present special number of the IJA, Engaging Imagination: Anthropological Explorations in Creativity, edited by Stuart McLean and Steve Coleman. The papers comprising this number were originally delivered at an Anthropological Association of Ireland conference, organized by the editors and held in University College Dublin and the Dublin Business School on 19–21 June 2003. The General Editor wishes to express his thanks to Francisco Arqueros for his invaluable contribution to the production quality of the present and recent volumes of the IJA.

The forthcoming Spring/Summer 2008 number (Volume 11 No. 1) will also be a special number, this time on Northern Ireland, the guest editors being Máiréad Nic Craith and Fiona Magowan. And Adam Drazin is preparing a future special number on Anthropology and Design.

Séamas Ó Síocháin

Contributors

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Jennifer Sime is a Ph.D. candidate in socio-cultural anthropology at Columbia University. She has conducted fieldwork in Galicia, northern Spain.
This book is concerned with one of the most talked-about and yet most elusive of human capacities. Argued over for centuries by poets and philosophers, imagination has been in equal measure exalted for its world-shaping power and disparaged for its potentially duplicitous trafficking between reality and illusion. More recently, the concept of imagination has been added to the lexicon of the social sciences – imagined communities, imaginary states and new social imaginaries becoming increasingly familiar as terms of analysis. Nonetheless, this increased attentiveness to imagination as a dimension of everyday practice has all too often left unexamined the nature and dynamics of the imaginative act itself. What happens when we imagine? Does imagination consist primarily in the production of images, in the making present of consciousness of that which is absent or not yet in existence? Should imagination be thought of rather as a dimension of language, finding one of its privileged expressions in poetic metaphor? Is imagination the faculty of an individual subject or can it manifest itself collectively? Is it the product of our subjective engagement with the world or does it create entirely new worlds? Is it possible to conceive of imagination outside the field of subjectivity, as the self-organizing activity of material processes, belonging as much to ‘nature’ as to ‘culture’? The essays in this volume aspire, not to provide definitive answers, but rather to inhabit and reflect upon these questions and controversies. That is, they seek, from a variety of perspectives, to engage imagination as an indispensable component both of collective life and of the production of academic knowledge.

It is not the aim of this volume to provide a historical overview of the concept of imagination and its successive reformulations. Nonetheless, it is worth noting that the recent turn toward imagination in the humanities and social sciences contrasts with what is, arguably, a much longer-standing intellectual mistrust of the imaginative faculty, a mistrust that has resulted in part from imagination’s seeming capacity to traverse and confound familiar categories. Philosopher Richard Kearney reminds us that, for many classical and medieval thinkers, imagination was an ‘unpredictable and irreverent faculty which could juggle impiously with the accredited distinctions between being and non-being, turning things into their opposites, making absent things present, impossibilities possible’ (Kearney 1998: 3). In particular, imagination was viewed with suspicion when it challenged the primacy of divine creation or the prerogatives of reason, or when it threatened to blur distinctions between copy and original, truth and falsehood. Kearney argues that the role of imagination has remained controversial to the present, pointing to a renewed suspicion of imagination in Marxian-derived notions of ideology and false consciousness and in the psychoanalytic theories of Jacques Lacan, who identifies the imaginary (imaginaire) with illusion, fascination and seduction, imprisoning the human subject in a series of static fixations (Kearney 1998: 3). In contrast to this abiding attitude of suspicion, successive thinkers have upheld the value of imagination as, variously, a faculty with claims equal to those of reason, a creative power, a source of truth and a force for revolutionary change. A partial list of imagination’s defenders might include Plotinus and the Neoplatonists of the classical and early Christian eras, the medieval Arab philosophers Ibn Rushd (Averroes) and Ibn Sina (Aviceirna), thinkers of the European Renaissance such as Bruno and Paracelsus, along with Spinoza, Kant, Coleridge, Sartre, Bachelard, Merleau-Ponty, Ricouer, Castoriadis and Negri (Castoriadis 1987; Cocking 1991; Gatens 1996; Kearney 1988, 1998, Negri 1991). Of these, perhaps the best known and most widely discussed has been Kant’s theory of the ‘transcendental imagination’ (an ‘art concealed in the depths of the human soul’), understood as the precondition of all knowledge and finding its freest expression in the aesthetic realm, where imagination, no longer viewed as secondary or derivative, is seen as able to create a ‘second nature’ out of the raw materials supplied to it by nature (Kant 1964: 138, 2000; Gibbons 1995; Kearney 1988: 167–70).

Kant’s formulations and those of more recent thinkers raise a question that is especially pertinent to anthropology as a discipline concerned with the comparative description of human phenomena: namely, do theories of imagination remain inextricably bound to distinctively modern, Western formations of subjectivity and experience? Paul Friedrich notes in his contribution to this volume that to engage imagination is, necessarily, to engage also the issue of linguistic and cultural relativity: not all languages, he points out, have a term corresponding to ‘imagination’ and where an equivalent is present, its nuances and range of usages may be very different. In the twentieth century, the view of imagination as the attribute of a radically individuated human subject encountering a world conceived of as distinct from itself found one of its starkest expressions in the early writings of Jean-Paul Sartre, for whom imagination was defined precisely by its capacity to withdraw from the reality of the given world (the en soi) in order to create a space of free consciousness and reflection (the pour soi) (Sartre 1948). Phenomenological accounts of imagination, meanwhile, like those of Bachelard and Merleau-Ponty, sought to escape the subjectivally detached implied in Sartre’s position by emphasising rather the dialogue of subjectivity and world and pointing to bodily experience as a privileged link between the two (e.g. Bachelard 1969, Merleau-Ponty 1962). In recent anthropology, such an approach has found considerable favour among theorists of embodiment as ‘the existential ground of culture and self’ (Csordas 1994: 6). According to this view,
The subjectivity, in so far as it is embodied, is always already in the world rather than apart from it. Imagination should thus be understood, not as a turning away from the given, but as an active component of experience and perception, engaged in a constant interchange with the material textures of the existing world.

Theories of embodiment have gained academic currency in tandem with a more widespread turn toward imagination as a social and cultural analytic. Among the most influential manifestations of this have been Benedict Anderson’s much-cited account of the modern nation as an ‘imagined community’ (that is, one whose members are able to imagine sharing a nationality with others they have never met) and Charles Taylor’s concept of the ‘social imaginary’, defined as ‘the ways people imagine their social existence, how they fit together with others, how things go on between them and their fellows, the expectations that are normally met, and the deeper normative notions and images that underlie these expectations’ (Anderson 1992; Taylor 2004: 23).

It is striking that this (re-)discovery of imagination has been coincident with a period of pervasive intellectual and political uncertainty, fuelled both by the accelerated geopolitical transformations of the post-Cold War years and, more recently, by the anxieties and antagonisms generated by international terrorism and the ‘United States’ self-styled ‘war on terror.’ At the same time, the academy itself has been subject to far-reaching changes including the re-organization – or in some cases closure – of faculties and departments, along with reduced levels of public sector support and increased reliance on private and corporate sponsorship. As Carol Greenhouse has noted, the contemporary academic milieu is one in which ‘the familiar paradigm of the social sciences as a subject that can be explained appear inadequate to a world in which structure and systematicity can appear at best fleeting and provisional’ (Greenhouse 2002). Imagination has thus offered both a means of engaging with a rapidly changing reality and a basis for understanding the ways in which people whose lives are caught up in contemporary historical transformations themselves seek to make sense of their altered circumstances. (It is worth recalling perhaps that the theories of both Anderson and Taylor were formulated too as attempts to account for historical change, that is, for the emergence of new and specifically modern forms of political association and collective belonging). A number of recent thinkers have claimed that imagination itself has assumed a newly significant role in the present as transnational flows of people, information and capital pose new challenges to existing conceptualizations of territory and social space. Imagination has become a basis for exploring the ways in which the real and the virtual are increasingly interwoven, as people, capital and cultural idioms traverse seemingly established geographical, cultural and political boundaries. Appadurai has famously argued that imagination in the contemporary world is no longer confined to the expressive spheres of art, myth and ritual, but plays an increasingly important role in people’s daily lives. With the aid of globalized mass media, he suggests, people now routinely imagine for themselves or their children futures in places other than where they were born and these imagined futures come to underwrite a variety of social projects. Imagination needs therefore to be understood not only as a way of understanding change, but as a significant factor in bringing change about (Appadurai 1996: 2–7). As such, imagination challenges us not only to conceive of new objects of inquiry traversing geographical, political, cultural and linguistic boundaries (for example, Appadurai’s notions of ‘ethnoscape’, ‘technoscape’ and ‘mediascape’) but also to reformulate the language of social and cultural analysis to accommodate the range of transformative possibilities that imagination makes available.

The recently re-awakened interest in imagination on the part of the humanities and social sciences can be seen to draw much of its impetus from the same ambiguities and uncertainties that have long troubled philosophers and theologians. Vincent Crapanzano, in a recent book-length study devoted to the subject of imaginative horizons, suggests that imagination has a particular affinity with the ‘beyond’ and the ‘between,’ with the evocation of as yet unrealized possibilities and with moments of transition or transformation that resist articulation through familiar categories. Anthropology and the other social sciences have, he suggests, often failed to do justice to this aspect, seeking rather to recuperate such moments via a logic of causal or structural explanation. He criticizes Turner’s discussion of rituals and ‘social dramas’ and their associated liminal states for over-simplifying liminality through a generalized appeal to notions of structure and anti-structure. What such an approach misses, Crapanzano claims, is the possibility of grasping the ‘between’ itself as ontologically distinct (Crapanzano 2003: 39–65; Turner 1969). A similar point is made by another recent commentator, Brian Massumi, who identifies imagination as the mode of ‘felt-thought’ most attuned to what he terms the ‘virtual’ as a modality comprising affect, movement, sensation and possibility. For Massumi, the virtual, as the privileged site of imagination, needs to be thought not as mediating between already established oppositional poles, but rather on its own terms – as a ‘being of the middle’ rather than a ‘middle being’ (Massumi 2002: 134). Indeed, according to Massumi, it is this very condition of between-ness that gives rise to new social, political and intellectual possibilities.

When imagination has been discussed directly in relation to the production of social scientific knowledge, emphasis has usually been placed on the ways in which local data are incorporated into larger explanatory schemes. Again, it is the intermediary role of imagination that is most often fore-grounded. C. Wright Mills wrote famously of the ‘sociological imagination’ as the capacity to apprehend the relations between individual biographies and large-scale historical processes, a capacity that involved, as he saw it, an ability to shift perspectives constantly ‘from the most impersonal and remote transformations to the most intimate features of the human self’ (Mills 1959: 7). Paul Atkinson’s more recent account of the ‘ethnographic imagination’ (which self-consciously echoes Mills) identifies ethnography as a specific genre of social scientific research and writing and focuses on the textual shaping of ethnographic data through devices of rhetoric, employment and argumentation. If Mills’s discussion is concerned to a large extent with questions of craft and methodology, including the role of the sociological imagination in establishing empirical linkages between contexts, along with the prospective public role of social scientific inquiry in the contemporary world, Atkinson, in contrast, confines himself to the rhetorical analysis of
ethnographic texts. A somewhat different perspective on the role of imagination is afforded by one of the contributors to the present volume, Hastrup, who, in an earlier study, has written of the anthropological imagination as a faculty concerned with negotiating between multiple epistemologies. For anthropology, she suggests, imagination plays an indispensable role in the ‘making of sense,’ that is, the setting up of hypothetical truth-conditions for a variety of unfamiliar cultural expressions. Hastrup invokes the anthropological imagination as an alternative both to an uncritical positivism and to those recent critiques of anthropological knowledge that she sees as negating the possibility of the world (engagement with difficult but constellated cultural worlds). Imagination is thus understood as affording a bridge both between cultural idioms and between anthropology's Enlightenment and Romantic heritages. Rather than usurping the claims of knowledge in favour of creativity, imagination is seen as a crucial component of anthropological understanding in so far as it allows such understanding to pass between the novel and the familiar: ‘Imagination provides the metonymical and metaphorical links between previous experience and unprecedented events and wordings’ (Hastrup 1995: 74).

The essays in this volume situate themselves with reference to this ongoing project of exploration and rethinking. The contributors consider imagination from a variety of theoretical perspectives but share an emphasis on the importance of its role in the making and remaking of human worlds, including the shaping of anthropological knowledge. As Tim Ingold has maintained, imagination is not a means of ‘detaching one’s mind from the world (engagement with difficult but rather an activity carried forward in the world’ (Ingold 2000: 417). Accordingly, the essays collected here descend from abstract speculation to consider imagination at work in a variety of ethnographic situations: from the stage of Britain’s Royal Shakespeare Theatre to the Siberian city of Omsk; from New York’s United Nations Plaza to the peat bogs of Ireland. Like Crapanzano and Massumi, the contributors emphasize too the interstitial character of imagination, as it plays across the terms of increasingly implausible-seeming dichotomies between the individual and the collective, continuity and change, the material and the symbolic, the actual and the virtual. As such, it will be suggested, imagination challenges us to renew our familiar vocabularies by re-conceiving social and cultural life in the register of process and potentiality, transformation and becoming.

Paul Friedrich’s paper considers imagination as a faculty at once individual and thoroughly social, the workings of which can be discerned across a range of cultural domains, from literature to science to politics. In contrast to the often finite and bounded constructions of classical social thought, imagination, he suggests, is open ended, a potentially limitless source of new possibilities, albeit one that necessarily draws upon the more restricted repertoire of materials available in a given time and place. Above all, imagination is productive of innovation and change: from artistic creativity to scientific discovery to political activism. Friedrich pays particular attention to the relationship between the first and last of these by considering the career of Henry David Thoreau as a naturalist, writer and anti-slavery activist. The manifold interconnections between Thoreau’s involvements in each of these spheres are taken by Friedrich to exemplify the variety and infinite range of imagination, considered both as a wellspring of human creativity and as a mode of engaged practice.

Steve Coleman’s paper attests to the power of the politically engaged imagination to evoke and thus performatively call forth a world not yet in existence. Drawing on Walter Benjamin’s notion of the ‘wish image’ and the semiotic theories of Charles Sanders Peirce, he considers the worldwide actions of anti-war protesters in the run-up to the United States’ invasion of Iraq in Spring 2003, in particular the series of e-mail petitions sent to the United Nations, calling upon that organization to oppose the impending invasion. These petitions, Coleman argues, conjured an image of a not-yet-existing democratic world order, even as the ‘international community’ supposedly represented by the United Nations was in the process of being by-passed by the unilateralist policies of the Bush administration and dismissed as irrelevant by the latter’s neo-conservative ideologues. Coleman suggests that the invocation of such a hypothetical global community (as distinct from the ‘real’ UN) can be understood as a ‘symbol’ in Peirce’s sense of the term, a sign of possibility endowed with the capacity to grow into actuality, in part by rallying its partisans and defenders.

If Friedrich and Coleman are concerned with imagination’s role in bringing about change, Kirsten Hastrup’s paper shifts the focus of discussion to consider how imagination is involved in both theatrical performance and everyday practice. Her particular concern is to explore and problematize the individual and collective dimensions of agency. Drawing on her own fieldwork with the Royal Shakespeare Company and on the dramaturgical notions of ‘character’ and ‘plot,’ she argues that imagination is an indispensable constituent of action both inside and outside the theatre. Imagination, or, more specifically, imaginative engagement with others, is the primary means by which the individual locates him- or herself within a trans-individual social space. This is the ‘plot’ wherein ‘character’ is realized not as the expression of a pre-existing essence, but as a by-product of action. Agency is, therefore, never a stable category, but unfolds always through a complex interplay between individual improvisation and the dialogic imagination of a larger whole. Just as the actor in a play is a ‘double agent,’ caught in a state of ‘ontological flux’ between identities, so too human subjects, through their interactions with others, are constantly involved in becoming what they are not (yet), a process of becoming, which, Hastrup suggests, is never decisively resolved into being.

Dale Pesmen’s paper re-examines the relationship between artistic creativity and political engagement in the context of ethnographic research and writing. Imagination is seen here to involve a willingness to experiment with expressive form, whether textual or imagistic. Considerations of form, Pesmen argues, have too often been relegated to a subordinate status in academic writing, as a decorative accompaniment to the communication of conceptual content. Against this tendency she argues for a heightened awareness of form as a source of new and substantive insights, urging scholars to explore the possibilities offered by multiple media and discursive registers. Her paper performs such an awareness by juxtaposing her fieldwork in southwestern Siberia with her work as a visual artist. The
result is a mode of ‘engaged critique’ very different from the now all too familiar debunking of social and discursive ‘constructs’.

Jennifer Sime’s paper elaborates on the paradoxical situation of artistic production ‘between form and form’s un-raveling.’ She takes as her central text Federico García Lorca’s essay of 1933, ‘Play and Theory of the Duende.’ The Duende is identified here both as the familiar trickster-like household spirit of Spanish folklore and as a principle of artistic creativity operating at the interface between order and chaos. In the latter instance it is Duende - sometimes personified as a possessing spirit - that disrupts form and technique to create an opening to an otherwise inarticulable space of dissolution and death. It is from this opening – or ‘wound’ – that imagination is seen to issue.

Oona Frawley’s paper takes up the question of imagination in relation to the experience of rapid social change and the phenomena of urbanization and migration. Drawing on Salman Rushdie’s concept of ‘imaginary homelands’ (Rushdie 1991), she considers the ways in which visions of an ostensibly vanished past continue to inflect perceptions of the present. She juxtaposes the Irish tourist industry’s glorification of a now largely vanished rural Ireland with the spectral afterlife of two demolished urban landmarks: Dublin’s Nelson’s column and New York’s Twin Towers. In doing so, she suggests that it is pre-eminently in such urban settings that something akin to the old Irish dindenhuar or lore of place – compounded of the sedimented layering of memories and cultural associations – is maintained in the present.

Jamie Saris’s paper offers a reminder that imagination has not merely been an emancipatory force, but has also played a central role in sustaining contemporary formations of power and inequality. Like Appadurai and others, Saris foresees an increasing role for imagination in the contemporary world, but suggests that this role may be a far from benign one. He shows how imagination has helped to shape and disseminate a now globally diffused vision of free market capitalism in which ever more conspicuous disparities of power and wealth are increasingly naturalized as the inevitable expression of impersonal economic forces. Indeed, he suggests, recognizing the complicity of imagination in reproducing these inequalities may be a prerequisite of unlocking its revolutionary possibilities – its capacity to intervene in such a world by proposing alternatives to it.

Consideration of a contemporary activist role for imagination serves as a reminder too that imagination is possessed of an irreducibly material aspect (as Pesmen notes in her paper, ‘imagination occurs easily when you play with the concrete’). Indeed, imagination offers one means by which the place of materiality in social-cultural analysis can be re-asserted, not as a reassuringly stabilised ontological ground, but as an endless source of new provocations, challenges and possibilities. It offers too a potential space of dialogue between the humanities and the sciences. As Friedrich notes, the speculations of quantum physicists and chaos theorists are themselves imaginative acts seeking to re-shape understandings of the material universe. These new scientific theories offer a powerful reminder that matter, like the social world studied by anthropologists, is not fixed and static, but is always invested with the potential for transformation. The material, far from offering a refuge of certitude, thus appears, when viewed from the vantage point of imagination, to shade constantly into the virtual. The material world is never simply and straightforwardly given, but is necessarily both infolded with habit (the accumulated past) and constantly projecting itself into the future.

Could imagination be thought of then as an attribute of ‘inanimate’ matter, as much as of human subjectivity (whether individually or collectively construed)? Stuart McLean’s paper explores this possibility by considering landscape art in contemporary Ireland as a field of practice encompassing both human interventions and the self-activity of material nature. Imagination appears here less as a faculty of the individuated subject, through which it acts upon a monolithic real world, than as a relational space of becoming, involving a multiplicity of human and other-than-human actors.

The essays in this book do not aspire to a synoptic overview of imagination in its multiple aspects, nor do they aim to ‘explain’ or ‘situate’ imagination with reference to the (allegedly) more substantial realities of history and social context. Instead, they remain attentive to the fact that every ethnographic situation, far from being self-sufficient, is always displaced from within by the range of transformative possibilities that imagination itself makes available. Imagination thus impels us to re-formulate both our research strategies and our analytic vocabularies. It challenges us, not merely to study imagination as one more phenomenon of social life, but to engage it as an active component of our research and writing. Contributors respond to this challenge in a variety of ways: by reflection on the role of imagination in the production of academic knowledge, by the use of montage (including juxtapositions of text and image) as a way of providing a more dispersed and cumulative mode of writing that blurs accreted distinctions between academic, literary and autobiographical registers. The composition of the volume emphasizes too the transformative and recombining role of imagination by juxtaposing a variety of theoretical perspectives, geographical foci and literary styles. As such, it aims not at pre-emptive closure, but rather to elicit the reader’s active participation in an ongoing dialogue. The volume as a whole contends that the recent turn toward imagination as a term of social and cultural analysis needs to be accompanied by more sustained reflection on the imaginative capacity itself and its multiple implications in the processes of social and cultural life. Rather than being introduced as an often un-theorized addendum to the discussion of new forms of sociality and belonging, imagination needs to be engaged in all its complexity as a force active across a range of contemporary practices, including academic research and writing. Such an approach promises to yield not only an enriched understanding of the present, but also a range of new perspectives on the making of anthropological knowledge.

Endnotes

3 Sartre’s solipsistic view of imagination is countered in part by his emphasis on the ‘magical’ relation between the image and the absent thing or person it invokes, which he traces to the ‘primitive’ belief that the images, possessions etc. of a buried
ancestor-king preserve him as though alive (Sartre 1948). For an elaboration of this notion see Gombrich (1950) and Berger (1972).

4 Tim Ingold questions how far theories of embodiment have fulfilled their claims to overcome the modern, Western dualisms of mind and body, subject and object. In defining the body as subject of culture, he argues, such theories have all too often ignored the body as biological organism and have thus done little to challenge equally entrenched dichotomies between culture and biology: “The embodiment of culture [...] leads to nothing less than the disembodiment of the organism” (Ingold 2000: 170).

5 A highly suggestive application of notions of embodiment is to be found in Tilley’s studies of the phenomenology of landscape, where the sensuous experience of places, artifacts and substances is accorded precedence over more abstract analyses of their symbolic and functional significance (Tilley, 1994, 2004).

6 For a discussion of Taylor’s concept and its implications, see Gaonkar (2002).

7 On Benjamin’s concept of the wish-image, see Buck-Morss (1989); for an introduction to Peirce’s thought, see Corrington (1993).

8 For a more extended discussion of critique as an academic genre (and of some of its limitations) see Latour (2004) and Grosz (2005).

References


Imagination Theory and the Imaginative Act

Paul Friedrich

To him she would unveil her soul’s shy nakedness, to one who was but schooled in the discharging of a formal rite, rather than to him, a priest of the eternal imagination, transmitting the daily bread of experience into the radical body of eternal life. (James Joyce)

Linguistic/Philological Preliminaries

The very idea of the imagination in anthropology and literary criticism, in poetry and ethnography, raises a question of linguistic relativity: does this thing we call ‘the imagination’, a darling of Anglophone, German and other Western Romantics, have any value for cross-cultural studies? The main fact of linguistic variation is the epicentre in Western Europe, followed by a strong but more admired association in the Hispanic and Hellenic worlds with the idea of the representation of images (often deriving from Aristotle, actually). Further on there are culturally specific associations – with prophecy in Hebrew, with the unreal in Arabic. Yet further on it is apparently absent in Sanskrit but other words such as manas (roughly ‘mind’) play similar roles. Yet further on, it is totally absent in Tarascan, Mayan and other Native American languages where, however, the approximate idea of the imagination is conveyed in talk about dreams, the telling of yarns, and speculations about improbable possibilities.

To pursue these comparisons a bit more intensely, the Russian language has a precise gloss for the imagination in voobrazhenie but its frequency, distribution and nuances differ markedly and, unlike its Western analogues, its etymological source in ‘form/image’ (obraz) is not only transparent but more palpable. The ‘august imagination’ of Wallace Stevens feels natural enough in English, but its translation, торжественное вображение, comes through as a strange and awkward neologism in Russian – granted, that, as they say, in poetry you can say anything.

Perhaps the most intriguing contrast is afforded by Chinese examples where word and concept are lacking and there is a strong value on origins from the past in a world where ‘reality is dangerous enough’ (Nakatani 2003). Is not our Western imagination, partly because of its poetic aura, excessively associated with the beautiful and the good? In the context of such comparison, in any case, what is left of ‘our imagination’?

There is a deeper and older issue of linguistic relativism. We have for long been bedevilled by dichotomies and dilemmas that I think are false. One of these can be boiled down to the question: is language an embroidery of the imagination or is it the incarnation? On the one hand, ‘The rose by any other name would smell as sweet,’ versus, on the other, ‘The limits of my language are the limits of my world’. The realistic answer to these rhetorical questions is: neither; language can be the embroidery or the incarnation, or both. To take two extreme cases, when certain particles such as Sanskrit eva are used as metrical fillers hundreds of times in the Gita it is certainly embroidery, and superficial embroidery at that, like one tassel of the intricate lace in a white collar around the neck of a Rembrandt. But when, on the other hand, Hamlet says ‘To be or not to be, that is the question,’ which can be neatly glossed or at least closely paraphrased in most languages, we have language incarnating, that is, putting some flesh on a high flight of the imagination. In a vastly larger middle ground, language forms such as the dual in Homeric Greek demonstrably order and channel the imagination to a significant degree. It is in this middle ground that the so-called linguistic relativity theory is most relevant. I feel, for example, that the semantics of my Concord, Massachusetts, boyhood dialect (affected by study of Thoreau, incidentally), differs greatly from the blend I speak today and that both differ profoundly from Texan English and Irish English, as do all of these from Gaelic or Russian and all of these Euroamerican worlds of meaning, in turn, from the Mayan and Tarascan Indian languages of Mexico. As we go along this chain, the reference and nuances of the imagination idea overlap but differ significantly. Sappho’s line about sleep dropping down through leaves that quiver cannot go into Tarascan, where sleep cannot drop.

At a deeper level, beneath its surface forms language and the imagination are entangled with each other to the point of being consubstantiate and where they are not consubstantiate it is the August powers of the imagination that govern language in any sense of the word. The deeper levels of the imagination not only govern but energize the skeleton of language forms that we call grammar, syntax, vocabulary and pragmatic rules of discourse.

A significant number of recent anthropological books, incidentally, have the word ‘imagination’ in the title but on close inspection turn out to leave it as an undefined primitive (e.g., Emery 1996, Gordon 1999, Parman 1998), which has its pitfalls: a feminist argument that derides imagination as a male product; astute study of e.g. George Eliot and Emily Dickinson would help obviate this fallacy. Sources which laudably grapple with the ideas of imagination include Durand (1969), anthropologically, Iser (1993) in literary criticism, and, excellently, Lazrothes (1999) – a professor of anatomy and surgery! And, earlier, Ruskin (1856), Coleridge (1817), Hume (1739–40), and, of course, Aristotle.

Other Linguistic Preliminaries

We should think about our imaginative individual in general terms of communication. Here we have the imagination of the speaker – a man haranguing a crowd, or talking to his dog: the imagination of the addressee, he it a beloved woman or a bored audience; the imagination that is built into the message, be it the implications of a death sentence or the unexpected
outcome of a recipe for Irish stew; the imagination that inheres in a code, be it the semantics of a crusade against evil or the personal code of poet Yeats within the Irish poetic tradition; the imagination at the social or cultural level, the Irish imagination. One could conjure up other factors but in any case we are dealing with very complex processes between many factors. Note that in every case above the poetic, rhetorical or otherwise verbal matters of seeing and writing – the ones Roman Jakobson focused on – have been conjoined with and contextualized within acts of the imagination; the imagination word coupled with the imagination deed.

Within the communication model just sketched, the message and the imagination within the model of tropes; the components of image, metaphor, synecdoche, and metonym (Hume 2001: 301 and passim). Let me ground these five classes of tropes with six quick as a flash literary illustrations: the dramatic irony of Sophocles's Oedipus; the image of Dante's yellow rose at the end of il Paradiso; the synecdoche of the elders with voices like crickets on the wall of Troy as they evaluate but never describe Helen; the formal trope of the lines that run 'Let the water and the blood, From thy wounded side which flowed' in the great hymn, 'Rock of Ages'; or the chiasmic orchestration of Homer's Iliad; and of course the global metaphor of Shakespeare's 'ripeness is all.' To these purely verbal examples could be added any number from architecture, athletics, political action, or music: the chiasmic organization of Mozart's Magnificat, for example. Tropes, like language itself, can be the ornaments of the imagination but are also integral to its inner core.

A Basic Assumption
Perhaps my most basic assumption is that the imagination is primarily located in the individual. This individual, far from being alienated, solipsistic or negatively 'romantic,' grows and lives in lifelong dialogue with the minds and bodies of others where being there together is essential albeit often not enough. In other words, the imagination, while basically individual, is always quintessentially dialogic, just as all truth is dialogic, if only potentially and subconsciously so. This dialogic nature of the imagination is enhanced rather than diminished by the sine qua non of uniqueness and creativity. One value of thinking in terms of the uniquely creative individual is that it leads us to ask: what are the meanings and emotions, not just of renowned figures like Thoreau, but of Tom, Dick and Harry in the structures of society and the paradigms of culture? Even the garbage collector has genius.

I take the imagination in a full sense that prioritizes the drives of the body; as Camus put it, 'I write as I swim, my body demands it.' I also envisage the imagination of this same individual in a genealogy in the widest sense, in a local and national history, in a language and a culture. The imagination is fully meaningful in contexts that range, for example, from an extended family to a lost family member to the essence of an imagined god. Beyond these things there is also, metaphorically speaking, the collective or popular imagination, the French imagination, the imagination of a people said to be peculiarly imaginative: the Irish, even what Boas, in the German Romantic tradition, called 'the genius of a people.' At this level of group or society or people the imagination can mean what is held in common by all or at least most of the participants, or it can mean a community, as imagined by one or more individuals (Anderson 1991; Coleman 2003: 178–80).

The dialectic between the individual as both unique and dialogic also raises larger questions of how the imagination is constrained and channeled in ways that are common to all mankind just as it is fed and fired by universal emotions of jealousy and sympathy, fear and communis. Be we humanists or anthropologists or both we must negotiate between the local and the universal, the situated and the unsituated.

Four Dimensions:

(A) Extension
What is the form of the imagination, if indeed it has a form at all, because, to begin, there is no limit to what the human mind can imagine. No matter how far the imagination goes there is always a farther horizon that beckons or repels. These infinitudes extend outward into time, space and similar worlds as we imagine them and, in the other direction, into the nooks and crannies of our interior ultimateity. The imagination is thus like the Pascalian infinitudes of outer space and time that stretch back into the immemorial past and forward into unknowable futures – except that instead of Pascalian's thinking reed confronting these twin metaphors of death we have both infinitudes within the mind of the thinking reeds that we are, in what is a fateful reflexivity.

The imagination in its extent is thus a galaxy or the universe itself with its big bangs and black holes – apt metaphors for a great love or other consuming emotion that may hurtle us into the total night of suicide or may carry us along on a tidal wave of ideas.

