

Metaphors of the Local

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THE FACULTY OF IMAGINATION

That reconciling and mediatory power, which incorporating the reason in images of the sense and organizing (as it were) the flux of the senses by the permanent and self-circling energies of the reason, gives birth to a system of symbols, harmonious in themselves and consubstantial with the truths of which they are the conductors.

Samuel Taylor Coleridge (on imagination), 1816

ORIGINALLY SEEN AS AN ATYPICAL FUNCTION of the mind, imagination used to be subordinate to the powers of reason and order. As a complex and contested concept, imagination has radically different connotations when used in different contexts. Although it does not have a significant presence in most contemporary theories of the mind, it had a much more prominent role in past discussions. Thus the concept can be understood through its history. In keeping with Samuel Taylor Coleridge's above-referenced thoughts on the concept, it

was once routine to regard imagination as imagery, as a flux of images. By tracing its development, however, one learns that it is not possible to discover a coherent and universal idea of the imagination. Therefore, I will review a few of the concept's principal theories, which range from the rational and pragmatic sentiments of the Enlightenment to the expressive and Romantic attitudes of the 19th century. This will allow for a synthetic understanding of imagination. In this brief investigation, my aim is to discuss how imagination is a key feature in producing, sharing and experiencing spaces. With IMAGINE BEING HERE NOW, our curatorial goal is to reflect on human experience and its spatial conditions in a contextual time. So in reference to these themes, I will look at the extent to which imagination is capable of influencing critical conceptions of existence and locality, and eventually, the curatorial endeavor.

Since Aristotle, at least, imagination has been associated with the importance and value of art. In the third book of *De Anima*, Aristotle defines it as the intermediary between perception and thought. The perceptions introduced by the five senses are processed by the faculty of imagination, and these *mental images* (*phantasma*), sensations and concepts are what become the material of that faculty.

[FIG.XIX]

In his *Treatise on Man* (*Le Traité de l'Homme*, 1648), René Descartes explicitly identifies both the *sensus communis* and the imagination with the surface of the pineal gland, to which images of both sense and memory are directed. Descartes did, however, acknowledge that it is the soul

that sees, not the eye. Contrary to Descartes' dualist method of inquiry, Immanuel Kant's notion of the imagination (*Einbildungskraft*) as a productive capacity of cognition is a powerful tool in creating another nature, as it were, out of the materials that actual nature presents. Kant allocates a central role to imagination in synthesizing the differing mental realms of sensibility, understanding, and reason. Imagination is the power of the mind that lets us combine and form representations.¹ Yet imagination is unequal to the ideas of Reason. The experience of the sublime, in its immensity and power, leads to a bitter awareness of the inadequacy of the imagination. However, this awareness also contains a pleasure in the harmony it clashes with. Kant thus describes the exchange between understanding and intuition as something akin to the continuous, ever present possibility for the faculties to mutually play out their essence.

The unpredictable power of the imagination was also suppressed to employ reason. David Hume contends that the delicacy of imagination is "*requisite to convey a sensibility of those finer emotions*"² in order to appreciate the greatness of art, to develop a meaningful standard of taste. However, contrary to Hume's prudent consideration, imagination was mainly appreciated as an enchanting, most sublime power, even as an absolute form of projective sense that is a prelude to expression, whether aesthetic or otherwise. This was the case with Samuel Taylor Coleridge, for example, who calls the ultimate, continuous act of universal creation in existence *the infinite I Am*. For him, human existence is a finite utterance reflecting and repeating this eternal expression. Perpetually assigning meaning – through metaphor –

establishes the relationship between the world and us. Thus, existence is a product of one's ability to imagine. Accordingly, Coleridge describes a distinction between the primary and secondary imagination in order to understand the aspiration of the artistic process. Artistic imagination, he claims, "*dissolves, diffuses, and dissipates, in order to recreate*". To Coleridge, the imagination is the most significant method of expression, continually expanding the extent of human conception, placing the artist at the center of the infinitely interconnected universes of one's own creation.³

As discussed, the history of the faculty of imagination ascribes imagining to imagery, which might also explain the consistent association of imagination with the greatness of art and artistry. Nevertheless, it has recurrently been pointed out that even if in some contexts the imagining may refer to imagery, in others this is obviously not the case. It is not immediately apparent that imagining involves imagery in any way, as it subjectively may be the thought of a possibility rather than a visualization of anything. A single, consistent mental faculty is thus impossible. As a result of abstraction from the Cartesian Cogito, the multifaceted imagination travels between existence and perception, between perception and expression, breaking free of the imminently rational moral code. In this sense, imagination is not limited to the acquisition of exact knowledge, but free from these – in fact, any – objective restraints.

