

PART III : REVIEW

CHAPTER 15

Afterword: An end to imagining?

Huon Wardle

Making present what is actually absent, is the mind's unique gift... this gift is called imagination...

Hannah Arendt

Imagination... is the only inner compass we have, we are contemporaries only as far as our imagination reaches. If we want to be at home on this earth, even at the expense of being at home in this Century, we must try to take part in the interminable dialogue with its essence.

Hannah Arendt

When we try to understand what others are imagining, or how they are imagining it, we are faced with a very great initial difficulty and then with multiple ramifications. As anthropologists, we sometimes talk grandly of a certain 'collective imagination', of 'collective memory' as a type of this, or of the 'anthropological imagination' as the means of accessing it. More loosely, we refer to particular people's (or peoples') 'ways of imagining'. However, in claiming this kind of knowledge we are making a primary analogy between what we observe about these others and qualities we truly know of ourselves alone. *Qualitatively*, I know that the other person imagines because I know it about myself; without this fundamental comparison with *how* I think I can

truly know nothing of *what* that individual may be imagining, nor how their imaginative capacities freight their observations and judgements as they go about their life.

Jakob Meloe tells us that, as human beings, we are ‘poor observers of whatever activities we are not familiar with as agents’ (1988). He means that my ability to understand what this other person is *intent upon* is significantly limited by whether I have myself done the work of imagining-and-perceiving involved in that kind of task, or not. Be that as it may, I do also depend on this other person’s view of me to be able to reflect on my own standpoint: their stance toward me becomes a component of my viewpoint as I come to imagine myself and my intentions. I do not just listen to what they say, I intuit and infer their view: I infer it by seeing what they do, noting how they stand with regard to me as well as the company they keep; and I register the effects all this has on me. And in that way - speaking now as an anthropologist - I triangulate an insight into their way of imagining by adopting a standpoint close to theirs and by retracing the direction, from the phrases and gestures that apparently guide their actions, back toward a way of looking out on the world that I take to be their point of view.

Ethnography bears witness, in this respect, to a dizzying array of imaginative viewpoints; children of different co-wives argue in an African house compound: an Amazonian shaman in his hammock recounts the antics of the creator gods as they make the universe during the mythtime: gang members debate the state of business on an urban street side: singers at a wake for the dead in the Blue Mountains of Jamaica argue over which key to sing in: these views open out and fade away as our gaze shifts from one ethnographic scene to another. In this regard, Foucault talks of ethnography offering a ‘treasure-hoard of experiences and concepts’ but also a ‘perpetual principle of dissatisfaction’ (2003:383). So these final comments pick up on the tensions and dissatisfactions but also the treasure-

seeking that anthropologists engage in when they try to ‘reflect on imagination’. Looking back at themes raised in this volume, I review some of the means and ends of an anthropology of the imaginary and the imaginative.

Malinowski and a sketch of the anthropological imagination

Max Weber tells us that, in establishing a coherent version of the lifeworld for any specific person or group, the social scientist is, in effect, constructing a ‘utopia’: their ‘as if’ articulation of the social is simultaneously in excess of, and significantly less than, the sum of observed facts (2012). Anthropologists, in that sense, write accounts that are both imaginatively invested and utopian in form, though this does not stop them from also offering true knowledge. Social scientists are not alone in this either: the activity of imagination, by lending coherence to a world we share with others, has inherently utopian (and dystopian) effects. Utopianism (and its shadow, dystopianism) are much needed elements of our everyday common sense as we go about balancing the irreconcilable in our social lives. Sometimes our utopias correspond quite closely to witnessable human reality, sometimes partly, and sometimes there is no fitting what Kant called the ‘crooked timber of humanity’¹ into them at all. Either way, their presence in what we call the ‘anthropological imagination’, and in the making of an ethnography is intellectually more deliberate, so let us begin there.

Few anthropologists would dispute Malinowski’s preeminence in establishing what we now call the ‘anthropological imagination’. His *Argonauts of the Western Pacific* is the paramount case of the ethnography understood as a method of imagining the lives of unfamiliar others. How

¹ ‘Warped wood’ in some translations (Kant 1983:34).

does Malinowski use the words imagine, imaginary, imagination? It may be surprising how often he deploys these words, especially at the beginning of his book, and he does so in three specific ways. First, he asks the reader to imagine herself coming to live in the Trobriand Islands:

1. Imagine yourself suddenly set down surrounded by all your gear, alone on a tropical' beach... Imagine yourself... making your first entry into the village...
2. Let us imagine that we are sailing along the South coast of New Guinea towards its Eastern end.
3. [I]magine the chiefs sitting high up on the shore under the gnarled, broad-leafed branches of the shady trees.

(1922:4,33,212)

Malinowski tells his reader to shake off 'popular' ways of imagining 'the natives', but he does not mean that they must replace their preconceptions with dry scientific views. Successful ethnography should still allow a reader to

perceive or imagine the realities of human life, the even flow of everyday events, the occasional ripples of excitement over a feast, or ceremony, or some singular occurrence.

