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and Jeremy C. A. Smith

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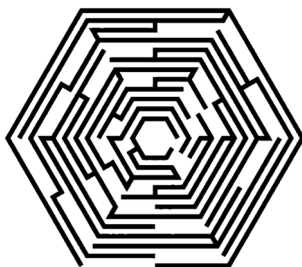
Imaginal Politics

Dialogues with
Chiara Bottici

SOCIAL
IMAGINARIES

Debating Imaginal Politics

SOCIAL IMAGINARIES

Series Editors:

Suzi Adams, Paul Blokker, Natalie J. Doyle, Saulius Geniusas, John W. M. Krummel, and Jeremy C. A. Smith

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Dialogues with Chiara Bottici

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Chiara Bottici

Editorial Introduction

Jeremy C. A. Smith, Federation University Australia

The philosophy and practice of Chiara Bottici has attracted greater attention since the publication of her 2014 book *Imaginal Politics*. If this is a landmark in the trajectory of her work, it is because the book condenses a statement and analysis of her distinctive concept of the imaginal. It seems therefore altogether fitting to feature a collection of perspectives in debate with Bottici in the 'Social Imaginaries' book series, as it is entirely valid to interrogate the imaginal as a concept and Bottici's position as a perspective in the field of 'social imaginaries'. That said, this collection of chapters spans a range of viewpoints on *Imaginal Politics* and its author's lifework. In this introduction, I do not intend to address all approaches. Instead, I set the tone for the book by briefly framing the relationship of the imaginal to conceptions of the imaginary and the imagination – one of the main problems addressed in the chapters – before moving on to an introduction of the multidisciplinary themes of the imaginal unpacked in the book's chapters.

This book addressing a new conceptual approach to the dimension of images, collectively instituted, joins a long-standing tradition of thought about more established concepts of the imagination – construed as both recreative and productive – and the imaginary and social imaginaries, in both the singular and plural sense.[1] The imaginal comes across clearly as a conceptual substitute for both the imagination and the imaginary. In debating the imaginal, what is it that the authors address? Chiara Bottici's *Imaginal Politics* elucidates this concept out of a small yet distinct lineage, first framed in Sufism's underacknowledged philosophical traditions. Quintessentially, the 'imaginal' refers to 'that which is made of images and can therefore be the product both of an individual faculty and of the social context as well as of a complex interaction between the two' (2014, 5). Bottici goes on to clarify how 'images' are specifically pictorial and not forms (in the domain of social

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context) or individual faculty (explored in the philosophy of the subject and psychoanalysis). Our authors debate this very elaboration of a pictorial concept in all its past, potential, and already-realized applications.

This precise notion is Bottici's focus, and it becomes an alternate plane of analysis to that of the imagination – bound as it is in its origins to the Enlightenment – and the imaginary with its indispensable ontology, whether in its Castoriadian form or a neo-Durkheimian one such as Charles Taylor's (Taylor 2004). It may be that 'the imaginal is not a world' (2014, 61), but it would seem that the imaginal conceptually intercedes between the ontologized imaginary and the subject-centred imagination, hindered as it is by inherited thought. According to Bottici, the imaginal more adequately interrelates subject and context – instead of focusing on the metaphysics of one in theories of the imagination and the metaphysics of the other in those of the imaginary. At the same time, the imaginal fosters a questioning of our established ontological categories to tackle the human condition.[2] If our times are inundated with imagery, then a language of the imaginal can throw this into relief without recourse to the long intellectual discourse on the real or non-real status of images. Bottici emphasizes this point when she writes '(i)f Hillman detranscendentalizes Corbin's imaginal world, I go one step further in that I try to deontologize it' (2014, 61). Consequently, images are more-or-less alienating (especially in the psyche) and more-or-less de-alienating, as Bottici goes on to explain. Moreover, imagery is culturally variable, context dependent, and adaptable to different political perspectives.

Yet, despite this strong stance against ontology, it would be wrong to conclude that ontology makes no appearance at all in *Imaginal Politics*. It surfaces in the unusual divergence from what Bottici regards as a central preoccupation of much of philosophy with death as the source of being. Human being, as Bottici vigorously avers, is instead 'ontologically rooted in natality' (2014, 70).[3] The living experience of all beings begins with this *fons et origo* and is marked recurringly by it. That existence begins with a bodily passage into a world of social beings is not a banal point, but one surprisingly and conspicuously absent from philosophical discourse.[4] Although this argument is ontological in nature, to articulate it, however, we do not need perspectives overly burdened by traditional ontologies. Castoriadis does not share this blemish of much of Western philosophy. Nevertheless, the ontology extolled in his magnum opus, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, leads Bottici to part ways with Castoriadis, with whom she otherwise agrees on many points.

As well as thinkers broadly in the field of social imaginaries – Castoriadis, Taylor, and Lacan – Bottici debates many others in *Imaginal Politics*: Arendt, Debord, Kant, and Hillman, to name the major ones. In the best traditions of critical intellectual discourse, the authors that follow this editorial introduction similarly engage Bottici's elucidation of the imaginal by problematizing

and then interrogating her main arguments. Some (Webster and Gherovici) engage the psychoanalytic side, focusing on the dimension of the psyche, just as Bottici focuses on the psychical monad as one of her most trenchant criticisms of Castoriadis. Others concentrate on the political imaginal (Forti, to a degree Jung and Zalaf) or on its juridical role (Goodrich). Philosophical interrogation abounds in Mendieta and Lara, examining both the metaphors that iconic and historical texts invoke, and the theoretical categories constructed in and around competing notions of the imaginal and the imaginary. Coming from backgrounds in social theory and historical sociology, other chapters approach questions of civilizations, states, globalization, and social movements (Smith and Jung and Zalaf). Almost all also engage other modes of collective institution and agency (pictorial, virtual, textual, relational, and historical) and do so from the vantage point of different disciplinary and interdisciplinary positions. The collection entails a multidisciplinary and interdisciplinary forum for critical engagement as several of the interlocutors observe.

We begin with evocative pictures of freedom. Opening with moral and political tales of four ships, taking us via metaphors of human fate, not to a telos of freedom at the end of socio-technical evolution, but to Apollo 17's photo of Earth – an awesome and yet cautionary image of our 'spaceship', Eduardo Mendieta's chapter interrogates Bottici's *Imaginal Politics*. The shared goal of imaginal politics and critical theory is the imagination of another world. Like Lara who follows, he puts at the heart of Bottici's *oeuvre* the imaginary institution as a generative context of freedom, or of its *constraint*, depending on perspective. Referring to Bottici's earlier work (Bottici, 2007), Mendieta detects a tension between the intellectual legacy of this work and *Imaginal Politics*, where Bottici contends that imagery does different work in the imaginal of the society of the spectacle. This tension is such that Mendieta can recruit an earlier Bottici against the conception of the imaginal. Enlisting Drucilla Cornell's version of the imaginary and her reconstruction of moral philosophy and feminist critique (for the purposes of reframing sexual imaginaries), he discerns in modernity an imaginal of freedom. This imaginal adds iconography to the philosophical contents of freedom. In short, we use images and allegories of freedom, as well as words and interpretations. His conclusion is a qualified endorsement of Bottici's notion of freedom-with-others, which he associates with his own notion of 'relational freedom'. In his own exposition, rights, morality, and imagination are all co-requisites of a concept of emancipatory freedom. There is common ground between these two projections of freedom.

Like Mendieta, María Pía Lara also focuses on the imagination and imaginal in Bottici's philosophy. Reflecting the thrust of her book on feminist imaginaries, Lara aims to construct radical extensions of the project in

Imaginal Politics. She does this in a three-step progression through Bottici's philosophy by reconstructing the latter's genealogical method around a reconfigured understanding of the relationship of images, myths, and narratives. In step one, she elaborates the critical potential of the imaginal in a twist that augments the genealogical method. Through this, she affirms 'a new kind of normative ground for the imaginal' (2021, 32) on which actors can discern good and bad. For Lara, this is the element missing from the elucidation of the imaginal. Yet, it is implicit in doing of critique as a sine qua non of intellectual activity. Having established the ground, Lara then recontextualizes the imagination, in a second step. At this point of her argument, she stands by Castoriadis by clarifying his view of the relationship of the imagination and the imaginary. On Lara's interpretation, the association of the two turns out to be more dynamic and entangled than Bottici seems to have believed. Finally, her attention turns to bridging the imagination, the imaginary, and the imaginal via language as the necessarily incomplete expression of the world in fragments. She unpacks Bottici's imaginal through a series of interrogative questions before proposing several additional elements entailing language and imagination (she follows Benedict Anderson in this moment). Critical of the imaginal, but not rejecting it, she hypothesizes that a new historical stage for the performance of imagery in politics has dawned. The three-step tour visits the giants of philosophy: Kant, Plato, Arendt, Charles Taylor, Adorno, and Benedict Anderson. With this, she sets the scope for other engagements with Bottici's political philosophy, arriving at a critical meditation of the position and trajectory of Bottici's notion of the imaginal and how it can be sharply differentiated from the imaginary and the imagination. In returning to Castoriadis she re-examines the contextualizing effect of the imaginary, agency, and imagination, but with the purpose of a clarification and enhanced understanding of the relationship to the imaginal.

We see early on that politics runs deep in Bottici's philosophy, whether the topic is the psyche, culture, or politics as it is explicitly and commonly understood. Simona Forti directly addresses the political imaginal in 'Revisiting Imaginal Politics: From Totalitarianism to Post-truth Democracies'. She examines Bottici's vital connection of images and politics since the Cold War. The political imaginal is in principle always disposed to both liberating and totalizing potential and rarely monopolized by either. Yet, the evident reduction of the capacity to imagine an alternate political order shadows the conditions of contemporary democracies. Like Zygmunt Bauman and others, Bottici depicts the conditions in which the spectrum for politics narrows markedly. Her specific slant is the saturation of our political imagination with images. Forti, finding 'post-falsehood' a more adequate and accurate description than 'post-truth', asks whether the shift in judgement in politics is ruptural or problematic and contingent. Questioning the novelty of the

current juncture, Forti surveys the end of twentieth-century totalitarianisms in search of a clear-cut break in the imaginal. For the current author, her compelling account acts as a reminder of Baczko and Lefort's journeys into the political imaginaries of totalitarianism (see Baczko 1999[1984] and Lefort and Thompson 1986). For the reader, it serves as a point of comparison with which to measure present-day trends. One of these is the neoliberal forms of technocratic governance, where electoral and parliamentary politics – dramaturgically performed on a public stage in the most imaginal way possible – produces no fundamental political contest of alternatives. Democracy itself, seen as always indeterminate and fragile in theories of the political imaginary (see Eisenstadt 1999; Lefort and Thompson 1986), is distinctly vulnerable in current conditions (Plot 2012; 2018). Forti is in accord with this view. Clearly, the status of truth and falsehood are at stake. However, Forti quotes Bottici's argument that

> (i)t is not just that a personality like Trump, with his (largely delusional) narrative of the self-made man, fits the new social media: it is consubstantial with them, because it is inseparable from the type of performance that these new technologies enable. (2021, 59)

What, for certain, therefore confronts us? Forti identifies a more definite pattern: populism expresses a feature of 'post-truth democracies' in common with the totalitarian imaginary – the exclusion of others. A world-in-common as a political project and utopian horizon (in the strict sense intended by Ricoeur) is one under pressure from the exclusionary tendencies and practices of post-democracy. Given this, what should we be disposed to, and what should we do? Forti's response is to call on us to be critical subjects. Critical subjectivity presupposes and necessitates 'ethical work on ourselves', in Forti's estimation (2021, 62). In our present conditions, this is a call to critically interrogate imagery as much as text and discourse. Although not a normative position, Forti's call sits fittingly beside the two preceding chapters in crisscrossing the ground of critique as a philosophical practice.

The next turn is to law. Noting that *Imaginal Politics* surprisingly lacks images, Peter Goodrich begins his chapter with a discussion of navels. Joining Bottici's view of the centrality of birth to being, he concurs with how the imaginalist thinks about natality but then posits questions about how they might picture it. The matter and materiality of the body's apparatus for giving birth gives also pictures alluding metaphorically and theologically to incarnation. As imagery is powerful in the theological tradition, so too is it in the word of the law and juristic traditions. Taking us through a genealogy of the *longue durée* of law in which the textual and imaginal emerged, Goodrich discloses the deeply and surprisingly imaginal nature of this domain of the

state and the degree to which images are evidence in law. Images support claims around *rights*. However, this becomes problematic in many contexts, especially in this era when the digitalization of imagery renders images ontographic. Images can seem poignant, even in legal judgement. Moving through the ontographic and legal status of limit events, where images are not available as evidence, Goodrich illustrates how this is so. His cases are simultaneously illuminating and absorbing: haunted houses, the details of Indian sacred sites, the status of the artists' tablet (canvas), and marginal imagery in court judgements. The 'haeccity' of imagery is cast in doubt in the case studies he outlines. Legal judgement, so dependent on words written and spoken on eternally in search of rationality, is flummoxed when facing such imaginal material. Judgement takes excruciatingly long to reach and cannot be conclusive in the usual way. Goodrich gives us insightful glimpses into the depths of the historic, historical, antique, and current-day imaginal at work in the law.

Psychoanalysis is another field informing *Imaginal Politics*. While Carl Jung and Castoriadis dominate Bottici's thinking here, two chapters invoke Lacan's perspective as a way to approach Bottici. In 'Bottici to the Letter', Jamieson Webster refers to the Lacan of images when discussing his register of the imaginary. However, she sees a more powerful approach to psycho-analysis lying in the 'perceptual unity' of word and image. This is not only a more adequate reading of Lacan, but it also offers potential common ground with Bottici's own emancipatory politics, according to Webster. Referring to an chapter by Lacan on the letter and the unconscious, Webster examines his understanding of image, word, and signified through gendered toilet signs, trees, the cross of the Resurrection, and the Tree of Diane. Lacan's disclosure of the complexity of meaning ends with the historical slide of image into let-ters – an overdetermination, if you will, of the materiality of words. Yet, the imaginal is far from doomed. Here the force of Bottici's philosophy of the imaginal re-enters the picture. Imagery – the imaginal – is indispensable in politics, especially modern politics. More centrally, the imaginal is vital to the institution of power as the symbolic field of sovereignty. Not only does the imaginal carry the potential for oppression and the resources of eman-cipatory politics, but it also bears the marks of trauma, argues Webster fol-lowing Lacan. Webster ends reading Bottici to the letter by highlighting the philosopher's other outlets for politics: poetry and stories. In highlighting the suffering and illness of mothers and daughters, Webster's selection shows the trauma of transmission and its legacy for the imaginal.

In all, Webster's is a substantial psychoanalytic response to *Imaginal Politics* via Lacan. It should be remembered that Lacan was an early French thinker in the field of social imaginaries and, as such, is a relevant point of reference for considering the imaginal. Patricia Gherovici picks Lacanian

psychoanalysis up from another angle. She brings questions of gender, body, and identity to Bottici's problematic of the imaginary in her chapter 'Traversing Lacan's Imaginary with Bottici's Imaginal'. Taking Bottici's imaginal to traverse the imaginary of Lacan, Gherovici treads a path left unexplored in *Imaginal Politics*: Lacanian psychoanalysis and the lacunae in Freudian methods. Following an outline of Lacan's theory of the imaginary and practice in psychoanalysis and primacy of the imaginary – as Lacan specifically conceives it – for embodied self-formation, Gherovici explores experiences of gender transition via a famous autobiography (Prosser 1998), a clinical vignette, and a related counterfactual society fictionally depicted on Uranus by Paul Preciado in *An Apartment on Uranus: Chronicles of the Crossing* (Preciado 2020). Affirming that autobiography is an especial kind of writing illuminating how the life course of a transgender person impacts on their self-becoming, Gherovici invokes Bottici's reminder that all bodies 'are processes of becoming, and transgendering is simply one of the possible ways to do so'. (2021, 112).

What significance does this insight into writing transgender identity hold for psychoanalysis and its configuration of the relationship of the imaginary and imaginal? Gherovici strongly suggests, with Bottici more than Lacan at this point, that psychoanalysis is a creative intervention supporting the kind of self-transformation involved in gender transition. In this process, the imaginal is not a world dimension appearing in Lacan's thought. However, application of the imaginal to Lacanian psychoanalysis would reconfigure the entire composition of the Imaginary, Real, and Symbolic, as Lacan conceives them. Understanding the relationship of the imaginary and imaginal in this way, writing and reading begin to look like forms of personal and political agency with wider applications for creative and artistic practice. In turn, Gherovici relates the insights into creativity, writing, and reading resulting from her analysis of the imaginal in psychoanalysis to her own clinical practice.

This chapter complements Jamieson Webster's focus on image and word with a meditation on writing, reading, and narrating. Written as intellectual intervention with Bottici as a critical reconfiguration of Lacanian thought, 'Traversing Lacan's Imaginary with Bottici' Imaginal' takes a step towards reconceptualizing Lacan's imaginary in light of Bottici's reconstruction of the imaginal. The chapter thereby helps to bring psychoanalytic thought and practice closer to contemporary lived experience.

Zalaf join the debate with an evaluation of one domain of Bottici's oeuvre: the relationship of Islam to politics and the emergence of Islamic politics. Like other chapters here, 'Islamic Politics of Imagination: The Case of the Muslim Brotherhood' unconventionally tests Bottici's theory empirically. Unlike other chapters, and unique to the current collection, 'Islamic Politics of Imagination' takes the Muslim Brotherhood as a case study. Suspecting that the compelling

'ideological appeal' of the Brotherhood has abundant resources for the imagi-nation of an alternative social order, Jung and Zalaf locate their case study in the historical context of Islamic modernism in order to throw into relief the imaginal politics of this Islamic movement. Yet, there is a further interesting aspect of their assessment. Following Bottici, they also harness predictions of secularization that have pockmarked social theory and some currents of criti-cal theory invitingly calling for a renewal of theories of religious social imagi-naries. The chapters tracks Bottici's salient reconstruction of the relationship of politics and religion. Turning to multiple modernities within Islam, Jung and Zalaf bring the public role of politics into focus. The utility of Eisenstadt's framework runs into limits at this point and Bottici's addition of the imaginal to imagination and then the imaginary comes into the picture. The imaginal adds much in problematizing modernist prophecies of secularization. This chapters further opens Bottici's own exploration of the public role of Islam by positing many Islamic imaginaries created in the context of Middle Eastern politics and rising movements of anti-colonial nationalism.

Joining the debate from a historical sociological perspective, Jeremy C. A. Smith brings into focus Bottici's treatment of both civilizations and civiliza-tional discourse and the modern phase of globalization. In the first instance, Smith expresses agreement with Bottici's critique of the political myth of 'the clash of civilizations'. Like Mendieta's chapters, Smith addresses Bottici's proposition of political myths as a twist on Blumenberg's philosophy of myth.

Extending her critique by accentuating the genealogy of the linguistic emergence of 'civilization', Smith proposes longer and shorter histories of the myth of civilizational conflict. To add flavor to the extension of Bottici's critique, Smith briefly explores how historical sociology, civilizational analysis, and world history have moved to revise previous scholarship on pre-modern civilizations. The best scholarship in historical sociology and world history has been engaged in the critical reconstruction of a more nuanced picture of the plurality of regional worlds and constellations. Instead of a tragedy of incommensurability and clash of civilizations (a la Huntington), they find contact, transmission, and exchanges, as well as conflict and warfare in the encounters of civilizations and societies. Plurality prevails in the inter-national arena of power. The emphasis on plurality continues in a critique of social scientific approaches to globalization. Following scholars in contem-porary civilizational analysis who highlight the diversity of civilizations and modernities, Smith contends that there is greater nuance in multidimensional approaches to the relationship of globalizing world regions, particularly when contemporary trends in capitalism are considered. By questioning analyses of globalization, he sets the global plane at a distance from regional worlds and the regionalisms that they generate. Noting the link to the spectacu-larization of politics, culture, and consumption made in *Imaginal Politics*,

he interrogates two sides of Bottici's treatment. First, questions are raised about the flattening tendencies of globalization whose outgrowth not only saturates the local and regional with the virtual imagery of the spectacle but also captures the potential to imagine an alternative social and political order. Second, Smith claims that this is contested ground for social movements with countervailing visions of the lifeworld. Furthermore, regional blocs and associations (many of which are vehicles for neoliberal policies and practices) and counter-globalist populisms (mostly of a Rightist character) complicate the project of globalization and social scientific analyses of globality. Smith's chapter joins others in expanding on and interrogating *Imaginal Politics*.

We end with a reflective response from Chiara Bottici. Bottici's reply begins with evocative images of three ships advanced in *Imaginal Politics* by her or by authors in the current collection. The images are evocative because they call on us to think about our collective fate and collective freedom. Bottici then turns to normativity and the challenges it poses, namely, how to discern and evaluate the worth and significance of given images. Reaffirming a Spinozist position, Bottici advocates immanent critique as a political-philosophical practice. From here, Bottici seeks to bypass the beguiling choice between universalism and relativism, just as she looks beyond the burdens of ontology when she elucidates her orienting notion of the imaginal. There is some continuity in the philosophical journey here for her, but also a shift. Bottici's subsequent elaboration of a lineage of her own project leading to a conception of 'transindividuality' seems to fit logically with the Spinozist paradigm of the world (Bottici 2019). How this influences both the terrain and dramaturgy of politics – to momentarily again invoke a Lefortian sense of the contingency of democracy – is evident in attempts to consolidate an understanding of post-truth politics. Taken us back to Forti's explanation and critique of this consolidation, Bottici reminds us that the purpose of imaginal politics is to disclose the outgrowth of the imaginal in the terrain of politics. How to do politics on this new terrain is a compelling question for Bottici's project. Her response includes a few obligatory points for another work devoted to that purpose.

Law and psychoanalysis come together in the reply and are treated with points of clarification that bring further coherence to her philosophy. Bottici continues to situate her perspective in relation to key arguments. There are updates to the position developed in *Imaginal Politics* in this regard but also small upgrades in the argument around law. For example, Goodrich's convincing point that images are oddly absent from *Imaginal Politics* receives a response. Taking the unconscious as transindividual, Bottici advances her thinking since the book in respect of psychoanalysis. Addressing a sociological register, Bottici provides points on concepts of mutual interest to her and the authors. The reply thus ends with a consolidation of engagements

with Jung and El Zalaf and Smith and critical divergences of perspective on modernity and, in Smith's case, the conceptual apparatus of 'civilization'. This is a clarifying moment in the reply in which fruitful illumination of positions emerges, if not resolution of perhaps unresolvable questions.

This, finally, is the spirit of the reply. Bottici clarifies aspects of *Imaginal Politics*, as well as fresh counterarguments raised in her interlocutors' interpretations. Furthermore, Bottici outlines, explains, and upholds her subsequent lines of inquiry and political argumentation, particularly around the political power of images and the genealogical method of critique. Clarification is a feature of debate as important as critical engagement. To debate and critique in this tradition of intellectual friendship, with generosity and respect, hermeneutically performs a democratic service for all of us who engage with *Imaginal Politics*. Together, we aspite to contribute to the democratic and emancipatory reimagination of the world. It is a service also for a wider reading and debating public with shared and varying interests in this project.

NOTES

1. An excellent recent source summarizing positions on the imagination is Geniusas (2018). See also Robinson and Rundell (1994) and Geniusas and Nikulin (2018). Seminal works on the imaginary mentioned in a number of chapters in the current collective include Castoriadis (19875[1975]), Ricoeur (1986), Taylor (2004), and various works by Lacan. See also Gaonkar and Lee (2002) and Baczko (1999[1984]).

2. On her later view, there is a slight but important shift. A theory of the imaginal presents a more flexible stance on the human condition paving the way for a potentially new social ontology (Bottici 2019).

3. Bottici later develops her adaptation of Balibar's notion of transindividuality as a potentially new social ontology (Bottici 2019).

4. The picture for social theory is different and a little complex. That, however, cannot be addressed here.

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Chapter 1

The Imaginal of Moral Freedom

On Chiara Bottici and Drucilla Cornell[1]

Eduardo Mendieta, Penn State University

Le droit est la plus puissante des ècoles de l'imagination
  Jean Giraudoux[2]
Le droit est la plus puissante de ècoles de l'liberte
  Eduardo Mendieta
Reason cannot blossom without hope, and hope cannot speak without reason: both must operate in a Marxist unity; no other science has a future, no other future has science.
  Ernst Bloch[3]

THE SLAVE SHIP AND THE FREEDOM
WE DO NOT, AND CANNOT, SEE

Chiara Bottici closes her book *Imaginal Politics* by calling for a re-orientation of critical theory, which in her estimation has for too long and almost exclusively focused on 'the conditions of public reason and the reasonable', thus leading it to 'overlook discussing public imagination and the imaginal' (Bottici 2014, 178). Indeed, this important although perhaps exhausted phase of critical theory has redirected our imaginary to such an extent towards arguing, and argumentation, justifying and justifications that the other dimensions of social life have been occluded and forgotten. This turn, began by Karl-Otto Apel, continued by Jürgen Habermas and advanced by Rainer Forst, nonetheless, is accompanied by its own imaginal: that of a seminar room in which mostly males are giving arguments to each other about the nature of the political, while outside, people are marching, carrying banners, wearing pink hats, as the police hurls rubber bullets, tear gas at them, and pushes them back with their shields and batons. The *non-coercive coercion*

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of the better argument is itself an image, surrounded by an entire imaginal. However, Bottici's last chapter, 'The Freedom of Equals: A Conclusion and a New Beginning' is pivoted on the exegesis and beautiful translation of a 1967 poem by the Italian anarchist Belgrado Pedrini, which in Bottici's estimation re-draws for us a powerful image that should aid with the re-orientation of critical theory, namely, that of a galleon on which humanity floats precariously. On this galleon, however, 99% of the crew are slaves and the remaining 1% are the masters. Bottici juxtaposes the image of this slave ship with that of Noah's ark. In the one, the slaves are invited to rebel instead of rowing for the regime that is killing them, while on the other, Noah and his family, the only survivors of God's wrath, tend to what remains of life after God has instructed Noah to gather two of each species. This juxtaposition of a slave ship facing its possible demise, and the other of a redemptive, preserving, ship of life, is telling.

As we ponder the power of these two images, and the imaginaries they invoke, I would like to bring before our imaginations two other ships. The first is that of the San Dominick, another galleon, which is the subject of what I would argue is one of Hermann Melville's most important, albeit neglected novellas, namely, Benito Cereno. This is a novella that Melville published in 1855 in the abolitionist magazine *Putnam's Monthly*. The story is masterfully told, in the *avant la lettre* mode of you only discover what has been going on in the middle of the story, when all the clues that the metanarrator has been leaving behind suddenly flash before your mind, like a movie scene in which everything suddenly falls into place like a jigsaw puzzle. The story, very briefly, is about a slave ship in which the slaves have mutinied, taken over, and have forced the captain to turn the ship back to Africa. The story, however, is told from the standpoint of Captain Amasa Delano, who has seen the ship and thinks it is in distress and has come aboard to see how he can help. All that he sees, however, is that the slaves behave like slaves, and the captain, a Spanish captain, behaves like the white master that he is supposed to be. Captain Delano cannot see what is in front of him, and he cannot recognize the fact that the slaves are in charge, while Captain Cereno in fact is a prisoner. One may hazard that one of Melville's morals in this story is that Captain Delano is himself a prisoner of a certain kind of ignorance, what today we call epistemic ignorance, but which we can also call a certain failed and failing imaginary, namely, the racist imaginary of white supremacy. Here is another galleon, but one in which the slaves have taken over the ship and leading it back to Africa: the homeland of freedom (Mendieta 2017, 169–88). I will return to Melville shortly.

The other image I would like to bring before your imagination is that of what has been called 'Blue Marble', which is a picture of the earth taken by the Apollo 17 crew, the mission that went to the moon in 1972 and sent those

images of the earth, for the first time photographed against the great void of space. The photograph shows the earth from the Mediterranean to Antarctica, showing the ice caps of the South Pole, most of Africa can be seen, and the Arab peninsula is also visible, but most of the picture is of the Atlantic and the Pacific Oceans as they surround the two largest continental masses on the earth. This image, it has been documented, is one of the most reproduced photographs in the history of photography. This image is, as philosopher Kelly Oliver has argued, more than what it presents: the earth in space (Oliver 2015). It is at once a technological event, as well as a hermeneutical breakthrough. Technology made available to humans an image of the earth, as a totality and as a world, in other words, the earth as a living totality. It should not go unnoted that the very technology that made this image available to us provided not a complete image, but a perspective. Technology, concealed behind the lens, also gave us a dizzy experience of omnipotence and omniscience. The photograph was the trick of a *sub specie aeternitatis* glance – the eye of a demigod. On the other hand, it also gave us another way to think of the earth, as if mimetically, not simply as a living whole, but as a spaceship: the earth is a spaceship travelling through space. We are on a giant ship gliding alone and vulnerable through the immense vastness of cold, dark, and silent space. As Oliver has argued, the image became the catalyst for the environmental consciousness and movements that took off during the 1970s. As Oliver eloquently argues, an image in this case was worth more than a million words. We now have a way to wrap our imagination around the factum of the unity of life on earth, the only ship we have.

Let me return to Benito Cereno. The last quarter of Melville's novella is narrated by means of the court documents of the trial of the insurrected crew, which had killed almost all the white crew, except for Captain Cereno and a couple of his immediate assistants. We know that Melville based his novella on an actual munity, the ship journal of the captain that survived it, and the court briefs that documented the trial that followed. The historical events resulted in the sentencing to death of the revolted slaves. In Melville's fictionalization of the mutiny and trail, the head of the leader of the revolt, however, is put on a stake and placed in the town square, to serve as a warning, to whom, one must ponder, as who but only whites can transit the town square. We read in Melville's re-writing of the legal record that the slave who led the rebellion refused to speak, to give testimony, to answer any of the legal questions, and not because he could not speak. He refused to be a witness before a court that from the outset refused to recognize him as a person. I want to aver that Melville's story is about the ambiguity, intractability, and indiscernibility of freedom. Who was free and how on the deck of this slave ship: Amasa Delano, Benito Cereno, or the revolted and mutinied slaves? I want to argue that 'Blue Marble' is also an image about the

ambiguity, intractability, and indiscernibility of freedom, on planet earth, in which our freedom is not simply met by the freedom of others, but the life of other living beings that are not human. I think these images, these allegorical images, are an invitation to engage in an analysis of what Bottici calls imaginal politics, and what I would call either a metaphorology or iconology of moral freedom. In the following, thus, I want to take up Bottici's work on political myth and the imaginal in order to show their relation. Then, I will read her in tandem with the work of Drucilla Cornell, who has been also advocating a study of what she calls the 'imaginary domain' in order to trace out what she calls in a recent book, 'the struggle for redemptive imagination' (Cornell 2008, 1–9).

IMAGINAL POLITICS AND THE RADICAL IMAGINARY

Whoever reads Bottici's other superlative book, *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, will come to understand quite clearly why she moves from a genealogy of political myth to imaginal politics (Bottici 2007). Chapter 10, of the third part of that book, is titled 'Myth, Historical Narrative, and the Social Imaginary'. The chapter deals with the ways in which historical narratives provide 'significance' to myths, thus enabling societies to construct stories that turn the mundane into the extraordinary and the extraordinary into the quotidian. Political myths are crystallizations of certain narratives that then provide societies with ways of making sense, but also of telling, what is significant for their own constitution. In that sense, political myths project a community of meaning by creating a putative future, but also retrospectively constitute that community by imagining that it has a certain kind of past. Communities are thus acts of narrative imagination. Throughout the book, Bottici invokes and redeploys Hans Blumenberg's notion of 'work on myth'. Political myths are works *of* myth while also working *on* myth. I would put it thusly: political myths are mythologizations; they hand down myths while also reproducing them, enabling their work of creating significance and relevance. Political myths contribute to the perpetuation and empowerment of a certain social imaginary. As Bottici puts it, the work of historians and the work of myth on myth 'are constitutive of the imaginary significations that contribute to the provision of meaning to everyday experience and without which no society could ever survive' (Bottici 2007, 219). Political myths, furthermore, make explicit how society is *instituted* and *instituting*, to use Castoriadis's language. Or as Bottici puts it: Any society continually defines and redefines its needs, and no society can ever survive outside of the imaginary significations that constitute it and that are constituted by it. The institution of society presupposes the institution of imaginary significations

that must, in principle, be able to provide meaning to whatever presents itself. (2007, 220)

It is this dialectical reflexivity of the imaginary significations that provide meaning for any given society. This is precisely the merit of Castoriadis's concept of the radical imaginary, for through this concept he is able to foreground the *instituted* and *instituting* function of the social imaginary. Bottici again: 'society exists only if can exist in the imagination of individuals who, in turn, cannot exist without the society of which they are part' (2007, 221). Tellingly, Bottici will argue that the radical imaginary, consequently, is prior to the distinction between 'real' and 'fictitious' can be made or can even become a question (2007, 223). This leads Bottici to conclude, powerfully:

> As a consequence, political myths can be seen as a site both for the construction of an instituting social imaginary and for the work of a radical political imagination. Myths are not simply symbols, and political myths, in particular, are not just mapping devices. They also contain determinations to act, and this determination can affect the specifically political conditions of a given society. (2007, 224)

I would add that for the same reason political myths are also the site for the restriction of the social imaginary and the work of a reactionary and regressive political imagination, as Bottici eloquently illustrates with her analysis of the political myth of the clash of civilizations. To the list of regressive and restricting political myths I would add the myth of the super-predator black criminal, the perpetual Mexican alien, and the myth of white innocence in the face of the perpetuation of racist institutions and practices in the United States.

In any event, chapter 10 of *Philosophy of Political Myth* is arguably the origin of *Imaginal Politics*, or at least the place where a certain kind of problematic emerged for Bottici, namely, the problematic of the relationship between the individual imagination and the instituted/instituting social imaginary. Another way to articulate this problematic would be to say that we are absolutely free, as creatures that can always freely exercise their imagination, so as to imagine their world otherwise. This is the absolute power of the imagination: the power to project a radically different version of reality. Or, diametrically juxtaposed to this view, is to say that our very imagination is constrained by the social imaginary, and that thus, at the very locus of our freedom, we are absolutely determined. Either we are absolutely free or we are absolutely determined; either we are single creatures of our imaginations or we are indistinct products of a powerful and insurmountable imaginary. This is the fundamental problem of human agency, the problem of how we have to be subjectified into freedom by being subjected to in order to be an

agent, what Michel Foucault calls certain technologies of the self. The prob-
lem of the social imaginary, whether radical or regressive, is the problem of
subjection and subjectification. This is the problem of the *askesis* of agency,
or what we could call the handwork of freedom, to speak with Peter Bieri
(Mendieta 2011, 111–24).