From subjective cognitive processes, Arjun Appadurai elaborates a very different description of the *work of the imagination* as a constitutive feature of modern subjectiv-

ity. For Appadurai, a collective imagination forms the basis for a *community of sentiment*, in contradiction to the faculty of a gifted individual. Appadurai develops on Benedict Anderson's analysis of the modern nation as an Imagined Community.⁴ He describes the work of the imagination as neither purely emancipatory nor entirely disciplined, but as a space of contestation in which individuals and groups seek to annex the global into their own practices of the modern. This shared process of imagination is fundamental to creating locality.⁵

IMAGINING LOCALITIES Appadurai argues – simultaneously building from the history of the faculty and dismantling its subjective foundation – that there are three dimensions which make the work of imagination in the *postelectronic* world significant: imagination has become a part of ordinary, everyday life and differs from older types of fantasy. Imagination focuses energy and mobilizes action instead of dispersing them. Additionally, as a result of the mass-media created communities and sense of belonging, imagination is no longer individual, since the media suggest a multitude of available possibilities that fundamentally affect our experience of *here* and *now*. As Appadurai notes, imagination is not a matter of individual genius, escapism or just a dimension of aesthetics. Imagination as a social, collective feature has a split character. On the one hand, it is the sphere in and through which the citizens of a modern nation-state are disciplined and controlled, but also through which collective patterns of dissent and new designs for collective life emerge. As a social force, imagination itself produces locality as a spatial fact and as a sensibility, enabling the beginnings of social forms without the

exploitative mobility of unregulated capital or the exploitative stability of many states. In *Modernity at Large* (1996), Appadurai explores the main predicates of locality as a category. He asks, *what can locality mean in a world where spatial localization, quotidian interaction, and social scale are not always isomorphic?*⁶ Appadurai does not view locality as traditionally scalar or spatial. Instead, locality is primarily relational and contextual in nature, having a complex phenomenological quality constituted by a series of links between the sense of social immediacy, the technologies of interactivity, and the relativity of contexts. This phenomenological quality expresses itself in agency, sociality and reproducibility, which define locality as an inherently fragile social achievement.

Locality is a phenomenological property of social life, providing intentional activity and material effects and including the actual settings in and through which social life is reproduced. This contextualization defines locality production as context-generative. The relationship of locality to contexts is historical and dialectical in nature, moving away from their context-providing features and reminding us that locality is a dimension of social life and always emerges from the practices of local subjects. Hierarchical organizations and corruptions of context reduce localities.⁷

Appadurai argues that if imagination is associated with the individual and with agency, the individual actor is the last locus that both experiences and constitutes larger formations, in part from their own sense of what the surrounding terrains and perspectives offer. With this Appadurai demonstrates that what is imagined is

no longer a unified, isolated place, but rather a *diasporic public sphere*. As noted, imagination is central to all forms of agency and is itself a social fact. By developing a critical spatial analysis, we can see more clearly how the social relations of space and scale are not preestablished, but rather the outcome of political projects and struggles. It is thus possible to imagine and create a different collection of social relations in new spaces of engagement with a different geometry of power, set of knowledge and politics of representation.

The contemporary self is frail, brittle, fractured and fragmented – such a conception probably reflects Appadurai's outlook on the social space and its construction. However, in fragile, fragmented societies the importance of defining and knowing oneself has risen above the sense of belonging to a culture or society at large. Space as a shared process cannot simply be constructed or instituted as an ideology or hierarchy. Shared processes have the potential to be a great repository of culturally developed resources. Therefore, in the paragraphs that follow, I will introduce Henri Lefebvre's thesis on producing and differentiating spaces as an act of resistance.

PRODUCING LOCALITY The transformation of spaces into places requires a conscious moment, which may subsequently be remembered as relatively routine.⁸ Characteristically, in *The Production of Space* (1974) Henri Lefebvre searches for new interpretations of revolutionary social processes. Lefebvre presents a dichotomy between abstract, absolute space and social space. To him, space is an ongoing social construct that affects spatial relations, practices, perceptions and meaning, thus subsuming produced things and encompassing their interrela-

tionships in their coexistence and simultaneity – their (relative) order and/or (relative) disorder. Here, space is a product of something that is materially created, and simultaneously operates on processes from which it cannot separate itself because it derives from them.