(1922:17)

Malinowski explicitly and imperatively directs his reader toward the work of imagining other people's lives as coherent in their own terms. He lays far greater emphasis on this task than did the next generation of anthropologists, Raymond Firth, Audrey Richards, Edward Evans-Pritchard, for example. Roy Dilley in this volume reminds us that Evans-

Pritchard regarded the use of empathetic imagining in ethnographic work with a certain suspicion and even scorn. Malinowski, however, sees the mutual orienting of the imagination as necessary in the relationship between anthropologist and reader. It is needed, in part, to dispel untruths about ‘savage’ peoples.

Hence, in a second deployment of the word, Malinowski criticises how other social scientists, economists in particular, have, up to now, used the idea of ‘primitive man’ to shore up certain foundational principles in their textbooks. Here, Malinowski takes ‘imaginary’ in a pejorative sense to mean unevidenced by empirical observation, *a priori* and assumed – nothing more than a figment. In contrast, ethnographic evidence demonstrates

how entirely the real native of flesh and bone differs from the shadowy Primitive Economic Man, on whose imaginary behaviour many of the scholastic deductions of abstract economics are based.

(1922:61)

Thirdly, finally, Malinowski positions himself imaginatively in the point of view of the Trobriand islanders themselves in *Argonauts*. Especially when he is surveying their expectations and the plans they make for their grand inter-island expeditions to exchange highly valued Kula goods. Malinowski looks at these inter-island voyages in terms of how the Trobrianders themselves comprehend them. Here, imagination is what binds Trobrianders to the future allowing them to strategise, bridging current fears with anticipated successes.

Thus the imagination of the adventurers, as in all forms of gambling, must be bent towards lucky hits and turns of extraordinarily good chance. The Kula myths feed this imagination on stories of extreme

good luck, and at the same time show that it lies in the hands of man to bring this luck on himself, provided he acquires the necessary magical lore.

(1922:328)

We see, then, Malinowski trying to redirect and reshape his reader's attention and their imagination, dismissing some of the utopic thinking that underlies Western social science while entering into the contrasting frame of a 'native imagination' – the world of his informants' expectations and intentions; their vision of their world. In all these instances, he acts as mediator and translator, drawing the reader further away from one world of social expectations, their own, into another where they will learn to comprehend quite distinct imaginative concerns.

Anthropology and productive imagining

At least for Malinowski, then, anthropological work is founded in active imagining. The anthropologist, he proposes, must mediate between worlds which are usually unreflectively and conservatively imagined – the native worlds of 'Westerners' and of 'savages'. Productive imagination becomes essential because only by means of it can the anthropologist and their reader manifest new types of concept and fact about human social life. Gellner has argued that Malinowski combined a bent toward empiricist fact-finding with a certain Central European romantic holism (1998). In particular, he was steeped in a version of the Germanic philosophical view that facts are simultaneously products of empirical experience and of active human imagining; that these two are an interwoven pair, not opposites. It is worth considering this tradition in more detail.

It begins with Kant's critique of naïve empiricism. There is no reality unmediated by how human imagining encounters the world, argues the Enlightenment philosopher. The mind always meets its sensory experiences or 'intuitions' armed with prefigured analogies concerning what the world is like: if it were not so, understanding anything in particular would be impossible. For Kant imagination is the mode in which we humans, as fundamentally social creatures, engage with sensory experience; how, in particular, we make what is absent present, constituting the now of our experience in awareness of our memories and hopes. Things become things, concepts become concepts, as opposed to noise or a 'rhapsody' of unconditioned potential, because imagination actively preshapes what we know (1949:128).

Common to highly diverse neo-Kantian thinkers such as Weber, Simmel, Piaget, Bakhtin or Sartre is the realisation that imagining is already entailed in any act of recognition. Even so, we are mostly unaware that imagination is acting in advance of what we take to be our view of the world. We do not feel ourselves to be imagining when we acknowledge and recognise some thing or some other person. But knowing for certain - knowing that the front plane of this building is specifically 'Gerschom's house' - involves an anticipatory-imaginative projection out of limited points of salience: 'yes, this is the one, this is the house! Do you see the cacti in the window?' It is often hard to recover how those anticipations came to us, even though we do now know for sure that what we thought might be, truly is the case. 'Look, there's his moped!' Hence Freud's metaphor of submerged and surface knowing: the conscious self can find itself compelled by anticipatory knowledge that came from somewhere out of view: 'Below', according to Freud's particular imagined geography.

Forms of imaginative investment – metaphors, symbols, myths, scripts, charters

The sheer scale of coordinated social activity entails that the awareness of many individual people must be engaged sporadically with common objects of imagining in order for life together to go on. That people frequently reference the same points of symbolic reference can lead us to suppose that there exists a collective imagination, or a potential for intersubjectively blended imagining, or that there are epistemes - thought-templates - that generate the imagining of entire epochs and of the particular people therein. But these are metaphysical claims and, as Nigel Rapport points out in this volume, they can blind us to those aspects of the relationship between individual imagining and culture that are indeterminate and non-symmetrical. Note how toleration, collusion, yay-saying, lipservice, accismus, lying, fear of speaking out, muteness, misdirection, equivocation, ironic acquiescence, ambiguity, vagueness, disinterest and simple misunderstanding can all generate an illusion of public unanimity that belies how, or what, any given person is actually imagining.