Bottici argues that the trajectory from imagination, to imaginary, to the
imaginal allows, or traces, an exit or an *Umweg*, around the aporetics of the
imaginary, the aporia of either subjection or subjectification, where we cannot
have the one without the other: no subjection without subjectification, and not
subjectification without subjection. This is why Bottici argues the following:

> If we start from the idea that imagination is *in primis* an individual faculty, the
> problem emerges of determining the ways in which it can be shaped by the
> social context. If we begin with the concept of the social imaginary understood
> as context, the problem is how to account for the free imagination of individuals.
> There are no easy ways out of this problem. For this reason, I have proposed that
> after a passage from a theory of imagination to a theory of the imaginary, we
> need to take a further step toward a theory of the imaginal. 'Imaginal' simply
> means what is made of images (*imagines*) and as it can be both the product of an
> individual faculty and of a social context, as well as the result of a complex, yet
> to be determined interaction between the two. Furthermore, as we have seen, in
> contrast to the imaginary – conceived as the unreal and fictitious – the concept
> of the imaginal does not make assumption as to the reality of the images that
> compose it. (Bottici 2014, 147)

Here, however, I would want to recruit Bottici one to argue against Bottici
two, namely, the Bottici of political myths against the Bottici of 'mere'
images.[4] As powerful and suggestive as the Bottici's deployment of the
imaginal is, I am not sure it resolves the aporetics of the imaginary, so well
diagnosed by her. I think that there are resources in the Bottici of the geneal-
ogy of political myths that may help us solve the apparent aporias that the
Bottici of the politics of the imaginal seems to corner us into. Indeed, at any
given time we are swimming, jostling, zigzagging through a sea of images.
We live in a world that is saturated by spectacles, as Bottici writes (Bottici
2014, 145). The question, however, is how do we let certain images map the
social world for us. Tell me what the wallpaper on your smartphone and com-
puter is, and I will tell you what kind of person you are. The transit of images
is overdetermined by ideologies, but also by the iconicity of certain images
that are woven into social imaginaries. We are consumers of images, and the
images we consume make us, or rather either expand or shrink our horizon
of action.[5] Let me illustrate, taking up cues from Bottici's own work on the
commerce of images. Western media relentlessly produces and reproduces

the image of the Muslims as irascible, radical, violent, misogynist, which are either deliberately or unwittingly juxtaposed to those of Westerners in carefree postures, holding hands, smiling, reading, dancing, jogging. These are two radically, diametrically juxtaposed worlds: one of fundamentalist totalitarianism, the other of enlightened freedom. The images of one invoke two imaginaries simultaneously: one of what we take the enemies of our culture to be, the other of what constitutes who we are and want to be. Political myths work through images, and the work of their ideological power is circulated and enervated through the process of making certain images the coin, the icons, the *emblemata*, by means of which we brand the 'other'. From among a sea of images, how do we get to select some as opposed to others for giving significance to our social existence? How do we use some as either flotation devices to help us swim through the flood of images or cling to them as buoys that anchor us in a sea of enmity and hate? How do we both select and produce an imaginal that can be radical rather than regressive and repressive?[6]

I want to argue that Drucilla Cornell's concept of the imaginary domain, as developed in her eponymously titled 1995 book, is meant to help us solve this problem (Cornell 1995). In that book, Cornell deployed the concept of the imaginary domain with a group of opponents in mind. The immediate background of Cornell's work was the morality debates of the 1980s and 1990s. On one side, you had the colonizing male imaginary that sought to tell women what they should and could desire to do with their bodies by legislating on the reproductive freedom of women. At the same time, these debates about women's bodies and desire signalled that they were to be made available to the unregulated desire of males. Thus, Cornell was interested in a certain male imaginary that sought to grant males license over women and their bodies, while dictating to women what they could and could not imagine as desirable for them. On the other side, you have the feminist crusades against pornography, led by Catherine MacKinnon and Andrea Dworkin. For Cornell, however, MacKinnon and Dworkin's putative activism on behalf of women turned into another form of the regulation, evisceration, and circumscription of the female imagination: they could not desire what was portrayed in pornography, for even looking at it was succumbing to violent and raping male desire. For MacKinnon and Dworkin, pornography is not just the 'fictionalized' portrayal, the acting out of a mental and unreal desire, but the actual performance of rape: pornography is rape, the performance of male violence on the real bodies of women. To this extent, however, the putatively feminist critique of rape as violence led to the colonization of women's sexual imaginary, women's imaginary as such, in which sexual desire itself was off limits, or at least to be cleansed of the male pornographic gaze and touch.

Cornell also had another set of contenders in mind. On the one side, the formal, proceduralist, constructivist Kantianism and Rawlsianism with its

empty conception of the social agent, and, on the other side, a substantivist, reductivist, feminist readings of pornography, abortion, and sexual harassment, with its prescriptive and exhaustive conception of material agency. Thus, Cornell aimed to develop a new conceptualization of the relationship between legal and political liberty, on the one hand, and sexual difference, that was not reduced to mere oppression or exploitation, on the other. In order to do so, she sketched a view of equal protection under the law with an appeal to what she called protection of the 'minimum conditions of individuation' (1995, 4). The minimum conditions of individuation that can secure equal protection, one that can be extended de jure, if not de facto, to unknown and unsuspecting victims of the absence of the protection of the law are: first, the preservation and protection of bodily integrity; second, access to a symbolic world that would enable the articulation of one's difference, or uniqueness, and relationships to others; and, third, the protection of the imaginary domain. From among the three axes of Cornell's minimum necessary desiderata for an equal political and legal protection, I want to focus on that of bodily integrity. Given that most immediately Cornell turns to Kant, and he is in the background of her reflection in general, bodily integrity should be called 'bodily dignity'. This later term becomes highly relevant if we consider that Cornell is re-defining Kant's argument about freedom under the law, a condition under which we are enabled to live out our freedom and pursue our happiness so long as this pursuit does not 'impinge' upon the freedom of others. Most fortuitously, somewhere else Cornell calls this bodily integrity, 'somatic freedom' (Cornell 2008, 13), which we ought to juxtapose to what Rainer Forst has called 'noumenal freedom'.

Cornell argues persuasively that the Kantian, and Millian, 'impinge' as a limit modifier of my freedom is too weak, and ultimately meaningless, especially in light of the ways in which certain forms of the enactment of 'freedom' may not necessarily impinge but can easily 'denigrate'. Take, for instance, racist hate speech or forms of hardcore porn, which are Cornell's points of reference. Surely it is not enough to aim to live out one's freedom by the light of one's reason and one's views as to what would make one happy, so long as it does not simply impinge on the freedom of others. Living out one's freedom must also affirmatively include not denigrating the freedom of others, whether symbolically or somatically. The denigration of the freedom of others is also a corporeal, somatic, denigration, which is what all forms of sexual harassment, hate speech, and hardcore porn enact. There is a second axis to Cornell's re-reading of Kant's moral philosophy and it has to do with coming to a symbolic world that enables precisely not only recognition but also of active agency. The third axis of this reconstruction is the axis not exhausted by body and language, or symbolization; it is the axis that points to the reconstitution of the agent in a horizon opened up by the lights of the

subject's imagination itself. For Cornell, this horizon of reconstitution, of re-imagining, of re-articulation, is what she calls '*the imaginary domain of women themselves*' (Cornell 1995, 80). In the feminist struggles against pornography, sexual harassment, and the attempt to rescind *Roe v. Wade*, what is at stake is not simply women's agency, and the way in which they can articulate their own needs and wants, but also their ability to imagine their own desires and hopes. What is at stake is the masculinist colonization, usurpation, and foreclosing, of a female imaginary, or rather, female imaginaries. This is what I would argue Cornell is saying when she writes: 'the symbolic encoding of one imaginary correlated with the heterosexual masculine imaginary as the 'truth' of sex is what has turned the question of pornography into a public inquiry' (ibid., 104).

While in the *Imaginary Domain*, Cornell aimed to re-articulate Kant's concept of freedom, as freedom with others, to use Bottici's expression, in her more recent work from 2008, *Moral Images of Freedom*, Cornell aims to re-articulate Kant's ideas about the constitutive role of the imagination in our morality. Cornell nonetheless couches this project in terms of the critique of a certain conception of femininity that she had already began in the *Imaginary Domain*. In fact, a certain strain of feminism was viscerally critical of the way in which the feminist struggle for civil rights and the struggle against gender discrimination through legal means became themselves tools for masculinist normalization through state mandate gendered norms. To use the language of MacKinnon, the state was male because the law it legislated was law in accordance with a male imaginary: law against sexual harassment and rape presupposed the agency of males and the passivity of females, and in that way they reinforced certain sexual norms, namely, the sexual norm of female passivity and availability to men. As Cornell puts it:

> Legalization then became a foe because it implied a concept of right that no matter how it was articulated would reinstate universalizable sexual norms, and it was just such universalizable sexual norms that queer theory set itself against. These norms were thought to not only undermine sexual enjoyment but also impose a trauma by closeting forms of sexuality outside state norms. (Cornell 2008, 12)

Thus, we are caught in a double bind: either we think outside the rule of law and the rights that a state can legislate and use to coerce, thus legislating a certain conception of gender, of being a sexuated being in a certain way, or, we turn our backs on the state, and its language of rights, and forego the coercive power of the state, and the language, and voice, of rights, and thus consign ourselves to a legal and political silence and voluntary invisibility. This is why Cornell turns to the concept of the imaginary, and specifically

for two main reasons. First, because it is through 'imaginary images' that our 'primordial sexual formation' takes place, and as psychoanalysis teaches us, these imaginary images are 'morally loaded' (2008, 15). Here we can think of Oedipus seeing his mother, who had become his lover, wife, and mother of his children, hanging after her suicide, which leads him to blind himself. There are some things we are not meant to see, because they are so morally loaded. I would remind us of that incredible scene in the *Crying Game*, in which the protagonist gets to see the women with whom he has fallen in love, naked, and there discovering that she is a man, or the scene in *Hang Over II*, in which one of the characters is talking to the beautiful woman, with whom he had sex during his drunken bachelor's party that he does not recall, and then she gets up and undresses to put on her performance outfit, to reveal that she has a penis. This leads the character to wretch and run out in dismay and self-disgust. There are some things we are not meant to see.

The second reason, now articulated more explicitly in contrast to the 1995 book, is that the imaginary enables Cornell to 'emphasize the playful role of the imaginary in the affirmative aesthetic play of our own bodies and sexu-ated being that allows us to re-envision and act out ever increasing differen-tiation of our sexuality' (2008, 15). The imaginary is not simply a horizon of normalization, subjection, and coercion, but also a horizon of creativity, playfulness, and subjectification – the way we constitute ourselves in such a way that we are not dominated, so much or in a particular way, but become the product of our *askesis* and *poesis*. And here Cornell speaks of the paradox of sexual freedom, one that demands a 'moral space that does not normal-ize the content of sexuality itself' (2008, 15). Chapter 1 of *Moral Images of Freedom* is therefore devoted to an exegesis of Kant's *Critique of the Power of Judgment*, and more specifically, to an analysis of the relationship among the reflexive judgement, *sensus communis*, the relationship between the constructive and synthesizing power of the imagination, the constitution of a moral view of the world, and of ourselves as moral agents in that world.

I do not want to go through Cornell's reading of Kant on beauty and the sublime, both because we already spend too much time writing about Kant's writings, and because I am not sure I agree with Cornell's reading of the entanglements of the beautiful, the sublime and moral self-legislation in Kant. What is important is that Cornell thinks that Kant, rather than let us say Homer, de Sade, or Nietzsche, is a key source for critical theory. Most impor-tantly, and I think she is absolutely right, is the claim that Kant's aesthetics and his analytics of the power of aesthetic judgement, which must work in tandem with the constitution of a *sensus communis*, is indispensable to any and all critique of society. Above all, Kant, in Cornell's analysis, links the aesthetic play of the imagination to the projection of a moral image of the work, and gets to work on our moral anthropology – a term Kant explicitly

uses in *The Metaphysics of Morals* – so that we may straighten the crooked timber of our humanity into the moral exemplars that we ought to aim to become. I like to use an expression of Bottici's and say that just as all myth is work *of* and *on* myth, the imagination is work *of* and *on* our moral image of ourselves. Here is where I differ with Cornell's reading on Kant's aesthetics. I think the relationship between the aesthetic and the moral does not gravitate around the beautiful, but rather around the sublime. I think that one thing we can and ought to learn from Kant is that morality is not simply beautiful, as when someone acts in accordance with the moral law, but when someone acts sublimely, and exceeds the bounds of the legible law so as to show us how we can read the categorical imperative in unsuspecting ways. It is our capacity to legislate the moral law in ever unexpected, and incalculable, ways – ways that exceed the bounds of our mores (*Sitten and Sittickleit*) that exhibits the heights of our sublimity: for it is when we legislate the moral law that we are also more like the divine legislator who legislates the laws of nature. On one side, the lawfulness of an immense cosmos extended over our heads as a divine tapestry – the starry night of the cosmos – on the other, inside, in the abyssal depths of our conscience, the moral law that knows no boundaries – the starry sky of our moral dignity.

THE POIESES OF FREEDOM OR FREEDOM AS A WORK OF ART (*FREIHEIT ALS KUNTSWERK*)

In the majestic work of intellectual and philosophical history, the *Geschichtliche Grundbegriffe: Historisches Lexikon zur politisch-sozialen Sprache in Deutschland* in eight hefty books, edited by Otto Brunner, Werner Conze, and Reinhart Koselleck over two decades (1972–1992), we can find an entry on *Freiheit*, freedom, that extends over 118 pages of tight and small print (Brunner, Conze, Koselleck 2004, 425–543). The entry, written by several contributors to the *Historisches Lexikon*, is an immense source of information about the semantic, conceptual, and factual history of freedom.[7] Among the many discoveries that one can make in this text there are five that are particularly relevant for my purposes in the present context. *First*, there is the discussion of how already in its earliest manifestation, freedom had a horizontal and a vertical dimension: to be free meant to be in a relationship to some authority and to others. Thus, one was free vis-à-vis a sovereign, some coercive power; and was free inasmuch as one could claim freedom vis-à-vis consociates. *Second*, that freedom always came in the form of 'freedoms', that one could not be free without that freedom being instantiated in a customary or legal expression of a catalogue of freedoms – to be free was to be granted and to be able to claim certain 'freedoms'. *Third*,

that freedom meant not only external freedom but also internal freedom; freedom meant not only to be free to do 'X' but also to think, feel, imagine, or dream of 'Y'. Freedom, particularly after Christianity interjected itself in the history of freedom, came to mean subjective, or mental and spiritual, and physical, or somatic and bodily, freedom. *Fourth*, we also learn that part of the semantic expansion and differentiation of freedom had to do with the differentiation between the 'space of freedom' (*Freiheitsraum*) and the content of freedom (*Freiheitsinhalt*), or, what we could also call symbolic and material freedom. *Fifth*, and finally, towards the very end of the entry, on page 493 to be exact, the entry has a peculiar section entitled 'metaphoric' which is devoted to the study of the different metaphorical ways in which freedom has been expressed. This section is a wonderful analysis of the different, and most literally, and not visual, ways in which freedom has been portrayed in the West, through poems, hymns, songs, and of course national anthems. Before I turn to this fifth 'discovery' I want to register that the entry closes with an *Ausblick* by Werner Conze, one of the main editors and architects of the whole lexicon. In this *evaluating* outlook, Conze notes that the concept and word of freedom have also been used ambiguously and with disastrous consequences. He focuses on Hitler's uses of freedom: his agitation for 'Freiheit und Brot' (Freedom and Bread) and the 'Freiheitskampf des deutschen Volkes' (Freedom Struggle of the German People) against the ideas of 1789 and 'Western democracy' (Brunner, Conze, Koselleck 2004, 539–40). In Hitler's rhetoric and the entire National Socialist ideology, the freedom of the people, a racial body, thrusts aside individual freedom. The freedom of the people as a race supersedes the freedom of individuals. As Conze writes: 'The right of personal freedom steps back over against the duty for the preservation of the [master] race' (2004, 540. *Translations by author*).

Now, as one reads the section on the metaphorics of freedom, I could not help but to think that this metaphorics also invites an iconology, if not an entire iconography of freedom. Along with a study of the ways in which we speak about freedom, whether allegorically or metaphorically, we also need a study of the visualizations, of the imaginal of freedom. And here we can think of the three hundred Spartans led by Leonidas, who resisted Xerxes's invading army, dying under a barrage of arrows that darkened the skies; we can think of Jesus on the Cross, a son of God, being sentenced to death and to be crucified with common criminals; we can think of the innumerable martyrs who died in the Roman Coliseum; we can think of Toussaint Louverture refusing to submit to Napoleon, and the many slaves escaping through the underground railroad towards the North. We can think of a black hand putting a ballot into a voting bin. Or, we can think of 'Liberty Leading the People' against the King's Army, as was famously painted by Delacroix.

And, most poignantly, we can see in our mind's eye the Statue of Liberty at the entrance of the Hudson Harbour, her arm raised, holding the torch of freedom. But there are more basic allegories of freedom: a road extending into the horizon, a bird cage with its door open, broken chains, two people of the same sex kissing and holding hands, running into the sea naked, and so on. That is if you subscribe to the dictum: *Verum index sui et falsi* [The true is the sign of itself and the false]. But if you subscribe to *Falsum index suit et veri* [The false is the sign of itself and the true or correct], then we would also have to adduce a whole catalogue of images of oppression, subjugation, bondage, and slavery: hands shackled by chains, the layout of how slaves were chained in a slave ship, a boot on a face, a mangled and burnt body hanging from a tree, a face with a moth gag, a sign over a door 'only whites', and so on. Freedom, and its *falsum index suit et veri*, thus has many images and the work *of* freedom *on* freedom is the work of those many images. There is a history of the visual representations of freedom that remains to be gathered. The history of freedom is also the history of the imaginal of freedom.

I want to bring these reflections on the work of images *on* freedom and *by* freedom to a close by bringing in Ernst Bloch. Bloch, like no one else, has catalogued but also philosophized about the role of images in the utopian imaginary.[8] His *The Principle of Hope* (1959, translation 1986a) is an encyclopaedia of images, narratives, songs, myths, allegories, metaphors of a different, better, and more dignified world (Bloch 1986a). In book three of this magnum opus, Bloch turns towards what he calls the real utopia, the project of the upright carriage. Book three is thus mostly dedicated to Marx and his development of historical materialism as the means for constructing what Bloch calls the *Humanum* and the 'Upright Carriage' of proper *humanitas*. The *Humanum* is the yet to come, and thus not yet (*noch Nicht*) actualized, humanity of the human. The *Humanum* is what the 'humanization of nature and the naturalization of the human' would construct. The *Humanum* is a utopian ideal, although it is latent, and thus possible, in the realm of history. It is the telos of human history, but also the introduction of a *Novum* in that history, for the full picture, image of accomplished humanity, is not yet complete. The *Humanum* therefore is the site of the construction of something entirely new and unprecedented, as well as the locus of the actualization of the potentialities that lay latent in material history.

In a later work, *Natural Law and Human Dignity* (1961, translation 1986b) he takes up the concept of the 'Upright Carriage' and the work on the *Humanum* by arguing that natural law and social utopias have worked in concert to elaborate the *dignitas* of the human (Bloch 1986b). While the natural law tradition has focused on the *eunomos* that would protect and

expand the dignity of the human, social utopias have focused on expanding the realm of happiness by projecting images of non-exploitation. Thus, while one tradition has laboured to project images of non-degradation, the other has focused on images of non-exploitation (Bloch 1988, 1–17). Bloch put it succinctly in his 'Tübinger Introduction to Philosophy' in the following way: 'Above all, for particular spheres of endeavor, there are the utopian lands of medical, technical, architectural and geographical expansion and attainment. Even in the ancestral territory of utopias, the social utopias are not alone: next to the images of possible human happiness in the social utopias, the rational images of possible human dignity are projected as teaching of natural law' (Bloch 1970, 89). This dual work of natural law and social utopias on human dignity is what Bloch calls the 'orthopedics of the upright carriage' (Mendieta 2014, 799–815). Together, they converge in the utopia of humanistic socialism, which projects the proper *humanitas of the Humanum* as a form of social existence in which conditions of both denigration and exploitation have been abolished. In the last sentences of his *Atheism in Christianity*, Bloch writes: 'A *Humanum* free from alienation, and a World into which it could fit – a world as yet still undiscovered, but already somehow sensed: both these things are definitively present in the experiment of the Future, the experiment of the world' (Bloch 2009, 256–7). Translating Bloch's analysis of the teachings of natural law, from the Stoics to the Black Jacobins, and the social utopias, from the dawn of human history to the paintings of the Romantics, into the language we have been developing here, we could say that one tradition has aimed at symbolic integrity, *dignitas*, while the other at somatic freedom, *libertas*. Thus, and this may be my conclusion, the *Humanum* is the site of the construction of moral freedom, that is to say, both internal and external, horizontal and vertical, freedom, or what Bottici calls freedom with others. The work on this communicative and relational freedom, as I indicated, is in large part, but not exhaustively, the work of the imaginal of freedom. *Rights without morality are blind, morality without rights is empty: both without imagination are mere coercion and subordination.* Tell me what image of freedom you have in your mind's eye, and I will tell you what kind of freedom you envision for others.

NOTES

2020) symposium focused on Bottici's work. There, I benefitted from the comments and questions of the participants, such as Meile Steele, who shared some of his work and comments on my chapter. I also want to express my gratitude to Matthias Lutz-Bachmann, who invited me to be a research fellow at the Forschungskollege-Humanwissenschaften in Bad Homburg v.d. Höhe for the spring of 2020, where I was hosted and taken care of by a wonderful team led by Frau Koban and Frau Sutterlüty.

2. (Giraudoux 2014, 161).

3. (Bloch 2018, 33).

4. Somewhere else I have put Bottici in dialogue not just with Drucilla Cornell but also with Maria Lugones, who I think is developing what we can call a feminist decolonial imaginary, see my essay (Mendieta 2020a, 237–64), and "Decolonial Imaginary" (Mendieta 2020b, 91–98) in Weiss, Murphy, and Salamon (2020, 91–98).

5. When I began to work on this essay I wanted to consider the relationship between "images" and "philosophy" against the background of two theses: on the one hand, the saturation of our lifeworld by images, images that furthermore have become decoupled or uncoupled from specific meaning. This means images are no longer allegorical, figurative, or metaphorical. Or, alternatively, they are no longer tethered to a symbolic system for which they stood visually and representationally. The coupling of images to metaphors, or the image as symbol, refers to the pre-modern close correspondence between image and language. On the other, referring to the second theses, there is what Martin Jay diagnosed as the "denigration of vision" in twentieth-century thought. While the rise of modern philosophy may be linked to the idea of reason as "light" and reason as a form of "vision", enshrined in the temporal concept of *éclaircissement, Illuminismo, Aufklärung*, in short, the age of Enlightenment, so-called post-modern philosophy rejects not only that reason shines light on our existence but that it blinds us into irrationality too. Reason as light may create its own cave of light where we are blinded to reasons. Thus, the call to overcome the ocularcentrism of the Western concept of reason so well diagnosed by Hans Blumenberg and David Michael Levin (who changed his named to David Michael Kleinberg-Levin). I wanted to link these two theses as a way to think through Bottici's proposal through the mediation of the wonderful book by Susanna Berger, *The Art of Philosophy: Visual Thinking in Europe from the Late Renaissance to the Early Enlightenment* (2017), where we can find this provocative and pregnant passage:

> The interaction of images with language organizes in a fundamental way the whole history of art in Europe. It is not just philosophical plural images (such as certain illustrated thesis prints or front pieces [like Hobbes' Leviathan]) that are structured by this image-language interaction; rather, *all* pre-modern art in Europe involves language, even if script is not literally present. Most images crated before 1800, and certainly all artworks in the more prestigious genres of that period, are incomprehensible without a reference to a text, such as the Bible, Ovid, or Tacitus, regardless of whether that text is literally inscribed onto the visual representation in question. Modern art can be seen as an attempt to sever this connection of images with language. In other words, visual presentations produced after about 1800 replace the art that tells traditional stories or visualizes ideas usually expressed in writing with one that captures the individual experience of a genius, an attempt that

can never succeed completely, because all awareness has linguistic character. This project [Susanna Berger's] focuses on philosophical visual representations to impart an aspect of this larger narrative. The rise and decline of the philosophical plural image is also a story of the demise of language in the organization of visual representation. (2017, 39)

Had I followed this line of thinking and research, the thesis would have been that Chiara Bottici's argument on behalf of the concept of the "imaginal" as a way to circumvent the aporia of the image and the imaginary is not only a proposal but a diagnosis. That we can countenance something like the "imaginal" means that the image has been doubly uncoupled from language, signification, and the background assumptions that make coherent any kind of symbolization, a grammar and lexicon of images, a lifeworld informed by its images. The "imaginal" that Bottici proposes exposes us to a Babelian Tower of Images, where we are bound to feel like Blade Runner Deckard in a post-apocalyptic Los Angeles.

6. Here, I am in agreement with the overall thrust of Meile Steele's argument, in his wonderful and suggestive essay 'Social Imaginaries and the Theory of Normative Utterance', which is in part a criticism of Bottici (2017, 1045–71). I am not convinced, however, that "normative utterance" gets us to weave a path between the constituted and constituting dimensions of the social imaginary that Bottici is diagnosing and trying to navigate through with the notion of the "imaginal". Why is it that we could 'imagine' and 'see' liberty leading the people, in Delacroix's famous painting, and saying "women are equal" could only get traction, at least in the United States, in 1920, when the U.S. Constitution was finally amended to grant women the right to vote, although we already had the Fourteenth and Fifteenth amendments. There are 'things' that we can see that we cannot say, and even when we say them, we must already have an image of what it is that we are trying to say.

7. Here I would highly recommend first Orlando Patterson's unfortunately unfinished *Freedom. Volume One: Freedom in the Making of Western Culture* (1991), especially because: first, the way in which it traces the historical evolution of three elements of freedom vis-à-vis also evolving institutions of slavery, namely, personal, sovereignal, and civic freedom. Personal and civic freedoms do not require elaboration, but "sovereignal" does. By this term Patterson means "the power to act as one pleases, regardless of the wishes of others, as distinct from personal freedom, which is the capacity to do as one pleases, *insofar as one can*" (3–4). Patterson will go on to show that this aspect or element of freedom has resulted in the very thing that it rejected, subordination, domination, and exploitation of others, as was exemplified in modern slavery and genocidal political regimes. The second reason why Patterson's text is an indispensable complement to any other history of freedom is the way he foregrounds the role of women in that history. I would also recommend David Schmidtz and Jason Brennan's *A Brief History of Liberty* (2010), which makes up with depth what it saves in length.

8. We now have two superlative works that have been inspired by Bloch and one wishes Bloch had had access to, namely, Gregory Claeys, *Searching for Utopia: The History of an Idea* (2011), and his *Dystopia: A Natural History* (2017). See also Gregory Claeys, Roland Schaer, and Lyman Tower Sargent, eds. *Utopia: The Search for the Ideal Society in the Western World* (2001).

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Rethinking the Imaginal

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In my recent book, *Beyond the Public Sphere: Film and the Feminist Imaginary* (Lara 2021) I discuss Chiara Bottici's contribution to the debate on the subject of imagination that has taken place in the Western tradition over the last two centuries (Bottici 2014). I have written about her stimulating work in this book, and I find her model of the imaginal persuasive about the specific ways that images have taken priority in our present political world. Here, I will show how her ideas about the imaginal have the possibility to extend beyond their initial scope. And, if this is true, how they fit with her own conceptualizations.

In this chapter I make three different claims. In the first, I consider how Bottici's use of genealogies, as a method she relies on in this book and in others, can serve as a kind of radical critique (Bottici 2007). My second claim is that imagination plays a role in individual agency as well as in the way we see ourselves as collective agents in society through dynamic interactions. Thus, social imaginaries are not only contexts, but they are also a mediation vehicle between the self and societies. Finally, I suggest why the imaginal can be seen as a new historical stage or as a significant historical transformation that represents an enlargement of imagination's conventional roles and its performative impact in politics.

I maintain that the imaginal is Janus faced. It has a negative and a positive side that is focused on how the construction of doing politics has changed in the present historical period because of the negative developments of the imaginal. If this is true, then we should be able to develop another way of understanding radical critique by using this concept. Bottici's ideas reflect the new stage of particular political problems that we are facing now. If we consider that there are historical stages where the imaginal has been developed through politics, we can also trace where and how these specific changes

took place and why. Doing politics now deserves a new kind of normative ground for the imaginal if we need to examine and discriminate between the good from the bad.

Bottici's historical reconstruction of the role of imagination needs some nuances and critical clarifying. My claim is that we need not to separate the faculty of imagination and the contexts of the social imaginary as if they were two independent entities. We should understand that they are interrelated and interact dynamically. This is the reason why I think that the German philosophical tradition allows us to better explore the interrelation between individuals and societies as complex processes mediated by the role of languages defined as forms of life.[1] I think this is a more complex approach than the one that postulates the division between the faculty of imagination and the context. That is, we do not see the world as it is, but as it is represented and expressed and there are mediations between the self and societies that must be considered as historically and contextually specific. So, languages are forms of life. The strength of the strategy of using genealogies relies on the fact that social and cultural practices are immersed in our languages. Changes or disruptions can be traced by following the historical roots until we find a rupture, a transformation, or even subtle changes. A genealogical reconstruction can help us see how societies and individuals change or how are they transformed through conceptual practices as well. We also learn about the limits of our own perspective and how it can be changed if we move our angle of vision or shift our focus.

On the other hand, language is neither just an instrument nor is it a fixed system that reflects how the psyche engages with representations, images, fantasies, and the like. Language is 'our' world. Because we possess historical horizons of representations and of interpretations, which is why any language available to us interprets the external reality as contextually constructed, the psyche moves along with the historical newer ways of us engaging and interpreting the world. My strong claim is that by thinking about the interrelation between the faculty of imagination and the context of interpretation we need to see how language mediates between them. Even if the faculty and the imaginary are different entities they should not be conceptualized as an either/or. Both dimensions are needed to show how imagination can be both a source of individual and one of collective agency.

The previous ways of thematizing the relationship between individuals and society have been discussed – especially by Cornelius Castoriadis – as if they were two different metaphysical entities without mediations. To be sure, this problem, which is taken up by Bottici, suggests how Castoriadis posed his own way of developing 'the psyche' as monad versus his notion of the social imaginaries.[2] For example, Walter Breckman argued that for Castoriadis it was essential to define the 'psyche' as a monad, yet Breckman

offers the novel explanation that he did this to present us with the individual's struggles to cope with reality and creativity. However, 'monad' is a concept that goes back to Leibniz. The concept's historical-metaphysical baggage raises the wrong connections to the past; moreover, it does not help explain what Castoriadis wanted to do. This is the reason I think that the German tradition of language theories offers us a better way to examine how individual minds relate to the social world. Certainly, what we imagine, how we represent ourselves, what we dream, and how we use imagination all have strong relationships to specific historical horizons of interpretations. *Pace* Lacan, language is not a fixed entity, but it is – above all – a social institution (I return to this later on).

If language is also a form of life, as Wittgenstein proposed in his late definition,[3] then it still has the power to be linked to our representations, fantasies, expressiveness, and the ineffable, since we are individual agents as well as members of a specific historical community. A useful example of this kind of analysis can be traced back to Charles Taylor, who envisioned the German tradition of language reconnected to the individual expressiveness, to the domain of creativity, to art in particular, and then, finally, to his own concept of the social imaginary.[4]

CAN GENEALOGY BECOME CRITIQUE?

Bottici gives a historical and genealogical configuration of how imagination underwent a conceptual transformation and how the imaginal was linked to a particular relation with the construction of politics. Before presenting her own ideas about the imaginal, which acquires specificity when we focus on particular examples of understanding politics, we can see what Bottici is trying to define with the 'visual turn'. Let us focus on Bottici's genealogy. She goes back to the beginnings of the Western tradition and to the way the Greeks used imagination to explain the difficulties of understanding how this concept was used and why. This genealogy is of particular importance because Bottici gives us examples of both how it was used by particular philosophers in specific historical contexts and how it related to other concepts such as fantasy and phantasy. She explains that if the Greeks did not claim that there was an ontological status for the uses of images, it was because they were not concerned with the epistemic claims.[5] Bottici makes a similar argument about the genesis of the uses of myth in an earlier book, *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (2007) because one of her aims is to rescue the role myths and fantasies that still play a big role in our times. Political actors and social spectators still deal with myths and myths do not relate to epistemic problems but to how myths capture people's inner fears or internal chaos.[6] They persist

in our minds because of their significance in what they seem to organize, to name, to construct as a coherent narrative, and settle an order where there was chaos before (in our unconscious minds). Plato used myths while relating them to fables and fictitious narratives.[7] He was also the first author who developed the connection between the truth related to the acts of seeing and to ideas as images.[8] Bottici makes a critical argument related to how images have transformed themselves in our times but she does not actually deal with the question of the epistemic claims that contemporary actors make and how they use their own narratives as if they are the 'truth' versus fake news, fake claims, and so on. The linguistic turn critically thematized how historically the epistemic connection of the image to the mirror's nature was also the legacy of Greek philosophy.[9]

Perhaps before that step can be taken, we need to describe how images and narratives are interconnected in politics, since this is the link that provides the possibility of understanding the kind of immanent critique that genealogies can offer and the spaces between interpretations versus reality. In order to develop genealogy as critique, we should be aware of some specific contextual problems such as the one I mentioned above about how Plato inaugurated the stage where vision was linked to the epistemic claim of truth. We can say that if we follow the Platonic path of linking images to truth, certain problems seem to be recovered from this ancient relation in our present times. This is the reason why we cannot collapse the status of images and their relationship to reality (i.e., facts), with specific historical representations and to the way these become struggles among actors. Their different interpretations need a space for discrimination if we can accept or refuse anyone of them. This would mean that we are able to focus on how images can be distortions (sometimes even pernicious ones) because they are linked to narratives and it is essential to trace how and when they are produced for certain political goals.[10]

First, I contend that those representations raise different problems. One of them is the connection between language and the world, which I will take up in the second part of this chapter. Another problem is to see if Bottici's claim that the pre-ontological status of images can work vis-à-vis the challenges of our times by relating it to the cynical perspective of 'alternative facts'.