The awesome and in principle unlimited power of the imagination has led some, notably poet Wallace Stevens – the ultimate poet of the imagination – to say that 'They say that God and the imagination are one,' which more or less agrees with Benedict Spinoza's idea that the basic property of God is infinite extension. The argument in terms of the infinite extensionality of the imagination, in any case, concurs with the Chicago physicist who averred that the human mind is more complex than the physical universe in which he is so expert and at home. Far be it from me, however, to flagrantly use jesuitical or rabbinical or is it socratic sophistry to convert this largely agnostic or even atheistic audience. My remarks here are
more immediately pointed at seeing individuals and cultures, not in terms of the finitudes of classical social and anthropological theory, but in terms of a more promising and open-minded vision. As an anthropological giant of yesteryear used to say: 'Culture is what people do, and what they say they do and what they say they should do', to which we can add 'what they could do, what they say they could do and what they say they should if they could' – the whole realm of the contingent and the possible in the individual and cultural imagination.

(B) Depth
The master concept of the imagination, if it is a master concept, cannot be conceptualized without that of depth, but since the very idea of imaginative depth is controversial, when not rejected outright, let me ground it in three interrelated ways to an irreproachable empiricism. This empiricism can be telegraphed as follows: the climactic instant ('the moment of truth'), the stratification of memory (e.g., 'deep memory'), and differential intensity (e.g., 'life under the gun'). It is not a matter of 'romantic' or Buddhist philosophy but of common experience in all cultures that certain instants or even minutes and hours bring consciousness to a point and that they are marked physiologically; the ultimate empiricist, William Labov, used as an eliciting device for unaffected speech as part of his brilliantly successful study of social dialects, the recall by his informants of personal tragedies. It is similarly not a matter of the philologist and his beloved Old Irish glosses but of common experience in all cultures that memory is layered in various ways which can be chronological or personal or both combined; as poet Osip Mandelstam once said, the texts that live in your imagination forever are ones that you read early or internalized in a permanent way; here the Bhagavad Gita and Bill Mauldin's wartime cartoons about Bill and Joe rub shoulders on your bedside shelf. Last, it is not just a plank in a social psychology that certain spans in the life of an individual or a group are marked, often scarred by continuous if intermittent intensity, be it your night before the gallows, or the Gypsy holocaust or the long march on Bloody Sunday in Derry. These three kinds of imaginative depth, 'the moment of truth', 'deep memory', and 'life under the gun', are facts of life for mankind and they reduce to an absurdity the points of view where all things are equal, that is, equally shallow, in cognitive and perceptual experience and in the imagination.

(C) Levels
While infinitely extended in principle, in fact the imagination is limited, blocked or channeled in some ways; the lines of the imagination can or could extend forever but they never go in straight lines. The imagination is limited, for example, by direct or indirect experience, even in the case of fancies and fantasies that flow seemingly unchecked or disconnected from any actual event. No matter how far-fetched or unreal or unimaginable the imagination, it always uses the materials of experience. This tension between infinite extension and the limitations of the finite has many ramifications; for example, it has been doubted that the image can be formed from ideas – which doubt should be immediately dispelled by Einstein's prediction that light curves or by dozens of Emily Dickinson poems that move from the abstract to the concrete. Of more than such historical interest is the epistemological gap, however relative, between raw sense experience and abstract cognition. Imagination theorists have tended to hierarchize between the raw and the ethereal, insisting on a relative priority where one is input to the other, a set of bleeding and feeding relationships. At one of these extremes the senses are said to provide input to the memory on which the imagination draws to sketch out images of its own. At the other extreme the imagination is so-called 'sensational sensation' from which are derived the images and ideas of art and science, language and culture. Rather than going down the primrose path of either reductionism, be it with Hume or Blake, let us recognize as most crucial the mediating role of the imagination; nothing but the imagination can mediate between the sensed realities of field experience – or a vacation in Ireland – and generalizing about them, be it through an ethnography or a novel. The only irreducible fact in the here and now, in the paintings of the Lascaux Caves or Joyce's Dublin, is the continuous feedback between all levels of the imaginative word and the imaginative act.

(D) Dynamics
One great methodological value of thinking in terms of the imagination is that it is inherently in flux, a process, a dynamics. One cannot think of the imagination as static as a fixed image. Even when it seems to be a fixed image, be it Rilke's statue of David or Blake's tiger paddling along rather tamely, the act of the imagination, the male body and the tiger in the mind of the reader and as a phenomenological fact is moving and animates, is flaming in the night: it is a situation where existence is purely and only processual, where, as the Gita says, 'That which does not exist cannot become and that which is not becoming has no existence'.

To rephrase the above, the imagination as we use it is not only the darling of Anglophone and German Romanticism but of the Romanticism of their respective social, literary and political ruling classes. It is, from one angle, which I will deconstruct anon, a bit of Euro-American exotica, a lexical counter in what the linguist Benjamin Lee Whorf called Standard Average English, SAE for short – not forgetting that he was mainly concerned with the way grammatical structures constrain and channel our thinking about space and time and the like. On the other hand, after this relativistic negativism, the general ideas of the imagination can be and are more or less conveyed in other languages, and ideas connected with the imagination as put to use by European and American scholars can lead to insights of great value as long as we do not squeeze Iroquois and Bantu nuance into the wine and butter presses of the imagination syndrome. The monumental ethnography, Bantu, by James Fernandez, is informed and implicitly organized in terms of Corder's Kuhla Kan, and by the general idea of the imagination, but it does not squeeze the Fang religious imagination into a procurstean bed of Standard Average European. As far as that goes, every one of our terms in anthropology and criticism are similarly limited, and by the time the Bantu and the Iroquois start writing ethnography or poems in Seneca or Fang, respectively, their terms are irreparably polluted in the same way. Despite all of its limitations, in other words, the idea of the imagination is peculiarly priceless because, as I will explain, it includes and transcends the realms of the cognitive and affective, of reason and emotion, of wit
and inspiration, of the cerebral and the corporeal, of mind and body.

**Two False Assumptions: Science, Poetry and the Imagination**

We cannot deal with the imagination realistically unless we throw away or at least heavily qualify the contrast, so habitual in anthropology and the humanities, of science versus art. What poetry or painting is more imaginative than archaeologist Alan Kolata carrying the Inca science of covered irrigation canals into the present day to increase tenfold the production of corn and potatoes in highland Peru? No poem is more imaginative than Harold Conklin's demonstration that only four general colours, roughly xantic, green-blue, dark and light, underlie the many dozens of surface colour terms in Hanounoń. or Victor Turner's almost contemporaneous demonstration of the semiotics of the three basic chromatic categories in Ndembu: red with menstrual blood, for example, light with semen, dark with faces. To this we can add Galileo's experiment for the speed of light or Watson's conceptualization of the double helix – and Rosalind Franklin's photographing of it. Such creation in science is maximally imaginative.

The basic fact is that volcanic forces of the imagination in any sense can be stimulated and strained to go to the fullest realization by having to work in terms of rigour. It may be the lines and matrices of the calculus or the lines and pitch matrices of Tang Chinese poetry, or the musical depths of J.S. Bach or the syncopated rhythms of a Hottentot musical ensemble. The vague or uncontrolled, on the other hand, is usually minimally imaginative when not, indeed, an insult to the august powers of the imagination. In sum, I would call false the conventional dichotomy between the putative rigor and reason of science versus the imagination as quintessentially poetic and vague.

Pursuing this vein, there is such a strong tendency and tradition to think of the imagination as uniquely connected with poetry in a generic sense that a number of serious qualifications are called for. In the first place, it is true that the poet's relation to nature and society or his analogies and associations are first cousin to anthropology and perhaps matrilateral cousin at that, but to proclaim that poetry is anthropology and anthropology is poetry is a theoretical copout as are all such rhetorical equations of two things that differ significantly from each other. Similarly, prophetic vision is surely one of the most essential and exciting forms that the imagination can take, but no more than the scientific illumination when, in the middle of a hot soak, you – that is, Archimedes – realize the law for the displacement of liquids and run naked down the streets of Syracuse shouting *eureka*. The age-old and false antithesis in aesthetics between art as imitation and art as imagination is rivedal to everyone's detriment in the false confrontation already noted above, of anthropology as description and analysis versus anthropology as imaginative hypotheses about the possible or about how natives in another world imagine such hypotheses. Rather than getting entangled in the 'isms' of the schools let us simply recognize that the fecund concept of the imagination has been mainly conceptualized in the humanities, particularly poetics, but that its natural scope is over all fields of human life, particularly its creative moments.

A Historical Retrospect: Bucking and Treasuring Tradition

Having proffered thoughts of my own, let me point you toward some theories of the imagination, all of which have distinguished pedigrees. From Plato and the Upanishads to Vico and Kant and down to this day, the imagination has variously been equated by various thinkers or obsessively associated with at least eight concepts that are unquestionably akin to it, and here is the laundry list: 1) analogy, notably the metaphor in many vague senses; 2) art and the aesthetic, also in comprehensive senses; 3) the emotions, feeling, and affective life in general; 4) the image and the representation of images; 5) the poetic and the literary broadly conceived; 6) the subjective versus the objective, the rigorous and the exact; 7) synthesis as contrasted with analysis: 8) and, last and least, with the sublime, be it à la Longinus or Kant.

All eight of these equations and associations, on the one hand, are realistic and have diagnostic or interpretive value, and have indeed fed into the cornucopia of ideas surrounding the imagination that we are graced with today, and that we can disregard or trash only at our intellectual loss. On the other hand, any one of them, taken with the usual exclusivity, will naturally blind our eyes to the others – and to other phenomena that are widely ignored or at least neglected such as the component of wildness and, more important, the act, the pragmatics of social and political engagement.

The past study of the imagination, to continue, has also been saddled with a host of antitheses or binary oppositions, all of which, again, have some value, but none of which merits the status of an absolute. Of these well-known oppositions I would single out at least eight that are at once insidious and suggestive and these are: 1) primary versus secondary imagination; 2) the imagination versus the Anglophone notion of ‘fancy’; 3) the passive versus the active imagination; 4) the reproductive versus the productive imagination; 5) the simple versus the fantastic imagination – one that I find particularly charming; 6) the materialist versus the idealist; 7) the idea versus the image; 8) Ruskin's suggestive trichotomy between the penetrative, the associative and the meditative imagination, and indeed more which, as is inevitable, intersect in various ways both with each other and with the eight concepts on the preceding page.

Many of these oppositions are governed by a visceral, vague, or at least intuitive dichotomization between sensation in some sense and the imagination in some sense: as Aristotle put it, ‘All sensations are true but most imaginations are false’ (1957: 159). Let us, however, eschew the also Aristotelian fallacy of roughing out a concept by defining the words used for it in one language and counterposing this to semantic neighbours, here judgment, knowledge, creativity, intelligence, mind, opinion. Similarly problematic albeit suggestive is the Renaissance (e.g., Shakespearian) ‘five faculties’, where imagination is nestled among memory, judgment, fantasy, and common wit.

In the first section of this essay I have tried to etch out a possibly imaginative, even novel way of thinking about the imagination, often exploiting one or more of the equations and binary oppositions just itemized above with what I hope to have been the right mix of reverence and irreverence. While these diverse dialectical relations lead to vital insights they tend to obscure the more
fundamental truth that the imagination works as an intermediary, or catalyst at all levels. And it catalyzes in all contexts from my own illegal crossing of the Czech border guided by the stars to the stars that guided Odysseus on his raft to poet Yeats hiding his face in a crowd of stars to Thoreau or the Chinese poet Du Fu speculating on the triangles created by two widely separated spouses, friends or lovers gazing at the same star – probably Venus, to an astrophysicist calculating the distance of a star with all the multimillion dollar technology at his disposal. The imagination is the great connector, the great lubricant, and the great catalyst.

A Provisional Summing Up
After scraping off the barnacles of conventional meanings and speculating on some new and also fruitful ones, it remains to etch out major areas where the imagination is uniquely at home, where we can explore it and sense it out. These areas of the imagination are, to begin, where conventional categories and paradigms are lent new life: the uncanny, the marvellous, and the wildness of Hamlet and the Iliad, the imagination finally is at home in revolt and protest of all kinds, from Thoreau camping out at Walden Pond to young people confronting the nightsticks of the Chicago police and devastating bail; their acts in favour of peace and against war were supremely imaginative. The imagination, in sum, is most at home in the creative word and, as much, the creative act or deed. To paraphrase one of my sources, the imagination is turbulent, strong and unyielding, as difficult to subdue as the wind.

I am arguing that this turbulence and strength are more fundamental than the strict factors of a logic where the imagination creates a meeting between East and West and other twins and excluded middles. The imagination here would call on a genius both liminal and transcendent – such as Thoreau’s – that crosses boundaries of logical categories and resolves logical contradictions. But while truthful and indeed of hoary antiquity, this logic is less central than that of wildness that I tried to adumbrate above with deliberate vagueness.

After exploring a meaning of the imagination that could be called Dionysian, even prophetic, let us turn to another that is equally fetching and to which I would ask you to subscribe. Or does the imagination mean only one thing? What we call the imagination can also be a process of creating or making whole (which includes of course creative understanding and reception). This second imagination is the mental energy or force that integrates, harmonizes, organizes, and orchestrates, that may ‘dissolve, diffuse or dissipate’ in order to recreate or, when this become impossible, it struggles to balance, adjust, unify (Coleridge 1997: 175). These integrative acts of the imagination, be they verbal or physical, bring together components that are imperfect, mere fragments, and make them into wholes that they may well be ‘perfect in their imperfections,’ as Stevens has it but may also be as perfect in their perfections as Hamlet or Michelangelo’s Pietà. This second aspect of possibility of the imagination, while usually couched in positive, aesthetic and verbal terms, can work just as powerfully in negative, ethical or behavioral ones, as will be expanded on below. This second aspect was brilliantly formulated early on by Coleridge (ibid. 97), who coined for it the name ‘es-eplastic’ (Greek eis-en-plasticin), ‘to shape into one,’ and has been enriched recently by Fernandez’s idea of ‘to return to the whole’ (1986). This second aspect, to complete the circle, we could call the Apollonian imagination.

Practicum I: The Imagination in Word
Having heard about some aspects of imagination theory you may wonder, as in the poem by Robert Southey, ‘But what was the good of it after all, quoth little Peterkin? Why that I do not know said he, but ’twas a famous victory.’ So let us make a 90° turn from our famous victory – or is it an orgy of ideas? – to illustrating the imagination in word and deed, in word, to begin, through a dramatic case of intertextuality that involves two of the most imaginative texts in world history: Henry Thoreau’s Walden and the East Indian Bhagavad Gita. As representatives of these triumphs of the imagination I will limit myself to two examples of their deep poetics, and then to some of the rhetoric that is consistent with that poetics – as a sort of preamble to the role of the imagination in political action. Let us eschew both the Kanti slumine and Anglophone ideas of fancy and, on the contrary, urge that the idea of the imagination is partly tested and given special validity in the cauldron of politics, of political engagement, action, and activism, from which it should never be cut off.

The Gita and Walden
A word of minimal introduction is called for as we make the heralded 90° turn on two wheels into questions of imagination intertextuality. To begin, Henry David Thoreau lived from 1819 to 1862, most of the time in the village of Concord, MA, where he worked as a surveyor and a pencil-maker while crafting a book of essays, a seven-volume journal and a tetralogy, of which the best known and most imaginative is Walden, A Life in the Woods. Walden, the major American work of letters, is a series of meditations on nature, political economy, raising beans and how to live and how to die. I take it that this classic text is at home among you in Ireland, not only because what it says about civil liberties has taken root here, as realized on Bloody Sunday, but because it inspired one of William Butler Yeats’s greatest poems, ‘I will arise and go now; and go to Inisfree… Nine bean rows will I plant there’, and so on. Walden in its eighteen chapters of poetic prose reflects enormous erudition in Western and East Indian writing, and a deep internalization of the greatest book of Hinduism, the Bhagavad Gita.
The Bhagavad Gita, in turn, was composed and inserted about 300 AD into the world's longest epic, the Mahabharata. It consists of four-line stanzas involving the predicament of a young prince who is loath to slay relatives and teachers in the opposing battle line; in the course of eighteen books of divine poetry, Lord Krishna gives about seven good reasons to stand up and fight and entangled with this are meditations on the cosmos, human nature, and how to live and how to die. The fascinating historical fact is that the event of the year 1843 in little Concord was the advent of the Gita (in the Wilkins translation) into the hands of the great philosopher, Ralph Waldo Emerson, who loaned it to Thoreau who read it and internalized its meanings while living by Walden Pond. This is not a case of borrowing—genres don't borrow—but of interaction between two high-flying imaginations: at scores of points throughout the text Walden is harmonic with the Gita. Let us look at three moments in this interplay (two of which have not been dealt with before or even noticed by the host of Thoreau and Gita scholars).

The Imagination in Poetics: Lists and Climactic Metaphors

Both of our texts share scores of tropes from the universal, cross-cultural repertoire or reservoir where, for example, thoughts are clouds and desire is fire. Yet some of them are not universal and are shared by Walden and the Gita. One is the list, which in the Gita may run to over 100 items when, for example, the attributes of Krishna are described. Walden, similarly, has dozens of long lists running to twenty or more foods or flowers. Many of the chapters in Walden are organized as lists—‘Winter animals,’ ‘Winter visitors’—and the book as a whole is to a large degree a list of lists; the trope of the list, a kind of metonym, also deeply influenced Thoreau's contemporary, Walt Whitman, ‘the poet of inventories’. But what is most striking about this trope in this case is how, after a long, relatively non-analogical list of sentences or paragraphs of descriptive, meditative or didactic text, there comes a transition into a climactic metaphor: for example, after nine stanzas on the indifference to opposites comes a great Gita list that Thoreau liked: whether seeing, hearing, touching, smelling, / Eating, walking, sleeping, breathing, / Talking, excreting, gasping, / Opening the eyes and shutting the eyes, and then the metaphor:

Casting (all) actions upon Brahman, Whose acts abandoning attachment, Evil does not cleave to him, As water does not cleave to a lotus-leaf. (V. 10)

Climactic metaphor is thus synergistic with cumulative sequencing. To take a second example, after nine criteria for one who is ‘steady of insight’ (prajjana), the Gita concludes with:

And when he withdraws, As a tortoise his limbs from all sides, His senses from the objects of sense, His mentality is stabilized. (11. 58)

The Upside Down Tree

Perhaps the most curious and diagnostic metaphor in all of Walden occurs near the end of chapter nine with its local yarn of a yellow-pine many rods from the shore of White Pond, the tip of which could barely be discerned, widely thought to be ‘one of the primitive forest that formerly stood there’ (133). On being taken out when the ice was thick Thoreau's raconteur ‘was surprised to find that it was wrong end upward, with the stumps of the branches pointing down, and the small end firmly fastened in the sandy bottom... there were marks of an ax and of woodpeckers on the butt...' There follow two paragraphs on the purity of White Pond, which harbor back to sentences preceding the Yellow Pine on 'the purity and bluish-green or glaucous color' of the White and Walden Ponds.

What is the source of this upside-down yellow-pine and what does it mean? At one level of deliberate mystification we cannot know and are not meant to; as with 'the hound, the bay horse and the turtle dove,' the signified cannot be recaptured (Johnson, 1987). At another level it is an intriguing bit of local history that, like a piece of amber, completes the jewel chain of lakes, 'great crystals on the surface of the earth'. At a third level what Thoreau calls Yellow-Pine (actually a White Pine) is simply a quaint local tale. At a fourth level, it will remind some readers and Thoreau of the Tree of Knowledge of Good and Evil in Genesis and Paradise Lost, or the World Tree in many mythologies, Indic and otherwise, and perhaps even the Old Norse Tree of Knowledge on which Odin hung. Which brings us full circle to our primary problem: the tropological intertextuality between Walden and the Gita.

At a fifth, equally mythological level the upside-down yellow-pine is an arcane but recapturable allusion to the beginning of chapter fifteen of the Gita. In answer to Arjuna's question at the end of chapter fourteen, Krishna says that the man who has surpassed material nature serves him alone, emblem of the immortal (110). He then continues in fifteen, and I quote:

The incorruptible being is likened unto the tree Ashwatta, whose root is above and whose branches are below, and whose leaves are the Vedas. Its branches growing from the tree (are the material) qualities, whose shoots are the objects of the organs of sense, spread forth some high and some low. The roots which are spread abroad below in the regions of mankind, are restrained by action. Its form is not to be found here, neither its beginning nor its end, nor its likeness. When a man hath cut down this Ashwatta, whose root is so firmly fixed, with the strong ax of disinterest, from that tree that place is to be sought from which there is no return for those who find it… (Wilkins 1959: 111)

Thoreau must have been enchanted by this Gita tree and the apparent contradictions from stanza to stanza between roots that grow up and then down and branches that are below, then spread, some high some low, and the key idea that cutting through the tree, specifically its roots, with the axe of disinterest will give one access to eternity. This poetics of a concealed mythology is part of a rhetoric that converts humble and local things like a night in jail for not paying one's poll tax and hence supporting the Mexican War, into what Thoreau, speaking of the Gita, as noted above, called 'a
stupendous cosmogonal vision’ which only could have been learned from the most trivial experience.

The Lily-Lotus of Purity

The lotus, symbol of purity not only in the Gita but other Indian classics that Thoreau was absorbing, recurs at key points throughout his work – but as a lily. A remarkable passage ten pages into A Week climaxes a listing of ten riverine flowers (and their ten colours) with the water lily, ‘the queen of river flowers which under the flake of morning sun can open as fields of white flashing like an unfolding banner’ (that it was missing then, it being September, illustrates the author’s figure of the missing signifies). Yet more conclusive: on the last page of Slavery in Massachusetts Thoreau finds the first water lily of spring, ‘… an emblem of purity…it suggests what kind of laws have prevailed longest and widest’. Not limited by the Gita’s laconic, poetic compression, Thoreau spells out the analogy as an allegory: the lily is purity, courage and sweetness in human affairs whereas the slime and muck underneath stand for the ‘obscene and baseless’ politics of the Missouri Compromise and the pro-slavery politician Steven A. Douglas. The Indic lotus, obviously not his sole inspiration, reinforces the lily of our Judeo-Christian tradition and beneath their considerable differences as symbols in their respective contexts there is a near identity of rhetorical function: to stand for purity and cognate absolute virtues.

Climactic metaphors obviously are not unique to Thoreau or the Gita; one is reminded of the great yellow rose at the end of the Divine Comedy, or the Cross of Gold at the end of W. J. Bryan’s pro-silver speech. It is not the abstract idea of the climactic metaphor but the peculiar content and associations that bridge between the American and Indian poets.

Practicum II: From Poetics to Political Rhetoric

The foregoing examples of the Gita/Walden poetics are partly political, as we just saw. Let’s now turn the corner completely into the basic issue of an imaginative tropology that is designed to persuade – riding on the ancient but valuable dichotomy between poetics as the art of expression of the heart and soul, and rhetoric as the art of persuasion for better or for worse. In Thoreau’s directly political writings we find the figures just dealt with and many others, such as the denial of opposites, still orchestrated with elegance but fired now by moral outrage. Here are some examples.

Four of Thoreau’s political essays are wrapped up with or pivot on powerful, focusing metaphors: Slavery in Massachusetts with the lily of political purity, already discussed; ‘Paradise (to be) Regained’ with complex analogies between physics and ethics where the light of the sun ‘is the shadow of God’s brightness “who is the light of the sun” and, we may add, the heat of heat’; ‘Resistance to civil government is structured in terms of an analogy between a night in jail for not paying one’s poll tax and a Dantesque descent into a political economic inferno and then a final ascent into intimations of a political paradise (Wood 1981); in ‘A plea’ John Brown hanged is Christ crucified. ‘These are two ends of a chain which is not without its links’; ‘Life without principle’ ends with political morbidity as dyspepsia, which no doubt amused his small-town audiences.

‘Politics is as it were the gizzard of society, full of grit and gravel, and the two political parties are its two opposite halves – sometimes split into quarters, it may be, which grind on each other. Not only individuals, but states, have thus a confirmed dyspepsia, which expresses itself, you can imagine with what kind of eloquence.’ Climactic analogy, explored and honed in Walden and his nature writings, and inspired by the Gita, appears as a finalizing, poetic thrust within the argument of a rhetoric.

A conclusive example occurs at the summit of ‘A plea for John Brown,’ where Thoreau collocates and mixes three violent metaphors one after the other over ten lines and these are: 1) ‘No doubt you can get more in your market for a quart of milk than for a quart of blood, but that is not the market that heroes carry their blood to’; 2) ‘when you plant or bury a hero in a field, a crop of heroes is sure to spring up’; and 3) the charge of ‘700 automaton brigadiers sung by a poet laureate is a less memorable feat than the charge of John Brown against the legions of slavery’, alluding to Tennyson’s ‘charge of the Light Brigade.’ Thoreau, like Shakespeare, not only does not ‘block that metaphor’, but mixes them with wild abandon (Pesmen 2000: 289–295). Yet ‘A plea’ escalates further to a giddy sequencing capped with a metaphor that verges on catachresis:

I do not wish to kill nor to be killed, but I can foresee circumstances in which both these things would be by me unavoidable. We preserve the so-called peace of our community by deeds of petty violence every day. Look at the policeman’s billy; and handcuffs! Look at the jail! Look at the gallows! Look at the chaplain of the regiment! We are not hoping only to live safely on the outskirts of this provisional government. So we defend ourselves and our hen-roosts and maintain slavery. (Thoreau)

Practicum III: From Political Rhetoric to Political Action

… the moral imagination discovers the moral order mainly through narratives of exemplary action rather than on engraved commandments from on high. (James Fernandez)

Thoreau’s activism, consistent with the demands of Lord Krishna in the Gita, has been alluded to here and there above. From early on his writings are salted with political protest and informed by covert political agendas – witness the scores of lectures, and lecturing is activism – on environmentalism and ecology, the abolition of slavery, resistance to colonialism and imperialism, the defence of civil liberties and the respect of individual conscience, the dangers of autocracy and mob rule. An awesome catalogue of engagement for a man who was primarily and most of the time a poetic writer and a naturalist.

Thoreau’s lectures are, however, more than balanced by activism in a physical sense that merits a review of eight down-to-earth anecdotes that concern the abolition of slavery and the failed attempt by John Brown to start a rebellion of slaves by seizing the armory in Harper’s Ferry. These anecdotes are: 1) in 1844, when the Concord authorities refused to ring the town bell to summon the citizens to Emerson’s epochal speech for Emancipation in the West Indies. Thoreau ran to the
church and did it for them; 2) in the 1840s and 1850s the Thoreau home was ‘a nest of Abolitionists’, a station in the underground railroad, and Thoreau repeatedly risked arrest to help Black men to get to Canada; 3) on July 12, 1846, he spent the eventually famous night in jail for refusing to pay his poll tax and so support the Mexican War; 4) through various acts he opposed the Missouri compromise and the Compromise of 1850, particularly their rules for the return of fugitive slaves such as Sims in 1851, ‘a perfectly innocent man’; 5) he opposed the Kansas-Nebraska Act of 1854, particularly its fugitive slave section and the return of runaway Anthony Burns (May 24, 1854): Thoreau and fellow radical Abolitionists connected to the Boston Liberty Party printed, wrote, and gave speeches, including Thoreau’s fiery ‘Slavery in Massachusetts’; 6) Thoreau met John Brown in Boston in 1858 when the latter was collecting rifles and money, heard his speech and eventually conversed with him at length during his visit to the Thoreau house; 7) for the day of Brown’s execution on December 2, 1859, Thoreau, despite widespread hostility, organized a memorial service; 8) after the execution, when one of Brown’s men returned ‘crazily’ to Concord, Thoreau took him to the railroad station and sent him back to Canada. We need to look at the concreteness of these anecdotes because of some critics’ opinion that Thoreau was ‘not political,’ and the theories in parts of anthropology where rhetoric is emasculated by being cut off from ethics.

Writing and publishing are action, political action in this case. Thoreau saw clearly what others only realized much later: the momentous import of Brown’s assault on Harper’s Ferry. He went into overdrive during a uniquely appointed ten days of writing. His journal ran: ‘I put a piece of paper and a pencil under my pillow, and when I could not sleep I wrote in the dark’, and ‘There was a remarkable sunset. I think the 25th of October… but it was hard for me to see its beauty then, when my mind was filled with Captain Brown.’ On October 30th the selectmen once again would not permit the town bell to be rung so Thoreau rang it himself before delivering ‘A plea’ to his citizens. The lecture was repeated days later in Worcester and before a huge audience in the Boston Temple of his Abolitionist friend Theodore Parker. It was ‘reported, reprinted, and discussed in all the Boston papers’ (Richardson 1986: 372). Like ‘The last days of John Brown’, which appeared the next year, it was published through many outlets and got enormous distribution in the Northeast. Its message was consistent with the Gita’s: violence is bad, but social evil is worse.

The thesis of ‘A plea’ was opposed by most fellow Concordians, even including, to some extent, fellow Abolitionist Ralph Waldo Emerson, by the great majority of other Abolitionists including William Lloyd Garrison, and by anti-slavery liberals such as Abraham Lincoln – all of whom saw Brown as a threat to law and order in civil society. Of the ‘secret six’ who had staked out Brown with arms and money, three fled the country, two were jailed and one was put away in an asylum for paranoia. Thoreau, in collusion with ‘a band of felons’ and also subject to prosecution for treason, was in fact ‘in danger of his life’ (Reynolds 1998), not only from the government but from mob action. But he kept putting his spoken and written word into the fray and saw to its publication, assisted by Elizabeth Peabody and other Abolitionists. His lectures and his writings, his rhetoric, during and after 1859, did more than any other single factor to interpret and conceptualize the meaning of John Brown to fellow Americans so that, as the hymn goes, his truth went marching on, to Appomattox and the end in 1865.

Epilogue

… for this reason, therefore, the description of the dunghill is pleasing to the imagination. (Ralph Waldo Emerson)

Thoreau’s activism in word and deed illustrates the main features of the imagination that I have advanced above. They extended to the Civil War and their implications are still extending today, in many countries. They involve many levels of imaginative depth, coming from and agitating the deepest wellsprings of motivation and ideology, not just in Yankee Concord but in the caste and class systems of the United States and elsewhere. In India, for example, Mahatma Gandhi, who already knew the Gita well, of course, read and internalized Thoreau’s ‘Civics through Solitude’, and through Salt’s superb biography, the anarchical, anti-authoritarian gist of Walden. He profusely acknowledged his indebtedness to both sources during the long years of the Indian independence movement, when he read and memorized one stanza of the Gita every day. In the United States Martin Luther King, Jr., leader of the civil rights movement, was inspired by both Thoreau and Gandhi for ideas on civil resistance, non-violence, and democratic liberation during the civil rights movement of the 1960s. Today, in the 21st century, defenders of civil rights against the Bush administration cite Thoreau in court. So when we say or sing that the soul – or is it the imagination? – of John Brown and Henry David Thoreau go marching on it is but a poetic phrasing of the abstract criterion of infinite extension.