The world is what offers itself to be imagined, but imagining cannot itself be found in the world. Of course, we see many forms for thought, or of *imaginative investment* - signs, images, mnemonics, projects, goods and especially other people - in plain view; but we cannot witness directly the awareness-imagining-seeing that remains the necessary condition for their salience except, to a limited extent, in our own thinking. If we attend to these investments (of course, our attention varies) we will find, or can at least infer, prescriptions, scripts, charters (mythic and utopian), and diacritic rules of thumb for action personally or *en groupe*: ‘you can be chaotic in Salsa and still have fun... but you can’t be chaotic in ‘Tango’ (Jonathan Skinner, this volume). Contrastive repertoires of this kind inform us of everyday

norms and shared logics against which personal experience can be tested: at the same time, they foreground points of conflict or dissonance in our common sense understanding of how the world is ordered ('do I dare to tango chaotically?') We may thus take from what is offered delightful 'elsewheres' for playful rumination - like the cities that the forest-dwelling Matses draw, as Camilla Morelli tells us here; spaces of adventure that allow an out-spilling of imaginative content vis-à-vis the dullness or incoherence of the quotidian life-space (Wardle 1999).

Of all the problems that exist in exercising an anthropological imagination perhaps the most difficult to avoid, or even to take account of, involves the hubris of confusing culture as a *heuristic*, a contextualising tool, with some specific person's *actual* way of imagining things. There is a certain vested interest on the part of the anthropologist in treating their own overview of the 'cultural field' as the actual ground against which the people they meet 'in' that culture truly imagine things, rather than as a utopic model or metric that can help them understand the diverse human activities they witness. Once we come to see human subjectivity as, to use a widespread analogy, a 'fold' of the cultural field, then we have licensed ourselves to preempt whatever imaginative spontaneity the other person may bring to the occasion: 'did you see what she just did?' says the anthropologist in this vein, 'what a striking enactment of cultural protocol!' On the one side, to use Mattia Fumanti's phrase (this volume), the freedom of individual imagination 'from the limits of the real' - including the anthropologist's view of reality - is all too easily blurred. At the same time, when it comes to imagining, we can note how, as Nabokov writes, 'the manner dies with the matter, the world dies with the individual' (1980:252). So, it may be helpful cautiously to reverse the ideas involved - the *belief* in a unified and knowable cultural field is best understood as a 'fold' of egoistic imagining (Wardle 2009).

Neuro-anatomy has advanced the use of new tools for cortical mapping that can pin down the places and times in the brain where electro-chemical responses to particular objective stimuli happen. In the face of these technologies imagination may begin to sound like a flimsy unscientific word, but, again, an account of imagining that, in this case, restricts itself to brain physiology or brain chemistry is destined to trace ever-decreasing circles of evidence and meaning. Neuro-anatomy can point to possible physical correlates of imagination, but it does not explain nor even describe imagining: on the contrary, it is imagination that lends these data fullness and coherence without itself being encompassed.

Introspection likewise has its hazards as a route to telling what, or where, imagination is. When I 'dwell' on it, my imagination seems to offer a 'private' 'space' into which I can 'withdraw'. I 'turn my gaze inward'; I ignore what is 'outside'. I 'map' and 'figure out', 'move between' and 'arrive at' certain images or ideas. Notice how many metaphors are invoked, with greater or lesser caution, when we try to describe imagining; words, symbols, and images that I came by while talking about and inhabiting a world with others (cf. Lakoff and Johnson 1980). As Wittgenstein points out, it is easy to trick ourselves when we use words like 'inner' and 'private' to describe thinking (1953). The subjective 'innerness' of imagination is not like the inside and outside that respond to each other in the world around us: imagination is not, in that sense, a space at all. Subjective 'innerness' has, of itself, no true 'outside' - not even the view reflected in a mirror. Instead, I depend on the stance and gaze, touch and gesture of some other being, another subject, to gain whatever comprehension I can of myself as an exteriority; and the same is true for that other person looking at me (Bakhtin 1992:36-64).

This conceptual problem of 'inner' versus 'outer' viewpoints comes to the fore when claims are made about how or where the self, the body,

imagining and world overlap, interact or merge. Rubrics for these relationships clearly vary across cultural settings and likewise between individuals (for example, between Descartes and Locke). Boesoou Erijisi told Leenhardt on behalf of the Papuan Kanaks that, for them, the body and consciousness are unconnected; what Leenhardt called ‘the body’ was, for Erijisi, not a singular thing at all (Clifford 1992:172). French philosopher Levy-Bruhl took descriptions of this kind as evidence of ‘participation’; a pre-logical merging of self and environment common to primitives (1966). But in this instance, at least, the centrality of a self *for whom* bodily aspects blend and extend, is still needed and given. Who, apart from a specific self (Erijisi) could we (or Leenhardt) attend to for a view on these matters?