Actors and social movements create their own narratives using their own particular perspectives and *images* to organize how things supposedly are. Political actors presume that their interpretations should be taken as real for political reasons. Their goals do not relate to the epistemic ground of their claims – though they claim that they do – but to capture people's hidden fears which are well organized and expressed through their discourses. The goal of these claims is to find significance among those who identify with the narratives to gain political hegemony.[11] Thus, these are struggles over power

and the question of truth functions as a constructed myth. Identifying specific political problems captured in a narrative or by focusing on how the distortion of certain images can be questioned is therefore necessary. Certain political goals aim to justify the exclusion of people. Consider how immigration in the United States and Europe has become such an explosive and polarizing issue.

There is a second issue that I want to consider here. How are we to give an account of the actual relationship between images and narratives if we don't focus specifically on the disinformation and hidden agendas of political actors to further their political goals? Consider how easy it would be for a well-placed political malcontent to develop a strategic narrative that ends up becoming a 'weapon of war'. One example of this is how Donald Trump uses images and narratives to pursue his own agenda about immigration by linking both images and narratives with tales of rapists and drug cartels.

I must clarify that Bottici does maintain that images and narratives are linked, but it would be interesting to take a hard look at the way the interrelationship between them can gain track of people's minds, especially because they manipulate 'fear' in the minds of citizens. Analysing an actual situation in which political actors could distort or create conflicts is useful because myths can be dismantled. Bottici has done this before. In *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, she critically examines Huntington's concept of 'the clash of civilizations' and shows how the concept of Europe becomes a *Eurocentric narrative* because it is assumed that 'civilization' has its central core in the West (Bottici 2007). Bottici and Benoît Challand provide us with a useful critique of this phenomenon in their seminal book *Imagining Europe: Myth, Memory, and Identity* (Bottici and Challand 2013).

It would also be interesting if Bottici could say something about the relationship between facts and fictions. Politics has specific aims; morality has others. Each system poses different challenges for the individual and for the society. Social issues become more complicated when they 'resonate' with the ways they are represented in the shared perspective of a political community. What happens when those images not only distort a community's very nature but also changes its aspiration for the common good? In her theory of myth Bottici takes a strong position about the role of the imaginal which can become a tool to criticize certain myths that promote strategies of exclusion. Indeed, she demonstrates how communities can create distortions about the real, because what matters most to them is their connection to certain political goals. Deciding how to act in a particular situation – whether it involves individuals or the community – places actors in front of different kinds of dangers and challenges. Acknowledging the psychological part of our reactions to certain myths can also help us understand that moral and political agents are not always rational. The way an issue or an opinion is presented can make it appealing or alienating when the configuration of a

political movement is at stake. The problem Bottici wants to solve is how the normative space of genealogies can become a kind of radical critique that enlarges its critical scope for our judgments as citizens or political actors.

It is evident that Bottici has critically examined the way 'significance' (a concept she takes from the work of Hans Blumenberg) gains track of people's minds because it feeds their irrational fears.[12] But now we must see how critique and genealogy engage with each other and amplify this intercon-nection. As we know, some distortions are not only untrue, but they are also cruel and morally pernicious, leading people into believing that what they may think is a mere 'matter of opinion' is, in fact, a dangerous position that subtly reassures them about their racism, homophobia, xenophobia, or other exclusionary doctrine. While we can never get rid of all fictions, accepting that some nuances and grey areas are not the same as outright lies, might help us identify certain images and myths as we develop a normative account as a kind of immanent critique. This is why we need the corrective role of critique related to genealogical accounts because a change of perspective might give us the possibility of seeing how distortions work.

We construct meanings that provide us with a 'vision of the world', and, certainly, some visions give us a better view than others. Some interpretations reflect moral insights about society's problems – not because they are factu-ally correct in themselves but because they enable us to see what is wrong with the political or moral goals immersed in the narrative's structure. 'Images' themselves do not work unless they are also connected to the agents' narra-tives and their political goals. In his book *What Is Enlightenment?* Michel Foucault maintains that 'what is taken as the norm' is the *constructed* goal to exclude others from the normal. For him, '[T]he attitude of modernity, the high value of the present is indissociable from a desperate eagerness to imagine it otherwise than it is, and to transform it not by destroying it but by grasping it in what it is' (1984, 41). Those who struggle over different interpretations should insist on the need to discriminate among them if their aim is social transformation for the better. This means finding out how politi-cal processes are built up and how the learning of how distortions work can complicate the 'reading' of specific historical contexts. This is the reason why Bottici's previous work is a powerful and stimulating tool. It is also very cre-ative. If I understand her correctly, she claims that there is no absolute reality apart from some perspectival interpretations. I agree with her on this point. We also need to examine how we can take the challenge of contesting and discriminating among certain images and representations that were specifi-cally designed to reduce or arouse people's fears. That is why the concept of the imaginal should be connected to Bottici's previous works to clarify our present situation.

The role of critique must be explored in terms of how certain genealogies function as a radical critique that involves 'a change of perspective'.[13] This is why the historical method of genealogy is gaining more and more adepts. Here enters the indissoluble relationship between narratives and the work on myth that Bottici has previously elaborated. I think that narratives and images are related and are, in fact, inseparable. The realm of pre-ontological status can be better understood if we can offer a new narrative that undermines the significance of the old one and bring about a change in perspective through a new angle. Alternatively, if we add moral significance to a narrative/image when we examine how we moved from the initial myth and reworked it with another perspective, we find that the new angle of the myth could also give us a different understanding of how a new order sets a moral and critical path.

Describing how the particular circumstance requires a significant interpretation of the fictive story can give us a critical understanding of how certain political goals cannot be justified. We can question the envisioned image/narrative 'solution' by explaining that it was used to exploit the people's legitimate fears (or illegitimate ones).

We humans can imagine ourselves through particular self-representations that must include the material and the non-material dimensions where experiences and hopes are constituted.[14] These dimensions cannot be adequately expressed in linguistic terms alone. Indeed, Bottici is right to consider how the unseen aspects of myths, images, and narratives are or can be unconscious and this is how they work well and produce significance. Then a critical change in perspective is possible, if we appeal to the invisibility of non-actors or if those who have no visibility and no voice are suddenly brought back into visibility and allowed to be heard. Certain images and narratives have the ability to erase individuals and whole groups of people. Thus, a lack of visibility can distort the social constructions of institutional practices and our relationships with other people. One example of this is how the omission of women from history books made us non-actors. Another is the enslavement and exploitation of black people. The United States would never have become the powerful country it is today without the forced labour of captive human beings in the cotton and tobacco fields of the American South.[15] The 'official' history erased the contribution of Afro-Americans by the use of images and narratives that focused on the achievements of white males.

If we believe that the excluded groups have a role to play in society's representations, then we must accept that we need not only have images related to narratives but also genealogies where we can focus on particular histories and find the images of those excluded. This might be the good side of the imaginal as a performative tool. Understanding and reconstructing critical events, tracing family histories, and transforming what 'appears' as visible

and what is erased from public views can help us exercise radical critique through genealogical accounts.[16]

I will end this section with Reinhart Koselleck's words about the importance of language to historical experiences and perspectives, '(i)t is the signature of European modernity that languages themselves – not just ways of speaking – have been instrumentalized and turned into modes of inclusion and exclusion of political units of action' (Koselleck 2018, 204).

A FACULTY OF IMAGINATION OR A
CONTEXT OF INTERPRETATION?

Now let us return to the faculty of imagination. With regards to how the faculty of imagination was explained by Kant, Bottici closely follows Gillian Robinson and John F. Rundell (1994). On his interpretation of the account of an isolated human mind that contained the faculty of individual imagination, he considered that this was a central topic of modern philosophy mainly through Kant's intervention. But Kant vacillated, as Robinson and Rundell shows, between the first edition of his *Critique of Pure Reason* and the second edition, when the role of imagination was diminished or reduced. Bottici agrees with Robinson and Rundell in thinking that Kant focused on the individual consciousness as one of the primary topics of philosophy. But my claim is that Kant deserves a better interpretation than the one offered by Robinson and Rundell. I think that Robinson and Rundell's work ignores the strong connection that Kant developed throughout his ethical work in relation to his concept of sociability and to the way he thematized moral identity through imagination. But first, we need to go back to Bottici's account of the reconstruction of the second stage, when philosophy and the social sciences reoriented its earlier focus, leaving behind the conception of the individual imagination while replacing it with the social imaginary. This historical reconstruction needs to clarify why not all philosophers separated individuals from societies as if they were independent. Such are the examples of Kant and of Hegel.

In Bottici's genealogical reconstruction of imagination, philosophy and the social sciences reoriented its earlier focus, leaving behind the conception of the individual imagination and replacing it with the social imaginary. In the first stage, psychoanalysis and structuralism, through their study of myths, fables, fairy tales, and rituals, are fundamental to 'society's' self-understanding. They opened up the territory of the imaginary as a new dimension and paved the way for what is known today as the post-structuralist turn.

In the second stage, Bottici argues that something like 'an overcoming' of the faculty of imagination by the turn to the social imaginary was supposedly

taking place. I think this step can be better explained if we focus on how language transformed our perspective with how previously we thought about individuals and societies. As intersubjective beings we are never just individuals, and language as a social institution provides us with our connections to others as we share the world with others through the same cultural and social practices and its institutions.

In the second stage, Lacan conceptualized the Imaginary domain, together with the Real and the Symbolic, as the three axes that constituted 'the psyche'. In Bottici's interpretation of Lacan, the imaginary represents a domain of alienation, whereas the Symbolic allows for the possibility of emancipation. Bottici claimed that, for Lacan, 'The imagination is an individual faculty that we possess, [and] the imaginary is the context that possesses us' (2007, 37). Under the enormous influence of Lacan, many books on history, sociology, and political theory focused on the imagination as an individual faculty and on the social imaginary as a constitutive and instituting domain. Yet the relation between both of these two conceptualizations becomes problematic when we think of moral and political agency as they are interrelated. In Bottici's words: 'If we begin with the imagination as an individual faculty, the problem is how to explain the influence, at times overwhelming (because it is constitutive), of social contexts. If we begin with the imaginary understood as a social context, the problem is how to account for the emergence of the free imagination of individuals' (ibid., 41). Bottici seems to be saying that between the imagination and the imaginary lies a separation or a non-relationship that lacks mediation and if so, we might ask why think of imagination as an either/or? Here we need to recall Castoriadis's leading role in formulating a new conception of the imaginary, which grew out of his own critique of Lacan. Yet he did not want to get rid of the individual agency. He conceptualized the psychic imaginary as "the unceasing and essentially *underdetermined* (social-historical and psychical) creation of figures/forms/images, on the basis of which alone there can ever be a question *of* 'something'" (1987 [1975], 3).[17] Thus, it represents a domain that lies beyond the rational and places limits on what can be articulated in ordinary language. But Castoriadis also acknowledges that 'world-image' and self-image are obviously always related. Their unity, however, is in its turn borne by a definition each society gives of its needs, as this is inscribed in its activity, its actual social doing' (1987[1975, 149).

According to Bottici's interpretation, what matters to Castoriadis is 'the emergence of the radical otherness or of the absolute new' (2007, 46). This cannot happen if we conceive of these two different aspects of imagination as competitive as if one of them substitutes the other. On the contrary, Castoriadis takes a strong stand against idealism and naive realism. I will go back to this point later on.

His concept of 'magma' indicates the impossibility of conceptualizing significations as 'determinate', because they can never be entirely so. Thus, Bottici argues, 'every society continually define and redefine its needs, and no society can ever survive outside of the imaginary signification that constitute it and are constituted by it' (Boticci 2014, 48). Granted.

While Bottici agrees with much of Castoriadis's position, she argues that his understanding of the relationship between reality and the social imaginary is *problematic*. Her self-imposed task is to solve this problem by rescuing the concept of what she refers to with *the imaginal*. She does this by refusing to define the ontological status of images, arguing that images are previous to any ontology. First, she thus understands the working of the social imagination as 'pictorial (re)presentations that operate both at the unconscious and conscious levels'. Second, our 're-presentations' are presences in themselves. And third, the unconscious speaks to us in and through images, which cannot be reduced to linguistic descriptions or references to the real. Bottici concludes that the *imaginal* is not the world, but it is that which makes our world possible. Here we find the clue that takes us away from how the narrative was initially structured: The imaginal is a *performative tool* or it works in a different dimension that needs to be theorized separately. Perhaps, coming up with a new formulation of how the imaginal performs is what we should be doing as we will see in the last section of my chapter.

Bottici is correct when she argues that imagination would not be possible if we could not think of it in the radical terms of otherness or the completely new. And precisely because imagination exists as an individual faculty or agency, it is possible to think that each of us brings something new into our world.

There is another version of individual agency and this is the path chosen first by Rousseau and then recovered by Charles Taylor in his work, *Sources of the Self: The Making of Modern Identity* (1989). Taylor thought that both Rousseau and Goethe developed their interest in self-narrations because, for them, their search for this kind of personal history expressed the desire to find meaning through an interaction between readers and authors. The more they thought about their own lives, the more they were convinced that the process of self-interpretation would also be a kind of self-reflexive *Bildungsroman* where they presented themselves to the readers as travellers on a specific journey in their process of becoming.

If for Kant the moral law comes from within, for Rousseau the process of the internalization of the moral principles had to be connected to the idea of an authentic life that is well chosen in the action of self-presentation. The value here is an aesthetic or expressive one. Originality or 'the radical new' is what becomes the source of being a distinctive human. Herein lies another connection between the individual imagination and the act of self-creation.

FROM THE SELF TO THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY

Now, I would like to turn to the linguistic turn and the way it enabled us to solve the problem of the inner and outer ways of connecting ourselves to the world. Individual minds were not monads, as we humans are intersubjective beings who have been socialized and individualized through language. Language involves not only understanding and meaning, but it also provides a 'pictorial view' that allows us to see the world as we emerge as social beings. In learning a language – as a 'know-how' – we find we possess an implicit understanding of our culture, institutions, and social practices. Our world is given to us through a specific language.

The theory of language that comes from the German tradition (the famous three H's – Humboldt, Herder, and Hamman[18]) amplifies how language is a living set of institutional and material practices and is itself seen as plural forms of life. What this tradition helps us clarify is that socialization and individualization are simultaneous processes. These processes make us human, as they are also the basis of how we see 'the world'. The Wittgensteinian notion of language as our place in the world, or as 'the house of being' in Heideggerian terms, is central to this perspective.

Language is much more than the external clothing of thought. It is not a simple instrument that we absolutely control, nor is it the medium of our relationship with others. Language creates community, and it makes possible all of our relationships. Language is not only a context but it also encompasses a whole web of symbolic and expressive capacities dealing with meaning and meaning-making and the numinous or the ineffable. Language is the instituting and constituting element of all kinds of embedded social practices. Yet the crucial fact of language is that it is public. Once we are conscious that language creates the public space for us, then the idea of monological beings – or monads – as isolated minds is shattered by this specific notion of language.

For example, according to this expressive notion of language that Charles Taylor recovers from the German tradition, language is not an instrument. It does not confine itself to the activity of talking about things (Taylor 1985, 215–47). Language expresses feelings and emotions. At times it's awareness, and at times awareness is lacking. We know about this because conceptual history and genealogies can give us a clear idea about how limited our language can be when we lack certain experiences and how those experiences (conscious and unconscious) can give place (or not) to new hopes. Both experiences and hopes crystallize in how we see the world and its limits. Only when we become aware of a change of perspective (or a frame), are we able to see problems where we could see none before.

The German tradition of language is expressive because German theorists conceptualized language as surrounded by something mysterious, something

that relates to the indeterminate spaces where imagination works out as if it were another kind of language, a symbolic one. But language is there, and the non-identity of this identity is what puzzles us. Psyches are individual and social at the same time. In fact, many of Wittgenstein's deeper concerns could not be expressed through language. He accepted the ineffable and claimed that 'silence' was obviously necessary when language proved its own limits.[19] Heidegger's position was to conceive of language as disclosive, that is, as creating a reality by itself. He also thought of poetry (and art) as creating or disclosing the truth.

Expressive language cannot be separated from the medium, that is, the subject. It manifests itself through someone, and it also reaches others. Again, this is better seen with the example of art as an expressive language. Expression is the power of the subject, but the whole is not entirely communicable, even if it is also manifested in fragments to other subjects.[20] Charles Taylor added, 'We can see that it is not just the speech community that shapes and creates language, but language that constitutes and sustains the speech community' (1995, 234). This is the reason I think that the social imaginary cannot be considered only as a context of interpretation. It is a more complex place that is simultaneously mediating and creating new realities. It encompasses and involves multi-spatial webs and practices where actors are embedded and become aware only when they can find novel narratives that 'resonate' – to use Hartmut Rosa's concept (2019) – with the way we experience the world.

Just as we are dealing with how Bottici is attempting to create a specific usage of her concept of the imaginal, as it can work only if we learn to see reality under new terms, novel interpretations come to redefine the world. The disclosive powers of new terms as well as the uses of and the changes in certain concepts enable us to see something that was previously invisible to us. The constitutive shared webs of meaning-making are parts of a wider space that involves the visible and the non-visible dimensions, and the non-identitarian unity of layers of historical experiences (sedimented) producing the new hopes. These can clearly be related to genealogical accounts such as the one that Bottici constructs with the concept of the imaginal.

As for the social imaginary, can we only define it with Castoriadis's own notion? (1987[1975]). Coming from a completely different place and set of concerns than the German theorists of language, Castoriadis focuses on the relationship between human practices and meanings (their significations). He thought – quite rightly – that we experience the world in fragments and constantly strive to organize the endless succession of layers. Because we never fully finish this task, the significations we uncover are never complete. Here is when we see how Castoriadis focuses on the formative premises of the 'imaging/imagining, presenting and relating as the capacities of the living beings' (Castoriadis 1989, 384). Note here the similarities with the

expressivist notion of language and the acknowledgement that we can never entirely express what it is. Thus, between language and the imaginary there are bridges – and they need mediations – that allow us to understand in fragments our relationships with our society. Both language and the imaginary attest to the limits of language and of what can and cannot be said and done. The non-identity between them is the human ability to learn about 'expressiveness' or the lack of it. That is, both language and imagination need each other to exist, but they endlessly strive to reconnect in different ways without fully integrating themselves into a unity. This is the reason why Wittgenstein was the first author who used the German word *Bild*, which has been translated as a 'pictorial view'.[21] For Castoriadis, these capacities of imagining are what makes us human beings.

THE IMAGINAL: A NEW PERSPECTIVE

So, what exactly is Bottici proposing in her attempt to go beyond Castoriadis when she brings up the concept of the imaginal? The imaginal seems to be connecting the spaces of aesthetics, innovation, creation, but also, as I said before, the negative elements, such as distorting, constructing myths, and creating spectacles. Let us explore what Bottici says. She claims that politics is imaginal and seems to be saying that politics could not exist without the imaginal. My question here is as follows. If politics has always been imaginal, why is the imaginal the solution between a faculty and a context? In my view this theoretical move complicates the picture of how we should understand the role of the imaginal. For example, the Imaginal can be a part of many social dimensions including art and religion which have similar qualities related to using images – 'pictorial views' – to show how the world is.

Bottici introduces her discussion of the imaginal with the provocative statement that 'communities cannot exist except as imaginal beings' (2014, 90). Without a pictorial representation of a community and a common territory, there could be no political boundaries. Indeed, even Benedict Anderson thought that his concept of 'imagined communities' possessed first the visual and the aural mediums. Bottici states that it is this shared 'image' that configures the whole. Can we now admit that the imaginal can be connected to the expressive dimension of human life? And, if it is claimed that politics is expressive or fundamentally original because of being imaginal, what are the differences between art as an expressive language and politics?

Let us first take up the political. As I have said, language and expressiveness are connected to images. But images are never entirely alone. They need a story or a narrative that enables them to find significance among individuals in the community. This is the reason Benedict Anderson turned to literature to

explain his concept of 'imagined communities'. Arendt, too, uses the example of the image of courage related to Achilles in the *Iliad* as she argues: 'Even Achilles, it is true, remains dependent upon the storyteller . . . who delivers into the narrator's hands the full significance of his deed' (Arendt 1958, 194). And Bottici agrees entirely with this because she mentions Arendt and *The Human Condition* in particular. Without a grounding in mythology and ancient history and the connection between Homer and the Greek experience of democracy, the 'image' of Achilles's courage would never have been in a reader's mind. As Bottici demonstrates in her genealogy of imagination, fantasy, and 'phantasy', knowing that certain political concepts came into use at a particular historical time adds depth and dimension to a reader's experience (Koselleck 1985). Bottici refers to images such as the 'agora', the Greek concept of the 'demos' and 'the human body', along with Hobbes's image of the monster *Leviathan* as an allegory of the state, for they are also political concepts. We can see how these images and ideas have clear narrative connections. As we expand our understanding of the uses of images and narratives, perhaps we will need to rethink the relationship Wittgenstein had hinted at between language and pictorial expressions. And while the Imaginal always seems linked to the political, it clearly has a broader application. In fact, all the images Bottici offers us are connected to figures of speech, such as memes, metaphors, metonyms, and synecdoche.

If communities are tied together through 'images', then the imaginal is not only the result of a third stage of possible conceptions of imagination. Only a genealogy can prove that something changed over time in our understanding and uses of a concept of imagination and perhaps the 'imaginal' existed in other eras and transformed itself because of particular historical problems. If this is what happened, then we need to focus on how and why. Today the fact that we are experimenting with new ways of using and prioritizing images underscores at least partially the strength of Bottici's argument.

Following her genealogical method, Bottici makes a more historical claim that 'representation as such is not an invention of modernity, but [is] the idea of a specifically political representation: whereas in the medieval epoch the representatives were simply delegates – that is, executers of the will of somebody else. In modernity they become autonomous interpreters of such a will and the interests of those represented' (2014, 92). Now let us turn to the most ambitious and critical part of the imaginal – that of society's becoming spectacles (Guy Debord). I find the critical idea of spectacles a useful and sharp critical tool. Bottici claims that the 'staging' of 'pictorial (re)presentations has become consubstantial to democracy' (ibid., 107). But this statement is not only true of democracy, it is also a strategy for the market and of neoliberalism. (An example is the actualization of Adam Smith's image of 'the invisible hand' by the neoliberal myth that wealth will be disseminated

through this 'invisible hand' even in contemporary societies.) The erosion of democratic hopes and institutions is the result of the ways that systematic distortions are the very 'nature of spectacles' (ibid., 113).

Bottici uses Rousseau and Debord to bolster her claim that societies are 'mediated by images'. She also concedes that art and religion are also mediated by images. But the turn to spectacle is, in her words, the 'quintessence of contemporary capitalism' (ibid., 115). Here we find the critical normative dimension that will situate us at the core of her conception of the imaginal as having two sides: a positive side and a negative one.

The historical importance of the imaginal becomes clear if we point out something that has changed completely over time, namely, how capitalism has transformed the way we perceive reality through consumerism. By constructing our identities through those actions/institutions that suggest we possess self-reflexivity when we invest ourselves as if we are our own industry of self-creation, images work differently than they did in the past. This is the negative dimension.

Consider how the market and technological innovation have made us consumers rather than agents.[22] It is these kinds of spectacles that no longer allow spaces between the real and the fictitious. And Bottici asks, 'How can we fight this?' Since we accept that images are never alone, there is always a narrative that constructs significance,[23] then we should focus on their distortions. If myths coagulate significance, and they are located at different levels of the conscious and the unconscious, then the imaginal works out with the help of myths. Bottici now clarifies how narratives and images are interwoven:

> If it is true that the imaginal, as we have defined it, is primordial in [the sense] that it cannot be reduced to linguistic descriptions, we must nevertheless add that narratives, precisely because of their evocative power, are one of the chief vehicles for conveying certain images as well as contesting dominant one. (2014, 172)

Finally, Bottici describes her critique of the bad uses of the imaginal along with offering us at least three different lines of criticism against the imaginal. First is the performative one, that is, staging a critical spectacle against all spectacles. I want to suggest a good example of this comes from a recent strategy adopted by global feminists, presenting the play called 'A Rapist in Your Way', based on the work of the famous Chilean feminist Rita Segato. It was first staged in Chile in the streets, then performed in Paraguay, Mexico, Spain, France, Japan, among other countries. Thousands of women chanted and called out the lines from this play while they were performing it, as they were reversing the entire patriarchal version of the rape story in which women are responsible for generating the sexual violence against them.

With her second critique, Bottici rescues her concept of myth following Blumenberg's essential work but going beyond it. I have an example to offer that can be described by how feminists like Silvia Federici (2004) and Maria Mies (2014) are working to destroy the myth of patriarchal capitalism by creating a whole new history from below.[24] Their historical configuration of the way the European institutions and political practices used women's labour for the accumulation of capital. The binary separation of production and reproduction was staged through specific disciplinary accounts of the 'wifezation' (a new term coined by Maria Mies).[25] Mies and Federici show the persecution and deaths of women who were called witches because they had knowledge about the workings of female bodies, how they conceive and bring children to life, how they are healers who know that the use of some herbs can prevent unwanted pregnancies. The two women also claim that the strict way in which social reproduction and care were separated from production allowed the exploitation of women. Without this kind of work, men would not have been able to accumulate capital at all.

In the third element of her critique, Bottici will open her ideas of imagination to the construction of her gender theory. I think that Chiara Bottici will be delivering more on this subject in her new agenda in a forthcoming book.

As you will see from all the papers included in this book, Bottici's conception of the imaginal along the lines of genealogies as radical critique gives us the opportunity to see some of today's most challenging problems in a new way: how myths and the imaginal have taken us to find ourselves living with the new *Frankinstein*[26] of antidemocratic politics arising from their own spectacles of authoritarianism. And with Bottici's work that provides us with tools to see this phenomenon with a critical change of perspective.

NOTES

1. Chiara Bottici actually mentions this definition in chapter 4 of her book (2007, 82).

2. Jürgen Habermas argued that the separation between psyche and society is metaphysical because we can't find mediations such as language. See Habermas (1987, 334). Yet for Walter Breckman, the question relies on how Castoriadis engages in establishing this separation as a 'non-empty intersection'. On going back to how Castoriadis defined as the rupture 'between the psyche and the psyche and the real by introducing "the psychical monad"', Breckman explains '"The monadic core begins to break up under the pressure of bodily needs and the presence of another human being (in the typical case the mother)." (2013, 125)'. For Castoriadis, this socialization of the psyche involves "essentially imposing a separation on it. For the psychical monad, this amounts to a violent break, forced by its 'relation' to others, more precisely, by the invasion of others as others, by means of which a 'reality' is

constituted by the subject, a reality which is at once independent, malleable and participable, and the dehiscence (never fully realized) between the 'psychical' and the 'somatic'." (Castoriadis 1987, 301).

3. Wittgenstein says, 'To imagine a language means to imagine a way of life' (Wittgenstein 1988, 31). I am using the Mexican version because it is bilingual, having the German in one page and the Spanish on another.

4. Charles Taylor has Taylor written extensively about this. See Taylor (1985). See also Taylor (1989, 2004).

5. Bottici claims that 'although for a contemporary reader to allude to our common usage term, Plato is here far from systematically associating *phantasia* with falsity, as we tend to do. *Phantasia* is not necessarily false but shares the possibility of falsity with both discourse (*logos)* and opinion (*doxa*). . . . *Phantasia* can therefore be both true and false, like thinking and opinion' (Bottici 2014, 16).

6. The concept used by Bottici is *significance* and it is taken from the work on myth by Hans Blumenberg. Blumenberg defines myths 'as stories with a high degree of constancy' and as ways to exorcize 'fear' or the 'unfamiliar'. See Blumenberg (1990).

7. Bottici claims that in Plato 'the *mythos* was generally juxtaposed to the *logos*' and 'Platonic myths have been read both as containers for a kind of truth that is superior to that entailed by the *logos*' (2007, 30).

8. This is the reason why Richard Rorty (1979) called Plato's stage as 'the metaphor of the mirror'.

9. Actually, Rorty saw this interrelation as very problematic and he was concerned with the critical question that we could have something like the truth in our interpretations of the world.

10. For example, Hannah Arendt claimed that this feature of Plato was due to his idea of giving authority to reason and she interprets Plato as an authoritarian philosopher because he did not think that truth could be taught, only accepted because the only one who could grasp the truth was the Philosopher King. See 'What is authority?' in Arendt (1977, 91–141).

11. For more on the subject of hegemony and political positions, see Laclau (2005).

12. Bottici's own description of the definition of "significance" is this '[S]ignificance is something more than mere meaning. It operates between what is consciously said about the world and what is unconsciously felt about it' in Bottici (2014, 128).

13. This is the argument well developed by David Owen. See Owen (1995). See also Owen (2019).

14. These categories of "the spaces of experience" and "the horizon of expectations" were coined by Reinhart Koselleck (1985).

15. Eduardo Mendieta has argued this much in his plenary lecture in Prague in May 2019.

16. See, for example, Owen (1995). See also Fassin (2018).

17. In his very good defence of Castoriadis's notion of the social imaginary, Walter Breckman argues that '[E]ven if new forms cannot be deduced from existing elements, they do not emerge in a vacuum nor are they "made" from nothing. The history of Castoriadis's own thought supports this image of creativity' in Breckman (2013, 137).

18. See Taylor (1985, 248–92).

19. Wittgenstein aphorism no. 7 says: '*Wowon man nicht sprechen kann, darüber muss man schwiegen*' (2009, 202).

20. Adorno knew about this undetermined space. For him, only art could grasp these fragmentary spaces as a non-identity unit, not through language but through expressiveness. See Adorno (1995, 2018).

21. Wittgenstein says, 'In diesen Worten erhalten wir, so scheint es mir, ein bestimmtes Bild von dem Wesen der menschlichen Sprache' (1988, 1). Adorno (1995) had similar views on the subject of imaginings which are related to the non-identity of the whole, the fragmentary, the ineffable.

22. This is very well explained in Boltanski and Chiapello (2005). See also Brown (2015) and Dardot and Laval (2013).

23. See Blumenberg (1990).

24. This element has been worked and explained by me in my book *Beyond the Public Sphere: Film and the Feminist Imaginary* (Lara 2021).

25. The Housewifization of women, however, had not only the objective of engaging that there were enough workers and soldiers for capital and the state. The creation of housework and the housewife as an agent of consumption became a very important strategy in the late nineteenth and early twentieth centuries. By that time not only had the household been discovered as an important market for a whole range of new gadgets and items, but also scientific home-management had become a new ideology for further domestication of women. Not only was the use of her energies to create new needs. A virtual war for cleanliness and hygiene – a market for the new products of the chemical industry. . . . The process of housewifization of women, however, was not only pushed forward by the bourgeoisie and the state. The working-class movement in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries also made its contribution to this process. The organized working class welcomed abolition of forced celibacy and marriage restrictions for propertyless workers. One of the demands of the German delegation to the 1863 Congress of the International Workingmen's Association was 'the freedom for workers to form a family' (Mies (1998, 106).

26. Indeed, as Wendy Brown describes this phenomenon, the neoliberals '[W] ould be horrified by the contemporary phenomenon of leaders at once authoritarian and reckless riding to power on this tide. In short, while the book will argue that the constellations of principles, policies, practices, and forms of governing reason that may be gathered under the sign of neoliberalism has importantly constituted the catastrophic present, this was not neoliberalism's intended spawn, but its *Frankensteinian* creation' in Brown (2019, 9–10).

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Chapter 3

Revisiting Imaginal Politics

From Totalitarianism to
Post-truth Democracies

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Chiara Bottici's work on *Imaginal Politics*[1] makes a decisive contribution to political philosophy. Questions regarding the role of the imagination and images are often relegated to the field of aesthetics, understood as a specific discipline, and the theme of the imaginary to the fields of psychoanalysis and social psychology almost exclusively. Save for a few important authors such as Hannah Arendt and Cornelius Castoriadis, indeed, the imagination and the imaginary have rarely been considered to be useful concepts to think about politics. First and foremost, therefore, Bottici needs to be given credit for having highlighted the deep and complex connection between imagination, images, and politics. To begin with, Bottici points out that, on the one hand, the imagination as an individual faculty has too frequently been conceived of as isolated and unrelated to the imaginary, which alone is considered to have a collective dimension. On the other hand, the collective imaginary has often been stigmatized as a totalizing concept, and individual imagination presented as an escape route from it. Accordingly, a simplistic idea of the collective imaginary as an instrument of constraint and of the imagination as an instrument of liberation has emerged.

Conversely, Bottici underlines that we cannot separate these two dimensions, which are constantly interacting in more or less obvious ways. The name she chooses to signify the power and significance of this interaction is 'imaginal': a term, a concept, a category that refers to that field of forces whose dynamics, she thinks, have been neglected by Arendt as well as Castoriadis (1987[1975]). Only via the concept of the Imaginal can we surpass the aporias that these two philosophers encountered. Arendt and Castoriadis, who remain crucial points of reference for Bottici, understood,

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respectively, the importance of the imagination and of the imaginary for the
construction of the political dimension, but neither of them was able to offer
an exhaustive analysis of the possibilities of interaction between these two
spheres.

What exactly, then, is this imaginal that Bottici theorizes? Imaginal, she
writes, 'means simply that which is made of images and can therefore be the
product both of an individual faculty and of the social context as well as of
a complex interaction between the two' (2014, 5), yet it is far from being an
empty concept. On the contrary, the imaginal opens a field of political and
social possibilities:

> It tells us two important things. First, the human capacity to form images is
> crucial, and its role must be accounted for. Second, even within a particularly
> oppressive social imaginary, there is always the possibility for the free imagina-
> tion of individuals to emerge. (2014, 7)

The imaginal, then, is a space of possibilities that allows us to escape the
grip of an authoritarian and totalizing imaginary, as well as avoid the confu-
sion produced by the proliferation of images typical of contemporary politics.
Indeed, Bottici holds that through the imaginal we can rethink the way in
which images themselves are formed and become aware of the fact that they
are not unilaterally cogent or true.

In what follows however I will focus on the risks that the sphere of the
imaginal can incur. Indeed, while the imaginal can be presented as a liberat-
ing space offering us the opportunity to 'think otherwise' and escape restric-
tions, it can also turn into a universe where images, the imagination, and the
imaginary, rather than opening spaces of freedom (by reciprocally limiting
each other, creating friction, and letting differences emerge), integrate so per-
fectly that any alternative becomes unthinkable. In some historical periods,
the phantasms of the collective and those of the individual can coincide to
the point of producing a totalizing universe, completely locked in on itself.
Bottici is aware that the bond between the individual imagination and the col-
lective imaginary risks sometimes getting caught in a vicious circle, but she
decides to focus on the positive possibilities that this bond can open.