Thoreau’s work incarnates and exemplifies all the other specific senses of the imagination that were articulated above: in the uniqueness and creativity of the individual, both in his theory of independence and his eccentric defence of civil liberties; in bridging the gap between art and science, both in his poems and his contributions to natural history and ecology; in exemplifying all the dimensions of imaginative communication and the tropes of this world; above all, its spontaneity, unconventionality, irreverence and rebelliousness, and what above is called ‘wildness.’

Yet our imaginative acts also include those of The Seven Sins, be it the pride of Lucifer, or his lusting after the Virgin Mary, the wanton destruction of bombed out cities or the perversion of young minds by the fiendishly ingenious devices of the media. This potential of the imagination for ethical black and dark greys as well as dirty white and lily white, for the brilliant tactics of pro-slavery ‘Stonewall’ Jackson and the equally brilliant anti-slavery activism of Henry Thoreau, brings us back to the suggestive ambiguity of the Han Chinese semiotics with which we began long ago above, the idea that ‘reality is dangerous enough’ – and so leaves us with an unresolved dilemma, probably the dilemma of what has here been dubbed ‘imagination theory’: how to reconcile the ‘eternal imagination’ that transmutes experience into radiant beauty with the equally eternal imagination that invents varieties of torture, fratricide, devastation and death, including their most banal forms.
References


Looking back on some dead world that looks so new: the idea of the U.N. in the run-up to the invasion of Iraq

Steve Coleman

Grasping ‘the imagination’

In this paper I would like to address a range of questions about the nature and role of the imagination. I would like to highlight the thought of philosopher, Charles S. Peirce, who developed an unusually complete theory of semiotics, reasoning, and the human community. Peirce was a leading, if under-appreciated, theorist of the human imagination. As Vincent Colapietro has shown (1988, 1989), Peirce was a champion of the role of unique individual imagination, while also showing the absolute continuity of individual thought and that of the human community. For Peirce, people who build castles in the air do not, for the most part, accomplish much, it is true; but every man who does accomplish great things is given to building elaborate castles in the air and then painfully copying them on solid ground. Indeed, the whole business of ratiocination, and all that makes us intellectual beings, is performed in imagination. (Peirce 1931–1958: 6.286)"}

Seen as a type of interior faculty, an aspect of an individual person, the imagination is part of his or her emotional and/or rational capacity. Here, Peirce reiterates one of the most usual common-sense interpretations of the term imagination, in which something like a detailed blueprint is constructed entirely in the mind—a coherent, determinate image is constructed through the free play of the imagination. But such a view is at odds with the way Peirce actually represents imagination in most of his writings on the subject. Peirce denies any opposition between imagination (‘fancy’, ‘musement’ etc.) and ratiocination. Reason is an aspect of imagination rather than the other way around, and the two can in no way be seen as opposing forces in human nature. In fact, Peirce's departure from standard philosophical common-sense notions is more radical than this, extending to his semiotic conception of the image itself. If by image one means something determinate, like a photograph, Peirce doubted 'whether we ever have any such thing as an image in our imagination' (ibid., 5.300). Instead, he supposed, the imagination is populated with much more complex figures, which are far more indeterminate than actual images. The general import of a novel, play, symphony or just one's immediate everyday situation is apprehended as a complex feeling or emotion, which the human mind apprehends as a simpler totality, the possibility that a series of phenomena are connected. Peirce calls such a flash of insight an abduction.

When a man desires ardently to know the truth, his first effort will be to imagine what that truth can be […] there is, after all, nothing but imagination that can ever supply him an inkling of the truth. He can stare stupidly at phenomena; but in the absence of imagination they will not connect themselves together in any rational way. Just as for Peter Bell a cowslip was nothing but a cowslip, so for thousands of men a falling apple was nothing but a falling apple; and to compare it to the moon would by them be deemed 'fanciful'. (ibid., 1.46)

Because abductions begin as feelings, imagination is always embodied:

The first proper significate effect of a sign is a feeling produced by it. There is almost always a feeling which we come to interpret as evidence that we comprehend the proper effect of the sign, although the foundation of truth in this is frequently very slight. This 'emotional interpretant,' as I call it, may amount to much more than that feeling of recognition; and in some cases, it is the only proper significate effect that the sign produces. Thus, the performance of a piece of concerted music is a sign. It conveys, and is intended to convey, the composer's musical ideas; but these usually consist merely in a series of feelings. If a sign produces any further proper significate effect, it will do so through the mediation of the emotional interpretant, and such further effect will always involve an effort. I call it the energetic interpretant. The effort may be a muscular one, as it is in the case of the command to ground arms; but it is much more usually an exertion upon the Inner World, a mental effort. (ibid., 5.475)

Imagination is linked to the first stages of a train of thought, as a sign of possibility, the vague supposition that a certain state of affairs may be the case. Peirce often speaks of the imaginative state as dream-like; 'a symbol, in itself, is a mere dream; it does not show what it is talking about' (ibid., 4.56), and it will not, until it gains some sort of connection— an indexical link — to the rest of the universe.

Imagination is usually associated with images, however complex, and with the iconic sign in general. But Peirce also hypothesised two other sets of sign-types, that is, indexical and symbolic signs. An iconic sign is grounded in its resemblance to any possible object, and a purely iconic sign resembles only itself— a pure dream-image. Indexical signs are grounded in their contiguity to their objects—in extreme cases, indexes register only an 'outward clash' —this direct consciousness of hitting and of getting hit enters into all cognition and serves to make it mean something real (ibid., 8.41). Such a collision could not happen without the symbolic realm. Symbols are signs of habit, propensities to think or act or make connections
between different realms of experience. Normally, only when established habits (as expectations) are interrupted are we conscious of ourselves qua selves:

We separate the past and the present. The past is the inner world, the present the outer world. Now, this joined with feeling (which it involves or requires) might be called consciousness and would be the world, were it not for the phenomena of error and ignorance, which force us to reflect that there were two worlds in that twosided consciousness. This consciousness furnishes all our facts. It is this that makes them facts. (ibid., 8.282)

Supposing matter to be but mind under the slavery of inveterate habit, the law of mind still applies to it. According to that law, consciousness subsides as habit becomes established, and is excited again at the breaking up of habit. But the highest quality of mind involves a great readiness to take habits, and a great readiness to lose them... (ibid., 6.613; cf. Colapietro 1989)

Experience consists in this breaking-up of habits, and the doubt thereby engendered is a vital aspect of imagination. Although we can imagine our way into doubt,10 ‘[a] true doubt is ... a doubt which really interferes with the smooth working of the belief-habit’; true doubt, which always arises outside the self, is the primary spur to imagination (5.510). Likewise, ‘all doubt is a state of hesitancy about an imagined state of things’ (5.373n).

A fully functioning symbol includes icons, that is, qualities predicative to certain objects, and indexes, through which a developing sign is (potentially) grounded in a larger exterior context. Because symbols are grounded in habit, they are potentially subject to self-control. They ‘grow’ in meaning; Peirce is fond of pointing out that a simple term like ‘electricity’ means much more now than it did to previous generations (ibid., 5.313; 7.587).

Any symbol actually used to refer to an object will have an indexical aspect to its use, and, insofar as it conveys any information, will have an iconic aspect as well:

Just as a photograph is an index having an icon incorporated into it, that is, excited in the mind by its force, so a symbol may have an icon or an index incorporated into it, that is, the active law that it is may require its interpretation to involve the calling up of an image, or a composite photograph of many images of past experiences, as ordinary common nouns and verbs do; or it may require its interpretation to refer to the actual surrounding circumstances of the occasion of its embodiment, like such words as that, this, I, you, which, here, now, yonder, etc. (ibid., 4.447)

We would benefit, therefore, from a closer study of how the iconic, indexical and symbolic aspects of meaning work together in actual events of sign usage, in other words, in social, cultural and political history. The term imagination properly encompasses the concerted actions of all of Peirce’s sign-types. By so considering it, we can see that the life of ‘imagination’ is lived not only in the head of the solitary dreamer but also, essentially, in the world; imagination must be embodied and must, eventually, become generalised through some sort of human community. Peirce takes great pains to point out that the great majority of semiosis is social in origin and locus. Thus a scientist can be such only as a (potential) member of a community of investigators, and her scientific ‘mind’ is located as much in the instruments and experiments of her laboratory, and indeed, in her writing paper and inkstand, as it is in her ‘mental faculties’ or even in her brain. Human imagination needs ‘the outward crash’ – to break habits of thought – as much as it needs organised conventional symbolic systems or indeed, ‘the play of musing’ of the creative dreamer.

Imagination in crisis

What, then, of social imagination, of human thought and creativity in the world, in history? I would like to turn to a recent crisis, certainly a crisis of imagination or a conflict between two worlds of possibility, or possibly between more than two. I refer to the run-up to the war in Iraq, which saw large portions of the world’s population at odds with their own political leaderships. Among the most intriguing of the immense flow of discourses which circulated in the first few months of 2003 was a seemingly pathetic series of email petitions, meant to be forwarded to one’s correspondents and then to the United Nations, calling upon it to oppose the war:

Today we are at a point of imbalance in the world and are moving toward what may be the beginning of a THIRD WORLD WAR. If you are against this possibility, the UN is gathering signatures in an effort to avoid a tragic world event.

Please COPY (rather than Forward) this e-mail in a new message, sign at the end of the list, and send it to all the people you know.

If you receive this list with more than 500 names signed, please send a copy of the message to: uniewash@uniewash.org

Even if you decide not to sign, please consider forwarding the petition on instead of eliminating it.

As well as swamping its computer systems, these petitions seem to have embarrassed the UN, which posted the following message on its website, pointing out that the UN’s constituency is its member-states, not individual persons:

*** Note to Web Site Visitors:***

The UN is NOT involved in soliciting or collecting such petitions. We would suggest that since it is member governments of the UN who will decide on whatever action occurs in various situations, citizens should contact their own government. Member states of the United Nations decide on the policies and programs of the organization. Citizens wishing to express their views or concerns on any issue, such as international peace and security should consider addressing their views first to the officials of their own government. The General Assembly is the main deliberative body of the UN, where all member states have one vote, and where issues relating to peace and security, admission of new Members and budgetary measures are decided by a two-third’s vote. The Security
Council with 5 permanent and ten rotating member states has primary responsibility for the maintenance of international peace and security and has the power to make decisions binding on all members of the organization. Security Council Decisions on major issues require nine votes, including the concurring votes of all the permanent members: China, France, Russia, the United Kingdom and the United States. The 10 other current members of the Security Council are: Angola, Bulgaria, Cameroon, Chile, Germany, Guinea, Mexico, Pakistan, Spain and Syria.

Your inquiry and interest in the work of the United Nations are appreciated.11

Let us leave aside for the moment the fact that millions of voters felt disenfranchised by the actions of their own governments in supporting the US administration's drive to war, and saw the UN as a court of final appeal — a perception strengthened by the UN's role in Iraqi weapons inspection, and the reluctance of certain governments (notably the UK's) to go to war without a mandate from the Security Council. I am interested in the elegant responses to these sentiments penned by Perry Anderson (editor of the New Left Review), which castigated the anti-war movement for its naivety regarding the UN:

The United Nations is not a seat of impartial authority. Its structure, giving overwhelming formal power to five victor nations of a war fought fifty years ago, is politically indefensible: comparable historically to the Holy Alliance of the early 19th century, which also proclaimed its mission to be the preservation of 'international peace' for the 'benefit of humanity'. So long as these powers were divided by the Cold War, they neutralised each other in the Security Council, and the organisation could do little harm. But since the Cold War came to an end, the UN has become essentially a screen for American will. Supposedly dedicated to the cause of international peace, the organisation has waged two major wars since 1945 and prevented none. Its resolutions are mostly exercises in ideological manipulation. Some of its secondary affiliates — Unesco, Unctad and the like — do good work, and the General Assembly does little harm. But there is no prospect of reforming the Security Council. The world would be better off — a more honest and equal arena of states — without it. (Anderson 2003)

For Anderson, the UN Security Council was only a 'portable ideological screen for the initiatives of the single superpower' (Anderson 2002: 7). His views were oddly in harmony with those of senior Bush advisor Richard Perle:

Saddam Hussein's reign of terror is about to end. He will go quickly, but not alone: in a parting irony, he will take the UN down with him. Well, not the whole UN. The 'good works' part will survive, the low-risk peacekeeping bureaucracies will remain, the chafferbox on the Hudson [sic] will continue to bleat. What will die is the fantasy of the UN as the foundation of a new world order. As we sift the debris, it will be important to preserve, the better to understand, the intellectual wreckage of the liberal conceit of safety through international law administered by international institutions. (Perle 2003)

Perle and Anderson both argue from 'realist' positions against the same popular 'fantasy' — that the UN could be 'the foundation of a new world order'. As Anderson put it, there is only one world order — that imposed by the US:

No international community exists. The term is a euphemism for American hegemony. It is to the credit of the Administration that some of its officials have abandoned it. (Anderson 2003)

For Perle and Anderson, the 'idea' of the UN has no relation to its actual function or powers. In this analysis, 'imagination', as ideology, conceals real social relations while appealing to or creating false dream-images in the minds of a gullible populace. But there is another way of approaching these matters, possibly no less cynical but leaving room for some hope: that these images are promissory notes issued by states to their populations. Thus, it was exactly the idea of 'the international community', as embodied in the UN, for which people fought and died to bring the Second World War to a close:

The United Nations was a real entity during the war, not a spin-doctored slogan offering a gullible public the promise of world peace after the conflict. The allies fought the war as the United Nations and created organisations in its name and on its foundation. (Plesch 2005)

Perhaps this 'UN' — the entity to which the Axis powers surrendered, was a bit of both. As a Peircean symbol, it "indicated" (had as its object) the entity officially founded in San Francisco in 1945, but its "meaning", that is, the interpreters it generated, embodied 'the promise of world peace'. Perhaps even the most ideologically distorted uses of symbols carry potentially disruptive entailments, promises which may get called in at moments of crisis. Thus, even as the great powers were setting up the post-war world system and laying the foundations of the Cold War, they found it necessary to appeal to the idea and image of world peace, in order to secure the allegiance of their own populations.

Leaving Perle and the Bush administration aside, the crisis of the UN and international law was a crisis of imagination. Anderson maintained that

... if the movement is to have staying power, it will have to develop beyond the fixations of the fan club, the politics of the spectacle, the ethics of fright [...] Resistance to the ruling dispensation that can last has to find another, principled basis. [...] current debates so interminably invoke the 'international community' and the United Nations, as if these were a salve against the Bush Administration. (Anderson 2003)

In a similar fashion to critics of the antiglobalization movement, Anderson looked to the antiterror movement for a blueprint, an image, of an alternative new world order — something along the lines of a Galileo, or a Dr. Faustus perhaps, working alone to hatch a new world system. I would like to suggest that historical movements don't work this way, nor does political imagination, at least when it is embodied in popular movements.

Anderson suggests that the UN is a woefully inadequate image (a spectacle) for a global antiterror
movement. But it became most powerful at exactly the moment the actually existent UN ceased to function, in the world of Perle and his ilk. Citizens of many nations put enormous pressure on their own governments not to vote in favour of war, that is, to not use the Security Council as a rubber stamp for the US war project. The Irish government continually reassured its public that only Security Council sanctioned war and the rule of international law was legitimate. When the US pressed ahead anyway without a vote, the Irish government, like that of Tony Blair, was caught out, violating its own explicit principles and the promises it made to its citizenship. The result was a tremendous crisis of legitimacy, as when (for example), the Irish government lamely explained that it could not endanger US investments by taking a stand or by denying the use of Irish facilities to the US military (cf. Allen and Coulter 2004). Needless to say, similar things were happening all over the world.

Perhaps the complexity of this historical moment can alert us to the role of the symbol in history: that the UN as a symbol contained what Peirce refers to as ‘powers’ that went beyond its immediate object (the actual existing UN of 2003) and any particular qualities one might have predicated upon it (its structure, degree of representativeness, etc.).

As ‘the portable ideological screen’ of the Security Council collapsed, exposing the democratic states’ betrayal of their own populations, what was left of the UN was what Walter Benjamin (1999) would term a ‘dream image’ discovered in its wreckage, an image very similar to that momentarily discovered by a handful of New Yorkers in the wreckage of the World Trade Centre: the image of ‘the community’, the unprecedented demonstrations of February 15th 2003 actualised these images, if only momentarily. Like those pathetic email petitions, these demonstrations momentarily called this other world of possibility into being, purely through the power of addressing it. In what Benjamin termed ‘a historical index’ – ‘the Then and the Now come together into a constellation like a flash of lightning’: Benjamin’s ‘figure’ (Cochran 1995) or ‘dialectical image’ could be read as a description of how Peirce’s ‘symbol’ unfolds in political and social history, as the playing out of human imagination – imagination the locus of which lies in the material artefacts of human history. Cochran refers to this as ‘actualisation’,

a process whereby the past and the present collide in producing new constellations of meaning … [S]teeped in idealism, it tends to name the process by means of which something hidden becomes visible or, to render a temporal version, the process by means of which something past becomes present. (Cochran 1995: 48)

Something of the order of practical action is required to actualise, or even to develop, the meaning of a symbol:

… a symbol, in itself, is a mere dream; it does not show what it is talking about. It needs to be connected with its object. For that purpose, an index is indispensable. No other kind of sign will answer the purpose. (Peirce 1976; cf. Colapietro 1988: 67)

This is why Benjamin insisted that it is only during political-historical crises that the dreams of the relatively powerless manifest themselves and develop. Popular movements advance by discovering and revealing connections between vague general concepts and aspects of events, in crises which they themselves advance or even bring about. The ‘actualisation’ of a symbol results not from its degree of coherence or completeness but from its degree of implication in ‘the outward clash’.

As Warner, Arendt, Derrida and others have noted, the United States called itself into being through a performative act, the Declaration of Independence, which constituted the citizenry of the US as a politically sovereign entity through its self-enunciation as ‘We the people’. This was an essentially indexical moment, but one with several entailments, not the least of which were several assumptions about what ‘the people’ consists of – what degree of cultural, social, religious, and ideological unity are necessary for the unity and coherence of ‘the people’.

The accidental genius of the antivax movement was its similarly constitutive, performative moment: it addressed the UN – not the actually existing UN of the Security Council or even that of the General Assembly, but a strictly non-existent though, at that moment, very real UN, the direct representatives and voice of the global multitude. By addressing this ‘UN’, people also performatively constituted themselves as – as what? Not as ‘we the people’ – this multitude was constituted by the unity of its adresssee rather than its putative unity as ‘a people’, let alone as ‘the people’. For Warner (2002), ‘publics’ (in the plural) are called into being through being addressed, in a type of discursive act which simultaneously creates ‘public’ discourses. These ‘publics’ are in principle unlimited in extent, but the characteristics of ‘public’ discourses and the material conditions of the discourse, in particular the presence of ‘publics’, lending them distinctive (and limited, exclusionary) voices (cf. Fraser 1990). The movements of 2003 lacked even this degree of self-specificity. Hence, the extraordinary diversity of the movement, it’s lack of coherence’ in the eyes of its critics – a strength rather than a weakness, as it kept all eyes focused on that which experts worldwide declared to be unrealizable – a real, democratic world order.

For a few months, this real but non-existent ‘UN’ (which ‘existed’ only as a sort of addresssee), with only what the New York Times referred to as ‘the second superpower’ — ‘world public opinion’ (Tyler 2003) behind it, became the most powerful player on the international political stage.

**Being stuck**

… the generalization of intellect and the more important generalizations of sentiment … It is the instincts, the sentiments, that make the substance of the soul. Cognition is only its surface, its locus of contact with what is external to it (Peirce 1976: 4:435).

Linebaugh and Rediker, in their book *The Many Headed Hydra*, tell the following story: In February 1803, Col. Edward Marcus Despard, condemned to death for advocating the overthrow of the British monarchy in favour of a republic, gave a speech from the gallows. Although he professed innocence, he declared himself ‘a friend to truth, to liberty, and to justice, a friend to the poor and the oppressed’.
Citizens, I hope and trust, notwithstanding my fate, and the fate of those who will no doubt soon follow me, that the principles of freedom, of humanity, and of justice, will finally triumph over falsehood, tyranny, and delusion, and every principle inimical to the interests of the human race (Linebaugh and Rediker 2000: 248–49).

Linebaugh and Rediker report that ‘at this significant phrase – “the human race” – the sheriff admonished him for using such incendiary language’ (ibid.). Note that the very idea of a unitary “human race” – now a truism – owes its reality in part to the struggle and deaths of people like Col. Despard. Peirce hypothesized that the symbol, as a general sign or idea, has reality but not existence (Peirce 2.292). Symbols influence actual existing events:

The words justice and truth, amid a world that habitually neglects these things and utterly deserts the words, are nevertheless among the very greatest powers the world contains. They create defenders and animate them with strength (Peirce, New Elements of Mathematics, 4: 243–4).

Symbols, as bits of living consciousness, have the power of growth:

A symbol is an embryonic reality endowed with power of growth into the very truth, the very entelechy of reality (Peirce NE: 4: 261).

How do symbols grow? There seem to be two ways of considering this. At various places Peirce gives an account of meaning in terms of a history of reference (as in the ‘composite photograph’ reference quoted above). In this case, the meaning of a symbol is ‘schematic’ (cf. 5.517) – a complex iconic sign. Here we may suppose, with Sapir, that such schemata are not fully conscious, and furthermore, that we are engaged in the business of trying to rationalize them; as Sapir says in the case of changes in the linguistic system:

These ‘drifts’ are powerfully conditioned by unconscious formal feelings and are made necessary by the inability of human beings to actualise ideal patterns in a permanently set fashion (Sapir 1985: 23).

The ‘drift’ of cultural symbols through history is partly motivated by their internal structures – the contradictions to which our ‘unconscious formal feelings’ respond. But such feelings must also be motivated by surprised expectations in a manner which directly reflects the way that experience and doubt foster ‘habit-change’ in the person – in fact Peirce denies that there is any substantial difference between ‘a man’ and a sign.13 In both cases, change occurs as a result of what Pesmen (this volume) refers to as ‘getting stuck’ – coming up against contradictions. In both cases, as well, our efforts to get unstuck are acts of the imagination as well as the will, and operate (sometimes inadvertently) to realize symbols. It is only this process of realization that gives a symbol its material (indexical) being and hence its ability to resist expectations.

As the case of Col. Despard demonstrates, this process is always potentially political, – a focus for human conflict and collective action. The mass demonstrations of February 2003 were a fine example of this, as opposing sides sought, not so much to define as to occupy what Silverstein (2003, 2004) terms ‘cultural concepts’ – the ‘messages’ which politicians and their opponents seek to embody and represent. Demonstrators in New York City saw the government’s anti-terrorist rhetoric as a means of stifling dissent, and engaged in a cat-and-mouse game with municipal and federal authorities. Dire warnings of impending chemical and biological attacks had been issued in the lead-up to the demonstrations, and citizens were advised to stay at home, insulating a room with plastic sheeting and duct tape. These efforts were undermined by a New York Times article which detailed exactly how difficult it is to kill large numbers of people with chemical or biological weapons (apparently, tear gas killed more effectively). On February 15th, many demonstrators adorned themselves with duct tape (in the form of gags, masks, and even epaulettes), mocking the rhetoric of anti-terrorism as US government snipers gazed upon them from rooftops. The state made every attempt to ensure that demonstrators got nowhere near the UN (originally proposed as the focus of the march), nor anywhere near the speakers’ platform at the conclusion of the march. It seemed as if the state’s goal was essentially to prevent demonstrators from ever seeing themselves as a single group (proposals for a rally in Central Park were likewise turned down). But the sheer numbers of people who turned up on the day overwhelmed both the march organisers and police, and the day descended into richly organised chaos. Marchers carried boom-boxes on their shoulders broadcasting up-to-the-minute reports courtesy of WBAI. Mid-town Manhattan became a giant human traffic jam as police impeded any direct movement toward the end-point of the demonstration. There were periodic break-outs through police barricades, enabling intrepid demonstrators to make short-cuts forward. But when we reached the vicinity of the platform, there was nothing much there, just the opportunity to stand in police pens (barricaded segments of the street) while listening to inaudible echoes from the stage. Escaping from this, attempting to walk to Times Square (subway stations had been closed), we discovered that the centre of Manhattan had been transformed into a giant meeting-room and salon for debate, as strangers discussed the day and the issues, complained about the cops, or debated tactics and goals. So this was ‘the new power in the streets’. Clearly, something was happening which escaped the intentions of everyone who was involved, whether they were organising the demonstration as a cultural ritual (Szerszynski 2002) or were trying to prevent or hijack this. Habits were being broken, doubts, fears and hopes realised.

But what was being born, discovered, imagined in this ‘laboratory’ of the streets? It is clearly too early to tell. The global anti-war movement remains stuck, having subsequently turned much of its efforts towards electoral strategies, in spite of persistent world-wide ‘democratic deficits’. The US administration and its allies are much more ‘stuck’, however, in a war which likewise defied their expectations. Meanwhile, world-wide sentiment has turned decisively against the war.

The imagination in power?

The aide said that guys like me were ‘in what we call the reality-based community,’ which he defined as people who ‘believe that solutions emerge from your judicious
study of discernible reality.’ I nodded and murmured something about enlightenment principles and empiricism. He cut me off. ‘That’s not the way the world really works anymore,’ he continued. ‘We’re an empire now, and when we act, we create our own reality. And while you’re studying that reality – judiciously, as you will – we’ll act again, creating other new realities, which you can study too, and that’s how things will sort out. We’re history’s actors [...] and you, all of you, will be left to just study what we do’ (Suskind 2004).

... what really provokes the most violent reactions on the part of the forces of order is precisely the attempt to make the invisible visible – the power of popular imagination to create new institutional forms – present not just in brief flashes, but continually. To permanently challenge the authorities’ ability to define the situation. The insistence that the rules of engagement, as it were, can be constantly renegotiated on the field of battle; that you can constantly change the narrative in the middle of the story [...] Direct action is, by definition, unmediated. It is about cutting through all such frameworks and bringing the power of definition into the streets (Graeber 2007).

One of the problems facing any attempt to theorize the imagination is that it seems to escape ‘ownership’ by either the dominant or subaltern classes – it is difficult to recruit ‘the imagination’ as a reliable agent for one’s own kind of history. In 2003, the imaginative prize was clearly taken by the Bush administration, if by ‘imagination’ we mean that admirably counterfactual construction of castles-in-the-air. But is that what imagination is really all about? In a famous paper of 1877, Peirce discusses four methods for ‘the fixation of belief’ – personal tenacity, public authority, deductions from a priori first principles, and ‘the scientific method.’ Reading it in the light of Peirce’s theory of the imagination, it becomes clear that what Peirce terms ‘science’ consists entirely in the organized attempt to encounter external factors the resistance of which may put oneself into a state of doubt, making oneself ‘stuck.’ ‘There must be a real and living doubt’ (5.376) in order to stimulate us to struggle for belief, to produce a new imaginative synthesis. The first three methods for fixing belief (which amount to a concise survey of recent US political debate) involve precluding this ‘living doubt,’ and thus hobbling the imagination. It is only in this sense that, as Graeber maintains, the imagination belongs to the subaltern, whose only field of action is the laboratory of the streets. And yet, such struggles rarely create new realities; rather, they cause general crises of the imagination, as Benjamin reminds us, and it is through these that new communal habits, sentiments, and concepts grow into realities.

We are in the midst of unspeakable ‘politics’ here ... it seems strange to me that any man of sense could think that any device could cure our condition of public health. The fatal thing with us, as it is with most peoples, is the dreadful ligireti of the people in regard to public affairs. I have a remedy for that. It is to start a certain movement which would of itself have a natural & inevitable power of growth. But I haven’t space left on my sheet, nor time left, to tell you what it is. Besides, why would you particularly care for it? (Peirce)\textsuperscript{14}

Endnotes

1 References to Peirce 1931–1958 are cited as volume and paragraph number.

2 ‘... a suitable line of reflexion, accompanied by imaginary experimentation, always excites doubt of any very broad proposition if it be defined with precision’ (5.507).

3 http://www.unicwash.org/unic%20w%20response%20to


4 ‘An indexical word, such as a proper noun or demonstrative or selective pronoun, has force to draw the attention of the listener to some heccepty common to the experience of speaker and listener’ (3. 460).

5 ‘Consistency belongs to every sign, so far as it is a sign; and therefore every sign, since it signifies primarily that it is a sign, signifies its own consistency. The man-sign acquires information, and comes to mean more than he did before. But so do words. Does not electricity mean more now than it did in the days of Franklin? Man makes the word, and the word means nothing which the man has not made it mean, and that only to some man. But since man can think only by means of words or other external symbols, these might turn round and say: “You mean nothing which we have not taught you, and then only so far as you address some word as the interpretant of your thought.” In fact, therefore, men and words reciprocally educate each other; each increase of a man’s information involves and is involved by, a corresponding increase of a word’s information’ (5.313).


References


In this article, I want to explore the role played by imagination in social action. Through the prism offered by Shakespeare's dramas and reflections made by present-day players of Shakespeare, the imaginative dimension of agency will be investigated. This is not to deny the profound importance of materiality; elsewhere I have made a case for a renewed attention to the mutuality of the social and the material aspects of social life (Hastrup 2005). It is rather to suggest that the distinctive human capacity for imagination contributes to the material realisation of particular worlds.

Agency is closely linked with subjectivity; in a recent article, Sherry Ortner proposes subjectivity as the basis of agency, making of the former a specifically cultural and historical consciousness (2005: 34) and reserving the latter to the domain of action that 'takes shape as specific desires and intentions within a matrix of subjectivity – of (culturally constituted) feelings, thoughts, and meanings' (ibid). While Ortner's general ambition to situate subjectivity within a larger social field rather than within the individual is close to mine, I am more than a little hesitant to separate meaning from action and to locate subjectivity with feelings, thoughts and meanings. As studies of violence have amply demonstrated, subjectivity and action are two sides of the same coin, closely linked (Hastrup 2003).

The concepts of agent and agency are usually deployed in debates over the relationship between social structure and individual freedom; 'they also pertain, however, to the nature of individual consciousness, its ability to constitute and reconstitute itself, and, ultimately, the extent of its freedom from exterior determination' (Rapport and Overing 2000: 1). Again, consciousness plays an important part in defining agency, even where the key issue is the extent of individual freedom. I shall shun the debate on individual freedom altogether, because it makes no anthropological sense at a general level, only in the context of various situations – to invoke Malinowski's well-worn phrase – and even then it presupposes an untenable preconception of 'individuality' as somehow the opposite of sociality. Anthropologists know that there is no such opposition. Although individual consciousness is, indeed, individual, it is deeply embedded in collective images. Conversely, individual experience and thought cannot be reduced to the outcome of external pressures and social norms.

Michael Herzfeld (1997: 3) has explored the relationship between the view from the 'bottom' and the view from the 'top' in terms of cultural intimacy, dissolving the polarity between individual and society and replacing it with a view of their complex interdependence. One of the means by which cultural intimacy, or a sense of familiarity that installs a sense of 'us' into the individual, is achieved is iconicity – the creation of meaning through resemblance (ibid: 73). In this sense, the link between the one and the many is imaginative in a somewhat broader sense than implied by Anderson's notion of the imagined community (1983). As Herzfeld notes, Anderson's work does not show us how imagination works in the everyday, in practical life (Herzfeld 1997: 6). We still need to explore the simultaneity between concrete actions – that are always individual and unique – and collective images and horizons of expectation.