The metaphors we use have consequences, then, for the kind of validity that our presence in the world entertains: they bridge an aporia – a gap or ‘blind spot’ – that exists for all human beings out of which plural morphologies (and dysmorphias) can emerge. Is it Alice (herself) who has shrunk and grown, or is it Wonderland (the environment)? A proportion of Euro-American test subjects can be convinced, using a certain apparatus, that a rubber hand, objectively unconnected to their body, is physically ‘their’ hand (Botvinick 1998). Some mobile phone users report symptomatic feelings that their phone is somehow an extension of their body.² Others describe ‘out of body’ experiences when observing the visual image of a heartbeat projected on a wall.³ The capacity for human consciousness to re-clothe itself in diverse animate and inanimate material forms is perhaps the most widespread of all mythic themes; one that reappears in latterday ideas of, for example, bionics or cryogenics. For modern biomedicine, the indisputable pragmatic value of placebo treatments present a complex parallel problem: their effects can neither be explained solely in terms of

² <http://blogs.telegraph.co.uk/technology/adrianhon/100006561/how-mobile-phones-are-turning-into-phantom-limbs/>

³ <http://www.sciencedaily.com/releases/2013/08/130814124852.htm>

what individuals imagine about their own bodies, nor by reference to bio-physical causality alone (Harrington 1999).

And so, ideas akin to those expressed by the Kanaks need not be absolutely ‘remote’ to us, precisely because, as Lévi-Strauss suggests, they derive not from ‘outside us, but within us’ (1963:104): they are inherent potentials of the asymmetry between imagining and inhabiting a world with others.

Even so, the technologies that organise society are successful to the degree that they institutionalise a certain democratic indifference toward concerns of these kinds. A creationist, an eco-warrior, or a follower of Ayn Rand can simultaneously stop at traffic lights, use an elevator, or an automated payment system, (or cross a bridge in Andrew Irving’s example here) without entering into conflict over their contrastive imaginings. Somewhat differently, Radin describes how, for the Winnebago of the American plains, freedom of thought was expected, but so was individual responsibility for its consequences (1927). Social coordination, then, can (and does) happen without individuals needing to imagine things identically.⁴ Two people can arrive at, or evince, similar approved answers to a task without following an even remotely related pulse of thought. Their personal trajectories coalesce at this moment without conforming at any other: with the result that, while, as William James puts it, ‘the trail of the human serpent is... over everything’, much of the time its tracks need hardly be noticed (1922:64).

Case study 1. Imagining a cultural institution ‘the street corner’.

The ‘corner’ as a site of street action must count as one of the oldest topics of urban social research; eponymous examples being William Whyte’s *Street*

⁴ Kant proposes that ‘logical private sense’ coexists with a more mutually responsive ‘common sense’, though the relationship can break down (2006:113).

Corner Society (1943) and Simon and Burns The Corner (1997), where, in both case-studies, the corner is synecdochic of an entire urban situation. It is fair to say that most ethnographers of ‘corners’ or ‘cornermen’ have described them concretely in terms of a certain kind of relationship to the space of the street: ‘corners’ have been evoked as sites of inequality and marginality; the place where ‘marginal man’ hangs out. Here, I want to point to the abstractness of the ‘corner’ ideal, though, and toward the role of individual imagination in enabling its reiteration. At least in Kingston, Jamaica – a city I have worked in ethnographically for over two decades - ‘a corner’ is not precisely a place, neither is it simply a known group of people. The corner is, nonetheless, a knowable quiddity. As a form for thought, the corner marshals a cluster of public symbols - a network of overlapping imaginative investments - and puts them to work: *its effects are pragmatic and real.*

Here is an example of how the ‘corner’ becomes an imaginative investment. I am talking to CDman who has some recent music - ‘sounds’ - that I am interested in. There is no problem with delivering these music disks to me, he says, ‘I can bring them to your corner’. I am a little intrigued by this spontaneous turn of phrase since we have never spoken to each other before. However, CDman has observed how I ‘move’ and, even though I have only been in Kingston on this trip a short while, he knows where my ‘corner’ is - over the other side of the street with Marshy at Marshy’s fish and bammy stand. This might imply that the ‘corner’ is the place itself, but that is not the case: it is not the segment of street-side but rather an analysis of how and where I interact with Marshy and the rest of the ‘crew’ that constitutes ‘my corner’.

In its simplicity, the image CDman presents of my ‘corner’ extracts from the noise of everyday experience something that is both personal and categorical. The interpretation is a tautology of course; that I ‘have a corner’,

and what I do ‘at’ the corner, evidence each other. In the case of Marshy and ‘my’ corner, my reiterated presence ‘there’ has gathered a recognizable rhythm – become a distinct gestus for others to notice and acknowledge. And, to that extent, ‘my corner’ is now an extension and property of ‘my’ bodily person. So, by using the phrase, CDman asserts a conceptually delimited past-and-future for my activities and thus creates an effect. I am aware of the ‘distance’ or gap between the ‘role’⁵ being ascribed and how I imagined things up to now, but I am happy enough to reorient my common sense to take in this new vista.