In the following pages, instead, I would like to focus on the 'dark side'
of the imaginal, so to speak. Thinking with Bottici and with the conceptual
tools she offers, I will look at the imaginal from the perspective of a fourfold
interaction between subjectivity, power, the real, and images.

To be able to speak (directly or indirectly) about politics and images
openly and honestly, one has to be upfront and reveal the premises one is
working from. I am convinced that when dealing with 'human affairs', as
the ancients would put it, the themes of liberation and constraint have to be

brought into conversation with two other concepts, namely, power and the structure of subjectivity.

Of course, when thinking these concepts together one has to keep in mind the role of historical and epistemological *a priori*, that the distinction between reality and fiction is not naturally embedded in the objects and the phenomena being judged. Even so, to believe in the inevitability of the bond between power, subjectivity, images, and the real isn't necessarily to believe that all judgments are equal and that every reality is but a fiction. Rather, it is to recognize that we know and perceive reality according to how we *can* express it discursively and according to how we look at it, where from, and what aspects of it are thereby illuminated, as well as according to the authority held by those who attribute to it one or another status.

As put by Castoriadis, at times, 'beneath the monopoly of legitimate violence lies the monopoly of the valid signification' (1991, 155), which gives shape to the social imaginary while at the same time nourishing individual imagination. This signification shapes how subjects, as well as society, read and construct images. In what follows, then, I will pose some questions regarding the inevitable relationship between images, the real, power, and subjects and try to understand how it has mutated, starting from the case of totalitarian regimes up to so-called post-democracies.

To begin with, I want to raise a couple of issues with the extremely popular topic of post-truth, though it would be more appropriate, I believe, to call it post-falsehood. The concept of post-truth interrogates the production and reproduction of images and the imaginary. As noted by Bottici, 'as a consequence of the exponential increase in the imaginal produced by contemporary capitalism, the proliferation of images has become more constitutive of subjectivity than it has ever been in the past' (2014, 66). In our society, images are everywhere, constantly reproduced, and seemingly indispensable for thinking about politics. To an extent, this has always been the case, but, because of the speed and pervasiveness of images, what we are facing today is a different phenomenon not only in terms of size but also of meaning. The technical production and reproduction of images being so simple, how can we determine which images are the result of the free play of subjective imagination and which come from the introjection of an imaginary that aims to manipulate us? In other words, which images are a source of liberating significations and which force upon us significations that were made to disorient us?

We need to ask ourselves: does the concept of post-truth really represent, as many have claimed, a historical shift marking a deep rupture in the traditional, philosophical, and commonsensical distinction between truth and falsity? To what extent does this distinction correspond to that between real and fictitious? Furthermore, the term post-truth has a strong political connotation,

transcending the ontological, epistemological, and gnoseological realms. It is, indeed, always used to refer to a certain way of doing politics that some political scientists have defined as 'post-factual politics' or 'post-reality politics'.[2] Here too, then, we end up debating the relationship between reality and images.

Further, is it true that, as held by some philosophers,[3] post-truth has its roots in 'post-modernism', that intellectual movement that made the Nietzschean motto 'there are no facts, only interpretations' – which we may reformulate as 'there are no facts, only images' – its undisputed doctrine? In this view, post-truth would be one of the toxic consequences of the expansion of the post-modern out of narrow intellectual circles into wider society where, as a result, 'the strongest' (be it an individual or a clique) have it in their power to spread narratives and images that can forge a social and political imaginary to their convenience. In other words, hermeneutics became an aid for inadequate presidents, anti-vaxxers, and online populists. If everything is a construction, if it's all a play of previously examined and selected images – they maintain – it all has the same value. This way of looking at things, however, could trigger, with the complicity of the new media, an endless process of *de-objectivization*.

I find these hypotheses to be too simplistic and likely ideological. I do not think it is correct to speak of a *contemporary* rupture with a regime of truth that was instead characteristic of an objective and trustworthy past, untouched by post-modern sophistry and Trump's tweets. I also disagree with those who attribute the problem of post-truth to soulless technological innovations and their ability to construct images so persuasive as to make any worries as to the status of reality superfluous.

To be sure, the relationship among power, subjectivity, images, and the real did change drastically when, in the time of totalitarianisms and partly thanks to technical innovations, power rose to total domination, nailing the subject to ideological tenets that had the absolute strength of indisputable truths. Since then, this relationship has mutated many times. To be sure, it has become far less violent, but it has somehow remained vulnerable to the risk of totalizing dynamics which can weaken or completely annul the innovative and liberatory role of the imagination. New technologies' ability to erase whole material realities played an important role in so-called mass mobilizations. Consider, for instance, weapons of mass destruction – ranging from bombings to nuclear weapons – and the shift they marked not only in the history of technology but also in the history of humankind, which was facing for the first time a threat of annihilation. Further, new technologies and media of communication allowed the large-scale construction and imposition of an ideological imaginary, which, in a move between catastrophe and rebirth, pushed the confusion between real and fictitious to its apex.

Perhaps, then, we could argue that in the time of totalitarianisms images began to be used, at once, destructively and performatively. If so, the imaginal, as understood by Bottici, would turn out to be the product of a fateful interaction between images, the imagination, and the imaginary, which operated as foreclosure to our perception of the real. Would it be a naive provocation, then, to say that the imaginal is immersed in falsehood?

To be sure, to be able to make such a claim, one would first need to reflect on the meaning of falsehood, whose status is no less debated than that of reality. As Bottici also emphasized, recovering Hannah Arendt, our capacity to imagine enables us to begin something new in the world, but also to lie (2014, 103). Setting aside the epistemological significance of the problem of falsehood, we can at least agree that, once we do away (and rightly so) with the idea of truth as correspondence between an object and its representation, it is not an easy task to determine the meaning of falsehood. It follows that, for starters and as noted by Derrida, lie and error do not coincide (Derrida 1997). One may have distorted a fact, failed to acknowledge an event, or affirmed the absurd, and still not have lied. Falsehood also isn't synonymous with self-deception: the perceptive, psychological, or emotional defectiveness of the self that is required to deceive oneself isn't equivalent to lying. It gets tricky, as you can see.

What was so novel, then, in the way in which the performance of falsehood typical of totalitarianism formed the imaginary, such that it could provoke such a deep shift in the history of lies and of political imaginaries? Many of the philosophers of that time – from Alexandre Koyrè to Simone Weil, from Emmanuel Levinas to Hannah Arendt, and from Raymond Aron to Karl Popper[4] – highlighted the difference between the way in which ancient and modern politics produced images and the way images were produced by totalitarianism. This difference wasn't only significant as concerns destructivity: negating or hiding some factual truths which, as such, preserved the ability to come to light. Totalitarianism also brought into question the age-old ontology that divided the world into truth and appearance, real and fictitious, but couldn't possibly foresee the 'creative' power of the imaginary constructions that, welded to a totalizing ideological project, would lay the foundations for the most delirious political systems. Indeed, the goal of totalitarianism goes far beyond the establishment of an authoritarian regime: totalitarianism bends reality to fit its ideological assumptions. Thus, according to many philosophico-political inquiries into this phenomenon, ideology emerges as the true grounding of the imaginary that sustains totalitarianism. This is an imaginary that needs to be strong enough to ensure the functioning of the regime's whole apparatus. Once verbalized, aberrant ideological fictions – they go on to argue – acquired the power to reshape the world, while the concealment of 'hard facts' risked destroying the very

fabric of reality. As put by Arendt, 'the straitjacket of logic' – that in philosophy takes the shape of the principle of identity, banning all contradictions – proved highly productive in establishing through its purely negative coercion a 'truer' imaginary system in which the disruptive elements of reality, perfectly homologated to ideology, were completely undermined.[5] Totalitarianism works to manipulate givenness – both ideally (through propaganda) and operatively (through concentration camps and terror) – to the point of making it disappear, subsuming it under the idea that works as the single undisputed premise of ideology.

The philosophers who analysed totalitarianism were, of course, aware of the fact that politics had always been implicated in the production of images, sometimes via ideological apparatuses. The forceful construction of imaginaries was not a novelty, and it had always been tolerated, at times even considered necessary, and not by demagogues alone. Imaginary narrations have always been a political tool that rulers, tyrannical or not, used in the millenary conflict between truth and politics. Even in the Republic, Plato would argue that power is good only when conforming to that truth of reason that only philosophers desire to know.

Nevertheless, as argued by Koyrè, Aron, and Arendt, totalitarianism takes falsehood to a whole new level, from mere concealment of some determined reality to absolute falsity, absolutely disconnected from any factual truth. At this level, images cease to be mere instruments of concealment and aspire, instead, to achieve the status of reality. If before totalitarianism the subjects' imagination was mobilized in the production of an imaginary, under totalitarianism a collective imaginary is forcefully imposed on the people through the construction of ideological premises. What's new about the way in which totalitarianism constructs images, then, is its totalizing performative power, foreclosing all possibilities of escape to the imaginal. Totalitarianism did not simply transfigure some circumscribed factual realities but gave 'creative' expression to aberrant ideological tenets through fictions so powerful and diffused that they risked reshaping the world and even destroying the very fabric of reality. Those regimes, then, laid the ground for the erosion of the distinction between facts and fiction, as they allowed the 'imaginary of the regime' to endlessly manipulate factuality.

All philosophical inquiries into totalitarian ideology underline the absolute power of the imaginary constructions of the totalitarian imagination – as opposed to traditional political imagination, which preserved the possibility of distinguishing between facts and fiction. How, then, is the relationship between power, subjects, reality, and images at the apex of totalitarianism understood in this conceptual framework? Power would seem to empty the subject and fill it up with the images of its ideology, and the imaginary so restrictively hegemonic that it asphyxiates the imagination.

Even under totalitarianism, however, I take the relationship between power, subjects, reality, and images to be more complex than post-war philosophers had envisaged. To be sure, in that historical moment more than ever, the imaginary came close to expressing its full destructive power, but that configuration of the relationship between power, subjects, reality, and images still poses a threat today and it will forever.

Perhaps, to grasp the dangers that exist today at the level of the imaginal, we shouldn't look at the reflections on the functioning of totalitarian ideology produced in the heat of the moment, but rather at the analyses of the critics/dissidents of 'real socialism'. These analysts brought the relationship between reality, images, and imaginary into question by discussing 'post-totalitarian lie' or 'institutionalized lie'. That is, a political falsehood still rooted in the 'novelty' of totalitarianism, but characteristic of a new political situation where a purely formal subscription to the crucial images of the collective imaginary was sufficient: an institutionalized imaginary, so to speak. By institutionalized, however, one shouldn't understand a reference to an ensemble of political and juridical institutions. Rather we should take the term in its more general sociological and philosophical meaning as a reference to the ways in which, in the political realm and beyond, certain images, as well as behavioural models and roles, crystallize in a given society or group through processes of typification and repetition. The focus, then, isn't merely on how political institutions assume, propagandize, and impose ideological or false tenets *from above* to obtain consensus and obedience, but also on how *the subjects* structure a static and repetitive imaginary *from below* by renouncing the freedom of their imagination.

The critics of real socialism were not just trying to warn the still communist East, but also the 'post-totalitarian' West, set for a future of global standardization.[6] As noted by Kolakowski, there is no single work of 'dissident' philosophy that doesn't centre, directly or indirectly, the issue of the stifling of the imagination and the stereotyping of language (Kolakowski 1983). Indeed, aside from the more destructive elements of ideological terror, we need to consider the more 'moderate' aspects of totalitarianism, aimed at hampering any autonomous judgement. As suggested by Milosz, while totalitarianisms are established with gunfire, they use non-conventional weapons to preserve their power, namely, images and language (Milosz 1991[1953]). Only through the use of a strictly codified language is it possible to hinder all forms of 'heretical' thought or imagination. Beyond the violent elimination of entire strata of the population at the hands of ideological terror, then, there is a form of power that stifles any potential for imagining an alternative and for putting up resistance to the regime. While, in the heat of 'ideocracy', an inner adhesion to 'truth-ideological' tenets was required, in the time of so-called

cold ideology (Papaioannou 1967) an 'institutionalized lie' – an ensemble of exterior behaviours aligned to the shams of the regime – was sufficient.

To use images and language as weapons is to resort to a normalizing, rather than violent, imaginary. A normalizing imaginary isn't fuelled by inspiring images and can reproduce itself statically; it is a routinized imaginary, actualized by subjects that suspend their own imagination. This type of imaginary still propels totalitarianism, but in a more everyday and diffused manner, to the point of becoming imperceptible. Still, they hold, this more 'superficial' production of the imaginary is just as effective as the most violent mechanisms of repression in preserving a regime. This transformation radically changes the way we look at the relationship between subjectivity and power; shifting the focus to the role played by those subjects that, though not responsible for political decision-making, contribute to the strengthening and reproduction of an imaginary that makes any alternative unimaginable.

To an extent, this same criticism is advanced by contemporary critics of post-democracies. By 'post-democracies',[7] in political philosophy and political science, we refer to those societies that still have formally democratic institutions but are not democratic in the substance. In these societies, freedom of expression is respected, free elections are held, officials and governments and officials do change, but none of these institutions actually reflects any democratic political choice.[8] In these societies, it does not matter who we vote for, critics hold, since the representatives of different parties will all behave similarly once in power. We could say, then, that in these democracies the *demos* is inactive, and not only as a result of external factors but also, increasingly, as a result of the citizen's own passivity. As Chiara Bottici highlights,

> the electoral battle dramatized on our screens hides the fact that no real battle is taking place, because the real clash is not among the official candidates (who most often have very similar policies), but offstage, hidden in the wings. The real fight is between the political options that are touted by the candidates, left and right, and those that are not even taken into consideration. The decisive distance is not between candidates, but between those who get a role in the spectacle and those who are left out of it. (2014, 112)

Our vertical and unidirectional view of power and the imaginary, then, needs an even more radical update. The latter in particular, as Bottici underlines, cannot be understood anymore as a set of images forced from above on obedient subjects, devoid of imagination. For one, today for the first time, images put into circulation by an individual can have the same weight as those that are put into circulation by political institutions. This happens through a resort, by the many, to some sort of direct mental experience of the world that

goes beyond the sensible, often pointing to one's own intuition – deemed to be truer than any reality others may attest to – as the source of the images. These individual claims to legitimacy, however, seem to ignore the extent to which intuition is influenced by an imaginary that is now hegemonic, though not binding. The product of this confusion, thus, is an explosion of images, each fuelled by the same static imaginary: a collection of micro-imaginaries locked in on themselves that, through the use of subjective imagination, reproduce hegemonic structures. Individual perceptions and intuitions are easily spread and 'institutionalized' as legitimate sources of information on the state of things, under the assumption that all images are equivalent, as if democracy meant that each imagination is equally credible.

What are we facing, then? Nothing but one of the possible outcomes of democracy, as one of its basic tenets risks invalidating any claim to authority. There used to be and there exists today still a healthy, liberating, critique of authority but this same critique may be exploited as a way to authoritarian politics. In this regard, we are witnessing a new way of using images in connection to a new kind of subjectivity that has been the true protagonist in the construction of the institutionalized imaginaries of post-democracy. As Bottici observes in her chapter on *Navigating Mass Psychology: The Political Myth of Trumpism*:

> While pushing the register of the spectacle and changing attitudes toward the truth of the image, the imaginal politics triggered by social media also turn all of their users into equal actors within the performance. . . . It is not just that a personality like Trump, with his (largely delusional) narrative of the self-made man, fits the new social media: it is consubstantial with them, because it is inseparable from the type of performance that these new technologies enable. By interacting on Twitter with their leader and his followers, Trump's supporters do not simply feel, but literally become protagonists of the performance of 'rebirth-in-greatness' that Trump's invocation to 'Make American Great Again!' triggered. They do not even have to imagine what their president looks like or what he would think about X and Y and Z in this moment in space and time. These thoughts are constantly there, buzzing on their mobile phones. And some of them even become unexpected stars of the spectacle: like the fire lieutenant in Tuscaloosa, who on the evening of April 29, 2019, tweeted to his scant followers: 'Granted I am in Alabama but most of the firefighters I talk to are voting @realDonald Trump' (Ben Rawls, 30 April, 12.10am @firemanbrawls), and then woke up the morning after to discover he had become a Twitter celebrity with 14,000 likes in a few hours, just because he had been retweeted by the President himself. (Bottici forthcoming 2022)

As it is clear from this analysis, we are talking of a way of using images that doesn't really aim to deceive, but rather to give visibility/expression to the

speaker. It is some kind of answer to a feeling of isolation, superfluity, and non-belonging to the world. Those who feel irrelevant hope to quench this feeling through visibility, by exposing images of the self, and thus constructing a coherent narrative of the relationship between their self and the world. This is not, however, an answer to that need for reality which Hanna Arendt talks about; the latter can only be satisfied when, starting from our different points of view, we understand that we have a world in common.

In comparison to the past then there has been a further reversal. The centres of political and social power construct an imaginary by intercepting the images and the needs of the subjects, while also trying to orient and govern these. While totalitarianism produced images oriented towards hostility and destruction to create an imaginary that could beat subjects into shape, and in 'cold post-totalitarianism' the imaginary normalized the imagination of individuals without the use of force, in post-democracies the imaginary is sustained by need, by the images that respond to the needs of the subjects, and by the powerful need for those images and subjective needs.

Contemporary society, then, starting from the desire of the subjects, provides a narrative barrier to the bleakness of reality and its complexity. Requests for social redemption and identity are weaved into an imaginary which can, on occasion, become aggressive to offload one's own feeling of frustration on someone else. It is for this reason that, at times, the post-democratic imaginary shares a trait of hostility with totalitarianism and post-totalitarianism, often expressed in an imaginal that excludes and diminishes the other. If there are no jobs, it is because some people undersell their labour at a price that makes it impossible for us to be competitive. If the healthcare system doesn't work, it is because some people unjustly take advantage of its services. An imaginary is formed through what Arendt called 'image-making', where factual truth is dismissed if it doesn't fit the image.

Much more, however, is at stake than the damage provoked by the evil will of those who take advantage of the insecurity or naivety of others who embrace their own catastrophic imagination with no further verification. What is at stake are the very substance of the world and the possibility of having it in common. The problem, then, isn't merely political, but ontological. The totalitarian regimes of the past century trod dangerously on the limit between what actually happens and what politics narrates. Conferring absolute primacy to the construction of images and endlessly manipulating reality, they laid the foundation for the paradoxical indistinguishability of reality and image, but they could not definitively destroy it.

The distinction between reality and fiction, blurred by the lies of totalitarianism, seems to be on the brink of extinction. Or rather, as we are really speaking of indistinction, it risks transforming the world into a gigantic phantasm. Perhaps this change in the nature of political power is what makes the

contribution of *Imaginal Politics* so timely, but instead of a 'global society of the spectacle', as Chiara Bottici claims,[9] we risk perhaps ending up in a gigantic phantasm. This is what is in store for us according to some of the most extreme forecasts about our future. Both those who are enthusiastic about the opportunities that the 'virtual' will open up and those who denounce the apocalyptical reduction of the cosmos to an image agree that, doubtless, we are living a 'crisis of the real'. In some cases, politics can benefit from this crisis, but there will always be a catastrophic risk of crossing a now ever so thin line of demarcation into a total play of mirrors.

Today, as Bottici reminds us, we are in the presence of a kaleidoscopic mediatic world made of images that are decomposed and recomposed as iconic substitutes. This whirlwind of images, taking on the status of reality, opens up endless possibilities for manipulation to the point of nearly convincing us that reality is not given to us, but rather sifted, selected, and even constructed, produced. The confusion of this total spectacle is so overwhelming that we feel helpless. Without even having to recur to Adorno, Baudrillard, Debord, or Huan, we see that things get always more inclusive and elusive, diffused and irresponsible. Even if we want to resist the arguments of those who bewail a society of the spectacle where everyone is transformed into a spectator and a consumer, we have to admit that image and reality are so integrated that we cannot see a way out of their thick web, in action or in thought.

The imaginary in which we are immersed today isn't violent towards those who do not align with it. We are not helpless, passive, and conformist, only because of fear or cowardice, but because we are thrown into a perennial succession of images where it is impossible to distinguish between facts and fiction. Indeed we would need a wondrous effort to get back what we have been deprived of, namely, the experience of a factual world that resists mediatization.

To get back the strength of our imagination we need to allow the singular, irreducible, painful factuality of the world to reach us once more, hoping that we can somehow still make experience of it, or that, at least, the way we stand before it can make a difference. To be sure, escaping the thick web of power/subjectivity/reality/images will not be easy and we will have to do it without that correspondence between reality and representation that would make our task much simpler. Inevitably, images will be mediated by relations of power: political power, social power, epistemic power, and the power of representations. Still, it is worth wondering how we can move within this web. Are we to cry out about the falsehood of the whole as some radical critical philosophers did in the last part of the past century? Or should we try becoming critical subjects with the courage to affirm their need for truth and for an alternative reality?

To conclude, I will go back to Bottici one last time and to her emphasis on the imagination as an ability to think otherwise. It is important to reiterate that this faculty can lead to liberation only if we recuperate its bond with experience. I like to think that *parrhesia*, as described by Michel Foucault in his last few courses at the *College de France*, answers this call (Foucault 2005; 2010; 2011). It means not only constantly interrogating the construction of the imaginary, but also our contribution to the imaginal, recognizing that the subject is always implicated in some or another power relation and that it is not sufficient to claim that we are resorting to our own experience to get off the hook. Experience, too, and what counts as experience, indeed, are implicated in a regime of production of images that orients our gaze.

What does it mean, then, to become subjects that are capable of exercising their freedom through critical imagination? Before we can even develop and follow certain cognitive and epistemological rules and processes, it is necessary, in order to become critical subjects, to do some ethical work on ourselves. That is, the self needs to establish an ethical/transformative relationship with itself. One needs to be conscious that it is not possible to escape power relations tout court and thus avoid the risk of an institutionalized imaginary, but, at the same time one needs to exercise freedom as imagination precisely through a search for reality.

The critical stance only secondarily entails an attention to the limits of reason (Kant), but it is first and foremost an ethico-political stance whose (historical and contingent) *a priori* lies in a desire to avoid being governed by institutionalized lie. This historical and contingent *a priori* begins by questioning and doubting: what am I? based on what truth – asserted, imposed, or 'inhaled' and internalized – have I constructed my subjectivity? Who am I in this particular fraction of humankind that finds itself in this point in time and space, subject to the power of truth in general and in particular? These questions open up the possibility of unsettling the immobilities crystallized in the cultural identity bestowed upon us. At the same time, they can orient us in our approaches to the imaginal, wary of the totalitarian threats that lie dormant in the relationship between individual imagination and social imaginaries.

(Translation from Italian by Giuseppe Vicinanza)

NOTES

1. See Bottici (2014) but also Bottici (2011), and more recently, Bottici (forthcoming, 2022).

2. The debate on this topic is wide. For a summary, I direct the reader to Runciman (2018) and Sunstein (2017).

3. Here, too, the epistemological, as well as the 'ontological-political' debate, is immense. For a synthesis (in the English language) of the main positions, see Ferraris (2014). The Italian author is one of the first to have reopened this debate, though his positions, which up to a few years ago were close to those of post-modernism, risk simplifying the matter excessively.

4. On the topic, you may look at Forti (2008a).

5. Arendt (1958) or Arendt (1952).

6. An enlightening example is Václav Havel's extraordinary essay (1990).

7. This debate was started by Crouch (2000). Importantly, among other works, see Wolin (2010).

8. While, in a post-democracy, voters have the possibility to choose between different parties, the difference between the representatives of these parties is very slight when in power. As American scholars have put it, whether you go blue or red, you still end up with neoliberal policies. The political developments of the last 10 years have shown that, in the United States as well as in Europe, the idea of a post-democracy isn't a mere theoretical hypothesis, but is embodied in our societies, the social order in which we are already living. Doubtless, globalization had a boomerang effect: national governments find it harder to control their economies, and financial elites find it easier to escape surveillance through international strategies such as lobbying or offshore tax havens, while some dream of a return to financial sovereignty, which traditional parties would be unable to ensure.

9. Bottici (2014, 125–26); see also Simona Forti (2008b).

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Chapter 4

The Ontography of Images

On the Legal Art of the Imaginal

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For Michelangelo, the centre of the corporeal, the fulcrum of the foetus, the missive mark of birth, was the navel. It is unique to the individual. It is the sign of the incarnadine bond of gestation. It is the figure, or more accurately, *ducta venosa*, the umbilical forbear, the bloody vein that uniquely signifies our lack of uniqueness, an origin, and chord to the other, to the chorus in the corporeal. It is, in the botanical argot made popular by Emanuele Coccia, the stem, stalk, or trunk that produces leaf, branch, and flower (Coccia 2018). To the point, however, which is that the umbilical collar and periumbilical skin circle is a scar, more strongly a wound, the primordial and most generative of images. An initial hypothesis: the image of beginning is the beginning of the image. It is that bloody and fleshy mark, the scar of birth which signals that the imaginal is also haptic, that the image is material, and that pictures matter and are manifestations. *Imaginal Politics* (Bottici 2014) opens up a world of virtuality, but I will argue that the cost of such an expansive accession to a floating world is the loss of the *vis* or force of the virtual as image, as matterphor and mattering. To supplement the work of Chiara the imaginalist is to insist upon the concrete presence of the image and to note, as my *klagen*, as my suit in both or all senses of the word, I am an admirer of her work, that *Imaginal Politics* has no images, and this absence matters, it is significant, a sign of philosophical restraint that has juridical implications. Law too resists the depiction, the materiality of the image, explicitly preferring dead letters – *literae mortuae* – to the living *imago*, threatened by the movement and emotion of matter. Back, however, to the beginning of the image as the emblematic corporeal sign and as the mark of the origin of law in the living voice, the *anima lex* of the sovereign and lawgiver.

The navel is the sign of incarnation, the primordial mark, the stigmata that references origin in the form of an image, a wound or opening, scarred on

the flesh. As with all images, what is signified cannot be shown directly but rather requires a double viewing. Most immediately the mark is on the flesh and the first line of vision takes up the theme of the materiality of the image, the tensor of the skin, of incarnation as the libidinal avenue to and opening of the phenomenal body to both vision and desire. The image has a materiality, a haptic quality which in imaginal terms is its visibility as an apparition and so temporal locus of affect and allure. The umbilicus is the memory of conception in that birth is always preceded by an unknown and invisible origin of which it is the appearance. The *pupa*, in biological terms, leads to the *imago*; the chrysalis is a transitional entity that results in the image, a living and usually winged insect. There is both *eros* and *telos* to the image which can be apprehended best by thinking of it as mobile and alluring in the manner of the flesh which insufflates and exhales, opens and closes, is alive to desire while also being the tactile bearer of an unseen and inexhaustible interiority. It has to be pierced to be perceived. A genealogy of this conception, of the two aspects of the image, its Janus face, is necessary to an adequate apprehension of the appeal and force of the visual and that which it generates, the imaginal as also the virbiusses of the imaginary that Bottici so expansively denotes without depicting.

The starting point in the West, both theologically and juristically, is *imago Dei*, as the prototype of visibility and from there *haec imago*, the face of Christ as the living form and only incarnated apparition of the origin of interiority. The Psalmists' version of this insight of absolute lineage or *vera philosophia* is *in imagine ambulat homo*, a key phrase in the medieval and Renaissance theories of the visual (Boulnois 2008). The body is an image, and the human in this theorization is imaginal, which following Bottici means fabricated of and transitioning among appearances: 'by imaginal I mean what is made of images in the sense of pictorial (re)presentations' (Bottici 2014, 60). The person is the image of their own conception, a wound or more precisely flesh and blood, *imago* as ambulant visage of unseen causes, the manifestation of *anima*, the soul as *pneuma*, apparition, or literally winged insect. *Christos*, as Didi-Huberman reminds us, is a term for unction, a coloured liquid, and is cognate in Greek with blood, a reference to both incarnation and death, to *haec imago*, this mask, this face, standing for the wound that lies at the root of the image, the active mark of generation and demise, *eros* and *thanatos* (Didi-Huberman 2007, 230). In the Christian terminology, they see themselves in him whom they pierced – *videbunt in quem transfixerunt* – the wound of Christ, the generative, opening of the flesh is where we glimpse the image as becoming, it being the avenue to knowledge. It is alive, an opening, an event of incarnation, the tear through which the image will transmit. To pierce is to go through the skin, the surface of things, and seek the interior of the image, the cause or drive of its *ambulatio*, its wandering, as also the

wandering of the eye. The stigmata of Christ is exemplary of the passage of vision to thought, the passing through from apparition to interiority being the desired Christian mode of progress towards the mystery of an invisible truth. Thus, the affect and orchestration of the eye, of vision, towards the interior and unseen. The face is a surface, and that apparition is the index and figure of the mind, the matter of transition which the legal tradition inherits, through the dogma that frames legal thought and through the rhetorical arts of figuring thought, primarily in Cicero who, in Lacanian style, takes up the passage and comments 'that the face is a picture of the mind as the eyes are its interpreter (*indices*)' (Cicero 1948, 150).

The index is what we would currently term a symptom of unconscious causes, of drive, a mobilization in that the image breaks out of the body, leaves its inchoate state, the chrysalis, and becomes imaginal. Incarnating images is a mode of figuring, of making something, but it is also an incorporation of the opening, a living of the wound as the modality of our imaginal being. It deserves pause, breath. What the Christian theory of the incarnation proposes is the body as image on the theory that the body is what sees, it is the flesh that opens and closes, looks and speaks, incorporates and expels in an environment of relay and change, perpetuum mobile, without which we would see nothing. The penthouse lids open and close in the sensuous and sensible act of vision, as an image looking on other images which in their turn come alive to the extent that we are open to them: 'images embrace us: they open *to* us and close *on* us to the extent that they trigger *in* us something that one could name an interior experience' (Didi-Huberman 2007, 25).[1] There is the *vis* that subtends *video* and virtuality alike, the force of seeing being its active performativity, its synaesthetic sensibility, its rupture of the fabric of the real, as the visible comes alive, for us and to us. The image tears a hole in the complacency of being and offers an opening up to an excess of meaning, the possibility of apprehending patterns and repetitions that lead towards the primal scene and thence to the abyss of origin.

To walk among images is to apprehend that these apparitions are living beings, that we look at and we are looked at, and it is only in that manner, as animated, respiring, transitory, incomplete entities that we can know and be known sensuously and synaesthetically. The image is extant historically and to view it as such is to apprehend it not only temporally but also spatially and sensibly as always in motion and in the process of becoming. To view, to meditate, to adore an image is to move with it and join in its tralatitious advenience. The image is a sensuous surface, an expanding libidinal tensor, a skin that spreads and stretches, matter that signifies sensibly. Where the theological tradition aimed to see in and through such aesthetic visualizing matter, beyond the apparition, the rhizome of lineage and the sign, the collective, which is to say the historical mark of the creator, whether that be *imago*

Dei or in the case I will discuss, *mens legis*. It is this sense of opening onto or more accurately expanding the surface of the visible that the humanist legal tradition inherits and expatiates. To fully apprehend the changes introduced by law becoming imaginal, through the mediatization of legality, it is necessary to reconstruct this inheritance as a visual archive, a lexicon, and method that law too receives, manipulates, and sends on.

The law is the other face of theology or, in Kantorowicz's elaboration of the *corpus mysticum*, it provides the secular expression of displaced religious categories (Kantorowicz 1958).[2] The jurists initially acceded to the Christian sense of invisible causes and spiritual practices and we find in Gaius's *Institutes* an emblematic case of the image taking priority over materiality (de Zulueta 1956, I.85). The casuistic question posed was that of an artist who paints an image (*imaginem*) on a tablet belonging to another. Does the owner of the tablet own the image or does the artist? In an exception to the doctrine of accession, it is held that the artist owns the image. As Justinian formulates it in the *Institutes*, the tablet accedes to the painting (*pictura*): 'It would be ridiculous for a picture by Apelles or Parrhasius to accede to a tablet worth almost nothing' (Birks and McLeod 1987, 2.1.34). This view was reversed by the commentators and the doctrine of accession came to apply. If someone builds or plants on my land it becomes mine by natural law, and so too if someone writes on my missive (*cartulis*) or parchment, even in letters of gold, it becomes mine 'because the letters accede to the missive or parchment'.[3] Reason is the result of a curious conflation of word and letter, of image and text wherein the truth is a facet of scripture from which visual depiction distracts and betrays. Whether the root of the transformation is the Catholic restriction of truth to scripture accompanied by an esoteric unwritten tradition, or the Reformers' *sola scriptura*, the legal definition of the image becomes a textual one, a reduction of the visual to the verbal according to which, from the early Renaissance on the image is *liber pauperum* and simply a substitute for writing, the poor man's book, the text of the illiterate. The maxim from the *Decretals*, whereby the picture takes the place of knowing how to read – *pro lectione pictura est* – gains expression in legal texts in the paradoxical form of the picture as *veritas falsa*.[4]

Pictura est fabula, for the lawyers the image was true insofar as it represented and false to the degree that it was not what it represented. The distinction, for the jurists, was between an evidential sense of true and false in which the license of the poet or the painter would often lead to fictive narratives and phantasmatic representations. There is a degree of choice in that the image can be true but that is a question of law or determination of the accuracy of the portrayal to the thing represented. For the lawyer the image has to be pierced in New Testament style so as to view its source and ascertain its truth. For jurists the source is ultimately written, it is the Code, the *Corpus iuris*,

the texts of law, and famously for common lawyers, if it is not in the books, it is not law. As the antiquary John Selden put it, *lex [est] in verba* (Selden 1614, 3). The insistence upon the letter of the law represses the visual which in turn constantly presses against the barrier of the text. The image is thus measured against writing, and pictures are reduced to words, to sources in the books of law. The written word, *ratio scripta*, opens into the realm of speech and by an ironic inversion into the unwritten, into action and image, performance and its fictions. This is evident if one looks to the didactic quality of the juridical apprehension of images as mere substitutes for words of law that are expressly termed, borrowing from Erasmus, *sileni Alcibiadis*, ugly on the outside and full of treasure within (figure 4.1). Thus, William Fulbeck in his introduction of common law remarks, not untypically that the 'words of law may be compared to certain images called *sileni Alcibiadis*, whose outward feature was deformed and ugly, but within they were full of jewels and precious stones' (Fulbeck 1599, 55).