Imagination plays an important part in this. 'Imagination is an activity in which human individuals are always engaged; and it is through their imagination that individuals create and recreate the essence of their being, making themselves what they are, were and will become' (Rapport and Overing 2000: 4). Yet, again, even individual imagination is not outside of the social domain. It can be argued that humans are social beings by their very nature (Toren 2002), and – by extension – that it is existentially impossible for the human imagination to remain indifferent to the existence of others (Kearney 1988: 247). This has profound implications also for our notion of agency that cannot be exclusively tied to the individual, quite irrespective of the fact that it is of course the individual who materialises the action.

The link between agency and imagination has not been systematically pursued in an anthropology that has oscillated between methodological nationalism (or holism) and methodological individualism. While the former stressed wholeness and uniformity, the latter emphasized fragmentation and inconsistency in human action. My point here is that while we cannot reduce agency to structural contingency, we can also not reduce the social to the result of individual action. Neither has separate ontological status; in practice, they are intimately linked by way of imagination. In a sense we have to recapture the renaissance (humanist) point of honour, and its reclaiming of the imaginative powers of humans (Kearney 1988: 155). It was henceforth seen to be in the power of humans to create a world of original value – yes, a world – through their own agency.

The link between agency and imagination will here be explored through a theatrical world in the fashion of the familiar anthropological strategy of thinking through ethnographies of diverse kinds in order to make a more general observation on social life. Drawing upon a larger work of mine (Hastrup 2002a), I shall demonstrate how individual characters are always formed in response to the social environment and how agency is contingent upon the imagination of
a particular plot. By way of concluding, I shall question intentionality as the source of agency and suggest that while intentionality may be important in the representation of an action, it cannot be claimed to be its source.

### The Illusion of Wholeness

Since the pioneering work of Émile Durkheim, anthropologists have been preoccupied with the tension between the whole and the parts, or between society and individuals. The focus has shifted between being predominantly on the system or on the person, and one or the other has been deemed logically prior, but the tension itself never goes away – in the realm of anthropology that is. More recently it has been suggested that ‘culture’ simply provides a set of shared images, values and modes of speech to which individuals may attach their individual understandings (Cohen 1994). Within any social field both the shared images and the diversity of individuals presents itself as a fact. In this section my focus is mainly on the shared framework of individual action.

In a precursor to this paper I have discussed ‘illusion’ as a key to understanding how society is realised in the actions of people engaged in a gradual fulfilment of what they see as the current and relevant drama (Hastrup 2004b). Illusion is to be understood in the theatrical sense of ‘suspense of form’ rather than a suspense of plot; what makes the drama gripping (for both players and audience) is not uncertainty about outcome but the process of getting there. Until the drama is over, the participants act in the interest of completing the story. This also applies to other social spaces, where agents gradually realise what they perceive as the ‘play’ through their actions. They play their parts in a plot – which also transcends them because of a consciousness of being linked in space and time to other people, other moments, and other stories. Conversely, the self emerges as a character within a plot-structure that is always deeply social (Hastrup in press). Social reality is not reducible to either the whole or the parts.

The notion of plot-structure is originally owed to Aristotle, who in his work on drama simply defined it as the organization of events (Halliwell ed. 1987: 37). The plot ‘is the first principle and, so to speak, the soul of the drama’ (ibid. 38). For Aristotle, the plot structure is the organization of events into the whole, which is the overall representation of action. Plot is more than that, however, as implied in the notion of soul: ‘plot like an animal’s soul provides a play with its essential identity, function and purpose’ (Freeland 1992: 115). The wholeness of the play is installed in the plot and it is therefore only when the drama is over that actions and characters can be fully understood – in view of their complex implications. By stressing the pre-eminence of plot, Aristotle simply built upon the pre-eminence of action in real life (Freeland 1992: 112). In general, social agents do not act in their daily lives in order to portray themselves, but through their actions the ‘characters’ stand out, more or less clearly.

For the player, the connection is embodied; the (imagined) wholeness of the plot is present in the individual action. There is only one action at a time, a hypothesis of character, existing ‘on the interface between you and what the author has written’ (actor Simon Callow 1995: 164). Through the embodiment of the play, players may even get to know the individual characters better than the writer; the writer wrote the characters with all due concession to the plot, but the players are them (ibid.). The action is real in this sense, too. If it is an imitation of action, it is still an imitation in action, as well. The emphasis is on the making of the representation, not on representation itself. It is an activity that deeply affects the player for whom ‘imitation’ becomes a lived experience, as the actor Simon Callow has it:

Picasso says: ‘To imitate others is necessary. To imitate oneself is pathetic.’ And of course acting is an art of imitation, of qualities of action (the act), and the place where they match yours, to what extent it would be possible for you to look like/talk like/walk like/feel like that man. The actor, talking to another man, often begins to assume his accent. He is in a state of ontological flux.

(Callow 1995: 171)

The notion of ‘ontological flux’ implies so much more than simply switching between being oneself and impersonating another. For the actor, action is one whole thing, and there is little discussion of primacy of either action or character; both are constituted within a plot that lends both coherence and meaning to individual actions – while also achieving its reality from these very actions. The suspense of form premeditates a kind of cultural engagement – to use Michael Herzfeld’s notion (1997: 3) – that breaks away from any notion of cultural determination while also giving room for an illusion of wholeness that proves efficient. In the drama, the representation of action (the act), and the organization of the events (the plot), fuse and make one whole play, a world. This actually qualifies the nature of ‘imitation’ at a vital point. The play achieves its realistic effect not by copying, but by making the audience vicariously experience real actions as intelligible only by way of emplotment, or the making a whole configuration out of successive events (Ricoeur 1991).

In this way the plot serves to give form to human experience. Indeed, much experience passes unnotice as experience, if it has not been narrated (Bruner 1986). The brilliance of theatre is that it replicates experience and offers conventions of interpretation at the same time; it works, not by replication of experience, but by condensing it and adding the larger-than-life quality, which redresses reality (Dening 1993: 89). As Phyllis Gorfain has it in her analysis of Hamlet’s significance for the audience (and for anthropology): ‘Hamlet … brings us closer to the chaos from which it protects us, even while it displays the epistemological paradox it presumes: knowing through not knowing’ (Gorfain 1986: 217).

It has been suggested that Aristotle works on and is interested in a particular kind of ambiguity in action, not simply in the sense of choices being made, but also in the co-existence of two fundamentally different modes of capturing and individuating actions: ‘On the one hand, an action is the object of the intentional states of a deliberative and choosing agent; it is what we do in the sense that it is what we are about and what we take ourselves to be doing. On the other hand, however, an action is an act; it is what we do in the sense of what emerges as the result of
our intentional activity’ (Kosman 1992: 65). In tragedy, and in drama in general, what is revealed is the latent fracture between the two. This is at the core of drama itself; in real life also. Actions acted are in an important sense beyond control, because their full context escapes us; there is an excessive amount of future crammed into the present.

If drama works by its creation of a whole, it is noteworthy that we only become aware of it when it is gone: ‘It is only when the drama is over that actions take on their true significance and agents, through what they have in reality accomplished without realising it, discover their true identity’ (Vernant 1992: 36). Theatre allows us the luxury of experiencing a whole story, of seeing action in its total context, and thereby enabling us to understand the nature of motivation, which our daily life does not. So far from simply mirroring life at this level, theatre shows us what life and history is never yet: a whole. This is one element in the working of theatre, not least Shakespeare’s – tapping into human nature. As Herder exclaimed in 1773: ‘How Shakespeare feels the whole course of events in the depths of his soul and draws them to a close! A world of dramatic history, as great and as profound as Nature’ (Herder in Romantics, p. 43).

If theatre works by way of creating ‘possible’ experiences, it moves its audience by demonstrating the secret whole world beyond the visible and fragmentary one. This may be a source of unprecedented empowerment. As poetry may have its master tropes, so theatre may have its key expressions. In both cases the limits – of language or of ordinary bodily action – are continually altered. This is true creativity, a creativity that reveals. The practical mastery of employment on stage is what moves the audience – not by providing answers but by redirecting their own enquiries. It is for theatre as it is for the spirit séance studied by Schieffelin:

The performance is gripping not because of the vivid display of symbolic materials but because the symbolic material is incomplete. Reality and conviction reside not in the spirit's message but in the tension produced when something important seems clear, while, in fact, it is still ambiguous. It is the experience of inconclusiveness and imbalance that gives people little choice but to make their own move of creative imagination if they are to make sense of what is happening (Schieffelin 1993: 292).

I would like to take this point even further into ‘ordinary’ social life, suggesting that imagination is always at play when agents assess the possible meanings and courses of action to take from 'here'. The present is always inconclusive, and to act meaningfully, one has to imaginatively project oneself into the future.

In the general theatre of self, agency may take many possible forms. The sub-text of all performance is nothing but the unprecedented act itself. There is no pre-text for action outside its own reality. For the player of Shakespeare, the 'play is an arrangement of the words of characters to tell a story. A play is nothing but characters in action. There is nothing in the play but the characters. Every word that is uttered is uttered by a character' (actor Simon Callow 1995: 163). This is worth remembering, because it makes it strikingly like the cultural engagement mentioned above. Any viable notion of culture today is nothing but people engaged in motivated action; there is no culture apart from practice – including speech and silence. The motivation for action, however, transcends the moment and belongs to the anticipated closure of a particular plot (Hastrup 2004b). In a manner of speaking, the social space presents itself as a ‘whole’ through convergent imaginative projections that take on a reality of their own and thus become the frame of those very actions that materialize the illusion.

**Acting in Character**

With the above discussion of ‘the whole’ in mind, we shall now address the question of individual agency; individuals are never reducible to collective representations, yet they are parts of a whole. There is a profound continuity between selves and worlds in this sense (see also Rapport 1997: 47). People are linked in society for community by many chains of being that make up in a particular ‘theatre of action’ (Arden 1989: 25) – a social space in which everybody plays a part (Hastrup 1997). I want to emphasize the notion of playing a part, which is not the same as simply playing a role, although the theatrical metaphor in anthropology has often been used to signify just that. It is to be distinguished on two grounds. First, playing a part presupposes a whole – whether a story, a plot, a play, or a culture – without which no part is meaningful. Second, playing a part means becoming a true character, not pretending to be somebody else, as we saw above.

‘Character’ is a key word in any discussion of Shakespeare. Since the seventeenth century, critics have discussed the nature of different characters and their relation to reality. Among them, Samuel Coleridge expressed a general feeling, when (in 1813) he said that in Shakespeare’s ‘mode of drawing characters, there were no pompous descriptions of a man by himself, his character was to be drawn as in real life, from the whole course of the play, or out of the mouths of his enemies or friends’ (Coleridge in Romantics, p. 130).

‘What is character?’ the 18th century player Charles Macklin asked, and he ventured the answer: ‘The alphabet will tell you. It is that which is distinguished by its own marks from every other thing of its kind’ (Actors, p. 122). The character is unique, yet its distinction stands out only in relation to others; in that sense, all identities are relational (Hastrup in press). Literary characters are exhausted by the statements that concern them in the narratives or plots in which they occur; they are no more and no less than what is said of them (Nehamas 1985: 165). This has often been noted for Shakespeare’s characters, as well; there is no characterisation beyond what is needed for the action to convincingly take place. The players are left to fill in the rest, the invisible and the unknown – or, in other words, the gaps and inconsistencies in character are to be closed by interpretation (Kermode 2000: 35). This is one reason why the characters are so malleable, and why ‘skill’ is an essential feature of characterisation. It is not that character is less important for that, only that it demands an intense observation by the player. As the actor Patrick Stewart expresses it:
Character always matters. It's not enough to say that a speech is simply choric or descriptive. Although Shakespeare doesn't tell us what Grandpré had for breakfast or whether he was bottle-fed when he was a baby, he clothes the character in such rich text that an actor can find a variety of characters if he looks carefully enough. (In Barton 1984: 61–62)

It will be recalled how Aristole saw characterisation as subordinate to the plot structure. The goal of drama is to structure activities and events, not to describe a qualitative state. 'It is not, therefore, the function of the agents’ actions to allow the portrayal of their characters; it is, rather, for the sake of their actions that characterization is included’ (Poetics, Halliwell ed. 1987: 37; cf. Vernant 1992: 37). The plot unfolds before our very eyes, and the nature of the characters is established in the process. History itself can be seen as a plot-structured, made up of events and actions, including speech-acts – actions that are not made to portray the characters but who will characterise them as a matter of course.

In some cases, playing a particular character also shifts the judgement of the character around on the part of the player: 'If one were to judge Henry VI (Shakespeare's Henry VI) on his political astuteness, foresight, and courage he would come off very poorly. But as the actor playing Henry, the person trying to get under his skin, it seemed to me that his intentions were utterly honourable’ (actor Ralph Fiennes in Players 3: 106). In trying to make Henry human, by literally embodying him, the actor discovered that in fact he has human, with all the good and the frailties that entails. In the process of play-acting something more universal stands out: the agent is always in a state of ontological flux, as the actor Simon Callow said above. This state, highlighting the general nature of the self as a 'fluid sign' (cf. Daniel 1986), is deliberately entered and explored by the player, who teaches us what we only dimly know, that through our actions we contribute to the filling out of the gaps and inconsistencies in our own character.

To become a character is not simply a matter of the individual player finding his or her own feet to stand on; it is also a matter of character dialectic. Players of Shakespeare’s and other social dramas are not alone in establishing their identities on the stage. It is constantly modified by the presence and expectations of others, who cannot be ‘imagined away’, so to speak. This is also part of the players’ experience during rehearsal when they gradually “find themselves” in the play in relation to others. The way Hamlet is impersonated limits Ophelia’s freedom of interpretation. The relational identification of characters (the character dialectic) as well as the fusion of individual player and character (the embodied character) emphasise the undivided experience of action and meaning. Further, it substantiates the claim that being is becoming (Nietzsche 1991), and by the very fact of being a social body, the performing self is always in a process of becoming another (Ricoeur 1992). By playing one’s part, the whole changes – as does the player.

Double Agency
A theatrical performance has a particular liminal quality; it is a site of passage – between worlds, times and plots (Hastrup 1998). The ambiguity of the theatrical time-space has to be taken seriously, because it is populated with people who are highly ambiguous by being other than themselves (cf. George 1996: 21). In their state of ontological flux they are literally living the interim, and become different characters through their acts. This also applies to the dramatic characters themselves, being constantly caught up in their own acts. In Macbeth, the main character is caught up in the history he himself has orchestrated, and his command ‘Let every man be master of his time’ (III. 1. 40) gradually loses conviction. If the question for Hamlet is to be or not to be, for Macbeth it is to kill or not to kill. Macbeth finds himself in a state of liminality, or interim, as he says (I. 3. 154). In Julius Caesar, Brutus expresses it like this:

> Between the acting of a dreadful thing
> And the first motion, all the interim is
> Like a phantasma or a hideous dream.
> (Julius Caesar II. 1. 63–65)

Who does not know this feeling from experience? Few have planned a murder, but many would have considered whether to apply or not to apply for a particular job or some such thing and found themselves in a temporal crisis akin to Macbeth’s: ‘a moment that seems exempt from the usual movement of time, when the future is crammed into the present’ (Kermode 2000: 205). The interim is saturated with ontological uncertainty. Acting temporarily solves it.

Acting, however, also shifts history around by forgoing a particular history and thereby impeding whatever other possibilities that once were. Macbeth comes to realise this; by having orchestrated a particular chain of events, he himself is trapped in a history beyond his control – and far beyond those dreams he had of grandeur and power.

> Had I but lived an hour before this chance,
> I had lie’d a blessed time; for, from this instant,
> There’s nothing serious in mortality—
> All is but toys; renown and grace is dead;
> The wine of life is draw’d, and the mere lees
> Is left this vault to brag of.
> (Macbeth II. 3. 89–94)

The players of Shakespeare also become centres of real worlds of their own making. The player and the character fuse into one person on stage; it is a profound experience. Playing Hamlet, John Gielgud remembers:

In rehearsing Hamlet I found it at first impossible to characterize. I could not ‘imagine’ the part, and live in it, forgetting myself in the words and adventures of the character . . . It was not until I stood before an audience that I seemed to find the breadth and voice which enabled me suddenly to shake off my self-consciousness and live the part in my imagination, while I executed the technical difficulties with another part of my consciousness at the same time. (Gielgud [1939] 1987: 105)

This is an articulate double agency that is central to play-acting, and by extension to other social actions as well.
As Gielgud suggests, it is not always easy to become one with the act, and for some players the double agency is further troubled, as suggested in Frances Barber’s reminiscences of playing Ophelia in *Hamlet* (1984) with Roger Rees as Hamlet:

> As the scene proceeds and Hamlet becomes even more violent towards her, Roger clasped my face, spitting out all his accusations against women directly at her, implying that women, and particularly herself, are the direct cause of his troubled mind. (Frances Barber in *Players* 2: 143)

The switch between the third and the first person for Ophelia is matched by a switch between ‘Hamlet’ and ‘Roger’ for her adversary; this switch is significant. A similar experience is rendered by actor Ben Kingsley. Recalling his playing Othello, Ben Kingsley tells how it took all his physical and mental strength to maintain a passionate indifference that would release ‘both the character and I’. In one scene (IV. 1), ‘Othello and I feel such a crushing inexpressible pain that we attempt to leave the arena’ (*Players* 2: 176). The ‘we’ speaks for itself.

We are familiar with shifting pronouns in anthropology, and with the anthropologist finding her first person ‘I’ transformed into a third person ‘she’ in the field, where she is objectified by others (Hastrup 1987). Both Barber’s ‘Ophelia and me’ and Kingsley’s ‘Othello and I’ echo this, and it seems that in general the double agent evolves into a third person, acting on his or her own behalf, as it were, as a composite subject, a ‘we’. Listen also to Sophie Thompson speaking in two tongues about playing Rosalind in *As You Like It*:

> Rosalind was very broken, down to the last speech in the scene, and Celia said ‘Now go we in content…’ to stop me crying again. Rosalind has the idea of disguise, but at this point I felt very like someone who’s feeling down and decides that if they do a lot of cooking or decorating they’ll feel better’ (Sophie Thompson *Players* 3: 79).

The ‘I’ feeling and the ‘me’ crying cannot be kept at arm’s distance, even if ‘Rosalind’ can be observed as broken.

The peculiar fusion of character and personal feeling in acting is also exemplified by Michael Pennington, who having spoken about the nature of Hamlet’s part relates how, during the process of preparation, ‘my imagination contracted and the play seemed to burst out of our confining thought’ (my emphasis). As the rehearsal process moves on, so his confinement shifts from that of his own thoughts to the space left for Hamlet within the world of the play:

> I was beginning to taste the famous isolation of the part, feeling the emotional tides of a man adrift from the behaviour, the humour, the very language of his neighbours: a disorientation that in some equivalent way was beginning to separate me from colleagues and friends. (Michael Pennington in *Players* 1: 125)

The speaking ‘I’ here is a third person, built from the fusion between the player and the character. In the words of Richard Schechner, all effective performance shares a double negation: ‘Olivier is not Hamlet, but also he is not Hamlet’ (Schechner 1985: 123). Performer training focuses its techniques not on making one person into another but on permitting the performer to act in between identities; in this sense performing is a paradigm of liminality (ibid). Between identities, the performer acts as a double agent, lending strength from both.

This becomes all the more complicated, when Shakespeare already plays the ‘double’ card in a play, the doubling of identities, or the shadowing of others. This complication finds expression in the following passage by Sophie Thompson on her playing of Rosalind, disguised as the young man ‘Ganymede’:

> Rosalind knows about her double nature – as Ganymede and herself – but Orlando is operating on one level, playing a game with a young bloke who seems at times to be taking it all a bit too seriously perhaps. The costume allowed me to be fairly sexless. I only ‘acted’ in a fairly corny ‘manly’ way when I was with Silvius and Phebe, being affected. With Orlando I didn’t change my voice or ‘act’ as a man unless I felt she panicked somewhat, and she tended to when she lost her way a bit. He kissed me in the speech about orators… We were up against the left-hand side of the proscenium arch, and we wanted it to be somehow dangerous, with Rosalind cornered and her cover in jeopardy. In a lot of places I felt I could react directly as Rosalind rather than as ‘Ganymede’, having established Orlando’s belief in him. When he told me he had to go to attend the Duke at dinner I was speaking as Rosalind when I made it difficult for him… and Rosalind really meant it. (Sophie Thompson in *Players* 3: 81–82)

The complexity of subjectivity stands out quite clearly here; there is no well-bounded individual consciousness at play here. While the ambiguous characters in Shakespeare’s plays may not be typical of people in general, they do point to the complicated processes of subjectification by way of self-objectification – or reflexivity. In this process, there is one feature that we may perhaps single out as at least partly determining the choice between first or third person. Whenever physical touching is involved, it is difficult to speak of ‘him’ or ‘her’. Touch is experienced in the first person. By extension, being emotionally touched also hits oneself, in a way that belies being ‘another’.

This process of subjectification displaces agency from the player alone, to the player-cum-character on stage. The result is a double agent, able to act convincingly and consistently within two motivational spaces: the space of training and performative mastery and the space of the character. It is as if the peculiar quality of the stage as a site of passage has been internalised and reflected within the player. As agents, players are doubly ‘habituated’; if habitus is embodied history, so deeply internalised that it is forgotten as history (Bourdieu 1990: 56), the player must work on the basis of two kinds of habitus. One is acquired through bodily training, in which technical knowledge becomes incorporated to a degree that it becomes second nature (cf. Hastrup 1995b); the other is acquired through personification, by which the moral universe of the character is internalised and becomes the base-line of the acts. The fusion of the two ‘natures’ is what invests theatre with life.
This fusion is very demanding on the player, being half of the double agent, as the actress Penny Downie relates from her playing Queen Margaret in *The Plantagenets*, Adrian Noble's comprehensive adaptation of the three parts of *Henry VI* and *Richard III*:

‘O, you’re playing mad Margaret’ people would say to me when I was cast. I spent a lot of time scraping away the preconceptions, coming up against the huge ideas of the mind that created this part, this enormous arc of a role that moves from one play to the next. I know that I had to discover more of myself in taking on this role of a woman who tells us so much about things universal through her particular journey. Surely it is one of the greatest parts ever written. (Penny Downie *Players 3: 139*)

Discovering the character is a discovering of oneself. Strangely, this is also what I felt – vicariously – after having been played by somebody else in Odin Teatret’s production of *Talabot* – being a play based on my life-story, including my fieldwork in Iceland (Hastrup 1992; 1995a: 144–45). Just as I felt a deep sense of loss when I could no longer see the play, so players of Shakespeare (and others) may feel a deep sense of regret when their part is over. Summing up the process of creating Hamlet, the actor Philip Franks ends on this note:

There is another element to it all, however, which it is difficult to talk about without sounding pretentious, and this is the effect of carrying the part around inside you. Sometimes it is as if you are haunted, sometimes you feel that you are in possession of something so precious that you are the luckiest person in the world, and sometimes it is like having a tumour. The experience of not playing is the same: something has been cut away, perhaps something dangerous and ugly. But something of ineffable value has been lost as well, and after a while you begin to doubt whether you ever had it at all (Philip Franks in *Players 3: 200*).

The part, indeed, becomes part of the player – and not only of the play. It is not just a matter of actualizing one’s capacities, it is also a matter of acknowledging the subject’s multiplicity and fleetingness, the subject never being anything but the sum of its acts and their contents. ‘Each subject is constituted not simply by the fact that it thinks, wants, and acts but also by precisely what it thinks, wants, and does’ (Nehamas 1985: 180). Becoming and being are therefore mutually implicated. To become who one is, is to be engaged in a continual appropriation of one’s experiences and actions, and of enlarging the capacity for assuming responsibility for oneself (*ibid.* 190–191).

The general point is that ‘becoming’ does not simply evolve into ‘being’. There is no ‘being’, which is not also and at the same time ‘becoming’. Thus the double agent on stage is but a specific, and spectacular, instance of the general multiplicity of the subject. All humans are in some sense double agents, engaged in becoming what they are not – yet, but what they imagine they might become through their actions. In this sense, the analytical power of the notion of double agency is that it allows us to disentangle the empirical fact of the mutuality of the frame and the act, and their simultaneous realisation. For the player, an awareness of the frame (‘this is theatre’) is necessary for the engagement with particular characters. In general, an awareness of the context of the situation (including the expectations of others) is implied by any meaningful action. Subjectivity – if anything – is a capacity for seeing oneself within a larger frame, and acting upon it.

**Agency, Intentionality and Imagination**

Both the character dialectic and the double agency discussed so far vastly complicates the common conflation of intentionality and agency. Agency in this (conflated) perspective is a matter of being able to give a reason for one’s actions. Giving a particular reason for an action is rationalising it, and rationalisation makes up for an explanation; Davidson even maintains that rationalisations are a species of causal explanation (1980: 3ff). Looking at the drama as a whole, and the plot as prior to character, one becomes less certain of the usefulness of collapsing rationalization and causality in this way. Richard the Third, rationalised and propelled along by his thirst with his will to prove a villain, is a case in point. At one level, Richard willed the death of his brothers and nephews, as he willed the marriage to Anne, and his courtship to Elizabeth. The efficient cause may therefore be attributed to his will, and to his power to make others do what he wants; in this perspective, agency could be seen as purely individual and as closely connected to intentionality. At another, Richard’s plot may be seen as caused by his evil mind, which again seems to be spurred by his unfortunate deformity, and it may be rationalised with reference to his wish to make himself heir to the throne. Here will itself is rationalised with reference to an inner state and a set of uncontrolled desires. Yet rationalization and explanation belong to different scales, and none of them seem able to comprise both the final and the efficient causes of the action.

The problem is further illustrated by the fate of Macbeth, swallowed up in his own evil passions to become king, and propelled along by his ‘intention’ towards his own (unintentional) destruction. He is caught up in his own acts, for which he remains responsible but not all of whose consequences he willed. For the individual agent, a fusion between desire and judgement occurs, which collapses the double agent into one and motivates action by a combination of intention and imagined consequences. For a scholar theorizing about action, it is not sufficient to collapse justification and explanation; this would make the ‘reason’ for an action equal to ‘making a claim which, if true, would also verify, vindicate or support the relevant belief or attitude of the agent’ (Davidson 1980: 8). In other words, the agent’s own explanation would always be both necessary and sufficient.

Such a claim would fail to accommodate the question posed by classical tragedy as well as by Shakespeare, regarding the extent to which humans are really the source of their actions (cf. Vernant 1992: 38). Clearly, both Richard III and Macbeth are to some extent caught in their actions, and swallowed up by their destinies; yet they are also responsible moral beings. And this is not only something that relates to literary characters, whom the author can mould freely; we have seen how even the players of these characters...
become swallowed up in particular moral horizons and actions, once they take the internal perspective of the character. The attempt to prove that any moral (or other) justification for action will always conflate with the rational, epistemological explanation is bound to fail. Intentionality has to be separated from agency (Singer 1993: 44ff.). Intentional subjectivity resorts to metaphor, such as the metaphor of ‘will’, which paradoxically erases agency. The agent may refer to intentionality in describing the action, but it is a description that includes the consequence of the act, and hence cannot be taken as its cause. Attribution of intention provides a justification, while attribution of agency is an assignment of responsibility (Davidson 1980: 48). Agency, therefore, is not reducible to intentionality, however much this provides the agent with a metaphor for the act.

The inherent problem in many discussions of agency and will is the notion of will itself, it appears. One ‘wills’ so much for so many reasons, and within different moral horizons, that the concept of will itself is severely weakened – as a rational explanation for action. By itself, ‘will’ explains only a fraction of the course of events, be they on the level of biography or world history. Willing something, and not just willing is the key; and what one wants is not simply an ‘objective’, but a fulfilment of desires and goals that are imbued with emotional and moral values of which we are rarely (cognitively) aware. Indeed, awareness may result in willing nothing, as we know from Hamlet, because it makes us observant of the fact that there is no simple, unified goal of human action, no shared master motive that will eventually result in eternal bliss, if reason could only reign. In his case, anticipation looms so large as to prevent intention.

The holding back of Hamlet, in the face of his sure knowledge of his uncle's wrong-doings, has been presented as one of the great literary enigmas of the world (Slokh 1990: 63), and countless are the interpretations and deliberations on this enigmatic character, who seems to refuse all categories. Of course, Hamlet can draw his sword and kill Claudius, but in using his freedom of will and his actual possibilities for action to do one particular thing, he would jeopardise other possible routes to alternative goals that would afterwards call for different rationalizations. His ‘freedom’, in fact, is very limited in that sense, caught as he is, and like we all are, between personal possibility and historical perplexity, and burdened with a part of ourselves that we will never understand, a fraction of boundless and unknown desire. Like Macbeth, Hamlet is victim of a present in which too much future is implied – as are all subjects.

Agency, then, has to be divorced both from intentionality and from a view of the disengaged self. The former is at best a rationalisation, the latter a fallacy. No self can be disengaged from his or her own actions, and not even the most detailed rendering of an individual’s intention would take us beyond a description of the act. To understand agency, we can learn from Shakespeare and his players that all selves are committed to an imagined plot, of which they are only partly aware because it takes shape as they go along – the frame moves with the actions – and within the environment of which they become accessories to each other's fates. Within these constraints individuals are caught in a web of conflicting values and viewpoints that cannot be solved by appeal to rationality and individual intentionality alone. This is partly owed to the fact that social agents always act ‘between identities’, as it were; they are double agents, caught between the player as person and as character as we discussed above. When speaking of identities we have most often been victims of the objectifying propensity of language. We have understood ‘being’ as ontologically fixed – yet being and becoming cannot be separated.

The role played by language is significant also when it comes to the representation of action in speech and writing. I think we may add to our understanding of this feature if we consider the proposition made by Donald Davidson (1980: 43ff.), that the identification of an action involves what he calls a ‘third event’ – which is where irony, individuality and unpredictability reside. This third event belongs between intention and consequence and relates to a notion of agency that we have rarely discussed.

Davidson's example is the statement that 'Brutus killed Caesar by stabbing him'. It seems clear enough that the stabbing resulted in Caesar's death (thus linking agency to causality), but we still have that 'third event' whose relation to other elements of the sentence is unclear, namely the killing itself. Killing is not a description of the act, but a compound concept of intention and consequence of the act of stabbing. In fact, most actions are described in terms that include their consequences. This gives rise to a recurrent mistake:

The idea that under the assumed circumstances killing a person differs from moving one's hand in a certain way springs from a confusion between a feature of the description of an event and a feature of the event itself. The mistake consists in thinking that when the description of an event is made to include reference to a consequence, then the consequence itself is included in the described event. The accordion, which remains the same through the squeezing and stretching, is the action; the changes are in the aspects described or descriptions of the event (Davidson 1980: 58).

Once we speak of agency we incorporate a good many things that have little to do with the act, and much to do with ways of imagining oneself in social space in a constant process of reorientation through actual social performance. This is why agency is most often portrayed as intentionality.