So, a concept-word like this invites us (even commands us) to acknowledge some coherent and predictable locus or thing - to make it our imaginative concern. But as we attend to one quality of ‘the corner’ others are occluded. For example, when we then ‘see’ the corner as a functional response to, or symbol of, marginalization, underemployment and money scarcity - which indeed it can be – we temporarily lose ‘insight’ into the corner as a theatre for individual poetics and distinctiveness of character. Shift imaginative frames and ‘the corner’ has a chameleon-like capacity to change too.

This unfolding and retreating of views is unending. We hold onto the meaning of the word but we cannot be sure that what concerns us is shared, though, for the most part, in terms of getting by, this may barely matter. To comprehend ‘the corner’ anthropologically, though, we have either to keep alive the fact of varied, divergent, imaginings, or what we see becomes an accretion of sociological clichés. As anthropologists, the objects of imagination shift and change as we coordinate our horizons with those near us. Thus the ethnographer lays her or his stake in the field of social inquiry on memories drawn from dwelling next to these other individuals, attempting to register what it was that made up their world. In the process

⁵ See Goffman 1961 on ‘role distance’ in *Encounters*.

of exploration, we learn of ‘the corner’ what Max Weber says of other ideal types that ‘in its conceptual purity, this mental construct cannot be found anywhere in empirical reality’, instead (as we indicated earlier) it is ‘a utopia’ (2012:274).

The limits of imagining

‘Is it lack of imagination that makes us come to imagined places, not just stay at home?’ asks Elizabeth Bishop in one of her poems, ‘Questions of Travel’. Some anthropologists have challenged the significance of imagining as a necessary and defining feature of human experience. For instance, Ingold has argued that:

[I]maging is not a necessary prelude to our contact with reality, but rather an epilogue, and an optional one at that. We do not need to think the world in order to live in it, but we do need to live in the world in order to think it (1996:118).

The distinction here is puzzling. Why would we assign opposite values to these two qualities that seem inextricable one from the other - thinking the world and living in it? We must certainly live in a world to think it, equally we must think of a world in which to live. Neither phase is ‘optional’, nor is the one reducible to its twain. When I solve some small everyday problem I begin by imagining a solution, but then, as I grasp at and match up whatever materials I can assemble, I re-imagine that outcome over again to bring the job to fruition.⁶ Every world is, in this sense, uniquely imagination-dependent; every act of imagining uniquely world-dependent.

⁶ See Levi-Strauss’ famous description of the ‘bricoleur’ or handyman in *The Savage Mind*.

Overall, the Kantian description of imagining – that imagination is irrevocably co-implicated with living in a knowable world - has been confirmed many times as some of the following observations will illustrate. With this in view, it is important to note how, despite the essential role of imagination in anticipating a knowable world, there are limits to its powers:

The power of imagination... is not as creative as one would like to pretend. We cannot think of any form for a rational being than that of a human being. Thus the sculptor always depicts a human being when he makes an angel or a god (Kant 2006:71).

When we populate other planets in our imagination, Kant goes on to say, we use human-like beings as our avatars. We might wish to qualify Kant's claim – rationality can, after all, be dressed as a fox or a spider – however, the key is that what limits imagining is everything we have come to know through living in and thinking through our world up to now. As they approach closer to the mysterious planet Solaris, in Tarkosvky's beautiful film, the cosmonauts' closest memories are re-materialised and take on a life of their own according to a force that can never be known for itself. Nalo Hopkinson's vivacious science fiction novels call on and rearticulate her knowledge of life in Jamaica and the Caribbean. In contrast, Nineteenth Century Romantics, for whom subjectivity could will into being whatever world it imagined, failed to account of the thermostatic control that the world as lived, versus the world of imagination, exercise with regard to each other.

Georg Simmel argues that the most recognisable forms of religious imagining draw their vivacity from familiar relations such as 'the child's faith in its parents, the friend in a friend, the individual in his people, the subject in its prince' (1997:280). Radcliffe-Brown comments likewise that aboriginal

totemism has nothing esoteric about it in terms of experiential content: eaglehawk and crow, the totem animals for certain kin moieties in New South Wales, were species which habitually followed foraging bands as they burnt the undergrowth for food (1951:17-18). In this respect Neilson's and Pedersen's argument in this volume that 'the concrete space affords particular imaginary scenarios' is well-taken. The relationships and communities of individual imagining are not, though, a replay of some particular objective social-geographical arrangement. In his efficacious ritual chants the Piaroa shaman reconfigures for the event in question a poetics drawn from an entire life-time of curing practice.⁷ What can be imagined is always in excess of what is immediately given to the senses and is likewise more and other than whatever can be communicated meaningfully at any one place and moment.