Figure 4.1 'Inverte et Avertes.' *Source*: From Jacob Cats, *Silenus Alcibiadis sive Proteus vitæ humanæ ideam, Emblemate* (Middleburg: Johannis Hellenij, 1618) at 53.

The word absorbs the image in the doctrinally apposite logic of interpretation. *Cartula*, the missive, the letter is the charter and warrant of truth and it carries the image as a superficiality, a substitute or in Agamben's reconstruction, an empty throne, a space to be occupied (Agamben 2011, xiii, 243). Even here, however, the image is a Janus-faced entity, a splitting of meaning, wherein the appearance is but the bearer of the stigmata of the juridical which is the word made visible in statute, decree, judgement, or other verbal performance of the active transmission of law. What is the human – *quid est homo*? inquires an early and satirically inclined constitutional lawyer, and the answer is *legis imago* – the image of law (Alciatus 1651, 190; Coras 1558, 23–51). There is the text, which is ugly, foul featured, no more than dead letters – *literae mortuae* – and then there is the performance of the text, *anima legis*, which is the living and breathing embodiment of the juridical in the heart of the human (figure 4.2).

Figure 4.2   Guillaume Perrière, La Morosophie. Contenant cent emblemes moraux, illustrez de cent tetrastiques Latins (Lyons: Bonhomme, 1553) 97.

Against this history of the *longue durée* of the *ius imaginum* or law of images as it is devised and relayed by the jurists, Bottici introduces the concept of the imaginal, tracing a history of images from Greek and Latin sources via Islamic philosophy to cultural and psychoanalytic theory:

> To sum up, extending the notion of the imaginal to both conscious and unconscious images has the effect of emphasizing that there exists a part of our mental life that is consubstantial to images themselves and cannot be reduced to something else. (Bottici 2014, 63)[5]

The imaginal is unleashed from the real: 'There is no original 'here and now' and therefore no authenticity to be preserved. Virtual images are not objects created once and for all, but processes . . . of perpetual maintenance' (Bottici 2014, 152). This leads to the imaginal not as the ontography of the image but as the inundation of the political with virtual images, qualitatively distinct representations that indiscriminately flood the mediatized marketplace of the social. Law faces the same experience of becoming virtual, of being engulfed in imaginal relays and so too has to apprehend the novel force of the visual – the viserbal as I term it – and learn how to move in non-textual forms. I will begin with a lament, a plaint, Freud's *klagen* or suit, which is that Chiara, for all the analysis of the fabrication of images, of the imaginal as representing 'pictorially', remains a lawyer, a textualist, and proceeds *ad similia*, according to analogy, and not *ad apparentiam*, according to appearances. The book contains no pictures, no visual depictions are analysed aesthetically, no sighting among the words of that fine heterotopia of the mutinous ship, and so no encounter with the naval or with navels, with visibilities and viserbalities, with depictions and bodies, blood and desire. She wishes *détournement* but it is a cerebral and verbal one. The imaginal does not live up to the image, it lacks aura but paradoxically it has force and perhaps even a greater power, effect and affect, allure and seduction, than plastic depictions. If I move to analyse, to view the role increasingly played by images and the imaginal in the judgements and transmissions of law, I am inordinately grateful to Bottici, for leaving me space to add a somewhat more specific apprehension and accounting of the uses of the visual in the juridical.

When Chiara discusses the imaginal, she means what forensic rhetoricians termed sentential narrative figures, sometimes 'icons' which in oratory referenced detailed verbal descriptions, portraits in poetic imagery. The imaginal is thus composed of bites and nibbles, tweets, fragments, fake news, and by reference but not depiction. One might add memes and gifs, snapshots, splash screens, photographs, and omnipresent selfies. The profusion of virtual imagery threatens phagocytosis of political action, the spectacle of the virtual overtaking and overwhelming any sensibility of reference. The change

is qualitative as well as quantitative because the imaginal relay becomes an ontography of its own, a distinct sphere of low cathartic or at least rapidly abandoned events in themselves. The plethora and plenitude of online imagery generates both obsessive viewing — scanning, browsing, glimpsing – and an adiaphorization or loss of affect towards the real.[6] The image becomes a fetish, the imaginal a cannibalistic devouring of the public sphere in which the spectacle as a thing–in–itself diverts both media attention and political action into a species of hallucinatory epi-dialogue, a pluralized antirrhetic. The same then would be the likely expectation of the juridico–imaginal realm, save that I am arguing that we should look at this, view and apprehend it visually as well as verbally because that is the necessary methodology for a critical visual encounter with the imaginal and necessary for any *detourné-ment* of images that will promote retinal justice.

   There is no question that images, photographs, clips, screenshots, as also *animé*, emojis, and emoticons circulate increasingly freely not only in the relay of law in the media, but also now in judicial judgements as well. The juristic equivalent of low cathartic impact is low doctrinal effect. Chimerical presence, evanescence, visual confusion in the sense that judges, following the legal logic of analogy, treat the virtual image as self-evident, as if it were a text. There is a case that prefigures this propensity quite strikingly. The decision related quite directly to the impact of spectres on value. The case concerned a property sale and the issue before the Court was whether or not the seller of a haunted house had to disclose the presence of a poltergeist to a buyer who would not otherwise find out. The seller had advertised tours of the house, nationally and locally, to view the ghost and so was estopped from denying the existence of the spectre. As a matter of law, the house was haunted (figure 4.3). Legally, however, the issue was whether the failure to disclose a spectre, silence as to haunting,

Figure 4.3   A Legally Haunted House – Google Earth.

was material to the contract. It seems a peculiar question in that materiality is precisely what ghosts lack but the court took an expansively equitable view, starting their reasoning with a citation to the Ghost in *Hamlet*: 'Pity me not but lend thy serious hearing to what I shall unfold'.[7]

The Ghost in *Hamlet* is of course *legis imago* in the sense that it is his father who haunts, 'I am thy father's spirit, / Doomed for a certain term to walk the night' so as to warn and to instigate revenge for 'murder most foul', adding 'But know thou noble youth, / The serpent that did sting thy father's life / Now wears his crown'.[8] In *Stambovsky* there is no evidence as to who the ghost represents or why it haunts but a certain malignancy might be adduced from a guest dying of an aneurism while staying at the house, not long before it went on the market. Death, the presence of spirits, a past that sullies the reputation and value of a property is legally cognizable in that it portends a change in value, but the bigger point is that Judge Rubin, from the Hebrew *reu*, behold *ben* a son, is willing to recognize the symbolic law that *legis imago* represents, here in the form of 'thy father's spirit'. Positive law aligns with the *nom du père* and takes the position that the invisibility of the cause is no more than an instance of the unseen character of all hierarchy and the fact that the *imago* here is not a mask, but a house simply analogizes the resident spirit to the residence. It is expressly 'the house' that is haunted and in the spirit of such paranormal occupations the Court acts 'as if' the property is partly in the possession of a poltergeist. Not even an 'as is' clause in the contract can exclude liability for the reason that the haecceity of the ghost is ontologically suspended. It walks the night but not the day, it is an 'as if' in Vaihinger's form, a juridical presupposition that founds a theory upon what is expressly termed a *Non-Entia imaginaria*, a juristic fiction. For Vaihinger, it is precisely the jurists who, through the legal fiction of the juridical person, have best prepared us for the distinction between the non-existent presence of the fictive, and dogma or hypothesis which endeavours to express a reality as yet unknown (Vaihinger, 1924, 269). If possession or properties of a building are involved, then the legal fiction of haunting resides in the structure as manifestation of the Symbolic.

Metaphysics is matterphorical. According to Gandorfer, matterphorical theory is the manifestation of the thought of things. Borrowing from quantum physics, matter is alive, not reified, and thus in the emergent onto–epistemology of matterphorics 'concepts cannot be simply ideational, they are brought into existence by onto – epistemological practices, when electrons crash into language and an orchid and a wasp cross a letter, and also when in here and out there, atoms and ions, winds and rivers, attract and repulse each other in ways that reveal desire to be a feeble concept' (Gandorfer 2020). Continuing in the path of the manifestations of spirit and the haunting of structures the recent Indian case of *Siddiq v. Suresh* was an action brought on behalf of the Hindu divinity Lord Ram, an incarnation of Lord Vishnu, in the form of his

human representatives, the *shebaits* – the custodians – of a Hindu religious sect.[9] The law suit concerns what is deemed by the Hindu community to be the birthplace of Lord Ram, a religious site that they claimed had been destroyed in 1528 when Ayodhya had been victim to conquest by the Muslim Mughal emperor, Babur. A mosque, Babri-Masjid had been built on what the Muslims claimed was empty ground.[10] The Hindu community claim was thus that under the mosque were the ruins of the temple of Ram. In 1949, the Hindu community invaded the structure for purposes of worshipping and the legal action followed. The plaintiff is the deity Ram – claiming to be the presiding divinity of the site – and after 69 years and 4,314 pages of lower court judgements, the Supreme Court of India, in a decision that runs to the appropriate length of 1,045 pages, affirmed that the deity Ram won the action, and the site has been returned to the Hindu community.

In Indian law, affirmed by decisions of the English Privy Council, deities are juristic persons and have the capacity to sue through their material manifestations: 'A Hindu idol is, according to long established authority founded upon the religious customs of the Hindus, and the recognition thereof by Courts of law, a 'juristic entity'. It has a juridical status with the power of suing and being sued'.[11] An idol is a vivified image, a consecrated representation of the divinity or, as one court poses it: 'It is sufficient to state that the deity is . . . conceived as a living being and is treated in the same way as the master of the house would be treated by his humble servant'.[12] It is not enough that believers have faith in the existence of the divinity, there has to be tellurian presence, an image – statue, painting, relic, or in the present case a space – that is the subject of ceremonies and rites of worship: 'The vivified image is regaled with the necessaries and luxuries of life in due succession, even to the changing of clothes, the offering of cooked and uncooked food and the retirement to rest'.[13] Ceremonies, pieties, flowers, rituals, even sweeping and cleaning around the statue or other emblem of the divinity were sufficient to found the image as a deity with legal personality. The religious animation of the image, the mobilization of matter through the mutual recognition of viewer and viewed, the apprehended in its emergence is the criterion of the juridical fiction of extancy in law. The idol, which for Christian theology, significantly enough, is *rei mortua*, a dead thing, is brought polytheistically to life and becomes the site of legal rights and duties.

The problem the Supreme Court had to overcome in *Siddiq v. Suresh* was primarily that any such idol was long demised, and the evidence of Ram's presence was primarily archaeological. The Supreme Court had to look for what were in the main enigmatic signs of the Supreme Being's manifestation through Lord Ram in the contested space. As the Judge puts it, the absence of idols need not preclude conferral of juristic personality, the contention being that 'Ram had manifested itself in the form of land itself'. The absence
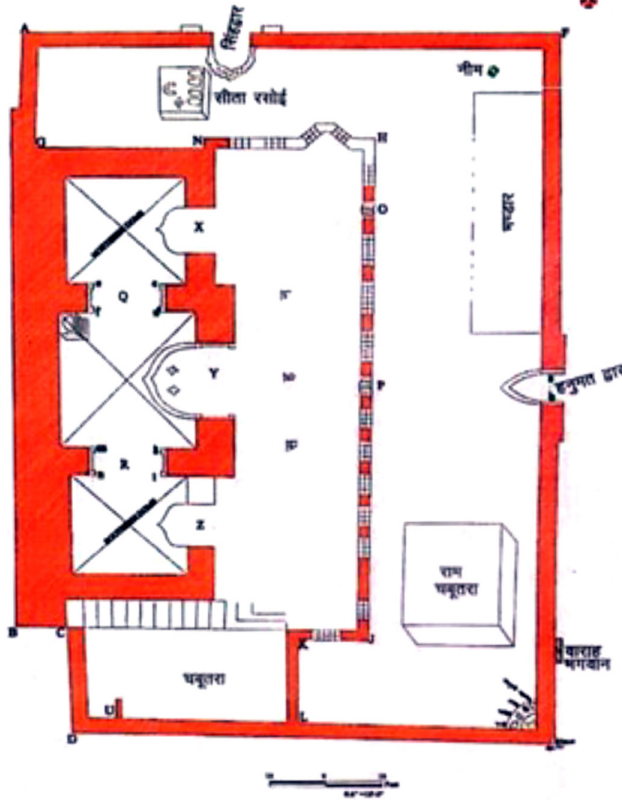
of an idol had precedent to support it, as shown by an earlier case where the divinity worshiped took the form of a curtain in front of the altar: '[a]t the time of worship, the curtain is drawn away and the altar is revealed to have an empty space. The empty space at the altar is the subject of prayers and devotees regularly leave offerings'.[14] A curtain, a vanishing sign, and an altar with an empty space were sufficient references *ab imagine ad rem significatem*, adequate to manifest the deity as present, enough of a legal persona to constitute a cause of action. While land without any distinguishing feature, absent manifestation of some kind, would be inadequate apparition of the deity, it is also deemed true that 'the absence of evidence may not be evidence of absence'.[15] The land has, however, to be distinguished from other property for juristic personality to be conferred on the realty. A mark, a sign, a pattern even on the land would be sufficient but jurisprudence requires something, be it relic, part object, a circle, a circumscribed empty space to support the assertion of divine presence. In conclusion, after examining over 300 photographs of ruins, of statues, pillars, markings, emblems, purportedly pertaining to the religious origin of the site as predating the mosque that now occupied the space it was decided that the manifestations were sufficient. If the deity is indirectly visible in the place, Ram Janmabhumi, then it is proven to the satisfaction of law's 'the prudent person' test, that Lord Ram was born there, and the place is sacred. If the place is worshipped as a deity, then, like the deity, it has a vicarious jruidical personality and the standing to sue.

The key with regard to the ontography of the image is that, in harmony with the juristic theory of the *sileni*, the image is the manifestation of nothing. It is the box, the treasure chest that needs to be opened, not to see through it but to see into it, as a body, as manifest. The recognition is that matter is manifestation, and it is the limit of the viewer's capacity to open that circumscribes the extent of juridical personality. As remarked at one point but not followed through, wind, rain, sun, trees, flowers, empty spaces, mountains, and dells too can all be deities and increasingly should be recognized and treated as such. Law, however, is moving most slowly towards such recognition, and much of the issue of impediment can be seen in the case at hand. The Supreme Court's extremely lengthy theological, epistemological, and juridical discourse on images is opaque because it is simply discursive and not visual. There is discussion of 315 photographs, detailed review of inscriptions, emblems, carvings, images, smears of paint but no pictures are reproduced. The judgement, which is surely long enough and detailed enough to include images, determinative pictures, is in this regard an empty space, a textual site of occlusion. What matters is manifestation and yet come the hour, the image does not arrive, no pictures of the depictions that determined the decision. The deity is legally the incarnation of the divine in an idol, manifestation in an image or other distinguishing sign, but no such apparitions are

presented in the judgement. The absence of images, I will argue, is here the evidence of absence, of the blindness of reason.

The point can be made directly by reference to the two depictions that do occur in the judgement. These are the plans of the extant building and a map of the site (figures 4.4 and 4.5). Two linear, graphic representations, one originally

Figure 4.4 *Siddiq v. Suresh* **(2019) Civil Appeal Nos 10866–10867 of 2010 Floor plan.**

SHOWING THE BUILIDNG IN THE SUIT WITH ITS LOCALITY

BASED ON THE PLAN NO. 01 & PLAN NO. 02, PREPARED BY SHRI SHIV SHANKAR LAL PLEADER, COMMISSIONER, DATED 25.05.1950
IN THE COURT OF THE CIVIL JUDGE FAIZABAD REGULAR SUIT NO. 2 OF 1950 / SHRI GOPAL SINGH VISHARAD V/S ZAHUR AHMAD AND OTHERS.

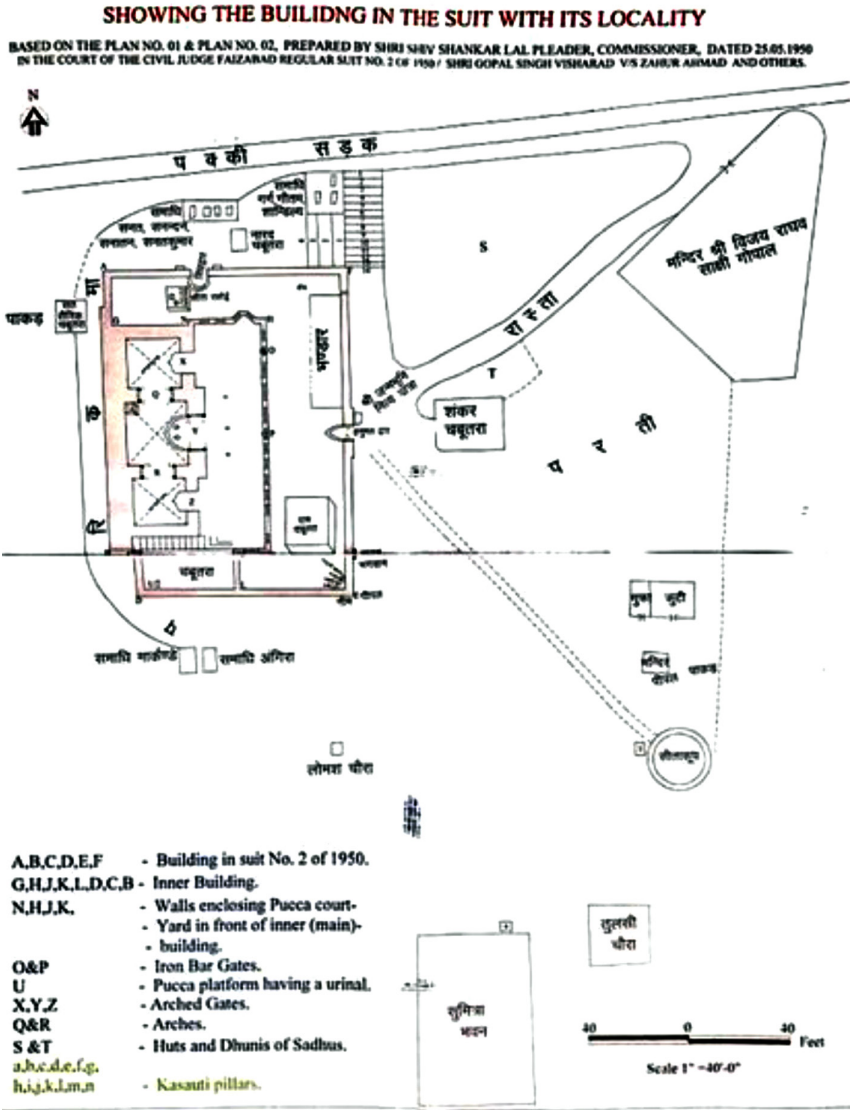|	
A,B,C,D,E,F	- Building in suit No. 2 of 1950.
G,H,J,K,L,D,C,B	- Inner Building.
N,H,J,K.	- Walls enclosing Pucca court-
	- Yard in front of inner (main)-
	- building.
O&P	- Iron Bar Gates.
U	- Pucca platform having a urinal.
X,Y,Z	- Arched Gates.
Q&R	- Arches.
S &T	- Huts and Dhunis of Sadhus.
a,b,c,d,e,f,g,	
h,i,j,k,l,m,n	- Kasauti pillars.

Scale 1" =40'-0"

Figure 4.5 *Siddiq v. Suresh* **(2019) Civil Appeal Nos 10866–10867 of 2010 Site Map.**

rendered in vivid color (specifically, the walls), the other shaded in parts, but both in their form aesthetic representations, and sensible objects of viewing. Here the sacred empty space is delineated but the map is conclusory, it provides no indications of the idols or other signs of the deity. If we look closely at the plan, it is a partial cartography. A scale has been added and the map has a key, but the only point of historical interest is that the depictions show a wall by means

of which the British administration had imposed partition on the two religious groups, Hindu worship to one side and Muslims to the other. There is a reason that the map appeals to the judges, it is assumed to be a rational image, a direct representation of a site, complete with scale and key, mathematically drawn and free of interpretation. Such is how law has most usually addressed plans, maps, schemata of place. They are analogous to writing, they escape the sensibilities and affects of aesthetics, they are grounded forms of knowledge. For present purposes, however, what is striking about the visual character of the judgement and of its mapping is precisely what it does not show, what cannot be seen, its veiling of the visual basis of the determination. The *sileni* here lack Alcibiades, the box is empty. In holding that the deity had manifested in the archaeological site, the judgement failed itself to manifest the proof of that appearance. The images are hidden from view and so the probative cannot be probed; the empty plan and diagrams without either reference or link to the signs of the deity become the sign and site of bare power. This is a version of the empty throne, the mystical seat of a potential that is always already invisibly the occupant of the site.

The Supreme Court reproduces an image that frames the decision by providing a purportedly rational context and siting of the issue, but it is one that directs attention away from images and towards textual expression, *ratio scripta* as a mode of absconding from the materiality of the conflict and the detail of the apparitions in which the deity appeared. This is Barthes's desert of words because what we are given by the Court is not matter but abstraction, not immanence but transcendence, even though it is precisely the immanence of the deity, the incarnation in material images that is the proof of possession of legal identity, and the jural personality of the place. It would be easy, both incisive of legitimacy and a relief from a prolix and overwhelming 'verballing', to have presented the images that determined. It is frequently done in judgements. The map and the plan are evidence enough that the reader could also be a viewer and see the subject of deliberation and so it is impossible to avoid the conclusion that the Court did not wish the images to be seen. It is a marker, of course, of the covertly political character and potentially incendiary consequences of the ruling, but rather than pursue that theme, it is insertion of distance, the flight to the text, levitation from matter to the linear ether of ungrounded concepts that in these circumstances is most significant. We are a long way from the navel of the decision, the Court is hiding by speaking too much.

Barthes talks of the ostrich burying its head in the sand as a form of discursive escape from seeing, a mode of closing the eyes, an evasion: 'It is through an 'intimate cessation of all intellectual operations' that the mind is laid bare. If not, *discourse* maintains it in its little complacency' (Barthes 2008, 13). It is not the word wind that matters, it is the feeling of the gust, the chill of the draft, the non-discursive sensation that is the goal of the performative utterance, the rhetorical *effectus*. Law is blindfolded by discourse.

Consider the 5,000 pages that the Indian courts deemed necessary to bury the simple archaeological question of whether there was visible evidence of a Hindu temple underneath the mosque. The photographs, the spectral capture of appearances would have sufficed. An extraordinarily extensive discursive divagation was necessary to evade the sensible subject of dispute. Text is here a skin, an outer and ugly face that has to be opened to and opened up for its subject matter to be known. What life does the discourse contain, what ghosts are hidden here, a question of the eerie and of failed presence, of the haunting of a site and the marks of agency, if any, that allow for its interpretation. The postulated test was that of whether the spirit could be seen, but the Court evades the direct assessment of the imagery and precludes the subjects of law, as well as the participants in the dispute, from seeing the legality and by extension the legitimacy of the legal apprehension of the ruins.

The question, had it been properly posed, that Lord Ram presses before the Court is one of legal aesthetics, a semionautical expedition into the ontography of apparitions, the interpretation of what is seen – photographed – and who is responsible. Are these marks of the divine or profane inscriptions? Do they manifest through Ram, Vishnu, the Supreme Being who, we are otiosely informed, has neither shape nor form? More strongly, do the markings capture non-human forces? Unlikely though it seems, to respond would mean to look, to apprehend, and in the process show what is viewed as evidence and give an account of the process and method of the juridical eye. The point is that this does not occur but rather words upon words repress, deflect, distract, and avoid. The ground, literally and matterphorically of the judgement is absent, the signs judged are missing, the case is closed before it opens. All of which is to assert that the Court exhibits a species of juridical incapacity, a failure to account for how it looks, an inability to justify its apprehension of the sensory visual bases of its determination. This is surprising because of the subject matter of the decision being so directly concerned with what could be seen, the evidence of Lord Ram's habitus. It also bends towards a more general question relating to *ius aestheticum*, or in more specific terms, retinal justice. How should courts view, or in critical terms, open up to and mobilize images?

The U.S. legal system is common law without brakes. Judges are fond of inserting screenshots, cut and pasted pictures, emoji, gifs, memes, and not infrequently photographs that they have taken themselves, into their reasoning. Images are increasingly populating precedent and so becoming law. As in the two previous decisions discussed, the focus is upon how the judges perceive the pictures that they reproduce, the image that apprehends the image. As elaborated thus far, the overall tendency is to avoid images and where they do need to be reproduced as evidence to support a decision, the criteria of viewing and of analysis are generally and often highly inaccurately those of self-evidence: the image in law is what it shows, the

only critical criterion adopted by the courts being that there cannot be evidence of alteration of the depiction. As for interpretation, the opening of the image, the unfolding of the pleats of vision, such is juristically unnecessary because the common sense of the eye will relay the story that the image shows. An early and paradoxical example from a procedural decision as to the appropriate forum for hearing a case can provide a useful instance of the next step, the movement from the failure of absences, the indiscernible ghost in *Stambovsky*, and the unseen apparitions of the deity, to failures of presence, here posed as the juristic quandary of the viserbal, the insertion of images into the precedent judgement and the relation of the what–is–seen to what–is–said.

In *Monica Del Carmen Gonzalez-Servin v. Ford Motor Company* the Judge had to consider two class actions from foreign jurisdictions, Mexico and Israel, relating to defective products. In each instance the Court viewed the forum as inappropriate – *non conveniens* in the euphemistic Latin – and continued to insert a duality of pictures, snatched from Google, of an ostrich with its head in the sand, and a besuited male with his head in the sand (figures 4.6 and 4.7). The plaintiff's case is summarily dismissed on the grounds that 'nearly identical' precedent authorities which the plaintiff has failed to address or even cite clearly decide in favour of remitting the case to the Mexican and Israeli courts, respectively, as the appropriate fora for decision. The Judge is enervated primarily by the fact that the plaintiffs have failed to cite to the relevant legal authority, a case the same Judge had decided two years earlier, which in his view disposed of the question. The four-paragraph judgement states only that

> the ostrich is a noble animal, but not a proper model for an advocate. (Not that ostriches really bury their heads in the sand when threatened, don't be fooled by the picture below.) The ostrich – like tactic of pretending that potentially dispositive authority against a litigant's contention does not exist is as unprofessional as it is pointless.[16]

So why the image of the ostrich and the suit? The Judge says nothing further about the images and yet these are the most striking feature of a very short judgement which purports to rule that precedent authority has to be read closely and treated as binding on subsequent courts facing similar facts. In other words, in future cases on similar facts, the ostrich and brown suit cannot be ignored, the images must be taken into account as having the weight of legal authority and bearing the gravity of their precedential imprimatur. Such at least would appear to be the trajectory of the decision, the written reasoning, but as the images are inserted without anything more by way of critical analysis than the parenthetical aside which effectively dismisses the

Figure 4.6 *Gonzalez-Servin v. Ford Motor Co* 662 F.3d 931, at 934.

Figure 4.7 *Gonzalez-Servin v. Ford Motor Co* 662 F.3d 931, at 934.

image, the inference is necessarily tentative. Put it like this, the litigants spoke without seeing, and the Judge responds by showing without saying.

What appears key is that the image is either deemed incidental, which seems implausible given its prominence in the precedent, or it is self-evident, too obvious to require explanation. It might also be comedic, a sillographic visual insertion, but again one that lacks any account of its juridical context and authority. What is missing is any adequate apprehension of the images themselves, in their juxtaposition to each other, and as part of the text or viserbality of the judgement. To view an image, as Lyotard elaborated some time back and as film scholarship has taken up, is not the same as reading a text and thus the question skirted in *Stambovsky* and avoided in *Siddiq*: that of apprehending the image comes to the fore.

The images are not standardized in the reports. They are in black and white in the printed versions and on Lexis, and in colour on Westlaw, and dpi varies on different sites. This is already a hint that these are not deemed to be of great importance, which is compounded by the fact that the provenance of the images on the web is not provided. Both are manipulated pictures, juridically false truths, although their truth pertains only to their presence in the verdict – the *vera dictum* – that the Court hands down. The picture of the ostrich is of poor quality and the 'noble animal' appears dishevelled and has its head hidden, either by a slight hillock of sand, or by virtue of being buried. Is this perhaps a *vérité* shot of an ostrich that appears to have buried its head? Undecidable though this may be, the larger point is that, however poor in quality and enigmatic in provenance, the picture is of an ostrich, a flightless bird that has both psychoanalytic and legal significance and these are not what the Judge inserting them appears to have intended. The introduction of pictures into the legal text is the advent of visual pictorial matter, of image and affect into legal reason, as if it didn't matter.

The ostrich and the suit in a decision about the importance, the seriousness of precedent is indubitably weird, which is to say out of place and out of time, *unheimlich*, but more than that an ontological shift, a change in the substance of judging. The weird, according to Fisher, entails a sense of the wrongness of a juxtaposition, a montage of things that do not belong together and that generate a sense of perturbation, a surreal effect. Part of that, from a matterphorical perspective is that we are not used either to images in judgements or to seeing satirically posed bodies installed in legal texts. Legally the ostrich has a history and meaning, being used in juridical emblems as a sign of justice because the flightless wings are of equal length. In other emblems the connotations are of delusions of power and occasions of injustice. These can be dealt with elsewhere and are hardly immediately relevant. The corporeality, however, has intriguing sexual implications, the long neck of the ostrich plunged into the ground is oneircally a detumescent penis, an

impotent masculinity, a bird that cannot fly compounded by a neck that in Freud's terms falls to the ground as opposed to rising into the air. Juxtaposed with the brown-suited individual there is a weird and not so implicit sexual connotation to the positioning of a headless non-person with their posterior offered unseeing to the world. It is in many senses a depersonalization which apprehended *ad apparentiam*, as an apparition and according to appearances, portrays not only an unfamiliar materiality to the decision but also a weird lust expressive most likely of a desire for domination. One might paraphrase Lacan here and say that if a layperson who thinks they are a judge is mad, a Judge who thinks he is a Judge is no less so. Both are fictions and share a structure of performative weirdness.

The final feature of the inserted pictures is paradoxically self-negating. The kneeling figure has possible religious connotations, but most directly the image of the suited figure is one in which the *imago* is hidden. Matterphorically the purported portrayal of the lawyer depicts the absence of any juridical *persona* precisely because the face, the identificatory feature of the subject, is missing. The picture negates the image as a juridical presence or reason, it is not what it seems. The advent and advenience of the novel visual mode of legal reasoning remain enigmatic, opaque, and strangely occlusive for an ocular form. What needs to be practiced is a performative relation to the imagery in judgements, a mobilization of the image in its historical context, with its archive of visual references, in its perpetually moving and changing orchestration as it appears.

The introduction of the image into the express process of determination, and here the reasoning of the judgement is, as Bottici argues in relation to the political, a qualitative change, meaning the introduction of a different network, an alternate relay and transmission of juristic power, and a mediatization of legal decisions which increasingly turns cases into events. The law in this logic is becoming a spectacle and the event of this spectacularity overdetermines the reasoning of the decision, not least by expressing judicial affect, and opening the body of the text to the image of its origin, its invention of desire. The Judge manifests his affect and to use the Freudian idiom he starts thinking – as in dreams – in images. These necessarily say more than is consciously intended, not least because the Judge is taking the image from elsewhere on the internet. He manifests his affect through purloined pictures that carry their history, context, and baggage of meanings and desires. Another weird example can elaborate the point, which is as Ovid puts it, *plus est quam quod videatur imago* – the image is always more than it appears to be (figure 4.8). Its surface spreads and folds, *recto* and *verso*, and if it is to be perceived in its vitality and virtuality it needs to be opened, alive.

In *HouseCanary v. Quicken Loans*, a case concerning home appraisals, mortgages, lending, and trade secrets, the Judge is irked by the atrabilious and at times vituperatively antagonistic character of the litigant lawyers' tactics.[17]

Discourage litigation.   Persuade your neighbors to
compromise whenever you can. Point out to them how
the nominal winner is often a real loser–in fees,
expenses, and waste of time. As a peacemaker the
lawyer has a superior opportunity of being a good man.
There will still be business enough.

Abraham Lincoln

Figure 4.8   *HouseCanary, Inc. v. Quicken Loans, Inc.* **Civil Action No. SA-18-CV-0519-FB (2018).**

He inserts several images into a short judgement, from which I reproduce the
last picture, an unremarked image of Abraham Lincoln which appears in an
appendix. Interestingly, the only image that appears in the text of the judgement
is a map, the other images appear in footnotes and this one in an appendix.
The imagery is almost typographically subconscious, buried, scarcely emer-
gent, and not quite recognized. Again, the requisite concept is the weird and
somewhat surreal placement and role of the image at the end of the judgement.
The text below indicates one possible interpretation, mediate don't litigate, be
a peacemaker, persuade, be 'a good man'. All of which seems anodyne and
inaccurate when Lincoln is most directly the symbol of the civil war, the fight
to end slavery, the warring advocate of a just cause, who was himself assas-
sinated. The appendix image, the last fold of the text suggests a judicial if not
judicious uneasiness with the pictorial, an uncertainty as to its place and rela-
tion to the text, an imaginal doubt. The image is again on its face surplusage
but it is there, an installation in the judgement, and a dramatic shift in medium.

The photo-portrait is most obviously a sign of lineage and legitimacy, a mark of nationalism and an assertion of the higher authority of the Judge who also sits *ex cathedra*, pontifically and in the exercise of a greater cause.

I have selected two marginal images as clues to the juridical imaginal as represented most directly in their use of plans, maps, and pictures, a slow gradation towards explicitly visual figures. The timorous trajectory of the Judges towards the imaginal suggests a sense that images are illicit and in the older language of law, idolatrous, and should be folded back into words. What is flagrantly missing is a sense of the difference of the pictorial medium, of what requires viewing and not simply reading, of how opening to vision is distinct from linear scanning of a text. The qualitative difference of the imaginal lies precisely in what cannot be said or cannot only be said. The image is a symptom of affect and when visual figures emerge in judgements, they both express and elicit emotions and engage sensibilities that are often dormant in purportedly rational textual relays. Such is only part of the point and does not genuinely differentiate the imagistic because there is as yet no apprehension of the performative and theatrical quality of the event constituted by the change in medium. The body apprehends the image as an affective sensory encounter, staged in the environment of image relays, attached to the rhizomes, pathways, lateral apperceptions, and oneiric memories that such a medium brings. The imaginal arrives as image clusters, as dense and enigmatic, its references less obvious, its reasons less known, its carriage of affect and influence less easily drawn.