At this moment in time, Lefebvre shows the dialectical conflict between abstract space and differential space. The reproduction of social space inevitably implies two tendencies: the dissolution of old relations and the generation of new relations. Thus, according to Lefebvre, abstract space brings forth a new kind of space, or “differential space”, because – inasmuch as abstract space inclines the elimination of existing differences – a new space cannot be produced unless it accentuates differences. In other words, Lefebvre sees the prospect of emerging spaces act in contrast to the forces of homogenization present in abstract space. I will return to the idea of differential spaces in discussing metaphorical capability as a necessity in producing localities. Resistance to the forces of homogenization thus presupposes individual imagination.

Lefebvre analyzes the history of spaces and develops a conceptual triad to explain how space is produced. Social space is a social product serving as a tool of thought and action. Every mode of production has its own spatial practice, producing its own space. *Spatial practice* refers to the production and reproduction of spatial relations between objects and products. It also ensures continuity and some degree of cohesion, implying a level of competence and of performance. *Representations of space* are attached to the relations of production and refer to conceptualized spaces, all of which identify what is lived and what is perceived

with what is conceived. *Representational spaces* refer to the lived experiences that emerge as a result of the dialectical relation between spatial practice and representations of spaces. This underlying continuity does not exist solely in spatial reality, but also at the representational level. Preexisting space underpins not only durable spatial arrangements, but *representational spaces* and their related imagery and fictitious narratives, or cultural models.⁹

As Lefebvre discusses the decoding of space by means of its associated time, he avoids attributing an anachronistic application of categories from a later time, subsequently generated by the *intellectus*. Time contains a spatial code. Lefebvre notes that as long as time and space remain inseparable, the meaning of each is to be found in the other *immediately*.

Immediacy and continuation are central in producing and defining spaces. In space, what came earlier continues to underpin what follows. This continuum is also one of the focal factors of the underlying, transitory, temporal biennial context of IMAGINE BEING HERE NOW. The preconditions of this socially produced space within the time context has its own way of enduring and remaining active through – in Lefebvre’s terms – the suggested triad of perceived-conceived-lived. What these three terms imply and identify contributes to the production of locality, which, as discussed, is a form of cognitive process, namely imagination.

THE METAPHOR OF THE LOCAL With our preceding consideration of various ideas, particularly those of Appadurai and Lefebvre, I have outlined the process of creating plac-

es from spaces. Drawing on the history of imagination as well as the social constructions of shared, spatial experience, my aim is to develop on the problematics – or should I say potentialities – of what IMAGINE BEING HERE NOW necessitates as a notion. In the realizations of the concept, we on the curatorial team of the 6th Momentum Nordic Biennial of Contemporary Art have noted how space and time are socialized and localized through complex, deliberate practices of performance, representation and action.

Essentially, for Appadurai, knowledge is central to phenomenologically defined locality. Imagination is the ability to produce thoughts of a place, where a sense of agency may be located. The potential of such creation emerges from recognizable, encompassing material reality and calls for a new, different social imaginary, based on existing realities that emphasize knowledge and knowledge production as cultural and social acts. Here Appadurai’s and Lefebvre’s philosophies merge. Time has a spatial code. The continuum of space is socially created and shared, thus imagined. This is essential to my reading, as I do acknowledge the social construction of space and the social aspects of imagination, as well as what they entail. However, concurrently to the idea of collective imagination, I regard imagination – as well as locality – primarily as a part of the constitutive, cognitive project, individually distinguished, experienced and perceived. Though the space of IMAGINE BEING HERE NOW is socially shared and produced, it will fundamentally be experienced and imagined on an individual level.

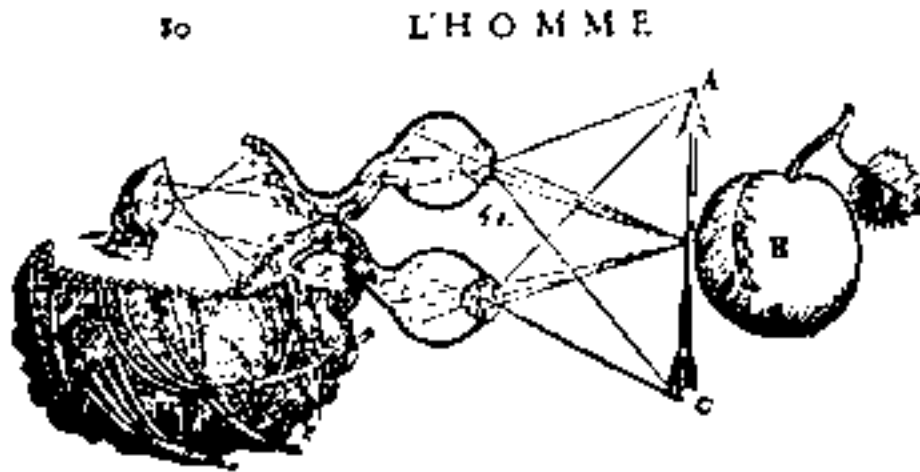
Additionally, in relation to IMAGINE BEING HERE NOW, I consider imagination to be a tool for overcoming direct