Realizing the accordion between intention and consequence provides a first step towards an understanding of the creative play of imagination in the making of the self and in engaging the world. No actions – except primitive bodily movement – are describable without imaginative investment drawing heavily upon the illusion of the whole plot to which the action contributes and which of necessity includes the consequence of the act into its description. Adding to this the proposition that imagination is dialogic at base and thus includes ‘the other’ as a point of implicit reference (cf. Bakhtin 1984), agency is profoundly social and incomprehensible outside a framework that transcends the individual, but which is not, therefore, structurally determined. Agency is a name for the human capacity to engage in actions that are both unique and reflect the plot in which the agent plays a part. Like the river (allegedly) discussed by
Heraklitus, being both that which changes with the running water and that which remains constant as a frame, agency comprises both the unique actions and the shared sense of their being part of a more comprehensive historical current – that remains included within the acts.

Note

References

a. Primary sources (abbreviations used in text):

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Acts,


Players 1,


Players 2,


Players 3,


Romantics,


b. Other references:


Something is very wrong, and it's not just political. That's an introduction. Something's wrong. For example, I saw a woman squander an ironic impulse. I don't think she knows she failed. She heard a song and looked down on its lyrics or its sappy passé style. Her distance on it gave her power: it was so obvious that if she, the observer, re-produced that song, it would automatically be a scathing, multifaceted critique.

There's an assumption there about what it takes to be active: to turn an observation into some kind of action. So she performed a cover of that song, but all I heard was that lousy song again. She mistook her feeling of irony, of distance, for the ability to make something subversive. Her sense that she was safely outside the spirit of that song betrayed her, turned on her, turned her into just a vehicle for reproducing that same song.

Nothing perverts a nice critical impulse like having absolutely no idea of what's required to realize it.

Something like this runty stunted irony happens a lot in scholarly writing too. I can't really inhabit what I'm going to hope for in this paper yet, either.

We're not too talkative about how we think. I mean, if you can produce thoughtful, original, well-written papers, what's to discuss? But painting and teaching myself to paint, and then teaching myself over and over again, exposes what I do when I write as pallid, flabby, half-baked. My anthropological prose has a rotten attitude, says it doesn't NEED literary voices, because information can be expressed, it says.

It's formally arrogant: 'Dolling up your theory with cool guips and imagery and adjectives makes it go down easier, but art is art and articles are science, so give it a break.'

But when you read your conference papers aloud alone before giving them, don't you run into really smart sentences that taste bad on the tongue and are too embarrassing to say in full voice even in your room alone? Some people do, and maybe they'll understand why I want to teach that no-good rotten-attitude prose a thing or two.

When I paint, what I do teaches me that theoretical critiques probably fail to thrive to some extent because writers aren't writing.

But professionals don't talk about their writing as often as they might if they took it seriously. It's some stupid mystique. You teach students to reason and write, but the really good stuff, if you're talented, mature, talented, talented, talented, you figure it out.

But what if 'talented' people are only assorted arbitrary survivors of crippling endemic imagery of the creative process?

Starting from the premise that many of our images of creative process are dumb and cruel and keep us from making better stuff than we do, I'd like to show a few things about how imagination works through imagery, using hints I've gotten while making pictures and ethnography. I want to present these as implying some questions about our writing and possible kinds of engagement.

Here is a beginning stage of a painting:

![Image](d.pesmen ©2003)

It doesn't matter if it's good or not.

I've tried to lose a lot of my reverence for beginnings. Because, for one thing, every time I start out knowing what I'm going to do, I end up growing out of it and having to chop it up into bait for bigger fish.

Also, in my case, returning over and over again to a picture or piece of writing, over time, creates richness and dialogue the existence of which one working session can never suspect.

Butchering my own first ideas had to stop being so gut-wrenching.

Here's an early stage of another painting:

![Image](d.pesmen ©2003)
It’s pretty, it took ten minutes, people might like it. But 
what did I get out of it?

Honestly, not a hell of a lot. So, as my friend Tania 
says, it’s my picture, I can spoil it.

So I do.

WHY am I painting or writing anyway? To hopefully 
be told ‘That’s brilliant, that’s nice?’ That’s chickenfeed.

Seems to me that the way to get making art, dealing 
with form, to teach us and help us think starts by training 
ourselves to value the long and uneven process, and to 
stop worshipping some ideal of an organic artistic 
gesture that cannot be altered or challenged or edited 
without damaging the soul of the thing.

With anthropology too, sometimes you think you’ve 
got it, thought it, now just write it up. But should I be 
spending my time on precise, virtuous execution of 
something I’ve decided already fully exists? Seems a sad 
little satisfaction, when every beginning’s a newly-hatched 
animal no one has ever seen the adult form of, and 
anything can happen to that critter as it grows.

And I can’t rush it. I have to mess around. Drag 
together data and thoughts that feel related; see what 
crystals and fungus grow. If I’m not sure how something 
belongs, I figure, if it thinks it belongs, it can sit for a 
while.

This is plain old generosity and is what makes 
ethnography rich.

About 1.5 million people lived in the south-central 
Siberian military-industrial city where I did fieldwork. In 
her kitchen in that city where the radio was on because it 
was always on, a precise older woman rarely seen outside 
that kitchen was describing the vastness of the region, 
the wheaty steppe, bogs of booted people combing out 
cranberries – lingonberries; and the taiga, with its 
monster anthills, and a person’s soul doesn’t lose its 
spirituality when it interacts with nature, and the vitamin-
rich stoneberry at the sunny edge but not the other edge 
of the woods. Anna Viktorovna was dutifully listing fur-
bearing animals near Omsk:

fox
 lynx
 bear
 polar fox
red squirrels turning into grey squirrels,
grey hares becoming white hares . . .
MOOSE,

courtesy of Dr. Howard Lanham

GIANT RED MOSQUITOES, GIANT BITING 
FLIES

but we were talking fur-bearing …

and an announcer on the radio started
rhythmically 
chanting
Pushkin
Chekhov
Gogol’, Lermontov
Tolstoi,

and we cracked up when we noticed.

Why did I tell you that?

Dostoevsky did 4 years’ hard labour in Omsk in the 
1850s. He called it ‘a dirty little place. There are almost 
no trees.' He wrote that he had seen no nature in ‘a nasty 
little town that is dirty, military, and perverse to the 
highest degree.’

Well, I took notes on gophers, hospitality, buses, the 
other world, filthy limericks, honesty, guys in leather 
bounding guys in leather to a bloody pulp, and glassy 
furniture. When I was mean to myself, it seemed like 
butterfly collecting. Ethnographic generosity, but who gives 
me the right? Writing a book does certainly not redeem 
pacratish gossipboard about live folks.

It’s got to become FOR something, or I’m just a 
gossipy packrat.

What your writing DOES is your engagement. But 
what about that jolt of joy when you discover something, 
make a connection, solve a mystery or come up with a 
very good explanation?

Tania came up with this example: imagine you go into 
business with a good friend. At some point he seems 
odd. You start watching him, and after weeks of spying, 
 isn’t there a rush of triumph when your suspicions pan 
out, you CATCH him cheating you? But what you found 
is heartbreaking. It’s bad. And your elated righteous victory 
is bizarre, it’s ambivalent.

Satisfaction is no proof you discovered anything good.

Critique’s also got this vulnerable spot. It’s no big deal 
for any smart person to find flaws, and it’s no great coup 
to catch other scholars.

Did they sin? Do they deserve to be caught and tried?

Shooting down can be real academic flabbiness: 
negative work that makes you think you have 
accomplished something.
In research and theoretical work, pride often gets mistaken for joy. And just like that woman’s ‘performance,’ her defectively realized irony, when you inadvertently get a kick out of something you hate, the fatal flaw is that you didn’t figure out how to realize what you believe in, your engagement.

Nobody teaches us how, and the muscle is entirely undeveloped.

Usually when I stop to ask myself ‘Why is this worth my time?’ I have no idea. I get stuck.

‘Stuckness,’ writes Robert Pirsig, ‘isn’t the worst of all possible situations, but the best possible situation you could be in . . . it’s exactly this stuckness Zen Buddhists go to so much trouble to induce . . . Your mind is empty . . . Consider, for a change, that this is a moment to be not feared but cultivated. If your mind is truly, profoundly stuck . . . you may be much better off than when it was loaded with ideas . . . this stuckness is bound to disappear. Your mind will naturally . . . move toward a solution . . . The fear of stuckness is needless because the longer you stay stuck the more you see the [thing] that gets you unstuck every time . . . Stuckness is the . . . predecessor of all real understanding.’

I keep having NO idea what I’m doing, I repeatedly get stupid and lose what skills I had. On the one hand, of course I know something, yet I keep ending up dogpaddling in cluelessness. And I can’t just nod wisely in its general direction, I have to actually spend time being lost.

It never really gets pleasant to do. And it’s always surprising.

The most useful thing I have found to do is to convince myself nothing apocalyptic will happen if I stop rushing to be smart, stop assuming the answer preexists inside me and all I have to do is break through to it,

and sit quietly for a while,

and let my eyes humbly, non-judgmentally move through some MESS like the beginning above.

It took a week to get this far:

In 1987 I heard someone say in a class that Spencer ‘took that organic metaphor too far.’ Funny, I thought; indiscriminate metaphor . . . funny . . . I spent time crawling in the library stacks, rummaging in very old and dated and new style and rhetoric texts, and began to realize that, historically, few opportunities have been blown to call mixed metaphors disgusting-repulsive-monstrous-impure-nauseating-abominations-with-wings-from-another-trope-tacked-on.

I wrote a paper about mixed metaphor, showing related etiquettes of imagery in how sanity, morality, structures’ and systems’ virtue, and realism in pictures are judged.

I’d been suspicious of traditions of coherence for a long time, but before I read those grammar and style texts, I had no way of thinking about it.

During my Omsk fieldwork I spent my time tagging around after a family of both implied and hardcore images of human and national ‘souls’ (and coherent and incoherent buddies of theirs). I also noticed a lot of everyday things.
At home it’s harder to get excited by details. I’ve found that making collages helps. It’s training to be surprised by things that are easy to come by. One day after collaging I found this:

It’s like Epistemology 101: we don’t get off on many everyday things because of all that naming. Naming in league with:

- habit.
- jargon.
- ‘It’s an epaulet. Epaulets stick onto uniforms.’

But what if you had to say: ‘Well it’s this gold metallic or cloth pad thing about yea big with long snakies coming out all over it, and you walk around with THAT … ON …’ …?

‘It’s an epaulet’ blinds us to how bizarre they are and to what happens when your eyes slowly down-drift from that over-shoulder air … onto an epaulet (for a second everything changes).

See, here are some men, and something happens with your brain and your breath when you look at their clothes. Maybe it’s not sexual excitement.

What is that up in the background?

So, collage; I glue inappropriate things onto pictures for fun.

Things pasted on gently, humorously shake up the naming, and for a while other things get surprising too. I walk out of my studio and formerly invisible things show up.

Here are a lot of guys with that stuff all over them:

I’m wondering about extending these standards to philosophical writing. In particular, when is it enough to just say, wave at or label an idea, and on the other hand, what thoughts must be treated as just an embryo of an entirely unknown process of embodiment?
I found this Sergeant Major on the US Army website. So help me God I did not alter this photo. I call it ‘Eagle Attack.’

Look at that. ‘A bird on his neck’ is just naming it. Actually it’s genuinely strange.

The eagle does this to Sergeant Major Tilley by virtue of some kickass formal things that would do an abstract expressionist proud.

The bonus here is that these formal things are also chatting pretty friskily with figurative Tilley.

People come down, drink, and listen to ice float north. Dogs jump for the ice floes and drown.

I wasn’t doing ethnography about the obscene Russian word for prick or irradiated Kazakhstan trash tooling by on ice floes, I was writing about the mysterious Russian soul, but I was also accumulating stuff, growing a semi-chaotic sample context in which soul was imagined, practised and reproduced. That microcontext had to be written, and that kept me from cheating too badly; that is, it kept sprouting opportunities to rethink.

So I wrote about bad words, how people said bad words at the market where they sell fur next to forged and freeze-dried toxic coffee and misspelled English vodka labels on bottles with local technical stolen alcohol inside, but how notices at bus stops offer to trade a plumbingless house for a car.

And what happened to Soul, Mysterious-Enigmatic Soul, after months of this abuse.

Russians have long auto-exoticized themselves as others have exoticized them, and vice versa, as riddles wrapped in enigmas.

Two Omsk men I knew decided to exploit their local access to chemicals and aluminum. So in ’91, while one rushed to Moscow selling aubergine-coloured wool coats, sacks of wheat crammed their offices, knitting machines, Italian boots, until he stumbled back hawking Operation-Desert-Storm-themed Soviet military watches. The ’90s did look like what they called it, a chopped-up salad-
senile-circus-theatre-of-the-absurd insane asylum, uncivilized, abnormal, monstrous, far-Eastern, wild-Western, African, Chukchi, Papuan, simian. Imagery more than distantly akin to nauseated indictments of mixed metaphor.

There they were, messes, failures, enigma, hybridity, abomination, paradox, unclarity, chaos, and deficits of reality, nature, validity, form, and civilization.

Thinking about mixed metaphors had helped me question my culture's hegemonic value-imagery. Working on an Omsk ethnography showed me how value imagery there, for example, everything clustered around the romantic cliché of Russian soul, was alive and kicking, despite generations of scornful disclaimers of having transcended all that crap.

I also examined that soul as akin to mine, showing how so many non-Russians are also formed and deformed by imagery of coherence, incoherence, and interiority. Parallels between Russian and other soul are so substantial that many non-Russians who like my book a lot miss the critique. They miss it, I assume, because:

'Soul's soul, it's down in there, it's your hope, your true self, creativity; it's what loves and can be loved; the source of everything alive. It's where you take things to heart.'

It's considered good to do things with heart and often, to take them there.

But the depths are also where pain, filth, moral flaws, sins, secrets, corruption and other sources of wealth and power are routinely hidden.

I came to see 'depth' and 'soul' as value-soaked practices of shuttling things between imagined inner, outer, conceptual, or cosmological pedestals. Good and bad both got internalized. Soul also tries to externalize; everything hard to say is seen as probably 'deep,' whether too precious, private, horrible, politically persecuted, or complex and brilliant.

Depth was imagined as a big space, an expanse, yawning away from perception. Perception was imagined as 'superficial,' getting less-less-less clear as it yawned. That is, what was 'on' surfaces was taken as mattering basically because of what it was assumed it 'expressed' of or about some more genuine, intense depths.

Whether a centre was celebrated as positive or negative, it was deep, that is, as it sank from petty clarity down into indeterminate transcendent mist, it was assumed to be 'much, much more, much different.' That is, its authority rested on opposition, quantity and compulsive exaggeration.

Depth is content-poor.

While working on the book, I got me a small electronic hyperbole-detector. It has one sick red eye and peeps wildly at invocations of transcendent enigma, vastness and depth. It keeps me from pledging knee-jerk allegiance to those authorities. Because, again, a really deep soul is structured to self-pollute. It's a bad deal that way.

Depth metaphors sprinkled through unrelated contexts, a religious faith in 'taking in' and 'bringing out,' and reverence for a static, spatial model of 'depth,' when lived by real people, make it structurally inevitable that dirty laundry will cohabit with and foul pearls, reproducing soul's proverbial conflict, complexity, and paradox.

Question: is this our best option?

Souls look unfathomable and complex because they're a projection into thingness of what's not a thing. I think the deepest thing is less promising than

how odd this uniform and this background are; and they're no more shocking than anything else. And it's all right there.

Photo courtesy of army.mil

Depth is conventional and reproduced all the time. Trying to express anything reaffirms depth. Unless I treat deep things as no more nor less than artifacts of an ethnometaphysical belief, a belief that surfaces are explained, governed by, and/or epiphenomenal to what's under them,

I reproduce depth.

I'm not arguing against soul's existence or calling it external or saying that there's no more than what we feel. That's reactionary.

'Soul,' as we know it is, I think, what our human flexibility, multiplicity, and creativity become when embodied as an oniony concentric with what's hidden, powerful, meaningful inside.

Images and practices we believe in and rely on belong to traditions of treating entities, groups, nations, persons, as having centres.

These images and practices are continuous with a stingy, individualistic world, with skinny margins of error, and with how ethnicities, classes, nations and so-called blood ties are constructed and, often violently, pitted against each other.
We can theoretically propose other imagery, but what about Habit.
I can’t just change it. It’s only a first step to disagree that souls are good where and as what we’ve grown them.
I’m stuck on the second step, and here’s where painting shows writing falling short.
I introduce my book as a critique, but to some extent some people must be missing the critique because, like that woman with her failed ironic cover version, I blew it on the realization front.
Pointing at a problem is good, but not good enough. And this problem with depth, it’s not purely social. This … I have it, I’m complicit. My right hand’s complicit. My writing’s so intoxicated with the authority and autonomy of its meaning, it doesn’t see it’s a gutless talking head.
If what I’m spending my time figuring out can’t somehow influence experience, my end product is, in the stupid sense, words. Scary, because you can make anything sound good.
Painting, on the other hand, invites me to develop experiments in a language that talks to other parts of life.
It helps me actually explore alternative coherences by, for example, helping me experiment over and over with the value of one moment of focus and ways in which one moment can connect to others.

I didn’t foresee where this would go. There were a lot of other possibilities. I’d paint it differently another time. But with this version I got a guy, a pigeon on his table, a duckling on his shoulder. Two birds, one guy, and some other stuff I had never seen before. None of them was expressed out of me.
They never were in there dying to come out. I’m not one of those kids’ plastic factories that squeeze out clay worms and stars. Things get made otherwise. Here, I played with paint.
Imagination occurs easily when you play with the concrete.
Look: you take a detail from a Toulouse-Lautrec painting:

See her flower? Weird as an epaulet. Move it.

Cut some little thingie from a piece of junk mail:

Lay one on the other:

Some cleavage . . .

Here she’s got an opinion about it herself.
Now if you throw it over her face you’re upping the ante a LOT, just like when you

turn it, you lose the girl but you can go entirely off on a new species of bird or landscape.

I mean, I think it’s worth trying this, shooting for something funny or interesting beyond a one-liner. It’s productive with almost any two pieces as long as at least one is figuratively vague. It seems way too simple to take seriously, but it plunges you right into the generative relationship between form and content, and demonstrates how easy that can be.

The experience of getting ideas and images for free like this really begs for a redefinition of ‘imagination.’ MIGHT you see it as ‘the unconscious’ streaming through a ‘more open’ ‘channel’? If you want to, of course, but since we do have some choice of what to believe in, I’m choosing to reject that one. On grounds aesthetic to the point of being moral, or vice versa.

I work on this skill of getting things for free, then I
forget to, then I remember. When I forget, the melodramatic model of anguished creating with bare hands is waiting to take over, and life gets noticeably worse.

Meaning gets made for free when you juggle text, too. Field notes, for example. What talks to what about what.

‘But “play” opens the door for sloppy, irritating self-indulgence, doesn’t it?’

Well … that would be bad and that’d be boring. But the didactic tone is a failure too, just less embarrassing around other people who also write that way. Thoughts not grown in interaction with form default to a hubris about communicating pure essence. A world in which that seems adequate excludes a lot of wisdom. On the other hand, I don’t know too much what a real poetics of scholarly prose would be like.

I have seen instances, though, of the power of formal work on ideas: for a long time my primary remembered experience of it was from Paul Friedrich’s Russian poetry class three million years back when he had us write two-page papers on Pushkin’s Onegin. Being two-page-concise is gruelling. But I got an idea and wrote it in two pages. And then I had time left, and what the hell, let’s see can I co-opt those ideas: a two-page critique into Onegin stanzas. I’m no poet, just meter and rhyme, girl endings,

boy endings. Well, in short, the thoughts woke up again, twitching and jumping. The theory got smarter. The poetry stank, but the sense was hopping around for joy.

It works for a mysterious reason related to the power of reading your paper aloud in your room. Even after you’ve written what you want, exposing the airtight information to vocal chords and other ways of saying shakes out what’s hiding in automatic dusty connections. It brutally exposes immaturity and defects, inviting the insights new juxtapositions bring.

Writing is part of realizing a thought.

Writing is part of thinking, a part where you engage.

I can’t do it yet, but I suspect that unless I expose my ideas to writers’ tools: style, voice, plot, sound, rhythm, those ideas can’t be radical; any virtue they have will be co-opted by the disembodied power of information.

Which is creepy.

Another creepy thing is how often you have to redefine your engagement.

It’s fugitive or something.

If I stop asking why I’m working on this, my good initial reasons start snoring and flip inside out.

Getting honestly stuck refreshes your engagement, but that feeling of being very stupid isn’t so pleasurable you’d go seek it out.

Acknowledgements

Thanks to Michael Wasserman, Tania Fel, Mikhail Mokeyev, Steve Coleman, and Stuart McLean.
'The prickly beards of shepherds and the peeled moon and the fly…'

Locating and Dislocating Lorca’s Duende

Jennifer Sime

In 1933, during a trip to Argentina and Uruguay, the Spanish poet and playwright Federico García Lorca delivered a lecture in Buenos Aires entitled ‘Play and Theory of the Duende’, in which he attempted to articulate the paradox of artistic production; that is, that the creation of artistic truth takes place between form and form’s unraveling. Perhaps it would be more accurate to say that he attempted to figure this paradox, for in this essay it is precisely the space of articulation that is rendered problematic. It is the home of the duende, the unstable entity that Lorca refers to (deploys, conjures up, pays homage to) in order to find a way to characterize this frontier and perhaps also to access it. Lorca’s writing is purposefully slippery, excessive, contradictory; he never pauses for long in one descriptive mode, but rather seems to revel in the difficulty of representing the duende, and perhaps also in the problem of representation itself, where it falters, where it admits—and even shows off—its internal lines of fracture.

In folklore throughout Spain, the duende is associated with the realm of the home. Although its English translation is usually imp, elf, or fairy, the word duende derives from dueno de casa, lord of the house. It is a household spirit. Like a poltergeist, the duende is a nuisance, although the duende has perhaps a more impish character. According to whom, he (in folklore, the duende is usually gendered masculine, appearing—when he does—as an old man or little boy) variously plays tricks or helps with the running of the house. He belongs to the home, demarcates domestic space, and also disrupts the serenity of domesticity: he hides things, breaks dishes, makes noise.

This first definition dissolves into one less obviously folkloric, one that seems to speak more of an internalized personality trait than a type of being, and is encapsulated in the expression interior duende. To have duende is to have charm, magic, appeal. Lorca tells us that this expression is employed throughout Andalusia in order to describe exceptional flamenco singers and dancers as well as toreros. He claims that the duende proliferates in the South of Spain, inspiring envy among other regions of Spain dominated by those lesser forms of artistic inspiration, the muse and the angel. In Galicia, the northwest corner of Spain, and the part I know best, there is no flamenco (or at least it is most widely disseminated on compact disc), no bullfights, and if one is to believe Lorca, no duende, but rather only the rain-soaked angel that inspires the melancholy poems of homesickness and longing in a part of Spain famed for its high emigration rates, especially to countries such as Argentina where so many Gallegos have immigrated that the word ‘Gallego’ is basically equivalent to Spaniard. I have, however, seen in passing several references to duende in Galicia: one in a Spanish fashion magazine with a special feature on new movements in flamenco, declaring that the duende is still alive in Spain. Perhaps, that assertion of life seems necessary in the face of duende’s apparently absolute loss of authenticity in its incorporation by the mass market, for another place where I saw mention of duende was a shop called El Duende which sells costume jewelry, and still another, as the brand name of a household cleaner. The shop, of course, echoes the magical appeal of duende, selling along with its glittering adornments the possibility of (at the least the artefact of) charm. And the household cleaner recalls the trickster spirit, its ambivalence between disruption and assistance vanished, as it is now unequivocally put to work. I mention these contemporary examples not to put an ethnographic stamp on a paper which is limited to the examination of a literary essay, nor to make the case for the duende’s absolute disappearance, which I strongly doubt, but rather to show how the shop and the cleaner and the magazine emphasize disparate aspects of the duende that seem unable to be reconciled with each other. The duende is fundamentally contradictory, and it is with and against these contradictions that Lorca plays and struggles in this lecture. His characterization of duende juxtaposes and intertwines the household spirit and magical appeal (including such appeal’s artefact) and artistry. It takes into account the playfulness, trickiness, and productivity of the dueno de la casa, its figuration as a supernatural being—even as he transforms that being into a demonic earth spirit—along with the idea of belonging that home implies. At the same time, he insists upon a continuous displacement or dislocation of home through his analysis of flamenco performances.

At first glance, Lorca’s conceptualization of duende seems to bear little if any resemblance to the trickster house spirit. He seems to emphasize, at first, duende as something that certain gifted people—especially artists—have. But is duende as individualized as this implies? Lorca claims that duende manifests itself most of all in the performing arts: music, dance, song, especially live performances. In these performances, the human body is necessarily present in a way less obvious for the visual arts, for example. The body becomes a spectacle, one constituted in and through the presence of an audience. The space between the audience and the artist is not simply one of appreciation on the part of a relatively passive audience for the skill and talent of the performer, but rather a site of interlocution where duende emerges.
Lorca emphasizes that duende is recognized and identified as such when it appears, not by an artist who claims to ‘have’ it, but rather by the audience.18 Is this only to say that an artist never performs in a vacuum; and that, still, what the audience recognizes, and makes possible through its presence, is technique, skill, and artistic creation? Is duende ever really a wholly possessed quality? Lorca indicates, without ever referring directly to the etymology of the word that recalls duende as embodied house spirit or duende’s elaboration in folktales, that duende maintains an ambivalently autonomous status. Lorca shifts from characterizing duende as something that artists have, to something that is recognized, to the figure of a (sometimes) demonically violent spirit that relishes the interstitial zone between form and chaos, a fierce mutation of the household spirit. The exquisite artist is able or willing – or perhaps compelled – to subject herself to duende, placing herself precisely at the point where artistic form disintegrates, where artistic form is born. What the audience then recognizes in duende is not simply technique, because duende is fundamentally different from technique; it is the other of technique, it is located at the point at which technique fragments and fall back into the abyss that precedes it. Perhaps this summary of Lorca’s characterization overly privileges the rhetoric of fragmentation, of a drive toward entropy, toward disunity. Technique, skill, and form on the one hand, and material substance, flow, chaos on the other, press against each other, withdrawing and extending. In this dynamic tension, in this violent space in-between, both technique and chaos become visible.19 At the epicentre are the artist and the duende. The audience bears witness to a fight. It is a fight for possession, for the performer’s suffering is transmitted to the audience. No one, claims Lorca, enjoys himself at Spanish dance.20 I imagine he wrote this with a wink, knowing full well that such sympathetic participation on the part of the audience must produce as much pleasure as pain.

Lorca provides an example of the interplay between audience and performer, describing the spectacle of a performer’s failure through her dependence on sheer technique and control, the audience’s recognition of that failure, and the performer’s response as the relinquishment of control and opening to duende. A famous Andalusian singer was performing in Cádiz: “For a while she played with her voice of shadow, of beaten tin, her moss-covered voice, braiding it into her hair or soaking it in wine or letting it wander away to the farthest, darkest bramble patches.”21 Her audience remained silent, until a man sarcastically murmured ‘Viva Paris’, thus deriding the singer’s performance as being nothing but controlled and sophisticated technique. In Cádiz, he implied, something else was required. The singer got up, ’torn like a medieval weeper’, and began to sing with a scorched throat, without voice, without breath, or color, but with duende. She was able to kill all the scaffolding of the song and leave way for a furious enslaving duende, friend of sand winds, who made the listeners rip their clothes… La Niña de los Peines had to tear her voice because she knew she had an exquisite audience, one which demanded not forms but the narrow of forms… she had to rob herself of skill and security, send away her muse and become helpless, that her duende might come and fight her hand to hand.22

The singer is a master of her art, and that is both the source of her failure, and ultimately, her success. She must learn to become helpless, but only after demonstrating control. The performer’s reception to duende is made possible through the willed shedding of her learned confidence, ability, and the song of its form. The artist with duende does more than expose the essence – the ‘marrow’ of things. This most intimate and interior of spaces, the marrow, is the secreted support of any artistic form or work. But marrow is not only support; it is not a skeleton or a work’s scaffolding, but rather that from which stable structures arise – only to risk being torn apart once more. In this sense, the marrow is the site where forms can be radically changed.23 Here, the singer accesses her duende precisely through the detour of ‘wound’ technique, the spectacle of ability and the performance of form and, importantly, its rejection as artifice on the part of the audience. But artifice and technique are still essential; they, along with the singer’s desire to rid herself of them, provide access to duende.

Furthermore, Lorca emphasizes in this passage that this is only possible through the recognition of the audience, more precisely, the audience’s registration of its lack of satisfaction. The duende here is conjured up by the audience as much as the artist. It could be said to possess as much as it is possessed – and it possesses the audience as much as the artist. The members of the audience are transformed into performers in their own right; they perform their suffering in ritualized fashion, tearing their clothes in unison. It is not an individualized notion of suffering that is at stake here, and it is certainly not one that is clearly demarcated from enjoyment.

The oscillation between possessing and being possessed is, for Lorca, the site of a bloody struggle, the source of artistic technique; the spectacle of things and inspiration originate. What kind of originary site is this? Why a wound as the trace of a struggle? For Lorca, the wound is an essential figure. It disrupts the unity of the body, opens it up to external forces and marks the influence of these forces on the body. It is both a perforation and an inscription. By this I mean that duende both disrupts meaning and form and makes them possible.24 (We might recall here the double role the duende has as household spirit, at once disrupting the home and essential to it.) One cannot overlook the influence of Catholic imagery of wounds that mark a frontier between normal human life and eternal life, life outside of time. Wounds index an encounter with an enemy who would drain one of life; their repetition in the form of stigmata indexes an encounter with God. Lorca claims that the duende wounds the performer, and by doing so, can facilitate access to God through the body and voice of the performer, and access to the divine that is as much for the audience as for the artist.25 It is also an access to God that performs the lack of need for the intervention of ecclesiastical authorities; it is immediate, unmediated. Or rather, it is mediated through a demonic figure and the technique of the artist.

I do not want to linger too long on the subject of the divine, since Lorca does not attempt to encompass his discussion of duende in terms of, say, religious experience. But I do wish to point out that Catholicism clearly shaped his thinking, providing Lorca with imagery, and, conversely, he provided it with a brief and unraveling glance: a religion that maintains an intense focus on the mediating figure of the priest has, in spite of, or perhaps because of that, always had to encounter the possibility of such mediation becoming superfluous.
Even the history of the mystic tradition in Catholicism has both troubled and been incorporated by Church doctrine. Lorca cites Saint Theresa of Ávila as a ‘supremely flamenco woman’, flamenco because her duende — misrecognized in the statue by Bernini in Rome as an angel — wanted to kill her for ‘stealing his deepest secret’, the mystical union of the five senses through a wounding, which in turn, opens up another, seemingly limitless horizon: not God exactly, for the name of God would fix this horizon too easily. But rather: ‘that stormy ocean of Love freed from Time’.26 A horizon reeding to the point of disappearance, opening up to infinite possibility. And, in that stormy ocean, infinite struggle.