Imagine this unfamiliar creature: the closer I inspect it in my mind's eye, the more it seems improbably composed from distinct but familiar things: the beak and webbed feet of a duck, a body covered in fur with small eyes like a mole. In his book, *Kant and the Platypus*, Eco describes how ninety years passed before specimens of the duckbilled platypus were recognised as real by a scientific community (2000). Initially encountered as a set of incoherent elements, the platypus was widely viewed as a crude attempt at fraud: recognising it demanded much more than an empirical encounter; it required conceiving and communicating that this kind of entity, in its totality, could be a thing at all.

Piaget shows in a similar vein that for a child coming to recognise that the world is made up of distinct and enduring things involves an extended process of imaginative-sensory feedback. Crucially, for most people, this includes a growing capacity to discern critical sounds and to recombine and rhythmicise these as meaningful utterances for others to

⁷ Joanna Overing personal communication.

hear. Hence, this dynamic of imagining and sensing, through which the child ‘constructs reality’, entails also an emergent awareness that this self of theirs is something distinct from other aspects of world (1955). Egoistic symbiosis with world gives onto self-differentiation from and within world in a dialogical (and uncompletable) process. Sudden reappraisals of how the world is made up vis-à-vis self (and hence who the self is in the world) give imagining-perceiving its characteristic feel of surge and diminuendo.

Feedback between imagining and perceiving

After a great deal of dialogue and cognitive effort, *ornithorhynchus*, the duckbilled platypus, ‘added up’ – perhaps still odd, even uncanny, but no longer impossible. Psychologists of perception have provided many insights into how complexes of information are composed imaginatively as knowable entities, and how coherent perception-imagining can fail. It is worth reviewing certain of these findings in detail.

How perceptual ambiguity is resolved. The psychologist Fred Attneave was amongst the first to recognise that ambiguous visual phenomena provide valuable insights into how imagination composes reality (1971). For example, looking at a cluster of similarly sized equilateral triangles, the mind’s eye tends to posit a ‘direction’ in which the triangles are ‘moving’ - it is hard to ‘see’ them as having no trend at all. Even so, some residual ambiguity always remains. As Bateson points out, meaning and point of view are unstable moments of fixture in a looping feedback between concepts, self and environment (1979). To this, Mary Douglas has added that the degree of effort put into asserting unambiguous meaning for particular aspects of the world varies according to the seriousness of people’s co-dependence: in contrast, laughter can signal that the imagination welcomes incongruity in human relationships (1966). A drive to attain

coherence, and to acknowledge incoherence or ambiguity, are equally significant for learning about, and narrating our experience of, the world. The ‘hauntings’ Peter Collins discusses in this volume, and uncanny awareness in general (‘what the hell is going on here?’ as Collins puts it), speak to the significance we grasp from disturbances and gaps in this process.

How imagining and attending are co-implicated. While we seem to appreciate the world as an integrated panorama, the eye itself has clear focus only on a small part of the field of vision, the ears only on narrow wavelengths, while the full sense of scenic completeness is supplied by our imagination. Two experiments show relevant aspects of this. In a well-known ‘gorilla visitor’ illusion, psychologists Simons and Chabris ask audiences to attend carefully to the number of passes a group of ball players are making in their game. Many of those taking this test - though not all - will fail to notice a gorilla-suited actor walking between the players. In a second experiment, subjects arrive at a counter and are handed a form to fill in. When they hand the completed form back, a majority will not notice that the receptionist who gave it to them has been replaced by someone else. They continue to act *as if* their world were unaltered (Simons 2000). What people think is, and what they imagine *should be*, the case are, much of the time, tautologically interdependent. There is a further aspect to the issues involved here which Whitehead calls ‘negative prehension’: in order to build a coherent perspective, a wide range of information must be actively excluded from imagining and perceiving (1929). Hence, theoretically at least, there exists for each of us an aggregate of imaginary ‘dark matter’; of unimaginables or

things never imagined.⁸ The world could always have been imagined otherwise.

The socialness of imagining and attending. Since human acts take place with others in mind, then, as Leo Coleman discusses in this volume, imagining, whether intentionally or not, is ‘sociocentric’. The experiments above show that we are prone to attend to what we have been directed toward by those around us, to the exclusion of other information. And, since comprehending people’s intentions may well be vital for sustaining my own pattern of life, looking where they look (aligning myself with their objective) is generally valuable. This alone can explain much of the compulsive quality that certain objects and projects hold temporarily for gatherings of people. We do not need, then, to invoke group mind or special powers of mimesis as Durkheim and Tarde did to explain these feelings. However, in this regard, rubrics shift and change. In 1836, Lelut redefined the term ‘hallucination’ to describe ‘internal perceptions wrongly attributed to the action of external objects’ - hence a signal of insanity. Many people were redefined as insane in these terms (including notably Socrates whose ‘daemon’ or guiding voice helped him resolve philosophical problems; Leudar and Thomas 2000:8). As we have noted, though, when it comes to the relation between imagination and world, the distinction between ‘internal’ and ‘external’ is highly equivocal: this boundary has inherent potential for manipulation. And, as Lugones also tells us, it makes a great difference to how we respond to the world imaginatively whether our means of self-expression are calibrated by others according to what she calls ‘arrogant perception’ or rather by way of a ‘loving’ view open to playfulness and incoherence (1987).