perception and our faulty senses, in order to function, cognitively, beyond the realm of two-dimensional representation and to find possibilities in multiple dimensions. As noted (e.g., Kant), the emergence of knowledge lies in the personal trust of imagination. In hermeneutical terms, cognitive processes employ our history, personal experiences and cultural traditions in order to comprehend and take in new experiences. The human context of knowledge is therefore conceived as a mediation between our immediate and emerging horizons, interconnecting historical succession in the chain of interpretations and re-interpretations transmitted from the past.

In this immediacy, Paul Ricoeur distinguishes human time both from the inner time of each consciousness and from cosmic time based on the regular movement of the stars. Human time is an interpersonal, public time where we can locate sequences of generations and the traces their lives have left behind. For Ricoeur, without at least an underlying sense of gratitude to our predecessors' history, human time would be meaningless.¹⁰ The continuous present is the moment defined by our space of experience and horizon of expectation, including the time of action and the initiation of new sequences. *"On a cosmic scale, our life is insignificant, yet this brief period when we appear in the world is the time in which all meaningful questions arise."*¹¹ From this perspective, the past gives way to a living memory, attached to the present and focused on the future. Ricoeur calls for imagination to substantiate time, as *"we have so many unfulfilled plans behind us, so many promises that have still not been held, that we have the means of rebuilding the future through reviving our heritage in its multiple forms"*.¹²

In conclusion, it is essential to acknowledge that this process of restructuring space and its representations as well as dismantling the principle of the faculty of imagination is instituted in each individual experience and in each individual cognitive mechanism. With *IMAGINE BEING HERE NOW*, my aim is to rethink various alternatives and metaphors for locality, whether personally defined or socially shared. The metaphorical meaning and reference await appropriation through the activity of recontextualization, as meanings are not given to us directly. Curating thus becomes a process of drawing meaning from such connections while translating this process into a spatial experience of forms and ideally enabling the processes of resisting hierarchical space.

To concur with Coleridge, human existence is a finite utterance that attributes metaphor, establishing the relationship between the world and us and defining existence as a product of the ability to imagine. This metaphoric capability merges imageries, conceptualizations and language for symbolic representations, which are literally not applicable. Here, metaphors of the local become the place where being is manifested and identity formed. Imagination as a source of cognitive innovation and evolution must emerge as a new tradition for argumentation, consisting in a whole diversity of interdependent, individual localities. Hence, if locality is individually defined, a socially constructed continuum that takes place in the immediate, defined by presence and by personal histories, metanarratives and future aims, the phenomenological dimension of locality attains its full significance when it becomes a condition of temporal existence.



René Descartes: illustration for *Le Traité de l'Homme*, 1618-1637

1. Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgement*.
2. David Hume, "Of the Standard Taste", in *The Critical Tradition*; ed. David H. Richter, New York: St. Martin's Press, 1989.
3. Samuel Taylor Coleridge, *The Statesman's Manual*, 1816.
4. For Anderson, "it is imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion." *Imagine Communities*, 1991, p. 6.
5. Arjun Appadurai, *Globalization*, Durham: Duke University Press, 2001.
6. Arjun Appadurai, *Modernity at Large: Cultural Dimensions of Globalization*, Public Worlds Volume 1, Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1996, p. 179.
7. *Ibid.*, pp. 182-188, 189.
8. *Ibid.*, p. 183.
9. Henri Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, Malden: Blackwell Publishing, 1974, pp. 227-230.
10. Paul Ricoeur, *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies in the Creation of Meaning in Language*, London: Routledge, 1978, p. 254.
11. Paul Ricoeur, "Narrated Time", in *Philosophy of Today*, vol. 29, no. 4, 1985, p. 263.
12. Paul Ricoeur, *Amour et Justice*, 1997, p. 58.