In the broader sense, Lorca’s figure of the wound indexes an encounter with an other, an encounter never staged in terms of an easy and distant sympathy, as Lorca characterizes those other, lesser sources of artistic inspiration: the angel and the muse. The angel flies high overhead, dazzling and shedding grace, but always from a distance, and allows one to realize one’s work without effort. The dream of sheer illumination. The muse, on the other hand, dictates, provides forms, awakens intelligence, which, according to Lorca, constricts access to emotions, distances the artist from the possibility of his own death, and therefore can often work to limit horizons of thought instead of expanding them. The encounter with the duende is a rather more vexed and transformative event. ‘But one must awaken the duende in the remotest mansions of the blood’.27 Here, Lorca alludes to the duende of the house, but these houses have at once acquired a remote grandeur in their transformation into mansions, and a strange interiority with respect to the body. The duende’s abode has, in a sense, moved deep inside. Lorca’s figure of the wound itself has an estranging effect. Compared with angel and muse, who arrive definitively from without, bearing the gifts of light and form, the encounter with the duende is one simultaneously from within and without. Such an encounter embodies the movement of a (violent) dislocation from oneself. It is a fight, writes Lorca, but not one where the artist overcomes his duende. It is not a fight that is won, but rather is interminable and continuously leaves its marks.

The wound is an opening that points toward the presence of death. Indeed, the possibility of death is what opens up a gateway for the duende, and Lorca writes that Spain, more than any other country, is one ‘open to death’. He describes death as being an end everywhere but Spain, where death is welcomed: ‘Everywhere else... death comes, and they draw the curtains. In Spain they open them’.28 Death is the means by which, ironically enough, people become visible to the world and the world becomes visible to them: ‘Many Spaniards live indoors until they die and are taken out into the sunlight’.29 The dead man acquires a postmortem life that appears truer, more alive than its original: ‘A dead man in Spain is more alive as a dead man than any place else in the world’.30 The dead man’s life here is akin to an image that exceeds its original, an image that already exists in the form of a dislocation, a distancing at the heart of the original.31

If life itself becomes an ambiguous category in its reappearance in the unlikely form of a cadaver, so too does the corpse bear a particularly ambiguous relationship to place. As Blanchot notes, ‘death suspends the relation to place’.32 The corpse is almost unbearable present; it lies in a certain place that it seems to have made its own, that it belongs to in a way more profound than any other previous sense of belonging perceived in life. At the same time, the person who died has definitively parted. The body left behind does and does not belong to him, does and does not bear a resemblance to him. The cadaver preserves a dislocation that ordinarily remains hidden; that is, the pull toward becoming an image that shadows every object, every body. Everything and everyone is pulled, as if by a gravitational force, from the singular to the generic and neutral.33 Lorca writes, in a phrase that resonates with this idea, ‘Everything finds its final, metallic value in death’.34 This after-life, this ‘metallic value’, is already present within life itself; that is, the possibility of one’s death is already ensured in the existence of one’s body: ‘The duende must know beforehand that he can serene death’s house and rock those branches we all wear, branches that do not have, will never have, any consolation’.35 If the duende has an affinity to death, and calls into conscious awareness that impossible thought – the possibility of one’s own death – then the duende inhabits a chronotope almost unbearably abstract and intimate at once: the beyond of death always within the body. That the living body is an index of the cadaver it will become reflects the indeterminacy that the corpse has between being at once absolutely here and nowhere at all.

Or everywhere at the same time. For Blanchot, the corpse remains in its place, yet exceeds its own palpable boundaries. Its presence (in a house, for example) is felt in every room. For Lorca, as well, the strangely alive quality of the dead presences itself everywhere; it crosses the boundaries of the body. ‘Fine weeds of death’ appear in persons more like itself: other’s objects, the possession. He had time’s breathlessly: ‘the hut and the cart wheel and the razor and the prickly beards of the shepherds and the peeled moon and the fly and moist pantry shelves and torn-down buildings and lace-covered saints...’.36

In this oscillation between presence and absence, life and death, proximity and distance, the live dead man is able to create an aperture for the duende’s entrance: ‘His profile wounds like the edge of a barber’s razor’.37 The wound thus opened up attests to the movement of a displacement at the heart of things. It resonates with what Stefania Pandolfi has written of fitna, ‘an inscription of a difference without which life, and society, would be impossible, but a difference which poses a mortal risk’.38 As an object always withholds within itself its own image, so does an image point toward the presence of the object in its very absence. Blanchot can thus write that it is ‘with substance that the image is allied – with the fundamental materiality, the still undetermined absence of form, the world oscillating between adjective and substantive before founding in the formless proximity of indetermination’.39

Lorca maintains, in seemingly paradoxical fashion, that the duende both wounds and only arrives where wounds are present. He later comments that ‘the duende loves the rim of the wound’.40 That is the place where form and indeterminacy of form are most sharply juxtaposed and where one can move most easily between one and the other, where one can most readily discern their mutually constitutive quality. This is similar to the question of whether one possesses duende or whether duende possesses, whether duende arrives from within or without, or whether duende is actually both (or all) simultaneously, that quality of alienation that is most
interior to the self. Lorca's imagery of wounds conjoins injury and healing, but the latter process is never completed: 'In the healing of that wound, which never closes, lies the invented, strange qualities of a man's work.'41 Accordingly, for the one who has duende, her work is made possible through duende's very staging of indeterminacy – between form and materiality, between presence and absence, 'where geometry borders on dream.'42 What Lorca calls 'spontaneous creation' can only come into being through its own unrelving and its production in a space that is neither here nor there. One kind of dislocation...

... And another, the lecture itself takes place in the distance between Spain, one of its ostensible objects, and Buenos Aires, the site of Lorca's slippery articulation of duende in metaphors that pile up, one on top of the other, in an excess of language that produces disconnects, contradictions, pieces of the puzzle that won't quite fit. The home of duende is in performance, a space of pain, suffering, wounding, but one through which emerges pleasure, creativity, form. And where there is always a risk that form will fragment, that suffering and pleasure will reveal their intimacy, that the mutually constitutive relationship between artifice and technique and essence will show itself. However, at the beginning of his lecture, Lorca tells his audience that he 'will try to give [them] a lesson in the hidden spirit of disconsoante Spain'.43 It appears that Lorca is making a case for duende as existing if not exclusively in Spain then in Spain more than any other country. Does Spain, then, in this sense provide the grounding element, the 'home' that throughout the rest of the essay is being continuously displaced? The answer at first appears to be yes. But it seems that it is only at a remove from Spain, only to an overseas audience, that Lorca could make the claim that the purpose of his lecture was to reveal the secret of Spain's spiritual essence. Or more to the point, he could describe the extraordinary force of the duende, which, at least in his home in Andalusia, was also imbued with the status of the everyday. It is this very shift in location which allows Lorca's version of duende to thus emerge. Lorca paints Spain in the most exotic of colours for his Argentinean audience in his attempt to trace the contours of this 'hidden spirit'. He speaks of Spain as a bull's hide, bullfighting and the death necessary to it as constituting the very ground of Spain. He characterizes Spain as 'a country of ancient music and dance' and, of course, as particularly open to death, whether on the stage, in the bullring, or in the most ordinary of homes. Lorca initially describes the duende as belonging to Spain in the most primeval ways; that the duende is a tellurial earth spirit and is a matter of blood, of the most ancient culture, of spontaneous creation.44 It is as if Lorca is moving toward a description of the essence of the duende which carries within it the essence of Spain.

However, Lorca's first figures of duende come from outside of Spain: Socrates's happy demon who scratched him when he swallowed the poison, and Decartes' melancholy demon who tired of 'circles and lines' and escaped to listen to the songs of drunken sailors.45 He then interrupts himself in a fantastical excursus in describing the exquisitely demanding audiences of Andalusia. Here we return to the performance in Cádiz of La Niña de los Peines discussed above. Lorca sketches quick portraits of four members of the audience present. There is Ignacio Espeleta who claims his origins in Cádiz as reason not to work, there is Hot Elvira, the aristocratic Sevillian whore who refused to marry a Rothschild because he was not worthy of her, there are the Floridas, who appear to be mere butchers by profession but are really millennial priests who sacrifice bulls to the gods, and last of all, an unnamed tiny man, 'one of those dancing manikins that rise suddenly out of brandy bottles'.46 It is as if the apparent valorization of (Spanish) blood and ancient culture could only move toward – rather than a revelation of an essence – an excess that reveals itself through a 'layering of language' through which Lorca elaborates a fantastical set of characters. The rhetoric of continuity and pure presence of blood and culture reveals itself, not simply as fantasy, but as internally differentiated, opening itself up for a different kind of outcome than that of true essences. That which would have been most familiar and intimate – ultimately, a story of home – is shot through with fabrications and lines of fracture. Insofar as Lorca exotizes Spain, it is also a self-exotizing that allows him to defamiliarize Spain even as (or possibly because) he makes a spectacle of it. Geographical distance allows for a dislocation of home. In this way, exoticism does not take place in the recognition of differences between subjects and cultures but rather as internal to and even constitutive of them.47

Duende is also for Lorca the power of fantasy, that which can make of the idea of the transmission of stable cultural forms a (still powerful) fiction and an assemblage of audience members casting judgment upon a local flamenco singer the purveyor of a new reality somehow both solemn and absurd at the same time. Elsewhere, Lorca describes the transmission Spanish cultural traits were precisely 'as if in the figures he draws out in nearly archetyped fashion for understanding the duende in Spain: Jews, Moors, blacks, and gypsies. These are, of course, figures of internalized and externalized foreignness, of expulsion and exile, and who had left and continue to leave deep traces in Andalusia.48 'Tradition' here is less a medium of pure transmission from the past, than it is a recall shot-through with oblivion, a site of transformation: 'One kind of movement that occurs in memory is the turning of one thing into another thing, a play of transformation with a carryover, a trace, of what is lost.'49 These figures, which partake as much of an imaging of the past as much as they do of actual history, leave traces that, even if half-forgotten, resonate in performance, in the body of the performer.

**All that has black sounds has duende.** These black sounds for Lorca are 'the roots fastened in the mire that we all know and all ignore, the mire that gives us the very substance of art.'50 Here, duende reveals itself in the human body that is both the site of memory and forgetting at once. The duende climbs up into the body through the soles of the feet, itarticulates the body, causes it to articulate itself. The body and voice imbued with duende speaks of its origins in mire, in what is always forgotten and what can only be remembered in a different form. For Lorca then, duende's appearance is never the appearance of beauty. He tells a story of a dance contest in Jerez de la Frontera where an eighty-year-old woman won first prize, competing against lithe young women, all graceful and supple bodies. She simply raised her arms, threw back her head, and stamped her feet. In these movements, her duende emerged, 'sweeping the ground with its wings of rusty knives'.51
The wings here do not serve to provide flight or the transcendence of a bird’s eye view. They wound; they cut out a ruinous space that the duende must occupy. Insofar as the duende is implicated in the memory of that originary black mire, it can only allow for that memory to emerge in the form of a ruin. That is, a form which is always slipping back into formlessness: the rim of the wound. The duende here is the movement from the formlessness of oblivion to the gestures of the body, without definitively belonging to either.

At the end of the essay, Lorca says that he has constructed three arches and placed in them the angel, muse, and duende. The angel and muse are easily locatable; they stay still in the spaces allotted to them. Here, Lorca asks, ‘The duende... Where is the duende? Through the empty arch comes a wind, a mental wind blowing relentlessly over the heads of the dead, in search of new landscapes and unknown accents; a wind that smells of baby’s spittle, crushed grass, and jellyfish veil, announcing the constant baptism of newly created things.\(^{52}\) The wind blowing through an empty arch where the duende was supposed to be located suggests ceaseless movement, an escape that is never quite completed, and a tense affiliation with the material world.

What makes for great artists, according to Lorca, is their ability to perform their own lack of belonging; their own location in a space that is always between form and the formlessness that undergirds it, a space of estrangement within the self that cannot quite be said to belong to the self. This space is primarily that of the ineluctability of death, but also the possibility of madness, of uncontrollable desires. In this sense, the gift or inspiration of duende is the production of openings that are also displacements, where things belong both inside and outside.\(^{53}\)

When Niña de los Peines throws back her head and sings in a voice like a ‘jet of blood’\(^{54}\) – this gesture, this voice enacts what Lacan says ‘is inside the subject, but which can be realized only outside, that is to say, in that locus of the Other in which alone it may assume its status.’\(^{55}\)

The literary critc Martha Nandorfy, in her analysis of the oblique signs of duende in Lorca’s *Poet in New York*, takes this Other to be nothing less than death itself, that Lorca is flirting with the possibility of absolute negation, a negation, that is, that is still understood in terms of the death of an individual self.\(^{56}\)

But I think it needs to be understood in less metaphysical terms. Death for Lorca seems also to refer to the small deaths where pleasure blooms from catastrophe, where things that are forgotten also constitute a kind of death that is necessary for memory to take place, and where death always means the production of –possibly – more substantive forms of life.

### Endnotes

4. This idea of a space in between form and chaos is somewhat reminiscent of the Japanese term *ma*, which, conceived in both religious and aesthetic terms as a space-in-between, partakes of form and non-form, an opening up to and an emptying out of the world. However, in addition to the obvious differences between Spanish and Japanese religious and aesthetic traditions, the space that the duende occupies, rather than being an ‘expectant stillness’ or a ‘pregnant nothing’ (two characterizations of *ma* by Arata Isozaki and Roland Barthes, respectively) is spectacular, violent, where things are torn apart and put back together again in different form. See Richard B. Pilgrim, *Intervals [Ma]* in Space and Time: Foundations for a Religio-Aesthetic Paradigm in Japan*, in Charles Wei-Hsun Fu and Steven Heine (eds), *Japan in Traditional and Postmodern Perspectives*. Albany: State University of New York, 1995.
9. In some ways, Lorca’s figure of the wound resonates with Elaine Scarry’s analysis of pain. She claims that pain ‘...actively destroys [language], bringing about an immediate reversion to a state anterior to language, to the sounds and cries a human being makes before language is learned’ (4). At the same time, it can be a source, perhaps the source for the remaking and re-imagining of the world. I cannot, however, draw too close a parallel here, because Lorca always uses wounds as figures and images, while Scarry attempts to answer the question as to what pain fundamentally is figuratively and literally, especially with reference to its deployment in torture and in terms of its relationship to power. See Scarry’s *The Body in Pain: The Making and Unmaking of the World*. New York: Oxford University Press, 1985.
14. *Ibid.*.
15. *Ibid.*.
26. *Ibid.*.
27. *Ibid.*.
30. *Ibid.*.
32. Roger Célestin, *From Cannibals to Radicals: Figures and Limits of Exoticism*. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996. He writes, ‘...rather than representing a relinquishing of or an escape from local culture, from Home, exoticism becomes, in my view, the means for certain writers to negotiate (discursive) position and (subjective) space vis-à-vis this culture and vis-à-vis the exotic simultaneously’ (3). While Célestin finds a certain tension or straining between the subject, home, and the exotic, for Lorca, home and the exotic become inextricable from each other, and the exoticizing gesture works to defamiliarize home.
33. ‘I am used to suffering from things that people do not understand, do not even suspect. Being born in Granada has given me a sympathetic understanding of those who are persecuted – the Gypsy, the black, the Jew, the Moor which all Granadans have inside of them.’ Lorca, cited in Maurer, ‘Introduction’, ix.


References


Possession: Imagining Landscapes

Oona Frawley

So many cultures are possessed by landscape, that, after the physical landscape itself, imagination might be said to be the most powerful determinant of our ideas of our homelands. Writing of his particular situation as an émigré and exile of India, Salman Rushdie has referred to the possession of ‘imaginary homelands’:

It may be that writers in my position, exiles or emigrants or expatriates, are haunted by some sense of loss, some urge to reclaim, to look back, even at the risk of being mutated into pillars of salt. But if we do look back, we must also do so in the knowledge – which gives rise to profound uncertainties – that our physical alienation from India almost inevitably means that we will not be capable of reclaiming precisely the thing that was lost; that we will, in short, create fictions, not actual cities or villages, but invisible ones, imaginary homelands… (10)

I would like to adopt Rushdie’s phrase here: but while he contends that ‘imaginary homelands’ are largely created by the removal of a native from his or her place of birth and the resulting idealization or mis-remembrance of ‘home’ from a distance, I would go further and suggest that, in many ways, imaginary homelands are all that we can know, even when we are at ‘home’: such is the strength of our imaginations and the power of the imagination to maintain fictions about place and locations.

My thinking here is inspired by the work of two theorists: Jacques Lacan and Gaston Bachelard, both of whom have worked extensively on subjects that can introduce and illuminate this idea of the imaginary as it relates to landscape and our perceptions of our homelands. Lacan, of course, uses this very word, ‘imaginary’, to describe one of the stages of human infant development. During what Lacan terms the ‘mirror stage’, an infant held up to a mirror will, for the first time, perceive itself as a whole, entire and complete being. The infant, Lacan argues, witnesses what appears to be a masterful image of itself, and its ego begins to develop as a result of this projection of power and control. Of course, the infant’s body merely appears co-ordinated and erect in the mirror (it is, after all, being held up to the mirror by another and is in fact not yet in control of its own limbs); this illusion of self Lacan calls ‘the imaginary’. Terry Eagleton puts it aptly: in ‘this realm of images’, as we create a unified identity for ourselves, we ‘misperceive and misrecognize ourselves’ (Eagleton: 143).

The Lacanian notion of the imaginary is a useful one when considering the intertwining of homelands and imagination, providing a curious analogy with the ways in which we construct identifications. Much like the uncoordinated infant held up to a mirror by its parent, we tend, when confronted by the specter of our homelands, to imagine something quite other to that which is there: our imaginations project and so construct, in other words, an idea of a homeland that is, at least in part, ego driven, a ‘misperception’ like that Eagleton notes, arising from the attempt to describe what Bachelard calls ‘the space that we love’ (1994: xxv).

Bachelard’s philosophy of space is justly famous, not least because the language he employs pays continual tribute to the role of imagination. This philosophy can be briefly – if inadequately – summarized by the following passage, in which Bachelard describes the significance of place in retaining memory:

The finest specimens of fossilized duration, concretized as a result of long sojourn, are to be found in and through space. The unconscious abides. Memories are motionless, and the more securely they are fixed in space, the sounder they are. (1994: 9)

Our memories, in other words, are more likely to survive if they are grounded in a particular space; but what Bachelard points out is how quickly memory gets caught up in imagination, so that, as he concludes, ‘Reverie extends history precisely to the limits of the unreal’ (1971: 122). Memory, as writers like Rushdie and Bachelard explicitly recognise, does not offer our imaginations a replica of experience, a reliable or wholly ‘accurate’ rendering of the past, but what the memory researcher Frederic Bartlett called a ‘construction’ that is implicitly dependent upon the involvement of imagination:

Remembering is not the re-excitation of innumerable fixed, lifeless and fragmentary traces. It is an imaginative reconstruction, or construction, built out of the relation of our attitude towards a whole active mass of organised past reactions or experience, and to a little outstanding detail which commonly appears in image or in language form. (Bartlett: 213)

Remembrance’s inevitable twining with imagination means that our ‘constructions’ of place and homeland are not reflective of some ultimate, unquestionable reality; the result of this pas de deux is that the landscape itself becomes a depository for our imaginings of it.

Imagination thus accommodates the physical and metaphysical natures of place, and it is this binary that I would like to briefly explore. In both the United States and in Ireland, landscape (and specifically rural landscape) has been used by writers at key moments in history to shape the idea of nation, suggesting that nation formation is dependent, in part, on an invented pastoral: Henry David Thoreau carved an image of an independent, self-reliant America out of canyon and clay, as it were, while John Millington Synge word-shaped glen and sea into an ancient, mystical Ireland that could be used in the service of the new Irish nation. Both
Thoreau and Synge were, despite their pastoral writings, urban, educated men who, inspired themselves, recognized the power of the ‘natural’ image to fire others’ imaginations; their work is in this sense reflective, perhaps, of a more general human desire to root culture in the most primordial of all imaginary landscapes in the western world, an Eden of the mind. Both Thoreau and Synge, I suggest, in tapping in to such a mythos, contributed to the formation of imaginary homelands that drew heavily on pastoral imagery, landscape and ideology.

The world might be said to have become much more urban in the last century and a half; when Thoreau penned the notebooks that would become Walden, there was still a sense of frontier in America, of indeterminate boundaries; when Synge kept his journals on the Aran Islands, he experienced a liminal sense of being at the edge of something – not only of Ireland, but of Europe. More than a century later, as Walden Pond is a literal stone’s throw from development, and as the Aran Islands are due a new, multi-million euro port to accommodate the tourists who pour across the sea, I would like to consider representations of the imaginary homelands of the United States and Ireland, and to consider whether they have changed. In a time of overwhelming modernization, do we still rely upon vestigial images of our homelands? And how do these rural ‘mythologies’ function when they are confronted with contemporary urban centres like New York and Dublin, if at all?

Tourist brochures function, in one way, as a collective imaginary, in Lacanian terms, in that they can indicate the way in which a given culture perceives or imagines itself. If we consider brochures for American holidays, think of the postcard-sized photos that hang in the windows of travel agents, we recognize that, while cities like New York and Las Vegas do feature, such places are often overwhelmed by advertisements for what are perceived as grand, national, natural treasures: the autumn-coloured chasms of the Grand Canyon; the dazzle of wind-sculpted snow atop Cascade peaks; curving California coastline that appears untouched, unexplored; a rocky outcrop of Maine – all depict a pristine, untouched America. The presentation of such natural space, of a certain kind of rurality (since these photos tend to be unpeopled, unhoused, empty) goes far in depicting America as it would wish to see itself, and, indeed, as it has attempted to see itself since its self-conscious beginnings.

When Emerson and Thoreau came to write about America in the mid-nineteenth century, they created an America in language that sought to represent the landscape that they witnessed in their imaginations or, as Emerson might have put in, in the mind’s eye. Thoreau’s removal to the ‘wilderness’ of Walden was a transcendental journey in more ways than one, since, in many ways, Walden was not a wilderness at all, but a polite farming suburb in walking distance from town, a town in which Emerson passed his lifetime. Thoreau’s journey was, then, an imaginative one into the expanses of an imagined America, one replete with the promise of exploration and movement, with borders that were ever shifting, unsettled, infinite. Such an imaginative grasp of America as Thoreau had in 1850 persists in the tourist brochures that proclaim an untouched landscape, waiting to be explored.

If America persists for tourist consumption as a space of national parks with protected landscapes (with major cities like Los Angeles and Las Vegas often presented as ‘side trips’ from this main business of natural imagery), it persists too for Americans themselves, in, for instance, the singing of national songs such as ‘America the Beautiful’, performed daily across the United States by mostly urban schoolchildren: ‘Oh beautiful for spacious skies, for amber waves of grain, for purple mountain majesties above the fruited plain’. The images in this rather serious anthem are repeated in the more sing-song, childish ‘This Land is Your Land’, also a school staple diurnally sung in countless off-key renditions: ‘This land is your land, this land is my land, from California to the New Island. From the redwood forests to the Gulf Stream waters, this land was made for you and me.’ The grace ‘granted’ to America, by the first song and the manifest destiny implied in the second is inherent in the landscape; it would seem that in some way Thoreau’s imaginary landscape persists in a larger, cultural memory of America that wants to believe in that nature-based nation stretching ‘from sea to shining sea’. At a moment when one of the landscapes preoccupying Americans most profoundly is a foreign one of desert, mesmeric heat and unceasing violence, and when ‘grace’ seems to have all but disappeared, the focus on such imaginary landscapes would seem to become even more important: as America’s self-image as the bringer of democracy and peace continues to corrode, the belief in an American ‘heartland’ in which the land is uncorrupted and full of promise is one that converts support unendingly. The image can bring solace, self-consolation, and can, of course, keep awful realities at bay by submerging them in the rhetoric of the younger America.

If we turn to the representations of Ireland in contemporary travel literature, a similar mythology, the sameness of course, is at work. It is the brochure that depicts Dublin in its streetlit, traffic-jammed glory; instead, we have images of fields edged by gorse as yellow as fallen sunshine, of isolated, whitewashed, thatched cottages, of donkeys with patient, gentle eyes. Looking at such images, one would never guess that the Irish continue to be possessed by an apartment-buying craze that sees as yet unbuilt penthouses bought from inky designs, with only a recent hint of a slowdown apparent. Rurality persists in its tenacious hold on the Irish imagination, along with the ideal of a quiet country life and a local pub in which one holds a special stool; Guinness and its savvy Diageo admen have exploited this imaginary island so successfully that budgets for Guinness ads can run to the tens of millions in order that Irish and non-Irish viewers alike can consume not only the famous ‘dark stuff’ but the image of a particular Ireland that, even in its more urban representations, is based in ‘rural’ values in one popular ad, a young man sets out on foot across Ireland, eventually diving from the Cliffs of Moher in order to swim the seas. He reaches America, enters a pub and approaches another man, to whom he utters the words ‘I’m sorry’. After a hug, the men are seen, friendship restored, toasting pints. In its use of epic-scale Irish images like the Cliffs of Moher, Guinness confirms the continuance of a certain mythos of Irishness that – the ad tells us – is vital even to contemporary young Irish in urban centres on both sides of the Atlantic. Guinness is good for you, in other words, in more ways than one, in that it reiterates in subtle and not-so-subtle ways a mythology of the nation as modern while referencing the rural through immediately recognisable images of Irish landscape: field, brooding sky, cliff, sea.
Such images possessed writers of the Revival just as they had their American counterparts some fifty years earlier.Syng Yeats, Lady Gregory, as well as lesser-known Irish language writers, wrote of the peasant, of the landscape, and largely shunned in their writings the cities that held and educated them, that published their work. Unmarked by the toil of soil themselves, they could afford to idealise such images. So effective was their work that Sligo is now known as ‘Yeats’ Country’, the Aran Islands are an easy day trip, and thatched rooves – so rare – are under preservation orders, and those who live beneath them are entitled to grants for their maintenance.

Since the eras of Thoreau and Emerson and Synge and Yeats, things have altered radically. Both the United States and Ireland are now far more urban; for every Thoreau, there is a Thomas Wolfe; for a Synge, a Joyce or a Roddy Doyle. And yet, as witnessed in media from tourist brochures to songs to ads – the perception of the national homeland as rural and untouched is not elided by urbanism; what I would suggest is that in contemporary American and Irish culture, the existence of the city does not erase the imagination of the rural. Just as postcards of Temple Bar are sold alongside images of the Aran Islands, the contemporary mind seems to comfortably accept both the rural and urban claim on the imagination.

As the United States and Ireland have modernized and as the urban landscape has become increasingly important to the development of the nation, particular urban spaces have developed their own mythographies, functioning as emblems. Two specific urban sites – Dublin’s Nelson’s Pillar and New York’s Twin Towers – provide some insight into the ways in which imagination can operate in relation to homeland in contemporary America and contemporary Ireland.

Nelson’s Pillar was the result of a joint English-Irish team: the pillar designed by Englishman Francis Johnston (1760–1829), and the sculpture at the top the work of an Irishman, Cork sculptor Thomas Kirk (1781–1845). As a metaphor for colonial endeavour, one could hardly ask for anything more fitting than this monument: with its English-Irish creators, its name (after the English general who won the battle of Trafalgar that marked the defeat of one empire by another), and its position on the main thoroughfare of the colonial administrators’ base and Ireland’s capital city, Nelson’s Pillar became an immediate and obvious focus of the Dublin landscape in 1808. By 1894, when an observation porch was added, Nelson’s Pillar became a new kind of attraction for those wishing to have a bird’s eye view of the Pale: and the presence in Joyce’s Ulysses of a scene atop the pillar attests to its formidable grasp on the Irish imagination.

Curiously, Thomas Kirk was also responsible for some sculptures in the General Post Office, constructed only a handful of years after the erection of the pillar. His three contributions to the GPO are Mercury, Fidelity, and Hibernia, and they serve as an appropriate summation to the intertwining of imagination and landscape and to the idea of the pillar itself. Mercury, a god of swift change; Fidelity, an allegory of stasis and loyalty; and Hibernia, the troubled female representation of Ireland, are ironically apt figures to have witnessed the pillar’s existence, as well as its demise. For, famously, at 2 a.m. on the eighth of March 1966, the pillar’s top half was blown up, pitching Lord Nelson to the street below. The base was, several days later, blown up in a controlled explosion by the Irish Army (doing more damage than the first explosion), and the space paved over. William P. Fay, the then Irish Ambassador to the United States, noted the American response to this event in a March 11, 1966 letter, when a member of the American House of Representatives ‘thought fit to inform the House that “at long last the free people of the Republic of Ireland in their own unique way have embarked upon a program of urban renewal in Dublin city”’ (cited in Dwyer: 6).

The pillar was gone, but its absence was a tangible presence on the street, forever more observed by the woman sculpture nearby whose breast has, to this day, an equally intriguing absence, a pierced breast, a hole disappearing into dark weathered metal, the result of a bullet during the Easter Rising. The pillar, gone, its rubble removed, remained the depot, the stopping or starting point for Dublin buses, whose scrolls read ‘Nelson’s Pillar’. The space remained in the minds of the people, even if the pillar was absent. When it seemed daft to continue to send buses to a place that no longer existed in – literally – concrete terms, the contemporary ‘An Lár’ was created, which, as an uncle told me recently, marked a new level of confusion: if, in the aftermath of the pillar’s bombing, one travelled to a place reachable only through the combination of memory and imagination, one now travelled to the centre, but the centre of what? In this sense Dublin Bus might well be thought of as providing local citizens not only with public transport, but with profound questions to consider while en route.

When, several years ago, Dublin began advertising for a replacement to the pillar, the competition was initially known as the ‘Pillar Project’. And the object, the sculpture chosen, is now daily proof: a pillar of a different kind: a spire, a breath upwards; a spire, the goal of higher things; a spire, an imaginative reworking of the traditional colonial monument. Standing in the space of Nelson’s Pillar, the spire has literally re-placed that pillar, filled what was an imaginary absence. Nelson’s Pillar persists in the imaginary geography of Dublin: this overwriting of landscapes is a testament to the persistence of imagination.

The Twin Towers were, similarly, a type of colonial monument. Conceived of in the late 1960s, and completed in 1972, they combined the craft of a Japanese architect and American engineers with immigrant muscle. Unbeknownst to those involved, however, the towers were to become not an ode, but an elegy to the capitalist endeavour. Bachelard, writing of the height of city buildings, claimed that their height was a purely ‘exterior one. Elevators do away with the heroism of stair climbing so that there is no longer any virtue in living up near the sky’ (1994: 27). On September 11, 2001, of course, the overwhelming height of the Twin Towers became interiorised again, as elevators were lost and the heroics of stair climbing were reinstated in an unimaginable way.

In the aftermath of September 11, the towers’ absence from the skyline unnerved airline pilots used to a certain sky-down view, unnerved apartment dwellers – including myself – so used to seeing their immense lines against the sky, and unnerved subway users, who read maps that still insisted upon the World Trade Center as a point of arrival. The towers’ absence was too much to bear: and in their stead, two columns of blue light were erected, skyward. Ghostly, beautiful, haunting, the blue beams replaced the towers, giving New Yorkers in particular a
sense of presence where there was, inevitably, only absence. Since then, of course, plans for the towers’ replacement have been announced, after another international competition. Like Nelson’s Pillar, the Twin Towers will survive through replacement and a kind of deferred reflection: we will look in the mirror and, once again, see a more complete, more coordinated society than ever existed; we will return to the realm of the imaginary and there take comfort.