The import of the imaginal in law can be thought in Agamben's terms of liturgical effects (Agamben, 2013, 37–8). The office of the image is that of opening and disseminating the interior of the office. The traditional mode of investiture was *apertio oris*, an opening of the mouth that mimics the dogmatic sense of the rite of unveiling, of opening images to view, drawing back the shutters, opening a door, curtain or scrim was termed *aperire imagines* and both occasioned and made viewing possible. Returning to Barthes and the picture of the ostrich, words, language, discourse prevent us from seeing. The intimate cessation of all mental activity is necessary for the body to open to an image, the suspension of chatter, and even law's chatter of stones has to quiet for an opening to vision to be possible. Whether pictorial or plastic, solid or virtual the legal *vis et potestatem* of the visual, the apperception of image apprehension requires a different methodology, a distinct lexicon, a separate archive. As the matter of legal relay changes the office that the image opens is that of a legal aesthetics, an aptitude for perceiving the imagistic origin of rule and judgement, an ability to stare at the navel of law.

To end with the beginning, the philosopher's navel gains a reprise in the last chapter of *Imaginal Law* in a naval image. Not *stultifera navis* as a comment on the rabble of lawyers, but rather the galleon that should be turned heterotopically into a ship of the free and the equal. The naval carries

the navel 'in search of different images . . . and different regimes of truth' (Bottici 2014, 188). The juridico-political quest, however, is less exterior than interior, a matterphorical odyssey that turns inward to quiet the body and open to viewing. The office of images – *officium imaginum* – is now a key component of professional practice and requires critical theatrics for which project Chiara has provided a base, a navel from which to begin. To engage in that adventure, as my cases briefly indicate, it is necessary to open up to the image as other than text, an actual or floating figure, ghost or angel, a shared intellection, a mobile zone of transmission. The fear of the image as irrational might also benefit from a sense of the possibility of play, the ludic character of law as an irenic theatre may in time be what matters most.

NOTES

1. See further Didi-Huberman (2018, 3–5).
2. On the inheritance of the corpus mysticum by the body of the people, the flesh of commonality, see Santner (2011).
3. This view is found in *Digest* 6.1.23.3 (Paulus); a similar view is given, for instance, in the anonymous *Lectura* at 2.1.34, printed in de Zulueta and Stein (1990).
4. This maxim is from the dialogue *Altercatio Hadriani Imperatoris et Plinii Secundus*, reprinted in Alciatus (1651).
5. On the image as the medium of sensible life, see also Coccia (2016).
6. This descent into low cathartic impact and consequent shark aesthetic is well elaborated in Pedullà (2012).
7. *Jeffrey Stambovsky v. Helen Ackley* 169 A.D.2d 254.
8. *Hamlet*, Act 1, scene 5.
9. *M. Siddiq v. Mahant Suresh Das & Ors* (2019) Civil Appeal Nos 10866–10867 of 2010. It is intriguingly the empty seat of the divinity, shri ram lalla virajmaan, the throne, virajmaan, of Ram that sues.
10. On the archaeological evidence, see Varma and Menon (2010).
11. *Pramatha Nath Mullick v. Pradyumna Kumar Mullick & Another* (1925) LR IA 245. In *Ram Jankijee Deities v. State of Bihar* [1999] INSC 196: "a Deity being consecrated by performance of appropriate ceremonies having a visible image and residing in its abode is to be treated as a judicial person". 245
12. *Siddiq* at paragraph 140.
13. Siddiq at paragraph 141.
14. *Sri Sabhanayagar Temple, Chidambaram v. State of Tamil Nadu* (2009) 4 CTC 801.
15. *Siddiq* at 215.
16. *Gonzalez-Servin v. Ford Motor Co* 662 F.3d 931, at 934.
17. *HouseCanary, Inc. v. Quicken Loans, Inc*. Civil Action No. SA-18-CV-0519-FB (2018).

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Bottici to the Letter

Jamieson Webster, psychoanalyst, New York

LACAN AND IMAGINAL POLITICS

What does the imaginal, as Bottici defines it, have to do with psychoanalysis? Bottici, in her important book *Imaginal Politics* – which is the focus of this collection of chapters – tends to lean on Jung and Castoriadis who place an emphasis on images and imagination in the unconscious, while Lacan becomes the villain in the story of images, especially in his influence on twentieth- and twenty-first-century political philosophy critical of spectacle, tying ideology to images and Lacan's theory of the imaginary. In Lacan's theory of the imaginary (part of the three registers with the symbolic and the Real) he likens images to the realm of the ego, its fictional assemblage, its use of the image as an image of the unified self, and so the very source of alienation. As Bottici notes, images in the imaginary as Lacan uses it are not a possession of the human, but rather something that possesses us. The hallmark of the mirror stage is misrecognition, taking oneself for the external image that can be perceived, against the lived and conflictual experience of being in a body. In distinction to the imaginary, many like to think that it is all 'words, words, words' for Lacan as far as the symbolic is concerned; and it is only the relation to language that challenges the psyche's misguided penchant for images or imagos.

But this is only one way of reading Lacan. I would like to reverse this mythical depiction of Lacan that rests on a facile understanding of his registers without taking into account the specifically psychoanalytic understanding of what comprises the symbolic following his integration of Levi-Strauss with Freud in order to speak about clinical phenomena. In fact, so much of Lacan's account of the symbolic is stretched between phonemes, images, signifiers, sounds, and letters, as a network or field that accounts for the production of

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meaning, but is not meaning itself, which is more imaginary than symbolic. It is not images per se that define the imaginary, as much as it is perceptual unity – the gestalt – which includes or is included in the mechanics of under-standing, recognition, identity, and identification. As psychoanalysts, we are attentive less to the image versus the word, and more to the way that images and words are being used: for a word can be used in an imaginary fashion as much as an image can be deployed symbolically or even function as an avatar of the Real.

Thus, what counts is neither images nor words in themselves but their place within a structure, or how their use denotes a particular structural configura-tion. For Lacan, insofar as the symbolic undercuts imaginary mechanisms, he is most attentive to bits and scraps of language, sound-images, replete with enjoyment and life, as they appear suddenly in an analysand's discourse. He says this is language and images in a 'characteristic state of anarchy in the human order' (anarchy being a term dear to Bottici's political vision). He continues,

> these images [which make up verbal beings] are present in the human economy in a disconnected way, with an apparent freedom between them which makes possible all kinds of coalescences and displacements, the juggling that we see at the origin of so many manifestations that make for the richness and hetero-geneity of the human world in relation to biological reality. (Lacan 2017, 104)

What is important to Bottici is the ontological ground of the imaginal as a realm before the division between the real and fictitious, a division that accompanies the modern conception of the subject as a monad, antagonistic, and separate from social reality. The freedom of images and their heteroge-neous richness, especially in this seminar where Lacan is seeking to ground what he calls the formations of the unconscious – meaning the symbolic foundation of dreams, jokes, slips – follows Bottici's originary imaginal matrix which is neither a faculty of the individual, nor is it part of the world independent of the subject.

Thus, the imaginary, as fictitious, fantastical, and fake, belongs to the ego, the fiction of the individual, not the unconscious, which, for Lacan, is transindividual. The ego is an illusion and the organ of illusion. This distinction between the ego – which for Lacan is constituted, against the unconscious which is the constituting agency – was critical to an attack on ego-psychology and their notion of the need for a strong ego seen as the root of the autonomous subject – especially as a subject independent from the unconscious and the drive. For Lacan, this was a complete misreading of Freud. It is my contention that if Bottici had turned her attention to Lacan's notion of the symbolic and his critique of the ego, she would have found a fellow

traveller who would echo more forcefully her political claims and her literary inspiration. Her concern for the passage from imagination to imaginary, like reason to rationality, is precisely the story of imaginary alienation that works to repress symbolic functions, disguising the transindividual and historic ontological ground of the subject, composed of images, myths, and all that accounts for the poetic power of language, meaning not just words, but what exceeds them, yet is nonetheless symbolic in nature.

THE LETTER AS IMAGINAL

Let us not simply take me at my word. I would like to make a diversion through Lacan's paper, 'Instance of the Letter in the Unconscious, or Reason Since Freud', to demonstrate how steeped the symbolic and the unconscious are in images and the imaginal. Perhaps no other paper better demonstrates the relation between the letter and the imaginal in the structure of the unconscious and what Lacan sees in it, as Freud's attack on reason. Of the title, Lacan writes: 'My title conveys the fact that, beyond this speech, it is the whole structure of language that psychoanalytic experience discovers in the unconscious' (Lacan 2006, 413). This, he says, is aimed at those who think the unconscious is the site of instincts, as opposed to a well-organized system structured *like* a language. The *like* is a very important and often forgotten qualifier – the unconscious is like a language, not a language, or not JUST language, but like the structure of language, which includes many aspects which Lacan will seek to elaborate. This is one reason why Sassurian linguistics is crucial to this text – especially how his understanding rests on the radical separation of the signifier from the signified, which is the figure or algorithm that Lacan plays with throughout this chapter – S(ignifier)/s(ignified).

How do we understand the appearance of this term 'letter' in the title of this chapter? Lacan writes, 'By 'letter' I designate the material medium [*support*] that concrete discourse borrows from language' (ibid.). Linking language and letter, Lacan refers to the entire closed differential system of language composed of letters, phonemes, traces, and signifiers that, as Saussure showed, exists independently of the signified. Furthermore, the letter is not the signifier insofar as the letter is the link between speech and language, an element that insists inside of discourse. This is why the word 'instance' in the title is important, implying the instantiation of the letter and the laws according to which a signifier operates, the insistence of the letter or how certain elements within language can assert themselves beyond any conscious control, and also, the instant of the letter, meaning the moment in which the letter appears in a discourse and the chance character of unconscious determination, or, even in the listening of the analyst.

It is this material aspect of language (literal traces or written marks, images, sounds, combinations of sounds, words broken into pieces and rearranged, as well as the fact that these letters are *spaced*, placed at different positions, that language is a virtual space with its proper, non-intuitive dimensions) that supports discourse and is used by discourse. Signifiers only refer to other signifiers and need not refer to any signified. Signifiers are posited and positioned: 'the signifier doesn't need to justify its existence in terms of any signification whatsoever' (Lacan 2006, 416). Otherwise, we are caught in the heresy, or rather strange tautology, of searching for 'the meaning of meaning' which logical positivism seeks, as do most neurotics for that matter.

Importantly, this system of language (the Other), which knows no limit, being without limitation, predates each one of us, and we must enter into it at a certain moment of human development – something Lacan likened to a trauma. Psychoanalysis discovers the effects of this entry in every person who enters into a psychoanalysis, which is why Lacan likened analysis to reading a patient's discourse to the letter – in other words, listening to their unconscious. Lacan is quick to link the trauma of language to the trauma of sexuality, substituting an original (and wrong) diagram that attempts to create a direct link between a signifier and a signified through the word *arbre* [tree] and a picture of a generic tree, with images of bathroom doors with the words Ladies and Gentleman (see Figures 5.1 and 5.2).

He writes, in his quite ironic tone, 'the point is not merely to silence the nominalist debate with a low blow, but to show how the signifier in fact enters the signified – namely, in a form which, since it is not immaterial, raises the question of its place in reality' (E, 417). He then goes on to talk about a brother and sister who are on a train seated across one another and arrive in a country whose language they do not understand. ''Look,' says the brother, 'we're at Ladies!' 'Imbecile!' replied his sister, 'Don't you see we're at Gentleman''

Figure 5.1 Arbre.

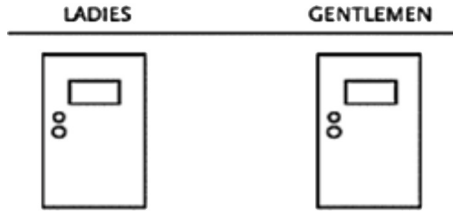LADIES   GENTLEMEN

Figure 5.2   Toilet Signs, Inspired by Lacan (E, 417).

(ibid.). The images of the bathroom doors, the attempt to signify a conundrum – which one of these is us – overflows the words used (see Figure 5.2).

No signification is complete as the diagram of the tree would purport. What nominalist thinking seems to underestimate is, precisely, the *barre* [bar], or the resistance inherent to signification. Furthermore, the *barre* is fitting for Lacan given that it is an anagram of a tree in French – *arbre*. Again, Lacan is introducing us to the material dimension of speech at the level of the letter, something that exceeds, or insists within, his discourse on language: 'whence we can say that it is in the chain of the signifier that meaning insists, but that none of the chain's elements consists in the signification it can provide at that very moment' (E, 419). This point cannot be more important for the psychoanalyst who reads what insists and cannot get taken up in any kind of consistency, especially with respect to meaning. The analyst's words play with this insistent inconsistency in language, making oracular statements, pointing to equivalences or gaps in a patient's discourse, breaking words apart to form new meanings, and changing the punctuation of a sentence. Lacan also calls this inconsistency the sliding of the signified beneath the signifier: a 'twofold flood in which the landmarks – fine streaks of rain traced by vertical dotted lines that supposedly delimit corresponding segments – seem insubstantial [see section on Seminar 18 for more on floods and rain]' (Lacan 2006, 419). The symbolic is a twofold flood – an image which I think describes Bottici's use of the imaginal as attacking from both directions the individual and reality.

The next passage in Lacan's text is extraordinary for what he does with the 'letters' he has deployed up until now, namely, tree, bar, ladies, and gentleman. He aims to show how the word *arbre* [tree] crosses the Saussurian *barre* [bar] as a letter into reality. Lacan begins: 'For broken down into the double spectre of its vowels [*a,e*] and consonants [*b,r*], it calls up – with the *robre* [robur-oak] and the *plantane* [plane tree] – the significations of strength and majesty that it takes on in our flora' (Lacan 2006, 420). Breaking the words down into its actual letters and their sounds, Lacan brings up two more trees, which denotes not only that there is no one tree, but many trees, but also that the image of a tree carries all kinds of significations, especially of strength

and majesty, linking the tree not to flora but to humans. No doubt the famous passage from Aristotle on cause (something Lacan refers to in his article 'Science and truth') regarding actuality and potentiality as illustrated by the *telos* of the acorn into an oak tree is on Lacan's mind. As well, the plane tree was important in the Phaedrus (Platanos or Plane Tree synonymous with Plato) where Socrates swears an oath to the tree to continue to speak or not, as Phaedrus wishes, until his moment of his death. Thus, an ancient argument between philosophers is manifested by this symbolic image of the tree – is man's *telos* the fullness of the tree or its fall?

Lacan continues: 'Tapping all the symbolic contexts in which it is used in the Hebrew of the Bible, it erects on a barren hill the shadow of the cross' (ibid.). The tree becomes the cross that denotes Christianity or the presence of Christians – this transformation from the more nature-bound paganism. But the cross is also the new figure on the hill, this time man-made from the wood of a tree. One has to imagine the image of the tree on the hill, the Christian cross on the steeple of the church. Lacan is not only demonstrating the crossing of the *barre* [bar], but also he makes the tree into a cross – materially, figuratively, and symbolically. 'Next it is reduced to a capital Y, the sign of dichotomy – which, without the illustration that historiates armorials, would owe nothing to the tree, however genealogical it claims to be' (ibid.). The † becomes a Y, which is also an image of the tree. Y is the sign of dichotomy, of branching division in mathematics, of crossroads (prominent in Oedipus Rex), while also bringing us back to ladies and gentlemen with the difference between the X and Y chromosome. Furthermore, Lacan is making a subtle reference to medieval texts where letters would be ornamented, sometimes even contain pictures, and would mark textual division, as well as heraldry where the coat of arms was often divided into three parts, as the letter Y divides space and denotes one's ancestry. This armorial gives one's genealogy – the family tree – something that religion, sex, and DNA also purport to do. Where do you belong? What signifies to you where you belong? Are you born from one or from two? Are you sovereign or do you belong to and with others?

We move from the signifier tree to many signifiers of tree, the link between man and tree, since we are, after all, talking about words and other elements of language here and not the thing itself. This is the anarchic and yet historical structure of language. From man the majestic tree we move to religion, to ancestry, to mathematics, to division, and then to sex, sexed bodies, and the division of cells, DNA. Thus, we go from the word to the body via the letter. Lacan continues:

> Circulatory tree, arbor vitae of the cerebellum, lead tree, or silver amalgam [*arbre de Diane*], crystals precipitated into a tree that conducts lightning, is it

your countenance that traces our destiny for us in the fire-scorched tortoiseshell, or your flash that brings forth an infinite night that slow change in being in the πάντα of language:

> No! says the Tree, it says No! in the scintillating
> Of its superb head

Versus that I consider to be as legitimately heard in the harmonics of the tree as their reverse:

> Which the storm treats universally
> As it does a blade of grass (ibid.).

Not only are we now picturing the circulatory system, the branching of our veins, but also the nervous system and the firing of brain cells, like Freud's early diagrams from *The Project for a Scientific Psychology* showing a chain-like structure of interconnected Ys or trees as a model for neurons. Lacan jumps from biology to chemistry and philosophy via the Tree of Diane, the crystallizing of silver into tree-like structures that were also called the philosopher's tree in alchemical attempts to turn ordinary metals into the more precious silver and gold. Lacan is no doubt making fun of these early attempts at science, while also playing on the fact that these pseudoscientific efforts nevertheless underpin modern science. Science needs images.

By the end of this passage, we meet Heraclitus, where the slow path of the tortoise, and the flash of a lightning-like destiny, are but two moments in the 'One' of language, which could be thought of as its flow, its infinite metonymy, its Spinozist ground. We have now gone from the word to the body back to the word. Lacan ends this metonymy of trees with Valery's poem 'Plane Tree' where the No! of the tree brings us back to the bar, and through poetics we can return from this trip through human history back to nature. Whatever we might say, whatever NO! we utter, we do so vainly, for the storms treats us the same as a tree or a blade of grass. This of course is already present in poetic form, where this contrast – its 'scintillating' instance – is found in the condensation of *tête* [head] and *tempête* [storm], no less than the rhyme, *superb* [superb] and *herb* [blade of grass]. Valery's poem is also a beautiful and ironic take on the poet's attempts to appropriate nature as a symbol, either of man or something more metaphysical, where, by the end of the poem, the tree itself speaks and says – No! The tree resists man's attempts to speak for it, as much as the tree itself resists the storm: the *barre* of the *arbre*.

If it isn't the storms, it is storms in our head. The storm, at least as Lacan renders it here, is the letter, the imaginal – the twofold flood that makes any human landmark seem insubstantial. However, slow this process, all will be changed over time, even as the traces of history will be sedimented into the signifier, there to be read to the letter. If we thought that the relation between the word tree and the tree in the world was easy, simply a nominative, Lacan

has shown us the radical sliding of the signifier, traces of words, ideas, images, and the way that the letter crosses the bar into reality – not to denote a tree, but to give us its singular history: 'this is a function of speech that is more worthy of being pointed out than that of disguising the subject's thought (which is usually indefinably) – namely, the function of indicating the place of this subject in the search for truth' (Lacan 2006, 421).

Lacan ends this section extolling the letter in relation to Freud whose flames, he says, are spreading all around us; no doubt about to burn down the forest Lacan has led us deep into so that we cannot hear the great tree that is about to fall, namely, this work's subtitle, or supplementary title, 'Reason Since Freud':

> Of course, as it is said, the letter kills while the spirit gives life. I don't disagree having had to pay homage somewhere here to a noble victim of the error of seeking in the letter, but I also ask how the spirit could live without the letter. The spirit's pretensions would nevertheless remain indisputable if the letter hadn't proven that it produces all its truth effect in man without the spirit's having to intervene at all. This revelation came to Freud, and he called his discovery the unconscious. (Lacan 2006, 423–24)

Nothing of what takes place via language, via the letter, happens through the intervention of spirit, or indeed, of reason. It happens all on its own, which is what language, the structure or system of language, does. Freud discovered this automaticity, and he called it – the unconscious. What is imaginal in the unconscious is anarchic, subverting any vision of reason since Freud.

LEVIATHAN

The unconscious, structured like a language, is sovereign – not man. Lacan will even go so far as to say that the joke, as Freud characterizes it – that is, the only joke is one that I recognize as a joke and yet I need the other – demonstrates this sovereign conditional. The Other, as the locus of signifiers, is associated with a kind of power or sovereignty, given its independence in relation to human consciousness and 'reality' and the dependence of subjectivity on its action. The signifier represents the subject (for another signifier) and the subject depends upon this power of representation. If there is a real unity in Lacan, it is here, in the symbolic, but only as the perception that language has a place, whereas the symbolic is always incomplete, always becoming, in flux. Is it any wonder that Hobbes's Leviathan figures so prominently in Bottici's work, bringing into focus the question of sovereign power and the artificiality of representational forms of government. Thus, she says, politics doesn't emancipate itself from

the imaginal, it comes to rely on it more and more. What then is the relation between the imaginal and representative forms of governance?

The image that Hobbes uses as his front piece depicts the sovereign 'wearing the persons of its citizen as if they were just the innumerable scales of its armor' (Bottici, 95) demonstrating the unity of a political body by the represented and their representative, before which they are said not to exist. Bottici names this imaginal because while it is a fiction, it has real effects, like demarcating a territory on a map in reality has political power. Politics thus relies on images for its instantiation. While much of this characterization might sound 'imaginary', especially the will towards unity, thinking the imaginal via Lacan as more symbolic than imaginary, it only approximates a unity, is a fiction of unity. This is ultimately Bottici's point when she speaks about the need for the imaginal to lend legitimacy to what is essentially an artificial structure based on political violence and a rather heterogeneous world and people. Bottici wants the imaginal, however, to not simply be this kind of cover story but also a source of potential creation.

Moreover, if one studies the image from the Leviathan dear to Bottici's work, it bears an uncanny proximity to many of signifiers that Lacan unravels in his chapter on the letter, from the appearance of the tree or cross or king on the hill, to the armorial, heraldry, names, ancestry, lightning, and crossroads (dividing the city like an Oedipal curse), to scenes of violence and speech, and even the appearance of the repeated letters or figures, X and Y. What we saw was important for Lacan was that these signifiers amount to a basic existential, even neurotic, question that requires a kind of mythic, fictional construction: who do I belong to? Am I autochthonous or born from others? If from others, am I born from the same, or born from different? It is, of course, a question for psychoanalysts about sexual differences and sexual relations. To quote Levi-Strauss in 'The Structural Study of Myth':

> Turning back to the Oedipus myth, we may now see what it means. The myth has to do with the inability, for a culture which holds the belief that mankind is autochthonous (see, for instance, Pausanias, VIII, xxix, 4: vegetals provide a model for humans), to find a satisfactory transition between this theory and the knowledge that human beings are actually born from the union of man and woman. Although the problem obviously cannot be solved, the Oedipus myth provides a kind of logical tool which, to phrase it coarsely, replaces the original problem: born from one or born from two? born from different or born from same? By a correlation of this type, the overrating of blood relations is to the underrating of blood relations as the attempt to escape autochthony is to the impossibility to succeed in it. Although experience contradicts theory, social life verifies the cosmology by its similarity of structure. Hence cosmology is true. (Levi-Strauss 1955, 440)

For Levi-Strauss, we have difficulty acknowledging differences, sexual and otherwise, and we must speak to this truth via myth. The myth indicates what contradicts a theory of autochthony, and attempts to speak not only of human hubris, but also of the logic of human relationships. What we can see then in the image of Leviathan is an answer to this question: you are born my citizen. I rise up before you, your king, your representative, and I collect you into my body, as my body. The king is father and mother both, in the image of a motherland with divine right. But this is quite the magic trick, as Bottici notes.

What matters in the presentation of this image (which, it should not be forgotten, is also accompanied by a book) isn't the closing down of the question, nor the presentation of a possible identification with the image of sovereign unity – especially one that denotes simply, man or god – but in fact all of the images and words, the history and genealogy, the act of speech, the act itself, the differences and contradictions embedded in history that the image tries to unify. Even if there is an attempt to tell one story, this story will be inscribed, uniquely, by each person. What is sovereign isn't the sovereign, nor even the story or image, but rather the symbolic field, which means that it can and will be taken up by each person and is not merely the tool to be used for the will of the state. This is an important distinction in Lacan for words and the symbolic are not our tool to use, rather they use us, inhabit us, which is a force of resistance, a *barre* or No, to be respected, since because of it, we cannot be completely dominated from the outside, nor can we completely colonize reality.

This is the anarchic function of the image that Lacan alludes to, and which was the only place he put his hopes for emancipation, namely, that one can find oneself *there*, a version of Freud's *Wo es War*, in relation to the unconscious. If, for Bottici, the imaginal is both poison and medicine in contemporary politics, this is less in Lacan about the imaginary (which is certainly a necessary poison in human development) but rather about the trauma of the symbolic and the creation of the unconscious. Images are images for Lacan. Even animals traffic in them. They function as a kind of lure, a way of registering friend or foe, and even have a biological causal function, like in relation to the maturation of sexual organs in some species. A baby, for example, needs an image of its totality in order to organize proprioception and a rather premature neurological system. The image, as she points out, is a double-edged sword.

Certainly, the human is then susceptible to the power of the images throughout its life, but psychoanalysis focuses not on this, but the question of the unique and traumatic effects of the symbolic in the human subject. This is where psychoanalytic investigation and even psychoanalytic cure becomes viable. The unconscious for Freud is this symbolic network and not the images or imagoes that divert us from it. The symbolic predates every human.

We are born into it and have to accommodate it, meaning the symbolic has a power we have to form a relation to, less we fall into sickness or mere group psychology. The church and army for Freud use the mechanism of identification as a fixation point that attempts to quell an unruly and open symbolic wound – a kind of binding or suturing. This is why one has to be neurotic – or sick – to know the truth.

Freud could say something as strikingly general as, to ask about the meaning of life is already to be neurotic, because this opening of the subject to a symbolic dimension is traumatic insofar as one has to read their own history, position their own subjectivity, without any guarantee, certainty, or end. This is the tension I see in the image of Leviathan, not simply the absorption of the citizen into the sovereign as a representative static entity, but the attempt to illustrate the vast plethora of signs and images that make for history which we *wish* could become one. Otherwise, why have so many images, so many signifiers? The Leviathan is not an image of a concrete icon. Not to mention the fact that in order to explain the nature of representative power we do not only need a 'ridiculous spectacle', as Bottici calls it, but also we need endless words, words, words, to bring this power into existence. But, far be it for me, a psychoanalyst, to read the presence of a wish into such an image. Funny what we can talk ourselves into.

SICK

To conclude, I would like to traffic in the fact that I'm not only a friend and colleague of Bottici, not only a reader of her academic work, but also a psychoanalyst, and thus in a unique position to read the other side of her body of work, namely, her myths or fictional, poetic, writing. It is important to note that Bottici wants her two kinds of work to exist together, equal to one another, following her logic of the imaginal where fictional production and scholarship are united by myth-making. Bottici's *Imaginal Politics* is a call for the writing of new myths. But can myths really be new? Isn't it always new wine in old barrels? What can we learn about Bottici from the fictional side of her thinking? And what does it have to do with imaginal politics? Let us read Bottici to the letter. Certainly, the question of bodies and images, language and myth, and unification and disjunction permeates her poetry and short stories.

Bottici has written a cycle of poems titled, 'Stabat Matter'. The mother is the matter, as is her suffering. In the first poem 'In Nomine Matris', or 'In the Name of the Mother', she gives us a collection of a mother's ailments that read like a list of side effects for a new to market drug:

breast cancer, liver cancer, colon cancer, chills, high fever, swelling of the
lower legs, continuing nervousness, cough, dizziness, fainting, fast heartbeat,
increased sweating, nausea, severe and sudden, unexplained shortness of breath,
severe and sudden, unexplained headache, slurred speech, sudden loss of coor-
dination, severe and sudden, unexplained weakness or numbness in the arms,
vaginal bleeding, vision changes, blurred vision, burning, crawling, itching,
numbness, prickling and tingling feelings, dilated neck veins, extreme fatigue,
increased need to urinate, irregular breathing, irregular heartbeat, irregular pain-
ful and difficult urination, sore throat, white spots on the lips, swollen glands,
unusual bleeding, weakness, joint pain, muscle pain, confusion, diarrhea, dry
mouth, metallic taste, skin rash, sleepiness, spinning sensation causing loss of
balance, vomiting, anxiety, forgetfulness, dry skin, hair loss, irritability, ner-
vousness, red, sore eyes – and a broken foot. (Unpublished)

While these are certainly names, if not a mass of words, they attempt to give
an image of a mother's body, to give body, to give materiality, to a mother's
suffering. As we know, the virgin mother is always suffering on behalf of a
son, a man, a god, a king, in the name of – which is usually 'the name of the
father'. His name impacts bodies, not just an act that secures the rights of men
or sons, but also sets its sights on women who must submit to his name like
they do to patriarchy more generally.

   But, hysterical sick bodies revolt. The name cannot contain the matter or
the mother; cannot unify her body via the symbolic. This body must be spo-
ken, which is what this poem does as a kind of image-sound, a prose poem,
that speaks the mother as much as it speaks about the mother. In the end, it
is not only Oedipus and his famous swollen foot that is synonymous with his
name, nor even his torn out, sore eyes – the consequence of having revisited
his mother's body as a man – it is, as Bottici reminds us, also the matter of
mothers. To whom do I belong? For Bottici, to begin, we must first belong to
the suffering body of the mother.

   In her next poem, titled, 'Filiae', or 'Daughter', we move from the mother's
body and her suffering, to her offspring, her daughters, and how the suffering
is shared between them, the intergenerational transmission of suffering:

in the name of the mother, my pious catholic mother, I get to her house, I am
happy, for the first time I am, and I feel like I can enjoy it, I can enjoy it without
sinking, everything is very light, walking to the beach, walking in the street, I
want to lick the whole path, instead of walking over it, so that I can retain its
taste in my mouth, my sister gets here, announces she has a new girlfriend, who
is going to leave her wife to be with her, and my mother fell down the stairs,
cries, starts saying my sister is ruining a family because she is going to leave
a husband, I tell her it is a WIFE, she cries even more, she say there are three

children in the family, I say it is a wife and there are no children, my mother herself, with her three children, but the foot is swollen, visibly broken, and I try to bring her to the hospital, she does not want to go, all she wants is that my father gives her a shot of pain-killer in her belly, I tell her you are supposed to do that kind of shot in your butt cheeks, she replies that my father does it better in the belly, what are those shots in the belly doing to her, but she spends a week like this, with a swollen foot, visibly broken, bringing my sister's daughter in her bed, because, so she says, she has no father, and my father, the only father in the house, is sent to sleep downstairs, and required to give her shots, shots in the belly, they must be painful those shots, and all of this until the friend from Sicily calls her, she calls and tells her the tarots say she should go to the hospital, and then she goes, she really goes to the hospital, and she comes back, with her foot in a cast, and now she is in bed, in bed with her foot in a cast, triple fracture, the foot, I look at her foot, a swollen foot, a swollen foot in a cast: this is what OEDIPUS means, the swollen foot. Which is now in a cast. In the name of the mother, the daughter, and the whole body. (Unpublished)

Oedipus's biological parents tried to commit infanticide which is what led to his swollen foot as the mark of the violence of parents who attempted to escape their fate of being occluded by the next generation. It is an undoing of a sexual act, of filiation.

Here, the mother both commits infanticide and is the offspring with the swollen foot – not as a victim of attempted murder, but the result of the attempt by a husband and children to save her, to make her suffer less, and her attempts to escape their actions. The mother is autochthonous. In this primal scene of a poem, everyone is impotent in the face of suffering; something penetrates the belly, things swell, but these are not any longer the sign that children are being produced, but the signifier of what destroys them. Make this whole body immobile. Cast it in stone and keep it from throwing itself down the stairs. Is there a way to break this unity of suffering? Must it break in reality? What can hold this body and all its suffering?

From stone, we move to spirit, in the last poem in the cycle, 'Et Corporis Sancti' or 'And the Holy Body'. In this poem, we move from the suffering body, the transmission of suffering between bodies, to the image. The image comes to envelope the body like clothing. In this poem, Bottici questions her alienation from her own body, the image or copy that she mistakes for the original, and how this has removed her from a sense of her own flesh, always too naked, and never naked enough. The poem asks about flesh and images:

flesh, I felt beautifully dressed, I wanted to wear those virtual images, I felt like I could wear them whenever I wanted, the image, the digital image, inexhaustible, inextinguishable, the copy that had become more authentic than the

original itself, you had brought life to it, to it and to me, but I felt naked when
you stopped sending images, naked, naked in my bare skin, but can anyone ever
be naked, naked, like the naked body, which is always and necessarily dressed,
always a portrait, there is nothing more caught in the image than the naked body,
image of itself, essence of bourgeois individualism, the naked body, the clas-
sical body, the sculpture, the painting, the bronze, there is no nakedness, there
is just being, being and not being, plenitude and lack, a being that is for itself,
flesh, fullness, and overabundance, and a being that is for an-other, a being in
others, and for others, to be looked at, with no smell, and no touch, and thus
no flesh, so perhaps you are right, my image is too intellectual, too cerebral,
an image caught in seeing itself from the outside, and we should try to make
an image from the inside, so the skin will leave its flatness and become flesh
again, flesh and tissue, flesh and meat, flesh and viscera, flesh and fruit, flesh
and taste, flesh and health, flesh and death, flesh and decay, flesh and living.
(Unpublished)

I would venture an interpretation here. This image, alienating though it may
be, is what saved Bottici from the suffering that is pure flesh. But rather than
think of the image as a mere image, I would like to think of it as more sym-
bolic than imaginary in the vein of Lacan that I have elucidated. This would
be to think of the image more as a letter rather than symbolic inheritance.
This symbolic inheritance. Before the letter, we have only an autochthonous
theory of origins, matter mater matter.

   The letter, something she shows in this poem as sent, 'I felt naked when
you stopped sending images', brings life and death: flesh and health, flesh
and death, flesh and decay, flesh and living. Before life and death, there is
only pure suffering, pure enjoyment, and transmission of suffering, which
the letter breaks. It makes you see yourself from the outside, because of an
image or letter that exists, finally, from the inside. To the extent that this is
also the question of impregnation, something placed inside, flesh injected
into flesh, we establish an image of a sexual relationship, and the image is
itself sexual, relational, not in reality, but as a fictional assemblage, a myth,
an inheritance.