Patterning. Coherence-seeking, then, drives the relation imagining-and-perceiving. Psychologist of music, Diana Deutsch has experimented with capturing recorded speech and playing it in a repeating loop (Deutsch et al.

⁸ ‘known unknowns’ and ‘unknown unknowns’ to quote former U.S. secretary of state, Don Rumsfeld.

2011). When speech sounds are reiterated often enough they begin to be heard as song/music: this can occur after only a few repetitions. Deutsch's research reveals explicitly what many musicians have always known intuitively. For example, John Blacking has described how, for the Venda of Southern Africa, *u imba*, song, is distinguished from, *u amba*, speech on the basis that the former is recited using a regular meter (1973:27). In a related observation, Husserl shows how hearing music cannot be a matter simply of registering notes one after another, but must involve an extensive listening that combines and explores the past while anticipating the future (1964). While the present moment has no definable length, it does correspond to a subjectively felt continuity of rhythm: and, likewise, we can note how any particular human being introduces a distinct syncopation (of gesture, speech, attentiveness) into their interactions with others by way of presenting themselves. To this extent, human interaction involves a crossing of rhythms as well as an unavoidable counterpoint, since the entry of each distinct self into interaction brings a new pulse to the unfolding event. Our personal utopias have a rhythm to them that emerges from the past and protends into the future. Learning how to introduce and perform these kinds of rhythm effectively is a painstaking process; learning too well, may, as Paul Stoller suggests in this volume, introduce a kind of lifeless 'competence' into communication.

Case study 2. Imagining the standpoint of a life.

If we turn the pages of Captain TW Whiffen's *The North-West Amazons: Notes of Some Months Spent Among Cannibal Tribes*, we will come to this eye-catching photograph:

INSERT Fig. 15.1. Andoke Shaman and his Wife: photograph by Captain T.W. Whiffen.

Whiffen references his illustration in the following way:

The only member of the tribe who varies from his fellows is the medicine-man, and he will adopt any idea that appeals to him as an addition to the eccentricity of his appearance. One Andoke medicine-man, whom I photographed, was wearing a turban of bark-cloth dyed a brilliant scarlet; but his taste in this particular was purely individual, and denoted neither professional nor tribal distinction. The large bag shown in the adjoining illustration should be noted, for it was greatly admired by the tribe. It appeared to be made... with threads of red and undyed palm-fibre. It was not manufactured by the Andoke, but had been obtained by barter; however, it was of indigenous make, and probably came from the north of the Japura (1915:74).

The explorer has clearly posed his photograph to foreground this 'eccentric' distinctiveness of the shaman and his wife and we take this cue from him. However, the closer we look at their faces the more we are struck by some indefinable pathos: for once, the sentimentalism 'I feel for them' captures a certain literal truth: I feel-imagine - I initiate a certain rhythm and directedness, a pattern of life - on their behalf. Their expressions resist interpretation, and precisely for that reason, my thoughts attempt to cross the boundary of appearance trying to find a way to comprehend this stance

of theirs from their point of view.

INSERT Fig. 15.2. Andoke shaman and his wife (section)

Below, is an image of the photographer himself from his archive: the pipe-smoking Captain is on the left, and his servant John Brown, who accompanied him through the Putumayan jungle, is to the right.

INSERT Fig. 15.3. Captain T.W. Whiffen and John Brown (section): unknown photographer.

These faces intrigue us too because they also resist any familiar interpretation. In his monograph, Whiffen describes John Brown as ‘invaluable throughout the expedition... more loyal and more devoted than a traveller... has reason to anticipate of any black servant’ (1915:3). It is hard to ‘find’ exactly that sentiment ‘in’ the photograph, though.

This last picture is a section of a portrait of John Brown,⁹ again by Whiffen. This time Brown is carefully dressed - with a mark of distinction of his own, a top hat. The contrast with the other photograph is striking and whatever we thought we knew about Brown undergoes an intuitive re-organisation when we look at it.

INSERT Fig. 15.4. John Brown: photograph by Captain T.W. Whiffen.

⁹ The positive identification of John Brown in these two photographs was made for me by Ramiro Rojas Brown, his grandson (see also Rojas Brown 2010). I am grateful to Jocelyn Dudding at the Cambridge Museum of Archaeology and Anthropology for making these and other of Whiffen’s archival photographs available for viewing.