What I would suggest is that, while rural landscapes seem to become the repository for the projection of what are perceived as unchanging national ideals and imaginaries, as with Thoreau, Emerson, Yeats and Synge, contemporary urban landscapes retain something of the spirit behind the old Irish ‘landscape,’ or lore of place, recording the changes to place as they occur, and the resultant changes in names: if we consider the rural or unpeopled landscape to hold our idealised visions of our nations, the urban landscape, I suggest, becomes the reflection of the changing nature of our lives, the vagaries of the modern world. In the urban it is possible to overwrite, to continually renew: and through these acts our imaginations can come to terms with Mercury, allow us to say: yes, I remember, I imagine, I was there. Many Dubliners will describe for you not only Nelson’s Pillar, but the changes that occur street by street by street over time; New Yorkers will do the same, recalling houses, shops, buildings that once stood in a particular spot and are now occupied with other objects, by other people. The imaginary homelands shift, accommodate the vanished and the newly-appeared in a palimpsest impossible in a realm other than that of our minds.

As an immigrant in Ireland myself, I am all too familiar with Rushdie’s idea of ‘imaginary homelands’. Because I live in Ireland, the Twin Towers are, for me, absent only in the way that they were prior to September 11, 2001: and when I return to New York, their absence is unsettling precisely because it disturbs my imagination’s conception of New York as it was. My own experience, however, seems mirrored in that of thousands of New Yorkers, so many of whom speak of the Twin Towers in present tense, and have come to treasure the previously unremarkable photographs of themselves with tourist relatives or friends atop a conservatory that is, as I write, cloud, sky. Our minds create our homelands; that the Twin Towers are rubble piled in Staten Island, dust long since exhaled, or Nelson’s Pillar contained only in silent photographs of another era, does not matter. Our imaginations function in a continual present tense, accepting and integrating mythologies like that of the rural nation even when it is just that, a mythology; and making use of the urban landscape to reinscribe ourselves, our ideas, our homes.

Bibliography

Culture, Inequality and bureaucratic imagination: states and subjects for a new millenium

A. Jamie Saris

The space in which one examines is philosophically very different from the space in which one sees. (Gaston Bachelard, The Philosophy of No: A Philosophy of the New Scientific Mind)

Introduction

In this paper, I want to make a case for imagination as a ubiquitous, but neglected, modality in social life. Unfortunately, in such a short piece, I will not be able to offer anything like a comprehensive examination of such a complex term. Even confining ourselves to English-language speculation, for example, such a summation would still be huge. Just in the space between Hobbes's rather lame sense of imagination as decaying sense (1651) and Locke's subtly subversive understanding of reflection (1700), imagination emerged as the spectre haunting anglophone philosophy's empiricism. It is, arguably, one of the most interesting words in the English language and, while it appears in variations in parts of modern anthropology (such as 'imaginary' derived from the work of Lacan), its more natural language sense as a potential of certain kinds of thought is less well researched. In particular, the sense of this term denoting a way of visualizing a hoped-for better future – perhaps best expressed by one of the slogans connected to the wave of protests loosely referred to as 'anti-capitalist', that is, another world is possible – is less commonly examined. My interest in this paper, then, is in thinking about how we actively imagine the world in which we actually live, especially the connections within this global moment we are least inclined to see. If there is a slogan connected to my argument, it would run something like: this world is here because we are actively making it. Thus, there is a grimmer side to the case I am making – we are well along the road of imagining a world that is pretty unpleasant, and we had better start to understand some of the ways that this is actually done, if we want to go about changing it.

While there have been a variety of attempts to use imagination as a means of unpacking local situations (see Kaplan 1995, Arexaga 2000, Comaroff and Comaroff 2004, among many others), fewer theorists have looked at how imagination undergirds how an anthropology of the present global moment might account for what is not imaginable for the social sciences as well as their objects of study (Fernandez n.d. on imagination in the moral order takes this idea in a slightly different direction). Tellingly, the 2002 American Anthropological Association Annual Meetings was titled (Un)Imaginable Futures, emphasizing the common temporal orientation of the term I am trying to unpack here. Axel (2003), for example, has a very cogent critique of the theme of this volume, emphasizing the limits of imagination as a category of anthropological analysis on the basis of its coherence with the world of fact and some of the contradictions that he finds in Anderson's sense of imagined communities (1991), which he sees as one of the tap-roots of this use of the term imagination. Throughout, though, it is the positive sense of imagination that is emphasized. I believe that this use of imagination marks how closely the theoretical understanding of the term tracks its more quotidian usage. Much like an older idea of culture, others seem to have more imagination than 'we' do. Within 'us', certain classes of people removed from the workaday world, such as poets and other creative sorts, are understood to have more imagination than the run-of-the-mill person. Our day-to-day life, we suppose, is not a realm ruled by our imaginations (except as consumers of the products of the more imaginative among us, hence our connections to 'imagined' communities), and we mark this meaning of 'imagination' in our colloquialisms concerning the sorts of work and/or activities wherein the faculty is supposed to thrive, as opposed to our everyday existence. Instead, I argue that imagination clearly undergirds what we consider standard interpretations of public codes (what symbolic anthropology has long taken to be the real object of our researches); it speaks to the problem of legitimating power, and it is clearly bound up with how we know (and do not know) the world. My field for this excursion into the role of imagination is my reading of increasing structural and symbolic violence in the modern moment, alongside a case for why anthropology as a discipline should be interested in this issue.

Is Seeing Believing?

I begin, then, with four scenarios all coming from only the past ten years, touching, in very different ways, on the imaginings of justice, equality, and seeing or not seeing various types of interconnections.

1. Late 1990s. Jean Dubuisson, one miserable, from the central plateau of Haiti. When he was a child, his family, dispossession by a USAID-funded development project under the despotic US-supported regime of Papa Doc, the Pélègre Hydroelectric Dam, made the move from landed poor to desperate rural underclass. Unsure of his own age, he is sure that he has known 'nothing but troubles' in his life. He and his wife Marie watched two of their children die before the age of five. Since 1990, Jean has been slowly dying of TB, an easily treatable disease for, since the late 1980s, is claiming more lives than ever before in human history. Jean's treatment in 1998 cost only a couple of dollars a day, but the average income in Haiti was then only a little over $200/yr, and Jean was one of the people bringing down that average
(Farmer 1999: 187–200). At about this same time, when Jean is slowly dying from a very treatable disease, the Human Genome Project is being completed, inspiring some medical researchers to begin to imagine vastly increased life-spans, perhaps even effective immortality, for at least some members of the human race in the foreseeable future.

2. Late 1990s. At the Universities of Warwick and Oxford, an elegant experiment – conducted by members of a seemingly rare breed, some imaginative economists – yields a perverse result. Subjects are provided virtual (but ultimately convertible) ‘currency’ and are then allowed to ‘bet’ on various topics, while a few are rewarded with large windfalls. Subjects have no contact with each other except through a computer terminal, but they are aware of each other’s winnings. After very large inequalities are established, participants are allowed to ‘burn’ others’ income at some cost to their own. Much to the surprise of the ringmasters, 62% of the ‘losers’ incur further crippling losses to bring down the winnings of their ‘more successful’ counterparts. In the popular press, right-wing commentators (e.g. Mercer 2003) take this result of the experiment as confirmation of how envy lurks in the dark corners of an acontextual human nature, and, thus, they see the necessity of vigilance in a global economy still, in their way of thinking, too slow to reward life’s winners and to punish life’s losers, in the manner in which they deserve.

3. 2000–2001, at several sites in the USA. Another experiment – in one sense, a depressingly familiar scene – that of monkeys being used as pharmacological models to measure the addictive potential of a drug, in this case, cocaine. The imaginative twist: macaques raised individually are allowed to form social groups, complete with dominance hierarchies. Cocaine is offered only after such hierarchies are established. The results: while all the monkeys try cocaine, only the ones on the bottom of the hierarchies self-administer as often as possible (the closest demonstration that those who torment monkeys have provided of what humans call ‘addiction’). Furthermore, these monkeys show wide variance in Positron Emission Topography (PET) scans of their brains, with dominant ones showing higher numbers, and activity levels, of D2 receptors, which are implicated in the brain’s management of pleasure and aversion. Conclusion: brain chemistry, individual history, pharmacological action, and social dynamics are difficult, if not impossible, to disaggregate (Morgan et al. 2002).

4. 2002, Dublin, Ireland. A woman, D in her early 20s, relates (to a research assistant on a state-funded project on opiate prevalence) the history of her near-decadelong attraction to heroin, and her various, to date unsuccessful, attempts to come off the drug. The project is attempting to establish a clearer sense of the number of addicts in Ireland, at least 10 years into a serious heroin problem on the island, and twenty-plus years since the drug first emerged as a social issue in Dublin. After a paper and pencil instrument is filled in that measures types and amounts of compounds taken and that also develops some data on the woman’s sense of her social network, a longer conversation, developed over a few weeks, ensues. It proves impossible to get a simple narrative of her drug use without the details of the extraordinary amount of violence in her life – regular physical abuse in school as a younger, victim and originator of violence as teenager, the experience of rape at sixteen. Currently, she is on probation and in treatment, but she will likely be homeless when she is released, and will probably find that prostitution (in which she has been occasionally involved) will be one of her only career options. During the course of almost five hours of interviews D mentions heroin and the concept of addiction only tangentially and under prodding of the interviewer.

Connections
My basic assertion is a simple one: these scenarios are related by their ways of making visible, or their pointing out ways of obscuring, a fundamental reality, perhaps the defining quality, of our historical moment – that of gross inequalities and their systematic reproduction. This problem, of course, is scarcely a new one. Inequalities, like the laissez-faire economist’s sense of ‘the Poor,’ have always been with us. My point in this paper is not to bewail this fact; rather I want to think about the place that inequalities have in our current imaginings, that is, the conditions of the possibility for what and how we currently see, and what we feel we should do about what we see. I also want to look at the mechanisms whereby this seeing or the lack of it happens. Finally, I want to reflect on the role of anthropological thinking in this complex of what is imaginable and what can be acted upon.

Humanity and Inequality
Human sociality is in crucial respects separated from other forms of animal sociality precisely because we can imagine our own inequalities and assign them various valences. Minimally, we can imagine ones different from the one we are born with or into. More interestingly (and probably unique to our species), we can even imagine a society where such inequalities are eliminated or severely attenuated. The body of social theory out of which (at least anglophone) anthropology develops, moreover, takes inequalities as one of the foundational issues of human sociality – something that is both necessary to, and potentially destructive of, any possibility of humans living peaceably and well together in groups. From Hobbes (1651) to Rawls (1971), theorists of the social contract have had to balance the idea of some equality with respect to political power and legal subjectivity with massive inequalities of talent, interests, life chances, strength and the like. It is hardly surprising, therefore, that arguments both for and against certain types of inequality have historically been politically contentious and rhetorically powerful. Few notions have been more potent, for example, than Rousseau’s (1992 [1729]) sense of ‘unnatural’ inequalities (those based on une sorte de convention imposed on a theoretically more fundamental equality of Man), as a means of rallying political forces in the cause of social change in recent Western history. Despite being declared dead and buried several times over the past 250 years, this idea of a fundamental human equality is still powerful enough that Stephen Pinker, a psycholinguist at MIT has recently written yet another book attempting to ‘debunk’ it (Pinker 2002).

For this reason, imagination is an important but underappreciated aspect of governance. Technocratic control of populations, appropriation of resources, and application of bureaucracy all require both imagined entities to manipulate and, crucially, imagined endpoints as goals. At the same time, resistance to various technocratic projects also requires imagination, mobilizing constructs, such as the perceived locus of agency in social life and the sense of logical routes to
influence outcomes of initiatives. For such projects to succeed, states and subjects must also imagine what they cannot change, indeed, what they cannot see.

Thus, we come to the condition of possibility for the four scenarios above, which is the historical moment in which we find ourselves, at the end of, or at least adrift in, History, almost twenty years after the fall of the Berlin Wall, and the de facto triumph of a globalized capitalist order complete with US-military enforcement between states, and the largely uninterrupted growth of neo-liberal policies within politics, more or less without any credible material or ideological opposition. In this current wave of imagining, the market has emerged as the master metaphor of social life, and wide (and widening) inequalities, with their attendant affective states in ontological individuals of fear and greed, are the mechanics of this imagining of the market. Whatever the perils or the possibilities of this epoch, it is a moment when inequalities have never been greater both within and between societies and when the language in which to discuss certain kinds of inequalities has never been more meager in certain disciplines, including, I would argue, Anthropology. Hence the main, if not the only, paradox in our four cases above: we have, on the one hand, disciplines predicated on an ontological individual – economics and pharmacology – almost by accident, developing persuasive evidence that a socially-produced sense of equality and inequality is everything from a fundamental aspect of our behavioural environment to an important influence on our very biology, and we have social sciences, which have historically taken the ontological embeddedness of human beings in social groups as a given, finding it harder and harder to theorize what Jonathan Kozol (1991), an American writer, almost twenty years ago called ‘Savage Inequalities’ in any principled way.

What States and Subjects See

Models of bureaucracy have generally been dominated by metaphors of sight. We have become inured to terms like ‘transparency’ and ‘vision’ when discussing social policies and/or their origins and effects in modern industrial democracies. Similarly, analyses and/or critiques of the state have long conceded the centrality of vision in their terminology and analyses. ‘Bureaucratic gaze’, ‘panopticon’, and ‘inspectorial’ are easy-to-find descriptions in analyses of the state and its knowledge about its subjects. The visual metaphor also organizes our description of resistance to power. Resistance and escaping the gaze of a presumably totalizing state are equated in terms like ‘hidden transcripts’, ‘covert resistance’, and ‘subaltern history’, all presumably obscure from, if not actually occult to, the gaze of the powerful. Knowledge and research is similarly imagined – making visible the previously obscure. In short, seeing has been related to the exercise of power – in this sense of being able to manipulate something – and its lack has been linked to the ability to avoid power.

Researchers interested in the relationship of sight to power in the sense above too often cite the seminal thinking of Michel Foucault in an off-hand way as support of this position (e.g., 1975). Foucault’s way of thinking about sight, however, could not be more at odds with this crypto-positivist reading of a sense of vision. The visual in the panopticon or in the doctor’s gaze would better be put as a gerundive, that is, the visualizing of something. Far from seeing something already there, sight, subjectivity, and power simultaneously imply each other in this way of thinking. Less obvious, though, has been what invisibility implies for power. Bourdieu’s sense of institutional forgetting as an important part of his idea of ‘symbolic violence’ gets to this issue, but more after the fact (Bourdieu 1977, 1991). Mary Douglas in How Institutions Think also struggles with this issue. Unwilling to locate power or agency in anything but concrete individuals, however, she is forced to define institutions in terms of getting individuals within their matrix to think alike, and she recaptures the similarly Durkheimian sense that classifying is the privileged way that such thinking proceeds. As usual in such analyses, power is difficult to locate; individuals by definition do not exercise power over institutions, but only individuals can have agendas and interests for Douglas (for critique, see Saris 1995). Surely, though, if we construct the visible in social life, we must also hammer out an agreement as to what we cannot see.

(Re)visioning the State

Still, if one imagines the state as a set of institutions (a venerable and defensible position), then what we might call their current configuration of imagination, that is how they imagine they see or what they fail to see, and how they remember or forget, is very interesting. Part of our historical moment, we are told (whether this moment is heralded or bemoaned), is the so-called roll-back of the state: the removal of bureaucracy, the relaxing of regulations, and the cutting of taxes all leading to a smaller, more efficient government, a greater scope for private life and civil society, and more self-reliance in individuals. Many researchers, myself included, have questioned this assertion, especially as it applies to those losing socio-economic ground in the new society (Farnier 2004, Saris et al. 2002, among many others). One of the signal aspects of inequalities in the moment in which we live, for example, is how much of the state the dispossessed actually do see, whether this is the spectacular growth over the past twenty years of the carceral state in the US or the seemingly gentler ways that chronic social problems are being ‘communitized’ and regulated by semi-state bodies interested in ‘community development’ in some parts of Europe. Amongst too many of les miserable de la terre, especially those in so-called ‘failed’ states in the South, moreover, the problem is not a lack of state organs, but precisely their proliferation amongst various factions, all attempting to exercise an often brutal governmental over the same imagined territory and population. Armies consisting of strung-out adolescents, whose machetes are the only reliable weapons they possess, are led by men whom insist on the trappings of state bureaucracy.

It is especially easy, though, to miss how intrusive a presence is the state in certain areas and populations in so-called ‘developed’ society. As always, perhaps, the United States serves as the best window on this process. Television productions developed in the US, like COPS (now in its 700th episode), celebrate the most crude manifestations of state presence – heavily armed, uniformed forces, swooping into certain (always poor, generally black and brown) neighbourhoods, appealing to a white, mostly middle-class audience that responds to political appeals to banish government intrusion into their own lives. The State is not just made visible, but actually valorized for this population – a sort of value-for-money advertisement for their reduced tax burden.
Other shows that have become popular in both North America and Western Europe, especially the odious Big Brother, are not just the voyeuristic celebration of boring, mediocre individuals as many critics have justly claimed; instead, they exist as a sort of inside joke that we share with ourselves about the tenuousness of our own privacy in the face of the ubiquity of surveillance technology like CCTV and CARNIVORE.\textsuperscript{51} In my own work, for example, it astonishes me how certain commentators in Ireland can talk about the ‘roll-back’ of the state – the 8 or so neighbourhoods in the capital that score worst in the Truex-Haaze Deprivation Index, that also provide the overwhelming majority of the prison population, are also the target of multiple, very well-intentioned ‘community-based’ interventions (again financed by the state). Even the idea that the state has become smaller and less powerful would certainly be news in such places (see Saris et alii 2002).

While the popular and state imaginings of such connections have seemingly become impoverished, and even academic research slow to investigate certain connections (for exceptions see Davis 2005 and Elsner 2005), other analysts have had fewer difficulties. In the aftermath of a fatal prison riot in New Mexico in the US, for example, the Business Section of the Albuquerque Tribune ran a brief background piece on Wackenhut, the corporation making a tidy profit out of the state contract to run this prison, by (1) overcrowding and (2) cutting the number of guards on shift at any one time.\textsuperscript{62}

Crime does pay, if you’re in the private corrections business. Talk about demand: The nation’s inmate population has grown 228 per cent from 1980 to 1996. ‘We not looking at a slowdown in the numbers of prisoners’, says Doug McDonald, senior associate at Abt Associates Inc. in Cambridge, Mass. ‘Politicians still like to run against crime. We have longer and longer sentences. There are more people going away for longer periods of time.’ And, he adds, ‘Legislatures aren’t interested in spending money for prisons.’ (Albuquerque Tribune, Business Section 17/6/03)

Such arguments, connecting various decisions by elites, with bad (even deadly) outcomes for certain less powerful people, enabled by society-wide forms of bad faith, would seem radical in an Opinion/Editorial column of the New York Times, or even the Guardian, but it registers as a literal description in the Business Section of a paper from the US Sunbelt.

We might, then, ask ourselves why this is so. Radical transformations in the size, form and function of state institutions geared to the dispossessed have been remarkably integrated, and remarkably little investigated by anthropologists (exception Rhodes 2003). We know, for example, that prison populations have boomed in the US over the past twenty-odd years, but we scarcely realize how diverse these institutions have become, with some US prisons and jails being amongst the largest in-patient psychiatric institutions in the world, others existing as a sort of domestic destination of out-sourced telemarketing jobs, and still others functioning as models of factory production that have largely abandoned in the developed world. Further, at least some US researchers have pointed out how the statistics of the remarkable growth of the US prison size exist in defiance of both trends in the crime rate and the growth of population (e.g., Davis 2003).

Shulman examines some of these connections in his book, The Betrayal of Work (2003). A key theme of this analysis is the prevalence of mismatched assumptions about ‘work’ in the United States in the twenty-first century especially the harsh reality that so-called unskilled workers face there. These assumptions resonate with other neoliberal economic situations, such as that found in Ireland and the United Kingdom. Four such assumptions are (1) that social mobility is as possible as ever for the working poor in America, (2) that by improving their skills on the job, workers can significantly increase their wages, (3) that globalization is universally responsible for the marginalization of American workers, and (4) that private and religious charities provide the best medicine for those trapped in the new poverty.

All of these assumptions imagine collective action through elected government as either a hindrance or futile in the face of larger forces. While the ways that such an argument serves the interests of elites is easy to unpack, how often do we connect this ideological success of neo-liberalism to the relative attractiveness of prison employment in much of America for those on the wrong side of widening inequalities (it is only partially exposed to the most brutal of market forces, better unionized than the rest of the workforce, and seemingly protected, for the moment at least, from out-sourcing).\textsuperscript{65} Much like the army, it is, in short, one of the narrowing range of decent career paths for those labelled ‘unskilled’ by the masters of the new global economy. My point is that, despite some macro-analyses of the politics of widening inequalities (e.g., Klein 2004), we have only begun to investigate the mechanics of this system as a system. Much more work needs to be done, for example, on the symbolic coherence of this new configuration. Where does legitimacy come from, for example, now that the state conceals its limitations so readily (say with respect to migrant populations and certain security issues)? How is legitimating power performed successfully now that the middle classes in most advanced industrial economies seem to be at best suspicious of elections? How are certain populations on the wrong side of these widening inequalities being managed in newer equations of governmentality, and how do they respond to this management?\textsuperscript{64}

Examples could, of course, be multiplied, but my basic argument should be clear enough. We live at a moment of vastly heightened inequalities, ones that have been deliberately (and relatively recently) brought about by decisions made by elites, both within polities and in terms of powerful international organizations imposing their will on weaker entities (generally developing countries). These inequalities have very bad implications for those at the wrong end of them. Within the so-called advanced industrial democracies, these recently-heightened inequalities have been regulated by a massive growth in certain parts of the state, at a time when the social presence of state power is supposedly in retreat. I need not spend much time on the observation that the new international order has been accompanied by a growth in militarized intervention, initially led by NATO, and increasingly just the United States, nor that the same failed economic policies tending to magnify inequalities within polities are being exported time and again, generally under threat, in this New World Order. Despite the production of this global order of great benefit to
the already rich and powerful, underwritten by the military muscle of the most powerful state – something that looks rather like imperialism – we are told that never has democracy been stronger in world history, and we have even been informed that the corner has been turned on beating global poverty. In short, there seems to be a system of interlocking symbolic and material elements, the result of active and passive choices by subjects in a variety of structural positions, differentially handicapping specific areas and populations.

The Work of Culture

Where does anthropology, a small discipline not very used to thinking of itself as central to politically powerful discourses, fit into all this? A less obvious (and, indeed, far less commented on) aspect of this growth in the production and management of structural violence is an invigorated imagination of the culture concept that occurs at almost exactly the same period. From the revival of the culture of poverty argument connected to the ‘underclass’ in the US and the UK from the mid-1980s, to the concept of community in ‘Community Development’ and the maintenance of corporatist solidarity in Europe from about the same time (Rose 1996), to the tensions within nation-states about the flood of immigrants that the new global economy both creates and demands, to the Think Tank success of Samuel Huntington’s The Clash of Civilizations in explaining conflicts between states, non-state actors and groups of states, something like the culture concept has never been more firmly linked to power both within and between polities (see especially, Harrison and Huntington 2000). Culture now ‘explains’ the differential rates of success and failure of populations within countries being fundamentally remade by neo-liberal policies (Rose 1996); it lurks as the ultimate cause of otherwise inexplicable civil wars at the edges of the global economy (Huntington 1996); it is the reason why immigrants suffer discrimination within nation-states; it motivates better and worse health outcomes in the face of diseases of scarcity and excess; and it provides a convincing narrative (at least to some) of why Pax Americana is being resisted, most obviously if not exclusively, in parts of the Islamic world. It seems to me that only at its cruelest end can this explanation be read as simple false consciousness – voodoo practices as a reason for the spread of AIDS in Haiti or the famous analysis of Paul O’Neill, the (former) US Treasury secretary on a recent tour of Africa with Bono, claiming that triple anti-retroviral therapy for HIV/AIDS would not be cost effective in Africa because the lack of cultural acquaintance with wristwatches would make keeping to the relatively stringent dosing schedule too difficult for the natives – but these are the least interesting cases. Here artifice overwhelms whatever art there may be in this kind of ‘explanation’ where ‘bad faith’ seems a more persuasive description than ‘false consciousness’.

It is the ontology that such a form of bad faith supposes, and how someone might imagine its persuasiveness, however, that I want to illuminate with another imagined scenario. Imagine Ruth Benedict, magically returned from the other side more than seventy years after the publications of Patterns of Culture, examining the statement above. Paul O’Neill, discussing perhaps the most pressing health problem the world currently faces, elaborates an ontology of cultural difference that ‘explains’ one of the primary social-medical cleavages in the modern moment – how AIDS/HIV looks rather like diabetes in the so-called developed world and like the Black Death or Spanish Flu in the ‘less developed’ parts of the globe. Taken together, say, with some of the examples cited above, she could justifiably be forgiven for thinking that anthropologists were closely involved in the formulation of a variety of powerful discourse concerning everything from foreign policy to the administration of social problems within nation-states, even if she might disagree with the uses of the concepts in this instance.

In a sense, our revenant might still be correct. In the United States (again) anthropologists using a very Benedictian sense of culture are now advising on such diverse topics as how the US Army might kill more effectively and with less collateral damage in its ‘War on Terror’ (see Stannard 2007 and for critique see Price 2007) to how cost and populations can be managed to maintain the current structure of health-care delivery. Some commentators even place a ‘classic’ national character study, The Arab Mind by Raphael Patai (1976), as one of the roots of the neo-conservative assault on the Islamic world. And in Europe, anthropologists have found new avenues for funding for social policy-relevant research using a superficially similar understanding of ‘culture’.

On the other hand, our revenant would be very wrong with respect to the discipline as a whole. Clearly, this growth of the acceptance of what might charitably be called an untheorized sense of culture outside of anthropology has been accompanied by a retreat from the concept in the discipline that gave ‘culture’ its modern definition. The words that we have used to replace it, especially in thinking about so-called transnational phenomena, seem to me to be even less sensitive to issues of power and structural violence, especially in understanding their material and symbolic integration. What the current moment should force us to do is to think seriously about Gramsci’s famous dictum concerning the relationship of class and culture, that ‘The question of power is at the heart of the theorization of culture’ Gramsci (1983: 126–32). As Kate Crehan has recently pointed out in an interesting work on Gramsci and culture, the sense of ‘culture’ in the Prison Notebooks has important differences from its use in, especially American, anthropology (2002: ch.5). Gramsci saw hegemony as being built on the back of partial and contingent symbolic systems created by differentially placed populations with clearly unequal access to power within a definite political-economic structure (Crehan 2002). There was no necessary coherence in these systems and Gramsci was fairly dismissive of those academics, such as folklorists, who searched for such coherence. Gramsci’s most obvious descendant in the scenarios that began this paper would be the Critical Medical Anthropology perspective of Paul Farmer, who largely sees ‘culture’ as a form of false consciousness, especially when mobilised as an explanation for misery in Haiti, and who tends to be very chary in its use. At best, in this way of thinking, culture encourages certain forms of bad faith, and at worst it simply hides the machinations of power (2004).

To put it as briefly as possible, I believe that this critique too easily abandons the theoretical and methodological strengths of modern anthropology, and, further, it misses the symbolic coherence that is an important part of a successful hegemonic project. If we
are not to abandon some sense of coherence in symbolic systems, however, we will need to rethink coherence in the face of power and hegemony, and the privileged sphere for this reanalysis seems to me to be the imagination. This sense of imagination will not be in the sense of a new field, but as a ubiquitous (but theoretically neglected) modality of social life that is central to what we are doing in the here and now. I am not persuaded that a two-decade-long project stressing hybridity, -scapes, fragments, and the like have moved us as far forward as we might be in understanding our shared historical moment in this sense. In short, we are not merely in Fabian’s term ‘coeval,’ we are interconnected in ways that would have seemed fanciful only a couple of decades ago. ‘Globalization’ is only a convenient label, not an explanation, for this process.

Conclusion
Minimally, having the courage of our current professed theoretical convictions forces us to face some potentially grim realities connected to this realization. If we do construct significant parts of our social world, at least in part through a concordance of symbols within our imaginations, then we are well on our way to building a pretty grim reality in which to live. It is a reality that is deaf to the calls of the suffering; that has an impoverished register in which to discuss subjectivity; and one that has a very narrow sense of ‘meaning’ in power and politics. If we really believe that imagination is to be one of the midwives of another world,2 then we are over-late in investigating how it is under-girding and reproducing the one in which we currently find ourselves.

On this ground, such diverse phenomena as the sociology of knowledge, the analysis of advertising and popular culture, the study of elites, as well as those of so-called ‘new’ social movements can be brought into productive connection with one another. It is an area that the tools and thinking of anthropology should be especially suitable to map.

Acknowledgments
I would like to thank Dr. Colin Couter for many discussions concerning aspects of this talk and for looking at a very incomplete draft of the work. I also wish to acknowledge the assistance of Emma Heffernan for help with editing this piece.

Endnotes
1 This essay has its roots in two presentations, Engaging Imagination, 19–21 June 2003, University College Dublin and Dublin Business School, Dublin, Ireland, and at the Medical Anthropology Seminar, Harvard Medical School in March 2004.

2 There is, of course, an enormous philosophical literature on imagination, e.g. Sallis 2000. I wish to confine my argument in this piece to some of the specific ways that anthropology has used the terms. More evidence for a sense of fairness in animals can be found in Brosnan and de Waal (2003)

4 Wolf (1999) makes a very similar case in his volume on ‘envisioning’ power.

5 The acronym for the FBI’s computer programme to sift masses of e-mails for sensitive data. Effectiveness is less an issue (consider 9/11), than the shared sense that such techniques exist and could be used. Imagine the outcry in the seemingly conformist 1950s, if J. Edgar Hoover had announced the ubiquitous opening of letters in every post office in the nation.

6 Actually, the situation is even worse than it sounds, as the company clearly tried to deceive its inspectors by pretending to have more guards than they actually had on a pre-riot visit in the wake of complaints from some of their employees to the oversight body.

7 See Saris 2004. Coulter 1999 makes a similar case for how the Troubles in Northern Ireland helped insulate the province from Thatcherism.

8 John Gledhill (1999) discusses the metaphor of visibility in a very sophisticated way in his development of the notion of the ‘shadow state’, especially in his analysis of the production of violence at the edge of believability.


For a general summary of the debate, see Monbiot 2003 ‘Rich in Imagination’.


11 One of the few works in the 1990s using the concept of ‘culture’ in this sense is Kuper’s Culture: An Anthropologist’s Account (1999). In this piece, he more or less debunks the culture concept. The relationship of anthropology to its conceptual progeny has been breached in a more serious way in recent years, with a Special Edition of American Anthropologist (September 2004) dedicated to recuperating Boas’s legacy.

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‘To Dream Profoundly’: Irish Boglands and the Imagination of Matter

Stuart McLean

To me it’s a place that has a terrific presence by itself – this black primordial goo [...] There’s a tremendous history there too. I suppose because the vegetation has been deposited over thousands of years [...] like a little store-house of history [...] The bog is such a black soup – almost like a metaphor for the subconscious [...] so I’m trying to make a connection between the sleeping bog and an aspect of ourselves possibly.