   The letter, insofar as it is the birth of the unconscious, saves us from being
absorbed by the Other. To return to the final quote from 'The Instance of the
Letter':

Of course, as it is said, the letter kills while the spirit gives life. I don't disagree
having had to pay homage somewhere here to a noble victim of the error of
seeking in the letter, but I also ask how the spirit could live without the letter.
The spirit's pretensions would nevertheless remain indisputable if the letter
hadn't proven that it produces all its truth effect in man without the spirit's

having to intervene at all. This revelation came to Freud, and he called his discovery the unconscious. (Lacan 2006, 423–24)

The letter has no need of spirit to produce its effect, and it is flesh even when it arrives in the form of an image which awakens one from the slumber of suffering. It is certainly something that is exchanged, transmitted, and thus goes some way towards containing a body. Perhaps the biggest question for Bottici then is, what does this have to do with a Father or with the name? Well, the proof is in the pudding, as they say. Let me turn to one, final, short story, before concluding.

Chiara has a story titled 'The Dress of Ariane' that acts like a father myth, held in parallel to her mother poem. In this story, the main character meets her father who she has not seen for some time, and he takes her to the hospital, which is known as 'The Hospital of Awakenings'. He says he wants to take her to see 'sick people' who are 'sick of desire' and their treatment consists of injections of '*Bombyx mori*'. What is *Bombyx mori*? It is silkworms which the hospital has in barrels with mulberry leaves which the worms feed on. The father explains that the worms have an opposite life to that of humans, since they feed constantly only to be interrupted at the moment of transformation. This life of pure excess produces the silk thread and it is their silk thread that is injected into sick people to awaken them.

Bottici means 'little barrel', and I wouldn't be much of a Lacanian if I didn't search for her name in her own work. It is in this section of the story subtitled 'Thread' that is the one place that her name appears. Barrel, the containers for the *Bombyx mori*, that transforms and awakens the sick via silk. We are one signifier, one letter, between sickness and cure, a letter that also happens to be the one of the author's first name. The story ends with the following,

As word after word poured out of his mouth, I started to see a caterpillar spinning its silk in front of me. And while my father lectured on, I kept looking at this thread, so exotic and so familiar at the same time. As the filament came out, I tried to spin it around my finger, from the bottom to the top, as if I had made a spindle of my hand. And the more thread I wound up along my index finger, the stronger the sensation of warmth I derived from it. (Unpublished)

From the name to the word, we find the thread that is followed, both foreign and familiar, which provides a sensation of warmth. What gives Bottici a hand out of the maze here other than the symbolic, the literal letter? And with it she writes the story of her birth, born from two, mother and father, injection of *Bombyx mori*. This is not the story of the alienation of images, nor is it the overcoming of images. This is a story about the impact of the symbolic, a

primal scene written as the thread of her name, the transformation of a letter, the letter as an implanted excess, words that pour out like something that she can wind around her finger, control it, filament and filiation both. It is this which awakens her to another reality other than sickness. In any case, I was always going to be her psychoanalyst, her ultimate reader, because what is a Webster but a spinster, a weaver.

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Chapter 6

Traversing Lacan's Imaginary with Bottici's Imaginal

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Chiara Bottici's 'imaginal' engages psychoanalysis by combining the Jungian tradition (where the term 'imaginal' comes from) with the work of Cornelius Castoriadis, who argues that Freud gives prominence to fantasy and thus neglects the potential of the imagination. Bottici is aware of the existence of an unexplored domain within Freud's insights and adds that these might be found in Jacques Lacan's re-reading of the Freudian corpus, especially in Lacan's notion of the Imaginary. Despite hinting at that possibility, in *Imaginal Politics* she does not follow that path, and instead proceeds to elaborate her own theory of the 'imaginal'. In this contribution, I would like to take that unexplored path, and thus traverse Lacan's Imaginary with Bottici's 'imaginal'. The Imaginary order is one of three fundamental terms in the psychoanalytic theory of Lacan, along with the Symbolic and the Real. Each of the terms in this triad emerged gradually over time and underwent an evolution during the development of Lacan's thought. Even though these three terms are intertwined and their amalgamation produces what we call 'reality', for the purposes of my discussion here, I will approach the imaginary dimension separately.

The use of the term Imaginary appeared well before the so-called Rome Report (published as 'The Function and Field of Speech and Language in Psychoanalysis'), a text that is a veritable manifesto and marks a turning point in his doctrine. In this text, Lacan highlighted that the central motor of psychoanalysis is the signifier, foregrounding the symbolic nature of speech within psychoanalytic treatment. While after 1953 the Symbolic took precedence, the Imaginary was not far behind in terms of importance, since 'the entire analytic experience unfolds, at the joint of the imaginary and the

symbolic' (1978, 137). Twenty years later, Lacan summarized his evolution
by saying: 'I began with the Imaginary, I then had to chew on the story of the
Symbolic . . . and I finished by putting out for you this famous Real' (quoted
in Mellard, 2006, 49).

Thus, Lacan's work is often systematized as being organized in three
phases: the Imaginary (1936–1953), the Symbolic (1953–1963), and the Real
(1963–1981). During the first of these, Lacan tackled the primary narcis-
sism of the Freudian 'imago' in the psychical process of identity formation.
In the two decades that followed his delivery of 'The Mirror Stage' at the
17th International Psychoanalytic Association conference at Marienbad in
1936 – a paper Lacan presented before he was officially granted the title
of psychoanalyst and that was not read in its entirety because Ernest Jones
interrupted him minutes after he started speaking – Lacan's concept of the
Imaginary became fully articulated. This invention brought him great resis-
tance from other psychoanalysts both in terms of theory and technique. The
development of the imaginary remained fundamental for his theory, as it was
his 'entry into psychoanalysis', a sort of 'doorway' (Lacan 2006, 52) mark-
ing a path that he revised later in his career, in 1975, apropos of James Joyce.
With Joyce, Lacan discovered a new paradigm, a new relation to the body
and to the Imaginary – an Imaginary that does not fully hold fast and can fall
from oneself like a loose wrapping. As we will see, it is at this point that the
Imaginary turns into the 'imaginal'.

The pre-eminence of the Imaginary in Lacan's corpus is confirmed by
the fact that in his *Écrits* (Lacan, [1966] 2006), his three major texts on the
Imaginary ('The Mirror Stage as Formative of the *I* function as Revealed in
the Psychoanalytic Experience', 'Aggressiveness in Psychoanalysis', and
'Presentation on Psychical Causality') are presented in an early section of the
book preceded by the text titled 'On My Antecedents', as Diana Rabinovich
(1995) observes. Lacan arrived at psychoanalysis by way of the Imaginary,
and when he rethought psychoanalysis later in his career, he did so with the
Imaginary in mind.

Initially, the Imaginary order is located within the formation of the ego in
the 'mirror stage'. Lacan borrows from the experimental observations of the
French psychologist Henri Wallon about children's jubilatory recognition
of their image in the mirror and extrapolates these findings onto a theory of
ego formation as a dialectical progression in which the child identifies with
their image, a moment of illusory mastery over the body that is punctu-
ated by laughter. Lacan uses the category of the Imaginary as an attack on
ego-psychology. Since the ego is formed in alienation, that is, as an other,
by identifying with the counterpart or specular image, 'identification' is an
important aspect of the Imaginary that is also social and individual, where
one realizes, 'I am an other'. The ego is thus both social and individual

at the same time, a site of unstable harmony concealing a fundamental fragmentation.

For Freud, 'The ego' is not there from the start but has to come into being and, as he states in *The Ego and the Id*, it 'is first and foremost a bodily ego' (1923b, XIX, 26). This striking phrase that links the body to the ego does not recur in Freud's writings. For Lacan, the body emerges in a crucial moment of ego formation as the identification with an image that is *morcelé*, in pieces, shattered, since the driving force behind the creation of the ego as mirror image is the child's experience of a fragmented body that finds an appeasing, anticipatory reality in the image. The fragmented body is a feature that Melanie Klein explores in her work on the fantasies of the 'paranoid-schizoid position' of the infant's development, a split mental stage that establishes itself for life. Similarly, by the early 1950s, Lacan no longer considered the mirror stage as an evolutionary stage the infant traverses, but instead as representing a permanent structure of subjectivity: the paradigm of the Imaginary. Let us look at an example of the primacy of the Imaginary:

> The child is mesmerized. Tapping his toes and shuffling his small sandaled feet in a kind of awkward dance, he swirls and twirls, not in front of the camera, but in front of a window in the shiny black oven door. It's just the right height for a two-year-old. Wyatt is bare chested and wears a floppy hat on the back of his head. A string of colorful Mardi Gras beads swings around his neck. But what has really caught his attention, what has made this moment magical, are the shimmering sequins of his pink tutu. With every twist and turn, slivers of light briefly illuminate the face of the little boy entranced by his own image. (Ellis Nutt, 2015, xv)

Thus opens Amy Ellis Nutt's narrative *Becoming Nicole: The inspiring story of transgender actor-activist Nicole Maines and her extraordinary family* – an identical twin, 'mother whose instincts told her that her child needed love and acceptance; not ostracism and disapproval; . . . a Republican, Air Force veteran father who overcame his deepest fears to become a vocal advocate for trans rights. . . . Ultimately *Becoming Nicole* is the story of an extraordinary girl who fought for the right to be herself'. Nutt's book offers an intimate portrait of an all-American family navigating their child's gender transition. This is a transformation in which the captivating power of the image plays a crucial role, both for the kid who becomes Nicole and for the father who loves to record home videos of the first years of the lives of his twin children, as captured in the book's opening scene: 'This is one of Wyatt's favorite pastimes – dancing in front of the window of the stove' (xv) says the child's father who is behind the video camera. He asks his son to show him some muscles, but Wyatt ignores the request, mesmerized by his own reflection, lets out a

'small squeal of delight' not paying attention to his father who insists with the prompt 'Show me your muscles. Wy. Can I see your muscles?' (xvi). The toddler looks out of the camera range and turns back to the oven window, and with his back to the camera, strikes a halfhearted pose. With his fists propped under his chin, he flexes his non-existent muscles, never breaking the spell of his reflection. He is not giving his father what he wants, and the child grows frustrated at the repeated request 'Show Daddy your muscles' (xvi). 'With a look of part defiance, part apology' the little boy turns back to look at his own reflection on the oven's window and the father clicks the camera off.

From the very beginning of life, even before birth (as in an ultrasound image) we are defined by our bodies, and our bodies are formed by the bodies of others. Hence the emphasis on the 'imaginal', defined as the field populated by images as (re)presentation, that is, by images that are also presences, and that therefore also escape the simple alternative between the individual and the social. As Bottici, notes, while we may die alone, we are never born alone: another body is needed. We need another body to come into life, to become a breathing body and eventually *have* a body, because we *are not* bodies. The expression 'to have a body' shows that one 'is not a body': 'having a body' while 'being a body' requires a process of assuming the body one inhabits.

To assume our bodily existence, another body is also needed. To have a body, we cannot be alone. Another body holds the child upright in front of the mirror, allowing for the 'imaginal' transformation that will help the immature infant overcome 'motor impotence and nursling dependence' and acquire an 'I' of precipitated embodied subjectivity (Lacan 2006, 76). Psychological studies claim that by six months, when babies are still learning to babble and before they even recognize themselves in their mirror image, they can already tell the difference between a male and a female. This fact did not go unnoticed by Freud (1932/1933) who remarked that the first assessment one makes upon meeting a person on the street is, 'Male or female?' Notably, most of the time, this distinction is made instantaneously, a knee-jerk exercise of the imagination. Every day, we quickly classify bodies, ascribing a gender based on ideals taken from our social imaginary, searching for clues for those rapid gender attributions in someone's clothing, hairstyle, and body morphology.

William James (1890) wrote that someone's 'most palpable selfishness' is 'bodily selfishness; and his most palpable self is the body'. For James, bodily love precedes identification: 'He identifies himself with his body because he loves it'. Lacan argues that when we love the body, we love the image of the body:

> what I love, insofar as there is an ego to which I am attached with a mental
> concupiscence, is not the body whose beating and pulsation are all too evidently

beyond my control, but an image that misleads me by showing me my body in its in its *Gestalt*, its form. (Lacan, 2013, 33)

Love for one's body may entail a measure of misrecognition, but what if rather than loving one's body, one hates it? What then? How can one become a body when one is alienated from it? How can one be? Can one exist?

To start answering these questions, a clinical vignette may prove illuminating. As one analysand recently told me: 'I was a man in a woman's body. Now, I am a woman in a man's body'. This was a comment about the challenges of being a trans man; as a pre-adolescent child, T. experienced the arrival of bodily changes brought about by puberty like menstruation and breast development with shame and horror. Then, T. traversed adolescence as a sporty butch lesbian. Now T. is a man who needs to consult a gynaecologist for uterine pain, a problem that emerged several years into hormone therapy for gender transition. While T. finally feels physically comfortable in the world as a man, he is puzzled when experiencing intense uterine cramping during and after sex. One possible way of understanding T.'s pains has to do with Lacan's idea of an absence of sexual relationship. Sex separates because the encounter of two naked bodies is also the encounter of their imaginary representations. When we love a body, we love the *image* of the body. T.'s cramping is caused by an 'imaginal' that is not fully operative. An operative 'imaginal' would not cover over the inexistence of the sexual relation but just make it tolerable. T. experiences as bodily pain what we may call 'the pain of existing'. This occurs when the imaginary flattens and does not reach the richness of the 'imaginal'; for T., this void is experienced as an abyss. If there is always another body at birth, for this analysand, the problem is how to deal with the presence of an 'other' body. First the mother's body gave him life, a mother with whom a co-dependent and fusional connection was created. The other body was within, the man in the woman's body whose coming into being was hard to imagine. After gender transition, another body emerged – the woman inside the man that is causing gynaecological symptoms.

In general terms, the problem with the other is that an external body is tasked with producing the internalized one, as we saw with the mirror stage. If the genesis of the ego is precipitated by an image, constituting the affective identification that determines the narcissistic structure of the ego, how can one love an other as an other? How can one desire another body when one's own is itself a source of conflict?

Renée Richards writes in *Second Serve: The Renée Richards Story*, The most sexual act I did at these times was to regard myself in the mirror. I would stare, longingly I suppose, into the face of the little girl opposite me. Somehow, in the mirror my femininity was more real. Like Narcissus I was fascinated by that unattainable image, like him I pined.(1983, 27)

Jay Prosser has highlighted the importance of writing for trans people:

> Whether s/he publishes an autobiography or not, then, every transsexual, as transsexual, is originally an autobiographer. Narrative is also a kind of second skin: the story the transsexual must weave around the body in order that his body may be read. (1998, 101)

Prosser notes that long before they publish any memoir, trans people require a founding autobiographical act; this act of narrating is usually triggered by an institutional request, most likely originating in a doctor's office. Nevertheless, its effects are foundational. Prosser observes that mirror scenes constitute a convention of transsexual autobiography. Yet, the tinkering cannot just be explained by basic notions of the Lacanian 'mirror stage'. This is a slippage to which Prosser was not immune when he wrote: 'Like Narcissus captured by the sight of his reflection, the transsexual autobiography neither fully merges with nor moves away from the image of the changed self' (1998, 131). In fact, the writing of the memoir is not about narcissism in the classical sense; rather the ego scriptor (to quote Ezra Pound) reconstitutes the ideal image of the self via writing. Psychologically, something supports the body as image. Lacan (2006) calls this combination of body and image – self. In this sense, the body is 'imaginal' by definition, both because it is an indissociable combination of flesh and image, and because it escapes the dichotomy between reality and fantasy.[1] This self as body or the body as image has one main feature – it can fall (p. 150). When the self falls, it can be retrieved via the agency of writing: this is the writing ego. Lacan ascribes to the ego the support of the body as image; what supports the relation to one's body as image, however, is something one cannot see in the mirror.

With Joyce, Lacan discovers that the ego scriptor can restore the subject's relation to the body: writing helps incarnate the ego. What defines most transgender memoirs is that they follow a paradoxical movement in which an inscription (which in Lacanian terms partakes of the real or the symbolic) restores the fallen imaginary of an ego. In these memoirs, the narrator achieves a fully operative self-image once it has been written. Hence, the inscription allows for the restored visual image to form. The face that is constructed is structural, which calls up the phenomenological approach of Levinas (1969/1985), who defines ethics as the rapport of two faces (85). What distinguishes trans people, however, is that the almost infinite distance between one face and the other can be crossed by one single person. Is subjectivity just an effect of signification? Is the body purely imaginary? To cross the frontier between the sexes is often lived as traversing a mortal threshold, a passage from an impending doom towards a renaissance; what is at stake is precisely crossing an ultimate frontier. The drama of many analysands

identified as transgender is almost always predicated on existential issues. Gender transition is often a strategy of survival.

In the well-known and often-quoted *Conundrum* (1974/1986), Jan Morris presented her 'escape from maleness into womanhood' as a journey with 'some higher origin or meaning', adding: 'I equate it with the idea of soul, or self, and I think of it not just as a sexual enigma, but as a quest for unity' (9–10). By 'unity', Morris implied that she would be able to become one with the truth of her gender identification, a truth confirmed by a childhood memory: 'I have had no doubt about my gender since that moment of self-realization beneath the piano. Nothing in the world would make me abandon my gender concealed from everyone though it remained; but my body, my organs, my paraphernalia, seemed to me much less sacrosanct, and far less interesting too' (25–26). Morris was certain that 'gender' was opposed to 'body', 'organs', 'paraphernalia'.

This was because, as with most gender transition memoirists, Morris had lived in body marked by 'sexual incongruity' (172): 'I was born with the wrong body, being feminine my gender but male my sex, and I could achieve completeness only when the one was adjusted to the other', she writes (26). Interestingly, Morris distinguished 'feeling like a woman' from 'having the body of a woman'. She concludes: 'Male and female are sex, masculine and feminine are gender, and though the conceptions overlap, they are far from synonymous' (25).

Kenneth Paradis (2006) pointed out the political implications of Morris's (1974/1986) carefully constructed argument: 'By locating the truth of sex in the experiencing self rather than in the reproductive anatomy, the body becomes an object of subjective agency that can legitimately be altered' (57). With this strategy, Morris was aware that she was anticipating a trend. 'Could it be that I am merely a symptom of the times, a forerunner perhaps of a race in which sexes would be blended amoeba-like into one?

The world was contracting fast . . . might not mankind discard its sexual divisions too?' (41–42). Morris

> foresee[s] the day when science can evolve a reproductive system of choice, so that parents or more likely Governments can decree the sex of anyone, or organize the sexual balance of society. It will be harder to systematize gender . . . [because] [i]t lives in cavities. It cannot be computerized or tabulated. It transcends the body. (172)

Morris was imagining a world closer to what Paul B. Preciado dreams of in *An Apartment on Uranus* (2020), an extraterrestrial locality where one can find a more livable embodiment. 'My trans condition is a new form of uranism', they write.

> I am not a man. I am not a woman. I am not heterosexual. I am not homosexual.
> I am not bisexual. I am a dissident of the gender-sex binary system. I am the
> multiplicity of the cosmos trapped in a binary political and epistemological
> system, shouting in front of you. I am a uranist confined inside the limits of
> technoscientific capitalism.

Preciado tells the story of their transformation into Paul B., but this is not
only an account of gender modification, but also a consideration of socio-
political issues ranging from the escalation of neofascism and the technologi-
cal seizure of the uterus to the oppression of trans children and the function
of museums in a forthcoming cultural revolution. It is perhaps not by chance
that in her recent work Bottici takes up Preciado's concept of somatic com-
munism as an example of her ontology of transindividuality: if the imaginal
overcomes the opposition between the social and the individual, precisely
because the unconscious as discourse of the Other is transindividual in nature,
then bodies must not be conceived as pre-given individualities, but rather as
processes of becoming that involve the inter-, the supra-, and even the infra-
individual level. All bodies are processes of becoming, and transgendering is
simply one of the possible ways to do so.[2]

Preciado is re-imagining not just the world but the universe. Uranus, the
frozen giant, is the coldest planet in the solar system as well as a deity in
Greek mythology. It is also the inspiration for uranism, a concept coined in
1862 by the writer Karl Heinrich Ulrichs (under the pseudonym of Numa
Numantius) for men who 'loved differently'.[3] Ulrichs wished to eradicate the
association of homosexuality with criminality and pathology by arguing that
these men had 'a woman's mind trapped in a man's body' (*anima muliebris
corpore virili inclusa*). Following Ulrichs, Preciado imagines an apartment on
Uranus where they might live beyond the existing power, gender, and racial
constraints invented by modernity.

Beyond these perhaps prophetic fantasies, Morris admitted that she was
not simply looking for a sex change but for the realization of her own self:

> That my inchoate yearnings, both born from wind and sunshine, music and
> imagination – that my conundrum might simply be a matter of penis or vagina,
> testicle or womb, seems to me still a contradiction in terms, for it concerned not
> my apparatus, but my *self*. (21–22; italics in the original)

Morris's quest was for a state of unity that would be experienced as comple-
tion, making her body whole. 'I had myself long seen in my quest some veiled
spiritual purpose, as though I was pursuing a Grail or grasping Oneness'
(105). Morris felt trapped between a self/spirit that was mythically and
essentially female and a constraining male anatomy; as a solution, she longed

for the One. Though her feminine self is alienated inside a male body, she eventually manages to achieve unity via gender transition and by writing an autobiography, and thus by re-writing the myths she had inherited. As Bottici argues, a myth is not a story given once of all, but a process of re-elaboration of a common narrative core that responds to the need for significance.[4] It is because we want to find our place in the world that we need mythology, and to make that place ours, we need to retell the mythology we inherited.

To make sense of Morris's quest, one needs to explore the idiosyncrasies of Morris's peculiar relationship to her body. Morris (1974/1986) wrote that as a man,

> though I resented my body, I did not dislike it. I rather admired it, as it happened. It might not be the body beautiful, but it was lean and sinewy, never ran to fat and worked like a machine of quality, responding exuberantly to a touch of the throttle or the long haul home. (79)

Morris's male body was 'a marvelous thing to inhabit' (82). But by her mid-30s, after the birth of Morris's daughter Virginia, she developed a bitter self-repugnance: 'I began to detest the body that had served me so loyally' (89).

Morris became exiled from her body, which she experienced as an exterior entity with which she tried to reconcile. 'And so I asked myself, in mercy, or in common sense, if I cannot alter the conviction to alter the body, should we not in certain circumstances, alter the body to alter the conviction? . . . To alter the body! To match my sex to my gender at last and a make whole of me' (49). 'All I wanted was liberation, or reconciliation – to live as myself, to clothe myself in a more proper body, and achieve Identity at last'. Morris solution to the dilemma was 'to adapt my body from a male conformation to a female, and I would shift my public role altogether, from the role of a man to the role of a woman' (104). In Casablanca, Morris underwent sex reassignment surgery with Dr. B. 'I had a new body. Now when I looked down at myself I no longer seem a hybrid or a chimera: I was all of a piece. . . . I felt above all deliciously *clean*. . . . I was made, by my own lights, normal' (141; italics in the original). The surgery triggered a normalization that affected the body and the spirit: 'My body seemed to be growing more complex, more quivering in its responses, but my spirit felt simpler' (107).

Morris explains: 'I was a writer. Full as I was of more recondite certainties, I have always been sure of that too. I never for a moment doubted my vocation' (Morris, 1974/1986, 67). In writing about her writing, Morris describes her style as if it was already revealing an essential, traditional femininity, 'the quick emotionalism, the hovering tear, the heart-on-sleeve, the touch of schmaltz' (133). Or again: 'I often detected in myself a taste for the flamboyant . . . often a compensation for uncertainty' (132). Feeling that

they have been a writer since early childhood, Morris condenses this posture in a hedonist mode: 'Creating to please my senses was certainly my own literary method' (95). More deeply though, writing had been an attempt to make body and spirit cohere. This was achieved by way of an artifice, of a supplement (e.g., there was a gender transition but also the process of writing about it) that allowed for a resolution of what Morris calls 'sexual incongruity' (1974/1986).

Highlighting the role of the Imaginary, when Prosser (1998) talks about 'transsexual mirror stages', he quotes Morris's (1974/1986) mirror scene in *Conundrum*, minutes before going to the operating room for a sex change in Morocco. Already anaesthetized, pubic hair shaven, and disinfected, Morris staggers while going 'to say good bye to myself in the mirror. We would never meet again, and I wanted to give the other self a long last look in the eye, and a wink for luck'. The last sight of that image and the person who writes will emerge 'alive and well, and sex-changed in Casablanca. . . . I had a new body' (140–41). This scene is not only a transitional moment in Morris's transsexual trajectory but also the most crucial point in the transitional narrative. As Prosser (1998) comments, this is when the 'me' written about in the biography and the 'I' that writes become one; they had been 'so far separated by sex' and now are 'fused into a singly sexed autobiographical subject, an integral 'I'' (100). Here is the place where one sees the function of the ego as what I call the ego scriptor.

Many trans-identified authors produce autobiographical accounts of their experiences, offering a written testimony to their stories of transformation. It is in the writing of the memoir that a final bodily transformation takes place. The body is finally written. It is indeed the writing of the memoir that allowed Morris to 'embody' her body. By the same token, the gender confirmation surgery transforms her 'imaginal' – the result is jubilation. Morris (1974/1986) woke up ecstatic from the surgery despite the sharp pain: 'I found myself, in fact, astonishingly happy' (140). The Moroccan surgeon who performed her sex change seemed aware of what was at stake in Morris's ordeal; during the post-operative examination, Dr. B. commented in a mix of French and heavily accented English nicely rendered in Morris's transcription: '*Très, très bos* you could nevair get surgery like this in England – you see, now you would be able to *write*' (142; italics in the original).

Now being able to write, Jan Morris (1974/1986) constructed with *Conundrum* a text that gives shape to her being a woman. Thus, the memoir comes full circle. It opens with 'I was three years old when I realized that I have been born in the wrong body and should really be a girl. I remember the moment well, it is the earliest memory of my life' (3). And Morris concludes 'it is only in writing this book that I have delved so deeply into my emotions'

(169); it was also through writing that Morris completed her journey towards a solution to the conundrum of her existence. The book closes with this paragraph:

> [i]f I stand back and look at myself dispassionately, as I looked at myself that night in the mirror in Casablanca – if I consider my story in detachment I sometimes seem, a figure of a fable or allegory. . . . I see myself not as a man or woman, self or other, fragment or whole, but only as a wondering child with the cat beneath the Bluthner [piano]. (174)

This is the image with which the autobiography begins and ends. It keeps acquiring new meaning through writing. The image may be the same, but it reads differently. Now, finally unity has been achieved through the transformational power of writing. Is the re-writing of an image what one may aim to achieve at the end of an analysis? Lacan argues that in analysis, the analysand constructs the 'neurotic's individual myth' (1979). This myth is the construction of a scene which depicts an elaboration of trauma and ultimately allows for the formation of a symptom. Freud's recognition of fantasy implies that there is no correct way of perceiving reality and, further, that even reality itself undergoes an inscription, a writing.[5] The particular features of each person's fantasy stage a unique scene in order to support an unconscious desire. Even though fantasy is a *scene* – that is to say, a visual image – fantasy emerges in an analysis and it emerges by way of the only medium of psychoanalysis – speech. Thus, fantasy presents itself like a rebus, a puzzle combining illustrated pictures with individual letters in a form of writing like ancient Egyptian hieroglyphs, which simultaneously use the phonetic, figurative, and symbolic meanings of signifying elements.

The 'archeological' labour of reconstructing a fantasy reveals a phrase that exposes how subjects sustain their desire and negotiates *jouissance*. This fantasy expresses the analysand's position in a scene that is overdetermined by its symbolic structure. Behind an image, there is always a signifying structure. This is what Freud noted in retrospect after returning to his work on hysterical paralyses: body paralyses follow a map. This map is delineated by a particular word that shows itself in the analysand's symptom. This word is part of a missing text that must be reconstructed in each treatment. Here is what Lacan alludes to when he defines the unconscious as 'a censored chapter' in one's history:

> The unconscious is that chapter of my history that is marked by a blank or occupied by a falsehood: it is the censored chapter. But the truth can be rediscovered; usually it has already been written down elsewhere. Namely, in monuments in my body. That is to say, the hysterical nucleus of the neurosis in which the

> hysterical symptom reveals the structure of a language, and it is deciphered like an inscription which, once recovered, can without serious loss be destroyed. (2006, 215)

The work of analysis is not only that of archaeological reconstruction, but it also entails an act of creation that ushers something new into a deadly cycle of repetition. Lacan displaced the Freudian question of interpretation with a question of reading and writing – reading the symptom and writing the symptom. To describe this conjunction, I will talk of the 'sinthome'. The task of analysis is not simply to make repressed content conscious, as the preceding quote would suggest. The transformational power of analysis compares to the capability of Bottici's 'imaginal' taken as the force that reconfigures someone's reality beyond the Imaginary.

Clearly, the 'imaginal' exceeds Lacan's notion of the Imaginary and sends us in a different direction, the path to a new form of the symptom called 'sinthome'. This kind of symptom does not need to be removed or cured because it is a reconfiguration, a supplement that re-knots the three registers of the Imaginary, the Symbolic, and the Real. The symptom renamed 'sinthome' can be defined as a singular invention allowing someone to live. Lacan's later theory of the sinthome moves away from the medical field – the symptom is no longer a manifestation of disease that needs to be eliminated, as it is not pathology but instead a sort of creative solution. The word 'sinthome' itself, apparently an invention, is the ancient spelling of 'symptom' in French; it is however pronounced identically to the contemporary word. This subtle difference, inaudible in speech but patent in orthography, is a deliberate gesture hinting at the importance of the dimension of writing. A sinthome occupies a structural function analogous to the role Lacan ascribed to writing, particularly that of Joyce, who, Lacan argued, was able to use art as a supplement, as an artifice.

With Joyce's writings, Lacan discovered a new understanding of art and creativity, and this discovery brings the Imaginary in the direction of the 'imaginal'. How productive was this neologism? The shift in terminology related the symptom to art, with sinthome defined as the creative knotting together of the registers of the Symbolic (language, speech), the Real (whose effect is the mixture of pain and pleasure Lacan calls *jouissance*, the distribution of pleasure in the body), and the Imaginary (images, meaning) whose interlocking sustains the subject's reality.

By the time of the sinthome, Lacan was working on models that defied intuitive grasp taken from mathematics (set theory) and topology (knot theory), borrowing a different syntax and a new vocabulary in an effort to formalize what he observed in his analytic experience. This shift from linguistics to topology engendered major consequences for psychoanalytic theory.

Lacan no longer thought of the symptom simply as something to decode, a carrier of a repressed message (a signifier) that can be deciphered by reference to the unconscious 'structured like a language', but as the trace of the unique way someone can come to be and enjoy one's unconscious. The symptom as 'sinthome' is an invention that allows someone to live by providing an organization of jouissance. Identification with the sinthome occurs when one identifies with the particular form of their enjoyment, thereby deriving their selfhood. For Lacan, the aim of the cure was no longer to remove the patient's symptoms but to let the patient identify with her unique sinthome in order to enjoy it.

For an analyst, a symptom may be what you enjoy, something that may allow you to exist in the world – in other words, your idiosyncratic, creative, 'imaginal' strategy of survival. In this sense, the journey between genders could be a creative symptom, a way of making life livable. Lacan's sinthome evinces the singularity of an 'art', a *techne* that re-knots a workable consistency for the subject; this movement can best be evoked by saying that it moves the subject from a certain contingency to absolute necessity. Morris (1974/1986) describes her trajectory as inevitable, predestined, as if the sex change had always been bound to happen:

> I do not for a moment regret the act of change. I could see no other way, and it has made me happy. . . . Sex has its reasons too, but I suspect the only transsexuals who can achieve happiness are those . . . to whom it is not primarily a sexual dilemma at all – who offer no rational purpose to their compulsions, even to themselves, but are simply driven blindly and helplessly. . . . We are the most resolute. Nothing will stop us, no fear of ridicule or poverty, no threat of isolation, not even the prospect of death itself. (68–169)

One can see why for Morris her transition was a sinthome, and this sinthome was a necessity itself. A sinthome is what does not cease to be written. In Morris's case, the sinthome has produced, more than a 'woman', a 'woman of letters'.

The sinthome is inscribed in Lacan's theory of the Borromean knot, a knot made of three intertwined rings that correspond to the tripartite structure Lacan called the Real, the Imaginary, and the Symbolic orders. Although heterogeneous, these registers intersect and are held together. Lacan chose the Borromean knot because of its main characteristic – the rings are so interdependent that if one ring is unknotted, the other three come loose. A fourth ring can intervene to repair the failure in the knotting, re-linking the rings and holding together again those that had disentangled. This fourth ring can remedy the negative effects of the unravelling Borromean knot.

Lacan's theory of the sinthome applied above all to the singularities of Joyce's art but could also be generalized. Joyce's case was an example of how the art of the sinthome worked. Lacan's idea was that Joyce's writing was a corrective device to repair a fault, a slip of the knot. According to Lacan, Joyce's enigmatic writing in *Finnegans Wake* would undermine or undo language by creating a verbal stream of polyglot polysemy, saturated with multiplying meanings, a cosmos of indeterminacies; this revolutionary practice became his sinthome. Lacan then adds that Joyce wanted to make a name for himself, and thus produced a new ego through artifice. This turned into his signature, the mark of his singularity as an artist.

As I have argued elsewhere (Gherovici, 2010, 2017), I connect the peculiar meaning given to the concept of 'art' by Lacan in his interpretation of Joyce's works with what I discovered in my clinical practice when treating patients who identified as trans. Joyce's art compensated for a defect in its author's subjective structure and saved Joyce from insanity. The sinthome art granted him access to a new know-how that repaired a fault in the psyche; this produced a supplement that held together the registers of the Real, the Symbolic, and the Imaginary in such a way that it could fasten or re-knot the subject.

Bottici approaches Lacan by way of one of his most visible commentators and popularizers – the philosopher Slavoj Žižek, who describes the Imaginary as a deceiving zone, a place of alienation in opposition not to just to reality but to the Real. Bottici concludes her introduction to *Imaginal Politics* (2014) by expressing an explicit wish to move beyond this understanding of Lacan's Imaginary and test 'the possibility that the imaginary is itself constitutive of the real' (9). I hope to have shown that historically and conceptually, Lacan found his way to psychoanalysis through the Imaginary and even though he prioritized the Symbolic in the middle period of his career, moving onto exploring the Real in the past two decades of his life (from the early 1960s to 1981), the Imaginary remained always present. As in the life of any subject, the Imaginary continued to exert great influence.