There is a great deal, potentially an infinite amount, that we could add by way of context which might help us further understand the Andoque shaman and his wife, and likewise Captain Whiffen and John Brown, not to mention the interrelationships of all four. I am less interested here in how a good or true interpretation in those terms would come about.¹⁰ What I am aiming at is more immediate and primary. Engagement with these faces, and then the further attempt to comprehend the stances or standpoints involved, starts when their gaze meets ours and we recognise, not a genus or type of person, but rather a life distinct to itself. This moment, which combines recognition but also resistance, is what provoked us to imagine those people more fully and to ask (ourselves) for more context. So, the germ of intuition out of which an anthropological interpretation begins to unfold has in it a contradiction, because the imaginative process has ceased if, or when, I claim that the people involved are best understood as products or ‘folds’ of a particular epoch, or of a network of relations, or that their lives are expressions of a particular ontology. Here then, is one kind of tension or friction in the ‘anthropological imagination’ that is ignored if my priority is to move toward a final assessment. This ability to recognise the lives of others as on a par with my own is an imaginative ability. ‘Imagination’, Hannah Arendt suggests, ‘is the only inner compass we have, we are contemporaries only as far as our imagination reaches’ (1953:392).

Concluding Remarks: a kingdom of imaginative ends

My son, Max (twelve at the time of writing), informs me that he has become interested in the power of what he calls ‘immaterial objects’. In the yard of our village school two boys were playing, he tells me. The first gifted the second an imaginary weapon, ‘fire sword’, while reserving to himself

¹⁰ These comments are prefatory to a longer study of John Brown currently underway.

‘diamond sword’ to ‘fight’ with. Soon boy number two wanted to have the use of ‘diamond sword’, but his playmate refused to relinquish it. An argument started, which was only resolved by a teacher sending boy number one to sit on the ‘naughty step’ because he had refused to ‘share’. Max was struck by how the boys argued *as if* the things in question were real and by how the teacher took them seriously.

Some important features of imagining are foregrounded especially clearly in this struggle over ‘diamond sword’ and ‘fire sword’. Certainly, when we consider them from the side of imagination, all objects, tangible or otherwise, have an ‘immaterial’ dimension since, without the contribution of imagining, they are not objects at all. At the same time, absolutely immaterial, or virtual, entities hold an ever more compelling position within our modern horizons where more and more is invested imaginatively in goods that - or people who - have no tangible presence, but whose social and material effects are felt nonetheless. The exchange value of money is perhaps the most ubiquitous example, but there are certainly at least as many of these intangible presences in the life of the modern person as there were amongst the animist thinkers who conversed with anthropologists such as Paul Radin or Irving Hallowell. In this respect, where an object is invested with significance by only one or a few then it is perhaps easily disregarded, but where the investment is evidently made by many, then it acquires a power of ‘dull compulsion’, to use Karl Marx’s phrase, becoming entangled and imbricated with many other concepts, aims, actions, institutions – an obstacle that all must clamber over or sidle around. The swords of the two boys are immaterial, but their tears and anger are not, nor are the effects of the teacher’s intervention. One boy must sit on the ‘naughty step’ while the other perhaps - who can say? – finally and triumphantly raises ‘diamond sword’ aloft to his mind’s eye.

Imagining puts in play not only a familiar community of voices and valued things gathered during a lifetime in the world, but also looser feelings, untethered memories and uncanny absences and presences. It has a rhythm of ebbs and flows that responds to contingent impulses without producing any fully necessary sequence; more an elusive stream, or a serpentine crawl, to use William James' metaphors (see Mark Harris, this volume). For each of us, this self-generated common sense ordering is unique. And, since it preempts sense experience, imagination is an irrevocable constitutor of our realities. We are left with a puzzle: knowing what and how someone imagines is indispensable to understanding their vision of their world – the primary anthropological task - but we have no direct access to these qualities only their exterior show. We see a rhythm of activity and amidst that we intuit imagining at work. On our side, as observers and participants, is the fact that imagination cannot absolutely depart from the world it inhabits. So, the closer we are to someone, the more likely it is that what is important to them imaginatively may be close at hand (even if, like 'diamond sword', it has no material presence). At the same time, we rely on our standpoint outside their world of experience – our own common sense - in order to appreciate theirs in its own right.

When it comes to the correlation between imagining and world, each of us has little option but to rely on our own intuitive sense. As Malinowski points out, when I explore this or that person's vision of their world, then I engage in an imaginative endeavour: what does this stance of theirs consist in? What are they attending to, invested in, intent upon? What images, parables, folktales, analogies or metaphors do they 'live by'? From their view on their world, what do they know, or hold to be self-evident and what does all this add to our common anthropological knowledge? In this broadest

sense, anthropology treats the imaginative lives of each and all as elements of what Kant called a ‘kingdom of ends’ – each self, as much as the next, expresses a distinctive ‘world knowledge’ (weltkenntnis) that undergoes change as it directs itself toward life with others; to cultivating a life in certain ways alone, in other ways in common. The idea of a kingdom of imaginative ends, in turn, provides a horizon for the work of anthropology - that is, for the anthropological imagination.

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(DRAFT) Afterword to Harris, M. and N. Rapport (eds.) *Reflections on Imagination*. Forthcoming
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