The words are those of the sculptor Remco de Fouw, a resident of County Wicklow, describing his involvement in Boglands: A Sculptors’ Symposium, organized in August 1990 by the Sculptors Society of Ireland. Sculptors from Ireland and elsewhere (U.K., Netherlands, Japan) were invited to spend three weeks in the blanket bogs of the Wicklow mountains, taking with them minimal tools and no materials.86 Inspired in part by the site-specific projects of ‘land artists’ like Richard Long and Andy Goldsworthy, the aim of the symposium was to explore participants’ reactions to the shapes, textures and colours of the bog environment. At the end of three weeks, the works produced were left in situ to be effaced gradually by wind and weather, until they were finally re-absorbed into the landscape from which they had been fashioned. The project was recorded in Aisling Stuart’s documentary film of the same title and in a series of photographs by Christine Bond, which later served as the basis of exhibitions in Belfast (12 November–1 December, 1990) and Dublin (6–28 August, 1991).69 One of Remco’s contributions to the symposium consisted of a series of human heads, life-size or larger, sculpted out of peat and slumbering, eyes closed, beneath over-hanging canopies of wild vegetation. The heads were modeled in bas-relief, lying almost flush with the surface of the bog, out of which they emerged through a subtle modulation of textures, the unevenness of the peat giving way to the smoothness of the sleeping faces (Stuart 1990; Visual Artists Ireland 1990).70

* The word ‘bog’ comes from the Irish bogach, meaning soft or marshy ground. The surface of a bog consists of a thin upper layer of living vegetation, mostly sphagnum mosses, along with other plants such as heather and bog cotton. Underlying it is a much thicker layer of peat made up of compacted plant (and sometimes animal) remains accumulated over hundreds or thousands of years. Water passes rapidly through the upper layer, but is retained by the lower, through which it moves at a much slower rate. Despite its surface appearance, a bog can consist of between 85 and 98% water. Peat accumulates in acidic, waterlogged soils deficient in the oxygen needed by the microorganisms that assist in the breakdown of plant matter. Plant remains build up until eventually the ground becomes buried under a layer of acidic peat. As it expands, a bog engulfs and conserves anything in its path, the acidic and anaerobic conditions below its surface acting to slow the process of decay.

The cutting of peat (or turf) for fuel is mentioned in the earliest written sources, including the early Irish legal texts of the seventh and eighth centuries (Kelly 2000). Turf cutting continues to the present alongside large-scale mechanized peat extraction by Bord na Móna, a state corporation set up in 1946 to develop Ireland’s peat resources on a fully commercial basis (Jones n.d.). Since the nineteenth century the continuing exploitation of peat as a fuel source has proceeded in tandem with a growing recognition on the part of scholars of the significance of peat bogs as a material record of the past. The accumulated layers of peat contain millions of pollen grains, seeds and remains of plants and insects, giving a record of thousands of years of vegetation history. Bogs have been no less effective in conserving the human past. In County Mayo, on Ireland’s North Atlantic coast, turf-cutting and subsequent archaeological excavations have revealed the remains of buried landscapes – ancient farmsteads, walls and tombs – dating back more than four thousand years to a period prior to the formation of the bog. ‘Bog butter’, placed in the bog for storage by earlier inhabitants, continues to be unearthed centuries later.71 Human corpses deposited in bog holes and tainted by the acidity of the peat, have been found so well preserved that facial features, hair colour, clothing and stomach contents remain recognizable (Aalen, Whelan and Stout 1997: 108–11, 117–21; Feehan and O’Donovan 1996: 1–36, 115–52, 449–73; Foss and O’Connell 1998: 184–86; Mitchell and Ryan 2001: 144–48, 202–11).72

* To dream profoundly, in the words of the philosopher Gaston Bachelard, is to dream of matter: ‘Dreams come before contemplation. Before becoming a conscious sight, every landscape is an oneric experience… But the oneric landscape is not a frame that is filled up with impressions; it is a pervading substance.’ Behind or beneath the imagination of forms so often privileged in discussions of cognition and aesthetics there lay, according to Bachelard, an imagination of substances. The underlying substance of matter could be rendered visible by de-objectifying objects and deforming forms – as in the instinctive materialism of the child’s play, encountering the world not as gestalt but as flux, or in the movement of the potter’s hand, plying the as yet amorphous clay, drawing forth form out of formlessness, less by a movement of abstraction, than by infusing the very imagination of forms with an always prior experience of the richness and density of matter (Bachelard 1983: 4).
Dave Kinane, born in Dublin and now based in Manorhamilton, County Leitrim, was both a participant and one of the organizers of the symposium. He chose a site beside a small stream with overhanging turf banks on which grew heather, rushes and 'a kind of straw'. He described his initial reactions to the site in the following terms:

I came with some ideas in a sense, preconceptions about what I might build or what I might make. It was such an unusual situation for a sculptor, and not having the usual resources to fall back on what better way than to just start playing with the turf, mixing straw with the turf, in a way just like a child - mud pies - exploring the feeling of it, so I found myself just modeling the turf in a sense and pushing this new medium – for me at any rate – as far as it will go. (Stuart 1990)

As a sculptor, his first response, he recalled, was to attempt to fashion structures, shaping and giving form to the raw materials supplied by the landscape. He soon came to realize, however, that his efforts were at odds with the character of the landscape ('there's nothing structural on a peat bog') and that the process of engagement with his surroundings was more important than any end product: 'It was all very elemental – like being a child... it was like entering this space... a kind of magic space – almost like stepping out of the real world and into this imaginary space, which is also a real space...'.

The setting for the 'Boglands' symposium was an area of blanket bog traversed by numerous streams, converging to form just one of the River Liffey, which flows down to nearby Dublin and the sea. Ann O'Connor of Letterfrack, County Galway, was struck by the ubiquity of water as a medium linking together land, sea and sky. One of her projects paid tribute to this in the form of a water spirit shrine, fashioned from found twigs and branches and lashed together with reeds (Stuart 1990). One is reminded here that water has served the human imagination perennially as the element of movement and transformation, of flows traversing boundaries and the dissolution of solid forms. In identifying water as the primordial substance, the pre-Socratic thinker Thales would later be credited by Friedrich Nietzsche with the originary philosophical insight: that all things are one (Nietzsche 1996:39). No less widespread has been the identification of water with spirits of the dead, ancestors, burials, executions, sacrificial offerings and otherworldly journeys. In the case of the people known to history as the Celts, such a connection was first noted by the Roman historian Tacitus, who wrote, in a work published in 98 AD (and subsequently much cited by archaeologists and folklorists), that votive deposits in rivers, lakes and other bodies of water were widespread among the Germanic tribes on the westernmost fringes of the Roman empire (Aldhouse-Green 1986: 138–66; Tacitus 1970: 134–35).

What then of the water's edges, the marshlands, beaches and tidal estuaries that lie between land and water? If water has been conceived as the element of dissolution par excellence, are these not the settings in which solid and liquid, form and formlessness collide and intermingle, where fixed contours dissolve and where new configurations are born? The story of that mythical, yet world-historically powerful entity called 'Europe' has been in no small degree one of protracted struggle against the abject, waterlogged expanses marking its own inner and outer frontiers. Fernand Braudel writes of the Mediterranean plains with their malarial swamps, blocking the inland expansion of human settlement, the reclamation of which for agricultural use was achieved only at the cost of numerous lives and not completed, in some instances, until the nineteenth century (Braudel 1973: I 66–84). On a smaller scale, the fens of eastern England remained for many centuries a largely impassable area of marsh and scrub, prone to inundation by the North Sea. In this case, large-scale drainage operations and the reclamation of the fens for agricultural use began only in the late sixteenth century (Darby 1940: 1–22, 23–82). In Ireland too, during the early Christian and medieval periods, despite the continued cutting of turf for domestic fuel, bogs remained largely resistant to colonization and settlement. It was only with the consolidation of English rule during the late sixteenth and early seventeenth centuries that their hitherto unrealized agricultural potential became apparent to a further wave of English settlers (Mitchell 2001: 315–27). The earliest publications dealing with bogs date from the mid-seventeenth century, a time when substantial areas of land had already been forcibly cleared for purposes of plantation. One seventeenth-century writer concerned with the reclamation of bogs was William King, an Anglican cleric and future Archibishop of Dublin, whose paper 'Of the Bogs and Loughs of Ireland', presented to the Royal Society in 1685, identified the presence of bogs, in Ireland and elsewhere in northern Europe, as the hallmark of 'every barbarous ill-inhabited country' and included detailed suggestions for drainage and reclamation, illustrated with examples from England and Germany. King noted both the disadvantages of bogs (that they prevented the consolidation of land-holdings, impeded transportation, posed a danger to cattle and offered a refuge for thieves and outlaws), along with what he termed their 'conveniences', including their capacity to act as a barrier to invasion and conquest, their importance as a source of fuel, following the destruction of much of Ireland's native woodlands, and, no less strikingly, their preservative properties, as illustrated by butter, timber and human bodies retrieved from their depths – 'a Turf-Bog preserves things strangely' (King 1685: 954).

The photograph shows a man's face, the skin dark and leather-like, the eyes closed, as though in sleep. Closer inspection reveals the strands of hair protruding from beneath the pointed leather cap, the stubble on the chin, the pursed lips and, finally, the leather noose knotted around the neck. Unlike the dreaming heads sculpted by Remco, this sleeper was awakened to history by the turfcutter's spade, one spring afternoon in 1950 to be precise, when two farmers dug him out of the peat at Tolland Fen in Jutland, Denmark. Having been removed from the ground, he was transported to the museum at nearby Arhus, where his head is preserved for the perusal of visitors. His story is retold by the eminent (and serendipitously named) Danish archaeologist Peter Vilhelm Glob, who speculates that he met his end, like other similarly preserved peat bog corpses, as an offering to the earth goddess (Glob 1969: 18–36). Two decades later, his conjectured fate would inspire the Northern
Ireland-born poet Seamus Heaney to reflect on the transformations wrought by his sojourn below ground:

Bridegroom to the goddess
She tightened her torc on him
And opened her fen
Those dark juices working
Him to a saint's kept body

(Heaney 1998: 62)\textsuperscript{75}

The poem forms one of a series, published between 1969 and 1975, concerned with the peat-bog corpses discovered in both Scandinavia and Ireland and with bogs themselves in their role as preservers of persons and objects, which are finally regurgitated, both as the stuff of poetry and as an unsettling (yet secretly familiar?) presence among the living:

Earth-pantry, bone-vault,
sun-black, embalmer
of votive goods
and sabred fugitives

(Heaney 1975: 41)

Historical agency is ascribed here to the earth itself (the poet casting himself, awkwardly, in the role of 'voyeur'), as though the emergence of bodies and artifacts from these amorphous depths were also the sporadic reassertion of another temporality, prior to and independent of the time-scale of human history-making. It is, however, precisely by virtue of their prior ingestion by the earth that the bog bodies of which Heaney writes acquire a new historical legibility, their re-emergence into the present enabling not only the archaeological decipherment of Iron Age sacrificial and mortuary practices, but also the drawing, on Heaney's part, of a series of controversial parallels, across the intervening centuries, between such practices and the state and paramilitary violence besetting his native Northern Ireland in the mid-1970s.\textsuperscript{76}

Recent research has shown that the preservation of bodies in bogs is due to the presence of a substance called sphagnan, a polysaccharide (or sugar chemical) contained in the cell walls of sphagnum moss growing on the bog's surface. When the moss dies, the sphagnan is released slowly below the bog's surface. Here it is gradually converted to brown humic acid via a series of intermediate compounds. Sphagnan, humic acid and each of the intermediate compounds thus formed have the property of binding selectively with calcium and nitrogen contained in the bog environment. Calcium is thus extracted from a body immersed in the bog, inhibiting the growth of bacteria that would otherwise speed the process of decay. Decalcification results too in the softening of the bones, which can then be subject to distortion by the overlying weight of peat, or, under highly acidic conditions, the skeleton may dissolve altogether, leaving only an outer envelope of skin. At the same time, the presence of sphagnan and its associated compounds initiates a series of chemical reactions (known as the 'Maillard' or 'melanoidin' reactions) through which the body's skin becomes tanned. As a result, the body's skin (and all or parts of the skeleton) along with hair, nails, brain, organs such as the kidneys and liver and items of clothing made from wool, skin or leather can survive in the bog, although garments made from plant fibres will dissolve (Van Der Sanden 1996: 18).

* Recognition by archaeologists of peat bogs' preservative properties has proceeded in tandem with the history of landscape change. In Ireland, as throughout northwest Europe, the continued practice of turf-cutting, along with drainage and land reclamation schemes, particularly from the early nineteenth century onward, uncovered increasing numbers, both of prehistoric artifacts and of human remains, into the Iron Age or later. As the population of Ireland (and with it the extent both of peat-cutting and of agricultural encroachment on boglands) increased during the early decades of the nineteenth century, so did the frequency of such finds (Coles and Coles 1989: 9–31; Rafferty 1994: 188). Displays at the National Museum of Ireland in Dublin feature extensive collections of gold and other artifacts retrieved from peat bogs. Meanwhile, new discoveries continue to be made. A new exhibition – Kingship and Sacrifice – that opened in May 2006 at the Museum's Kildare Street premises features two bog bodies from the midlands of Ireland, Old Croghan Man and Clonycavan Man, both discovered during peat cutting in 2003.\textsuperscript{77}

If land reclamation schemes have aimed to domesticate and thus, in a sense, to disenchant the bog landscape, in accordance with the imperatives of modernization and economic development, archaeological scholarship from the nineteenth century onward has often presented a very different view; preserving the bog bodies as a site, not of economic production, but of ritual sacrifice. Bodies and artifacts were widely interpreted as offerings to a sanguinary earth goddess, while the bog itself was portrayed both as the resting place of the prehistoric dead and as the reputed abode of a variety of supernatural presences. The pale lights often seen flickering over bogs and other marshy places (and sometimes attributed to the spontaneous combustion of gases emanating from peat) have been identified in folklore with malevolent spirits, such as the 'Huldrke' (Denmark) or the 'Water Sheerie' or 'Bog Sprite' (Ireland), seeking to entice unwary travelers to a watery death (Feehan and O'Donovan 1996: 166–67; Glob 1969: 79; Walthouse 1894).\textsuperscript{78} Also in Ireland, the 'pooka', a protean, shape-shifting, trickster-spirit, capable of assuming a variety of forms, was often associated (according to army colonel and amateur antiquarian William Gregory Wood-Martin) with bogs and other waterlogged spaces, the amorphous character of which it appeared to share (Wood-Martin 1902: 55). Alongside the potential space of counter-imagining opened by such accounts, however, what is perhaps most striking is that archaeological and folkloristic speculations regarding nature spirits and pagan sacrifice should have been enabled, in equal measure, on the one hand, by a series of chemical reactions unfolding unseen beneath the bog's surface and, on the other, by a succession of human interventions aimed at rendering boglands more fully integrated into the industrial and commercial present.

* Is there a time before time? A time, that is, before the humanly constructed time-scale of calendars, chronicles and clocks? A dream-time? A time of origin, when the
contours of the physical universe were not yet fixed? The philosopher Michel Serres refers to it as ‘basic’ or ‘meteorological’ time; the time of multiplicities and elemental surgings, of the earth’s molten upheavals, of the noise preceding and accompanying communication, the chaos out of which intelligible form and meaning are forever emerging and by which they are continuously re-absorbed. Basic time is not to be understood as prior to or superseded by the time of history. Rather it remains contemporaneous with historical time as its unacknowledged precondition, re-emerging in moments of crisis and transformation as an abiding reservoir of new possibilities. Such moments for Serres are akin to the creative act (whether divine or artistic), which consists, similarly, in negotiating a passage between apparent contraries – form and formlessness, unity and multiplicity, cosmos and chaos – out of which new forms and new configurations of order are continuously born (Serres 1995: 81–121). * 

The English sculptor Chris Drury chose a site situated an hour’s walk away. The daily transit on foot across the bog was spent gathering plants and sticks. Along with them, he would select each day two words suggested by the weather or landscape. These would be written down and bound into bundles with the other found items, the bundles being then deposited at the site. What appealed to him was the physical intimacy established both with the place itself and between words and things:

> I like the is-ness of the place – the fact that the things are made from the plants that grow there. That’s the same with the words. They’re physical, almost like things that you pick up like rain, like deer, like mist. So instead of picking up a physical object you pick up a word. (Stuart 1990)

Like found objects, the words appear to proceed from the environment itself, already endowed with a certain substantial and tactile quality. The act of writing them down and binding them together with other found items confirms the artist’s sense of intimacy between verbal expression and the materiality of landscape and place. If there is a language of material reverie, might it not consist in just such a sensuous inter-involvement between words and things? The search for such an idiom has been a long-standing preoccupation of thinkers dissatisfied with the dualisms of mind and body, sense and intellect that have often been taken to characterize modern, Western thought. Think, for example, of Nietzsche’s invocation of Dionysiac music and song as an expression of a material universe’s endless becoming, or Julia Kristeva’s notion of the semiotic chora, linked to the submerged but ineradicable presence of the maternal body within language, or of Giorgio Agamben’s inferred realm of pre-subjective ‘infancy’, identified with the a-signifying clamour of the natural world, out of which human language and meaningful discourse emerge and to which they inevitably return (Agamben 1993: 53–56; Kristeva 1984: 25–30; Nietzsche 1999: 89–104). More immediately, however, one might look to Heaney’s bog poems, with their tactile lexicon and their visceral sense of life and matter. Indeed, Heaney’s verbal descriptions of bog bodies often appear to carry forward the transformations effected by the bog, suggesting at once the body’s seeming re-absorption by the natural world to which it has been consigned and allowing the still recognizably human form to be further transfigured by metaphor into new and fantastic shapes. Here, for example, is his account of the Grauballe Man, an Iron Age bog body uncovered in 1952 in the course of peat-cutting at Nebelgård Fen, a peat bog close to the village of Grauballe in Jutland:

> As if he had been poured
In tar, he lies
On a pillow of turf
And seems to weep

The black river of himself.
The grain of his wrists
is like bog oak,
the ball of his heel

like a basalt egg,
His instep has shrunk
Cold as a swan’s foot
Or a wet swamp root.

His lips are the ridge
And purse of a mussel,
His spine an eel arrested
Under a glisten of mud.

(Heaney 1975: 35)

In a speech delivered at Silkeborg Museum, Jutland, in August 1996, Heaney would describe his own initial response to the bog people in terms of the same metamorphic qualities: ‘It has always seemed to me that this phenomenal potency derives from the fact that the bodies erase the boundary-line between culture and nature, between art and life, between vision and eyesight, as it were.’ On first reading Glob’s book he was, he recalled, ‘a man obsessed’. The text and accompanying photographs called forth a spectrum of memories and associations, ranging from the appearance, smells and textures of bogs (‘that fragrant secret outback of heather and scrub, of squelchy rushes and springy peatfields’), to their preservative properties, to his own rural childhood in the 1940s, to the political and sectarian conflicts being played out at the time in Northern Ireland (Heaney 1999: 3–4). It was as though the metamorphic, in-between character of the bog people and of the landscapes in which they had lain for centuries were directly linked to their capacity, both to evoke individual and collective pasts and to inspire new imaginings in the present. The bog poems themselves can be seen to enact just such a synergy between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’ and between the retrieval of the ancient past and the elaboration of new cultural meanings, as poetic imagery and linguistic tropes amplify and extend the preservative and transformative work of the bog.

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The ‘Boglands’ symposium coincided with an uncharacteristically extended period of dry weather. As the project drew to a close, however, rain began to fall. Soon many of the works fashioned over the preceding weeks were no longer recognizable. Eventually the only traces that remained were in the form of photographs and film footage. If some of the participants had set out with the intention of shaping and giving form to the raw materials supplied by the landscape, an intention that several of them soon came to question, the subsequent
dissolution of their efforts furnished a decisive reminder that human activity and volition were not the only forces at work. From the outset, as a number of participants remarked, the material specificity of the bog landscape, its colours, densities and textures, played a distinctive part, facilitating certain projects and discouraging or actively thwarting others. At the same time, the incremental action of wind and weather, including the rain that brought the proceedings to a close, both continued and modified the efforts of the sculptors themselves. The making of art, far from being an exclusively human project — an affair of ‘culture’ as distinct from ‘nature’ — became, instead, a process of conflict between human and non-human agents. 10

The history of human attitudes to and representations of nature is a topic that has already received considerable scholarly attention (Collingwood 1945; Glacken 1967; Muller and Carlson 1973; Oeschlaeger 1991; Thomas 1983). I wish to call attention here, however, to a more basic question of ontology and in doing so to cast doubt on the possibility of maintaining a definitional separation between a distinctively human realm of ‘culture’, ‘history’ or ‘society’ and a realm of ‘nature’ conceived in contradistinction to it. According to the view put forward here, the material world is not a passive recipient of the order and meaning imposed upon it by culture, nor does it consist of inert raw material to be re-shaped in accordance with the dictates of human intentionality and design. Rather, the material realm (which includes, but is not limited to what we are accustomed to think of as ‘nature’) is endowed with its own form-generating and self-ordering capacities. This is a view shared, in different ways, by a variety of philosophers and scientists, past and present, ranging from Lucretius, Lucretius, Deleuze and Spinoza, to Latour, Latour, and Latour. In this view, what is at stake is the recognition that even the material universe is active and creative beyond the boundaries of the human. It has been my argument here, however, that places as well as people are endowed with a capacity for creative action. Indeed, human acts of imagining (and of remembrance) are encompassed and enabled by biological, chemical and geophysical processes, just as human, ‘historical’ time is framed within the more expansive temporalities of climatological, evolutionary and geological change (Grosz 2004: 257). In its capacity as the conservator of buried pasts, for example, the bog effectively prefigures the dreams of both scholars and creative artists, which are made possible only on the basis of its prior action. In the case of the ‘Boglands’ symposium, creativity itself cannot be considered as a faculty exercised by particular individuals, but is rather, as Tim Ingold has suggested in another context, immanent in the ‘life process’ itself, that is, in the entire field of relations between human beings and their environment (Ingold 2000: 108–9, 346–48, 417–19).

In conclusion, it is, perhaps, worth speculating that, given the habitual differentiation of the natural from the human, social realm that has characterized much of the thought of the modern West, alternatives to this view might be particularly likely to suggest themselves in certain places, especially so-called marginal or wilderness places, against which the claims of modernity and progress have so often been staked. As a result both of their distinctive materiality and of their seeming recalcitrance to human projects and designs, environments like bogs, poised ambivalently between solid and liquid, form and formlessness, take on a singular mnemonic charge. They recall, not only the variegated process of their own formation and transformation over time, not only the human histories enacted on or around them, but also a threshold, marking both a division and a point of contact and passage, between humanized, historical time and what Serres terms ‘basic time’ — the time of originary flux and metamorphosis, antecedent to the definitional demarcation of form from matter, culture from nature. The invocation of such a threshold serves at once to underpin and to call into question one of the founding myths of the social sciences, namely that the advent of modernity constitutes an epochal re-orientation of human being-in-the-world and thus a radical break with other, earlier formations of collective life. Concomitant with this imputed historical break has been an insistence on the distinction between ‘nature’ and ‘culture’, and as several more recent and sceptical commentators have pointed out, has been accomplished only by definitional sleight of hand, whereby institutionalized forms of knowledge (principally the division between the ‘natural’ and ‘social’ sciences) have often served to render invisible a continuing, indeed increasing, traffic across the terms of the nature-society binary (Bennett 2001; Latour 1993). Could it be then that in settings such as the Wicklow bogs both the historical past and modernity’s disavowed other-times are able to impinge, to potentially transformative effect, upon the present? Hence, perhaps the continuing fascination of bogs for writers and visual artists, whose efforts can be understood, less as attempts to order and re-shape the given world than as a further elaboration of form-engendering and form-dissolving processes already at work in ‘nature’ as much as in ‘culture’ (De Landa 1997). Could it be that imagination is nourished precisely by such a dissolution of instituted boundaries between the conventionally natural and the conventionally cultural? The literary critic Margaret Ann Doody certainly suggests as much when she writes that ‘Marshes, Shores and Muddy Margins’ are among the characteristic tropes and settings of the novel, that quintessentially hybrid literary genre, and are associated in particular with departures and new beginnings (Doody 1996: 319–26). The human capacity to imagine (and thus to create) would therefore seem to involve an attunement of the human organism (including mind, body and senses) to the larger, trans-human processes involved in the formation of both human beings and their material environments. In other words, the products of the human imagination participate in and are continuous with the production of the material world.
that sustains them. The fascination of bogs (and of other ‘marginal’ landscapes?) surely consists in part in their capacity to reveal that participation. In doing so, they afford an imaginative opening to a realm that is neither ‘nature’ nor ‘culture’, but is ontologically prior to all such differentiations and to the academic divisions of labour that they continue to help to organize. The delineation of such a realm requires not a ‘cultural poetics’, but a poetics capable of encompassing both human imaginations and the self-creation of the material universe: earth pantry, bone vault, primordial goo, black soup … dream profoundly.

Acknowledgements
Preliminary research for this paper was undertaken with the support of a two-year Research Fellowship from the Humanities Institute of Ireland, University College Dublin. Subsequent research and writing were supported by a McKnight Summer Fellowship (2005), a Faculty Summer Research Fellowship (2005) and a McKnight Land Grant Professorship (2005–7) from the University of Minnesota. I wish also to thank the participants in the ‘Boglands’ symposium who agreed to be interviewed and the Sculptors Society of Ireland for their co-operation.

Endnotes
1 The ‘Boglands’ artists were: Mamoru Abe, Joost Barbiers, Gerald Cox, Remco de Fom, Chris Drury, David Dunne, Romy Gray, Catherine Harper, Ann Henderson, Kathy Herbert, David Kinane, Betty Maguire, Ann O’Connor, Marian O’Donnell, Amanda Ralph, Aisling Stuart and Niall Walsh. Participants lodged together in a local hostel, dined communally and were encouraged to visit each other’s sites to view and discuss work in progress.

2 My discussion of the symposium in this paper draws on Stuart’s documentary film and on interviews with participants conducted between 2002 and 2004, with follow-up interviews conducted by e-mail, 2004–6.

3 A counterpart to the ‘Boglands’ symposium is the ongoing Sculpture in the Parklands Project at Lough Boora Parklands, Boora, Tullamore, County Offaly, an area of cutaway bog formerly utilized by Bord na Móna (see below). Starting in 2002, Irish and international artists have been invited to make permanent and temporary works responding to what is at once a variegated natural habitat and a landscape extensively modified through human intervention (http://www.sculptureintheparklands.com). Dave Kinane, one of the organisers of the ‘Boglands’ symposium (see below), was artist in residence during September 2006.

4 The term ‘bog butter’ refers to a waxy substance found buried in peat bogs, particularly in Britain and Ireland, usually in wooden containers, such as buckets, kgs, dishes or churns. Tests carried out at the University of Bristol in 2004 to measure carbon isotopes in nine samples of bog butter revealed that six came from butter or dairy fat, while the remainder came from subcarnivorous animal fat, such a lard or tallow (http://www.newscientist.com/article/mg18124392.400-bog-butter-test.html).

5 One participant in the symposium, Niall Walsh (born in Dublin and now resident in County Leitrim), make explicit (and ironic) reference to the archaeological significance of bogs by constructing a mock-up of an archaeological site, featuring discarded items of contemporary household furniture, found in the vicinity, partially embedded in peat and surrounded by a string perimeter, as though in the process of being excavated by archaeologists of the future.

6 Another participant, Gerry Cox, also remarked on the recalcitrance of peat as a sculptural medium: ‘It wouldn’t hold a form.’

7 Glob was involved in the excavation and subsequent investigation of a number of peat bog corpses. The Bog People, first published in 1965 (and in English translation in 1968), became one of the principal channels through which information about bog bodies and other finds reached a wider, non-academic audience. Glob’s book provides an overview of archaeological discoveries in bogs across northern Europe, along with more extended descriptions of some of the better-known bog bodies from the vicinity of Jutland. Public interest in bog bodies has since been sustained by a series of further academic and popular publications and museum exhibits, as well as by Heaney’s bog poems, which were re-published as an individual volume in 1975.

8 For a discussion of other literary works inspired by Glob’s book, see Purdey (2002).

9 For a more extended discussion of Heaney’s bog poems, see Stallworthy (1982), Finn (2004) and (for a highly critical account) Lloyd (1993).

10 Displayed alongside them are two older and less well-preserved bog bodies, Gallagh Man, found at Gallagh, County Galway, in 1821 and Baronstown West Man, found during peat cutting in County Kildare in 1953. The title of the exhibition – Kingship and Sacrifice – along with the accompanying texts and audio-visual displays, calls attention to the fact that numerous bog bodies and other bog finds have been uncovered in close proximity to ancient tribal boundaries, suggesting a possible link with rituals of kinship and sovereignty.

11 The gases released by peat consist largely of nitrogen (c. 54%), along with methane (c. 43 %) and carbon dioxide (3 %). One difficulty with attempts to explain marsh lights in these terms is that there is no reason for methane to ignite spontaneously. It is sometimes suggested, therefore, that combustion is due to the presence of diphosphane (P4O6), produced by anaerobic micro-organisms, which does burn spontaneously on contact with air (Feehan and O’Donovan 1996: 166–7).

12 On the question of non-human agency and what this might be thought to entail, see Callon and Law (1995) and Jones and Cloak (2002).

13 For a further discussion of the history and human significance of ‘marginal’ landscapes, see Harrisson (1992) and Pollard (1997).

14 Doody’s study challenges the widely held view of the novel as a characteristically modern, European form, arguing instead that examples of the genre manifest themselves across a range of literary traditions, from ancient Greece and Rome to China (Doody 1996).

References


King, William, 1685. ‘Of the Bogs and Loughs of Ireland, by Mr William King, Fellow of the Dublin Society, as Presented to that Society’, *Philosophical Transactions of the Royal Society*, 15: 948–60.


NOTES FOR CONTRIBUTORS

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Authors are encouraged to submit items for the IJA. Articles, which may be in English or Irish, should be original and should not be under consideration elsewhere. IJA is a refereed journal and articles submitted will be assessed by readers for their suitability.

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Presentation
Articles should be in the region of 4000 words. Included should be the author’s name and academic affiliation, the title and a short abstract of no more than 100 words. All contributions should be clearly typed on one side of A4 paper, double-spaced and with wide margins throughout (including notes and bibliographical references). Two manuscript copies should be submitted and a 3.5” disk or electronic copy in IBM PC format readable in MsWord. Receipt of a submission will be acknowledged, and articles will be processed only after receipt of both hardcopy and electronic copies.

The following points should be observed:
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Bibliographical references in the body of the text should be given in parentheses in standard author-date form (Lee and Devore 1968: 236). A complete list of references cited, arranged alphabetically by author’s surname, should be typed at the end of the article and adhere to the following style:


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Quotations. Single inverted commas should be used except for quotations within quotations, which should have double inverted commas. Quotations of more than about 60 words should be indented and typed without inverted commas.

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