The Borromean knot structure entails that the three registers of the Imaginary, Symbolic, and Real remain interdependent. The examples discussed show that the sinthome is 'that which comes from the real' (1975, 185). The sinthome touches upon the Imaginary while it unfolds in the Symbolic. The potentiality of the 'imaginal' exceeds the Imaginary and is comparable to the power of the transformation and reinvention of the sinthome. If the 'imaginal' is the space where possibilities might emerge, then this can be comparable to the sinthome. While as Bottici notes, the Imaginary is not constitutive of the Real, it is by way of the Imaginary (and its failures) that in his reading of Joyce, Lacan formulated the notion of sinthome. Here, both sinthome and 'imaginal' emerge as a space of possibility.

NOTES

1. For a genealogy of the concept of "reality", see the first chapters of Bottici's *Imaginal Politics* (2014) but also her earlier *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (2007) that begins with an exploration of how the word *realitas*, originally denoting what exists objectively, eventually came to mean what is in accordance to the material condition of our experience, thus creating the opposition between "reality" and "phantasy" (Bottici, 2007, Chapters 1–3).

2. See Bottici (2017 and 2021b).

3. Uranian alluded to Pausanias's distinction between two types of love in Plato's *Symposium*. Aphrodite was born of a male, Uranus (the heavens). This Uranian Aphrodite is associated with a noble love for male youths. Another account had Aphrodite as the daughter of Zeus and Dione and is associated with a common love of women as well as of youths and is of the body rather than of the soul. After Dione, Ulrichs gave the name "Dioning" to men sexually attracted to women. For Ulrichs, unlike Plato, male Urnings were essentially feminine and male Dioning, masculine.

4. See Bottici (2007 and 2021a), in particular the Introduction (2021 a).

5. Both reality and fantasy are discursively constructed. Freud identified the discursive nature of memory when he noted that memories of past events were distorted according to unconscious desires. He also discovered that the unconscious desires were based as much in material facts as they were in fantasies.

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Islamic Politics of Imagination

The Case of the Muslim Brotherhood

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Chiara Bottici starts her The Politics of Imagination and the Public Role of Religion with a brief excursion into the work of the German philosopher and literary critic Walter Benjamin (1892–1940). According to Bottici, Benjamin's understanding of modernity as a post-auratic epoch entailed the 'radical questioning of all forms of traditions', consequently also of religious traditions.[1] This destruction of the 'aura of traditions' Benjamin intimately linked to the mass movements of the first half of the twentieth century (Bottici 2009, 986). Contrary to Benjamin's prediction, however, Bottici observes in the twenty-first century a 'resurrection' of religion that as an 'endless reservoir for meaning' could even supplant politics (Bottici 2009, 996). In her eyes, the theorists of secularization got it wrong. In particular, Bottici continues, the phenomenon of 'Islamic fundamentalism in the post-9/11 world' calls for empirical studies dealing with the role of religion [Islam] in modern politics (Bottici 2009, 986). This is precisely what this chapter will do.

In the late 1920s, at the same time When Walter Benjamin began to write his famous Passagenwerk (The Arcades Project), Hasan al-Banna (1906–1948), a young Egyptian schoolteacher, engaged in religious missionary activities. The young man was preaching the 'correct understanding' of Islam to ordinary people in the coffeehouses of Ismailia, an Egyptian provincial town by the Suez Canal. There, Hasan al-Banna met with a small group of like-minded young men 'reciting the Quran, memorizing Islamic traditions, discussing forms of worship, and studying the history of Islam and the biography of the Prophet' (al-Banna 2013, 97). In Ismailia he founded an at first rather insignificant and small religious association that became the starting point for the evolution of one of the largest politico-religious movements in the contemporary Muslim world. Founded in 1928,

the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Ikhwan al-Muslimun) developed in the course of the twentieth century into a highly organized cadre party with numerous branch organizations far beyond Egypt's borders (Krämer 2010, 36). In stark contrast to Benjamin's assumption, in a Muslim context religious traditions were actually able to facilitate the formation of a modern mass movement. The Muslim Brotherhood became a major social vehicle for the imagination of a specific kind of modern Islamic politics (Jung and Zalaf 2019). How did this happen? How to understand Hasan al-Banna's Islamic politics of imagination?

We will address these questions in taking our theoretical inspiration from Chiara Bottici's conceptual triad of imagination, imaginary, and the imaginal. In her 'theory of imaginal politics' (2011; 2014), Bottici wants to overcome the impasse of setting against each other imagination and imaginary, the individual faculty of imagining versus the structural imposition of cultural contexts (2014, 37). Instead of considering the individual and the social as antagonists, Bottici argues that her concept of the imaginal as 'a field of possibilities' refers to the product of both individual faculty and social context (2014, 61 and 53). To a certain extent, the imaginal plays the role of a mediator between individual imagination and social imaginary (2014, 28). We will argue that we can find the success of the Muslim Brotherhood movement precisely within this field of possibilities demarcated by the imaginal. Hasan al-Banna's imagination of Islamic politics is the creative construction of a social order in eclectically drawing from the religious and non-religious social imaginaries of his times. The ideological appeal of the Muslim Brotherhood rests precisely in its potential for imagination as defined by Bottici. The idea of Islamic government represents a social order in the minds of its members, which seemingly offers solutions to individual and collective grievances without being immediately present to them (cf. Bottici 2009, 998).

We will unfold our argument in four steps. First of all, we will put Bottici's concept into a theoretical framework with reference to a broader conceptual discussion in social theory, including selective elements from theories of modernity and multiple modernities. Then, we will have a look at modern social imaginaries of the early twentieth century with global relevance. In particular, we will discuss the pervasive search for social order and the role of organization in this period of time. In a third step we present the response to this search for order by Islamic modernists on whose re-interpretation of Islamic traditions Hasan al-Banna relied. Finally, we analyse Hasan al-Banna's and the Brotherhood's imaginal politics against the background of these non-religious and religious social imaginaries. We conclude this chapter with some tentative suggestions about further research on the relationship of religion and politics in the modern world. We will do so with particular reference to the question of what it actually was that the theorists of secularization got wrong.

THE IMAGINAL, MODERNITY, AND
MULTIPLE MODERNITIES

Chiara Bottici derives her concept of the imaginal from the French scholar, philosopher, and mysticist Henry Corbin (1903–1978). In his critique of 'Western modernity', Corbin was inspired by the theosophical thought of the Shiite Sufi Mulla Sadra al-Shirazi (1572–1640). A Twelver Shiite scholar, Mulla Sadra was a leading figure in the seventeenth-century school of Isfahan, the Iranian cultural renaissance of this epoch, strongly influenced by the works of Ibn Arabi (1165–1240), Ibn Sina (in Europe known as Avicenna 980–1037), and al-Suhrawardi (1154–1191) (Eichner 2016, 203). In his concept of the imaginal, Corbin integrated Mulla Sadra's claim of balancing scientific knowledge with spiritual intuition. The imaginal takes on a mediating function between knowledge of material objects and abstract laws. Turning this dualism into an irreconcilable dichotomy Corbin understood as the central source of the 'catastrophe of the spirit' that manifested itself in Western culture (Cheetham 2003, 82). In Imaginal Politics, Bottici liberated the concept of the imaginal from this theosophical context in which it was grounded by both Mulla Sadra and Henry Corbin. Instead, she turned it into an anthropological constant, into a primordial human capacity, defining human beings as 'imaginal animals' (Bottici 2014, 71). In our application, we continue this 'profanation' of the term further. The imaginal serves us as an analytical tool in our making sense of the concept of multiple modernities that has replaced the previously hegemonic paradigm of classical linear modernization theories.

Dominating the Social Sciences and Humanities in the 1950s and 1960s, classical modernization theories pretended to be capable of explaining social change through one 'scientific' model. In their approach, modernization was concomitant with secularization understood as the retreat, privatization, and eventual disappearance of religion in the modern world. To a certain extent, Walter Benjamin's thought was already informed by these assumptions, later put into a scientific model. In the early 1990s, José Casanova seriously called into question the validity of these claims of classical modernization theories. In his Public Religion in the Modern World Casanova observed in a number of case studies the 'de-privatization' of religion and emphasized the role of religious organizations in public political discourses (Casanova 1994). Apparently, historical developments contradicted the assertions of classical modernization theories that religion and modernity are nested into a zero-sum game. In light of the Islamic revolution in Iran (1979), the global rise of Islamist movements, the capitalist achievements of authoritarian states such as China, or the role of religion in the democratic transition of some countries in Eastern Europe in the

1980s/1990s, the linear and secularist model of global social convergence lost most of its scholarly credibility. In the year 2000, it was then the late Israeli sociologist Shmuel Eisenstadt who eventually introduced the term of multiple modernities (Eisenstadt 2000a; 2000b). Scholars with post-colonial, post-structuralist, and post-modern backgrounds pushed further the replacement of classical modernization theories by the formulation of pluralistic theories of modernity. We utilize Eisenstadt's revision of modernization theory as a theoretical starting point in our understanding of what Bottici called the 'transformation in the public role of religion' (Bottici 2009, 987).

In his theory of multiple modernities, Eisenstadt – once academically socialized in the context of classical modernization theories (see Eisenstadt 1966) – turned the two core claims of this body of theories upside down. First of all, he described modernization not in terms of social convergence, but as a historical process of divergence, leading to multiple forms of modern social arrangements. Second, he stressed the role of religious and non-religious traditions in the social construction of these multiple forms of modernity. From Eisenstadt's theoretical perspective religion does not disappear. On the contrary, religious traditions can play an even determining role in the ways in which modernization historically evolves (Eisenstadt 2000a; 2000b). Despite a number of problems related to Eisenstadt's approach (see Jung and Sinclair 2020), the Islamic discourse of modernity and our case of the Muslim Brotherhood perfectly underline this role of religious traditions in the construction of modern social imaginaries.

Beginning with the Tanzimat period in the Ottoman Empire (1839–1876) and the rather elitist nineteenth-century Islamic reform movement associated with figures such as the Egyptian Muhammad Abduh (1849–1905), the Indian Syed Ahmad Khan (1817–1898), and the Ottoman Namik Kemal (1840–1888), through the establishment of modern national states and organized Islamist mass movements to contemporary Islamic networks and organizations, a broad variety of imaginations of Islamic modernities and modern Muslim identities have appeared. Yet, while Islamic reformers constructed these Islamic modernities in close relationship to religious traditions, they did so in a multiplicity of different forms. The Muslim Brotherhood movement, therefore, represents only one distinct and very influential form of this religiously guided imagination of modernity that has been contested by a wide range of other forms of intellectual and everyday imaginations of modernity tied to Islamic traditions. In reviewing specific ideas about modern Muslim subjectivities, Farzin Vahdat, for instance, discussed the thought of nine very different Islamic thinkers who all 'grappled with modernity and its relation to the Islamic world' (Vahdat 2013, xx). In short, there exist multiple modernities within Islam. How to explain these multiple modernities within Islam?

In which ways does this variety of modern imaginaries relate to modernity as such?

For answers to these questions, Eisenstadt's theory of multiple modernities does not help much. While making a distinction between modernity as a 'cultural program' and the multiple forms in which this program appears, his generic definition of modernity remains relatively weak. Eisenstadt merely repeats familiar but imprecise characteristics such as emancipation, industrialization, urbanization, and a shift in the concept of human action (Eisenstadt 2000b, 609). When it comes to our understanding of the multiple modernities within Islam, the puzzling diversity in which Muslims have interpreted a huge variety of non-religious imaginaries in putting them into the context of Islamic traditions, Eisenstadt's theory remains rather silent.[2] This void in Eisenstadt's theory is precisely the point at which we take Bottici's conceptual triad of imagination, imaginary, and imaginal as our inspiration. With her concept of the imaginal she puts the focus on the question as to in which ways social imaginaries become instituted by the creative imagination of individuals (Bottici 2009, 989). Applying a different theoretical parlance, the imaginal is a mediating concept between structure and agency.

Borrowing from the terminology of the German sociologist Hartmut Rosa, we translate this distinction into modernity as a macrostructure and as a multiplicity of projects. Rosa tried to make sense of the 'double nature' of modernity – that it represents both the emergence of a single global macrostructure and a diversity of cultural projects – with reference to the work of Niklas Luhmann and Jürgen Habermas (Rosa 2014). While Habermas defined cultural modernity in terms of a promising social project (Habermas 1997), Niklas Luhmann's Modern Systems Theory conceptualized it as an 'empty' and self-referential process of sociocultural evolution. Contrary to Habermas's normative theory of modernity, Luhmann perceived modernization as an abstract process of the production and re-production of social structures through communications, entirely devoid of any purpose in a normative sense. Luhmann defines modern society in terms of an all-encompassing global system of self-referential communications, internally fragmented by functionally differentiated relatively autonomous subsystems such as the arts, economics, education, law, media, politics, religion, and science. The global emergence of this modern social macrostructure represents a self-referential mechanism that excludes the modern individual from its social realm (Luhmann 1987). Historically, however, we can observe the social emergence of modernity as a complex process of negotiations about the concrete borders of social subsystems by social actors. Multiple modernities, from this perspective, are the expressions of the contingent attempts of social actors to draw these lines and to institutionalize consciously designed modern projects. Hasan al-Banna pursued such a project from a distinctively

Islamic perspective. Islamic politics of imagination, therefore, represent different projects of modernity.

THE SEARCH FOR ORDER UNDER COLONIALISM

Hasan al-Banna was born in 1906 in al-Mahmudiyya, a provincial town some 90 miles northwest of the Egyptian capital Cairo. His father, Shaykh Ahmad Abd al-Rahman al-Banna (1881–1958), was the son of a small landowning family and became the local Imam of al-Mahmudiyya in 1913. Hasan al-Banna and his family lived in a period of time once described by Peter Wagner as a 'first crisis of modernity' (Wagner 1994, 37). According to Wagner this crisis of classical bourgeois society was due to its inherent tension between liberal promises and social realities. In what Wagner called the nineteenth-century modernity of 'restricted liberalism', morally and rationally grounded liberal rules only applied to a distinguished minority of the population. Society at large, however, was characterized by stark social inequalities and mass impoverishment (Wagner 2010, 14). This tension between the liberal imaginary and the factual social exclusion of large parts of the population developed into an all-pervasive 'search for order' (Wiebe 1967). In this search for order, what Wagner calls 'organized society' emerged as a solution to the crisis of bourgeois modernity. Revolving around the idea of managing mass society within the territorial confines of the bureaucratically administered national state, this ideal of organized society became the dominant social imaginary of European politics in the first part of the twentieth century (Wagner 2012, 37). The important point here, while Wagner exclusively looks at the historical example of Europe, we can observe similar developments in the Middle East where this idea of social organization seemed to be equally strong. Therefore, we introduce here Wagner's concept of organized society as an ideal type helping in our analysis of the Brotherhood's imagination of modernity.

Going beyond Wagner's conceptual apparatus, two intertwined global cultural scripts seem to be particularly significant in this idea of organizing mass society in Europe and the Middle East. These cultural scripts which we will additionally draw upon have been described by the Stanford School of Sociological Institutionalism. First, the modern actor as a 'historical construction, claiming agency for the self, for other actors and for principles' (Meyer and Jepperson 2000, 108). Second, modern models of organization as means of collective actorhood, comprising elements of rationality, structured hierarchies, and member-individuals with defined roles and responsibilities (Meyer, Drori and Hwang 2006). In Egypt, this pervasive search for order took place too. However, it did so in the context of British colonialism.

It was not until the second half of the nineteenth century that European Powers began to interfere seriously with Egypt's administration. In 1876, European controllers took over the supervision of the strained public finances of Egypt. The establishment of this foreign control over Egypt's state finances was a prelude to the eventual British occupation of the country in 1882. The immediate grounds for imposition of direct British rule in Egypt, however, were the 'nationalist' uprising of the officer group around Ahmed Urabi who formed a parliamentary government in 1881. The so-called National Party turned against foreign domination, epitomized in the foreign fiscal control of Egypt, and against the autocratic nature of the khedive's domestic rule.[3] Together with British troops, the Egyptian aristocracy suppressed the revolt in summer 1882 and leading figures of the national movement went into exile. The events of 1882 established a pattern of interaction between Egypt's aristocratic leaders and international great powers which provided the political framework in which Hasan al-Banna developed his thoughts: in order to safeguard their own interests, the British colonial administration supported Egypt's autocratic rulers at the expense of the constitutionalist aspiration of the country's nationalist and liberal movements.

This pattern again characterized the political atmosphere after the First World War, when the young Hasan al-Banna left primary school, entering the educational path leading him to join the Dar al-Ulum in Cairo in 1923.[4] During the war, representatives of the Egyptian legislative assembly formed a nationalist pressure group headed by Saad Zaghlul (1857–1927). This group was mobilizing the Egyptian population to call for independence from British rule. Zaghlul and his supporters became known under the name wafd (delegation), demanding their presence as an Egyptian delegation at the Paris Peace Conference (Rogan 2009, 167). Great Britain, however, rejected the demands of the Wafd Party and Saad Zaghlul was arrested in March 1919. His deportation to Malta eventually sparked the Egyptian revolution of 1919 in which, for the first time in Egyptian history, a mass movement engaged in countrywide demonstrations. In 1922, then, Egypt achieved nominal independence under British tutelage and Saad Zaghlul served briefly as prime minister in 1924. However, the liberal nationalists, predominantly identified with the Wafd Party, failed to reach full independence and to improve the living conditions of the broader population. Moreover, the British authorities conspired together with the King against subsequent liberal governments, eventually discrediting Egypt's version of classical bourgeois politics (see Marsot 2007, 105).

The failure of Egyptian liberal nationalism facilitated the rise of specifically Islamic politics, promising both an authentic Islamic modernity and political independence from colonial rule (Gershoni 1999 and Smith 1973). Key in this development was the Muslim Brotherhood movement.

While attending the Dar al-Ulum, Hasan al-Banna witnessed the miserable living conditions of large parts of the urban population and an Egypt under foreign domination (al-Banna 2004, 238–39). For him, 'Western' oppression has deprived 'Eastern' societies of their integrity, dignity, and independence (al-Banna 2004, 19–20). In his imagination, Islamic politics would provide the remedy to this situation. Al-Banna employed the imaginary of managing society through bureaucratic processes through the lenses of Islamic religious traditions. In combining core features of organized modernity with Islam, he considered the Islamic system of government (nizam al-islami) the solution to both the misery of the Egyptian population and the political aspirations of the 'Arab nation'. This ideal of an Islamically organized Egyptian society he developed into a collectivist political ideology, providing a valuable alternative to the 'failing' liberalism of Egypt's bourgeois political elite. With the Islamic system, Hasan al-Banna constructed a model of organized society in which he re-interpreted Islamic traditions in terms of a modern political thought system (Lia 2010).

Throughout the 1930s the formally benevolent religious association developed into a highly bureaucratized religio-political organization. The Muslim Brotherhood consisted of welfare institutions, a well-defined hierarchical structure, and a highly organized student's movement inter alia. In each province the Brotherhood established an administrative office (maktab idari) that provided an effective line of communication to the central leadership in Cairo (Abdel Khaleq 1987, 33; Abdel Halim 2013, 245; Zaki 1954, 107–8). This build-up of a sophisticated modern organization went along with the expansion of local branches and membership numbers, displaying a remarkable growth of the movement. In its first by-law from September 1930, the Muslim Brotherhood limited its activities to social and religious work.[5] However, this declaration of the non-political nature of the movement was soon counteracted by its increasing involvement in domestic and international political affairs. At the Brotherhood's fifth conference in 1939, Hasan al-Banna stated that 'Islam is creed and worship, nation and nationality, religion and state, spirituality and work, Holy book and sword' (al-Banna 2004, 119). British observers eventually confirmed this growing political role of the Muslim Brotherhood. In 1944, they noted that the Brotherhood strongly mobilized anti-foreign feelings in order to get rid of foreign influence and to achieve Egyptian independence from British rule.[6]

In addition to applying the cultural script of a modern organization, the Brotherhood established paramilitary units too. This so-called Special Apparatus was apparently founded between 1939 and 1940 and played a significant role in the armed struggle against colonialism. According to Mahmoud Abdel Halim (1917–1999), a senior member of the Brotherhood, these units received physical training, instructions in the use of firearms, and

courses furnishing them with secret communicational skills (Abdel Halim 2013, 289–91). After the Second World War, the apparatus was engaged in attacks against British troops and in combat in Palestine. There, it supplied Palestinian fighters with financial means, arms, and explosives, as well as sending volunteers to take part in military action (Al-Sabbagh 1989, 320 and 345). In combining typical global political imaginaries of the first part of the twentieth century with Islamic traditions, Hasan al-Banna developed the Muslim Brotherhood into a well-organized political force, including scouts' groups, students' organizations, and a paramilitary wing (see also Abou El Zalaf 2019). Yet what kind of Islamic traditions? What were the religious imaginaries from which Hasan al-Banna and the Muslim Brotherhood drew?

ISLAMIC REFORM AND MODERN ISLAMIC IMAGINARIES

At an early age, Hasan al-Banna's father, Shaykh Ahmed, made his son familiar with the Islamic tradition and the Sunni schools of law (al-Banna 2013, 40–42). He continued this traditional religious education under a local teacher, Shaykh Muhammad Zahran, until entering the Egyptian primary school system at the age of 11. Shaykh Zahran did not hold the official certificate (alamiyya) of an Islamic learned and in his memoirs, al-Banna praised him for his direct, emotional, and spiritual relationship to ordinary people. This engagement with ordinary people as a lay preacher later became an essential feature of Hasan al-Banna's activities in the founding phase of the Muslim Brotherhood (al-Banna 2013, 14–16). In 1920, he moved to the teacher training school in Damanhur where he increasingly displayed forms of religious activism. In Damanhur, al-Banna was urging his fellow students to perform the obligatory prayers and to follow religious duties (al-Banna 2013, 24). In addition to his traditional religious education, he also immersed himself in Sufi activism during the years 1920–1923. On arriving in Cairo in 1923, al-Banna was a young man who was dedicated to pursuing the way of religious, moral, and social reforms. In his eyes, social activism in the name of Islam was by far more important than contemplative religious worshipping (al-Banna 2013, 17 and 44).

While studying in Cairo, Hasan al-Banna further strengthened this activist stance and became acquainted with prominent thinkers of Egypt's modernist Islamic reform movement. The encounter with the ideas of Islamic modernism made a strong impact on the young teacher and on the ideological foundations of the Muslim Brotherhood. In particular, Rashid Rida's (1865–1935) work left significant impressions on his thought. Al-Banna described himself as a 'tireless reader' of Rida's publications (al-Banna 2013, 67). Reading

Rida, he entered the imaginative world of the modern discourse on Islamic reform that characterized the intellectual debate in Egypt since the late nineteenth century. Hasan al-Banna became a part of this discourse of an Islamic modernity, eventually making the Muslim Brotherhood movement a real 'heir' to the Egyptian intellectual stream of Islamic modernism (Weismann 2017, 50).

The most famous Islamic modernists in Egypt, Jamal al-Din al-Afghani (1838–1897), Muhammad Abduh and Rashid Rida developed their thinking in the context of a severe dilemma. They clearly saw the European advances in economy, politics, and the modern sciences, whereas they could not really embrace these advances due to the daily experience of oppression by colonial politics (Johansen 1967, 12). Islamic modernists were confronted with similar changes to those of European intellectuals, that is, the 'empty' structural processes that Luhmann described. Their modernizing projects clearly mirrored ongoing border negotiation between distinct realms of education, law, politics, religion, and science. These reformers developed their new Islamic imaginaries in the structural context of an emerging functional separation of society. Muhammad Abduh, for instance, considered the communicative logics of the social realms of religion and science not as oppositional but as mutually reinforcing forces. In his eyes, modern religious and educational reforms were distinct means of achieving Egypt's political independence in the form of a national Egyptian state (Livingstone 1995, 216). While Jamal al-Din al-Afghani's paramount interest was Muslim unity in the fight against European Imperialism (Euben 1999, 99), he nevertheless subordinated his pan-Islamist ideas to the political realities of a rising international system of states. Muslim unity in the end was also for him an association of independent Muslim national states in a global system of politics (Jung 2011, 241). In short, re-imagining Islamic traditions, Islamic modernists interpreted them with conceptual references to the structural imperatives of a functionally separated modern society. They did so in challenging the previous monopoly of interpretation of religious thought by the traditionally learned shaykhs and ulama. Instead of the authoritative power of traditional Islamic institutions, the reformers located ultimate religious authority in the Holy Scriptures and the model of the Prophet Muhammad and the early Muslim generations alone. In this way, Islamic modernists reinvented religious traditions and imbued them with entirely new meanings (Al-Azmeh 1996, Dallal 2000, Jung 2011).

Hasan al-Banna met with Rashid Rida's thought at a point in time when Rida had left the more 'liberal' position of his mentor Abduh. Born in a village near Tripoli (in today's Lebanon), Rashid Rida joined the Islamic reform movement in Cairo in 1897 (Ryad 2009, 4). During the first years in Cairo he shared Abduh's openness for a selective indigenization of European institutions and ideas. They both aimed at a combination of

political constitutionalism, rationalism, science, and technological inno-
vation with the moral norms and values of Islam. In the early twentieth
century, however, Rida shifted increasingly towards a more rigid and pur-
ist understanding of Islamic revival. He abolished Abduh's approach of
gradual reform and selective collaboration with European forces, replacing
it with a more revolutionary and confrontational stance towards 'the West'
(Hourani 1962, 230; Tauber 1989, 124–27). In political terms, he moved
from a Panislamist to a more Arab nationalist position, advocating the
establishment of an Arab Caliphate in greater Syria (Haddad 1997, 254).
Due to his increasing frustration with both Ottoman and Arab political
actors, he eventually ended up in an affiliation with Ibn Saud, endorsing
traits of the purist Hanbalist interpretation of Islam prevalent on the Arab
Peninsula (Commins 2005). In the years before the First World War, Rida
fully merged his Arab nationalist agenda with the desire for Islamic reform,
fostering the idea of a fundamental antagonism between 'Islam and the
West' (Jung 2020, 84).

In addition to this shift in his political worldview, Rida developed the
sharia into the central imaginary of his version of a modern Islamic social
order. Muhammad Abduh already perceived an Islamic system of law derived
from the sharia as a means to achieve modern authenticity in the course of
social and political reforms. In Abduh's understanding, however, the sharia
remained a very flexible set of general divine principles for legislation
according to changing social needs and historical circumstances. Combining
the Islamic institution of the sharia with the modern concept of a holistic
civilization, however, Islamic modernists transformed a complex and diverse
set of modes of behaviour that was aiming at salvation into the totalizing dis-
course of a holistic Islamic system (Kelsay 2007, 44). Contrary to this view,
the deliberations on Caliphal rule between the eleventh and fifteenth centuries
already knew the tension between politics (siyasa) and religious principles
(sharia). Political philosophers of this time period clearly differentiated
between specific skills of governance and the sharia (Kalidi 1994, 199). Now,
in light of the modern relationship between the state and positive law, the
idea of the enforcement of legal rules by the coercive means of the state, the
distinction between sharia and siyasa was gradually replaced. Islamic reform-
ers employed the sharia as a means of social reform, initiating an increasing
juridification of Islam that in its conceptual terms built on the legal commu-
nicative logics of the evolving functional system of law. Consequently, the
sharia attained the character of a body of positive law that should be imple-
mented by the state. It was this modern imaginary of the sharia, perceived
as a 'blueprint' of an Islamic social order, that Hasan al-Banna adopted as a
key element in the political ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood movement.
Influenced by Rashid Rida he turned Islamic law into the prime source of

'moral integrity and cultural authenticity' in his search for a modern social order (Krämer 2010, 114).

In the second part of the nineteenth century, Islamic reformers tried to reconcile modern culture with Islamic traditions against the poles of traditionalist rejections and secularist affirmations of modern ideas and institutions. They addressed the challenges of modernity in the historical context of European imperialism. Islamic modernists advocated a project of comprehensive reforms by going back to the pristine traditions of early Islam. Imagining Islamic traditions through modern concepts such as religion, law, culture, nation, and civilization these modernist Muslim intellectuals laid the foundations for a specifically Islamic discourse of modernity. In drawing from the global cultural scripts of their times, they attached completely new meanings to classical Islamic concepts such as ijtihad (independent reasoning), jihad (holy struggle), sharia (Islamic law), tawhid (unity of God), and umma (community of believers), consequently linking the authenticity of their modern projects to Islamic traditions and a religiously defined past (Jung 2011, 263–73). Islamic modernists instituted a whole series of new Islamic imaginaries through creative imaginations. In this way, they endowed coming generations of Muslim intellectuals with a fertile ground for the mobilization of religion in their constructions of various projects of 'authentic' Islamic modernities. These modernists created a new 'field of possibilities' with modern Islamic social imaginaries from which Hasan al-Banna also drew in framing the imaginal politics of the Muslim Brotherhood.

HASAN AL-BANNA AND THE MUSLIM BROTHERHOOD AS A CASE OF ISLAMIC POLITICS OF IMAGINATION

In their search for order, Islamic modernists fused contemporary social imaginaries about politics with re-interpreted Islamic traditions, providing an Islamic semantic of modernity through which the rising Egyptian middle class could articulate its ambitions in an indigenous language. In a short note, Michael Eppel described this emerging middle class, the effendiyya, through attributes such as modern education, nationalist sentiments, newly urbanized, and socially upclimbing (Eppel 2009). Hasan al-Banna himself represented the effendiyya in both his educational background and socio-economic status. Moreover, as did many of this newly educated stratum of Egyptian society, he moved from the province to the city. In the ideological framework of the Muslim Brotherhood this new middle class could combine its search for order with pursuing its social interests in an Islamic vernacular. A good example of this is Mahmoud al Sabbagh (1918–2011). He moved from a small village

in the administrative district al-Sharqiyya in northern Egypt to Cairo where he studied at the new Egyptian University. Al-Sabbagh joined the Muslim Brotherhood in 1939, strongly disappointed with the failure of the established parties to achieve full Egyptian independence. In Al-Sabbagh's eyes, the political establishment seemingly accepted the British presence in Egypt (Al-Sabbagh 1989, 31–32). In his memoirs, he described his first personal encounter with Hasan al-Banna. In this meeting, al-Sabbagh noted, Hasan al-Banna was reciting verses from the Quran 'as if they were tailored solutions to the problems of our modern times' (Al Sabbagh 1989, 62–67). A similar account comes from Muhammad Hamed Abul Nasr (1913–1996) who was the fourth leader of the Brotherhood. Abul Nasr gives us an example of the way in which al-Banna compared the glories of the past, the ideal Islamic life by the first generations of Muslims, with the current lamentable condition of the Islamic community. According to Hasan al-Banna, the only way to revive these glories of the past was a sincere return to the Quran (Abul Nasr 1988, 8–10). In a nutshell, these examples illustrate the imaginal politics of the Muslim Brotherhood. From his religious standpoint, al-Banna and his followers successfully imagined modern cultural scripts in an Islamic frame of reference.

Two important features of Islamic modernism characterize this frame of reference: the justification of the present by the recourse to an imagined ideal past and the translation of contemporary modern concepts into a specifically Islamic language. For Hasan al-Banna, the solution to the economic, political, and social problems of Egypt and the broader Muslim world was a return to the exemplary 'Golden Age' of early Islam. Prophet Muhammad and the early four rightly guided Caliphs represented Islam as both a faith and a just social order (Mitchell 1969, 210). Therefore, according to him, it is necessary for Muslims to direct themselves towards this period of 'true Islam' in order to answer the most pressing questions of the present. In one of his 'epistles' (rasaʾil), for instance, al-Banna explained his concept of Islamic governance with reference to the Golden Age of Islam. The system of Islamic governance (nizam al-hukm al-islami), according to this explanation, is based on two major concepts. On the one hand, Islamic governance rests on a social contract (al-aqd al-ijtimai) between the ruler and the people. On the other hand, true Islamic rulers govern the political community according to the normative institution of the public good (al-maslaha al-amma). These two modern cultural scripts, the social contract and the public good, al-Banna, then trace back to the first Caliph Abu Bakr (al-Banna 2011, 5). Abu Bakr (573–634) was among the Prophet Muhammad's closest companions, was the Prophet's father in law, and he followed Muhammad on the hijra from Mecca to Medina (622). In the imaginal politics of Hasan al-Banna, the concept of Islamic governance combines modern political imaginaries with religious

narratives of early Islam. The religious authority of Abu Bakr imbues his modern conception of Islamic governance with both religious legitimacy and Islamic authenticity.

Similar to the case of the sharia, a new understanding of the classical Islamic institution of jihad has played a significant role in the ideology of the Muslim Brotherhood. In the pre-modern Islamic tradition, jihad was a restrictively circumscribed institution of 'justified war'. In centuries of intellectual deliberation, Islamic jurisprudents defined jihad with respect to both possible adversaries in war and the rules of conduct in war. The proclamation of jihad was subject to political and religious authorities (Jung 2016, 69–71). These deliberations resulted from the fact that the Quran does not contain a clear doctrine of war, but rather displays a multiplicity of narratives with often rather inconsistent notions of war and jihad (Bonner 2006, 20; Firestone 1999, 47). It was in the course of the modernist re-interpretation of classical Islamic imaginaries that the meaning of jihad also underwent important transformations. While Jamal al-Din al-Afghani applied the concept in his mobilization for the anti-colonial struggle, Muhammad Abduh translated it into efforts of working hard for the revival of the Muslim community in everyday life (Ibrahim 1999, 71). For both, jihad became synonymous with social activism in religious, social, and political matters (Hourani 1962, 128). Connecting the concept of jihad with that of modern social actorhood, the Islamic reform movement created a new social imaginary of the modern Islamic actor who justified social activism with a multiplicity of purposes. Islamic modernists not only expanded the meaning of jihad to domains beyond military campaigns, but they also disembedded the concept from the religious and political authority structures, which previously legitimated its conduct.

In the employment of jihad by the Muslim Brotherhood we can easily discern both al-Afghani's and Abduh's re-interpretation of the concept. While Hasan al-Banna and the Special Apparatus in particular understood the anti-colonial resistance as jihad, leading representatives of the Muslim Brotherhood movement have continued to promote jihad synonymous with activism in all kinds of social realms too. When al-Banna describes jihad as spending time, money, and individual work for achieving justice and reform, he clearly fused this Islamic imaginary with that of modern actorhood (al-Banna 2004: 81–82). The third leader of the Brotherhood, Umar al-Tilmisani (1904–1986), also propagated this all-encompassing understanding of jihad. In his eyes, conducting jihad was synonymous with working hard with all your money, time, and health for the improvement of the status of Muslims (Al-Tilmisani 1985, 81). In his book fiqh al-jihad (The jurisprudence of jihad), Yusuf al-Qaradawi (b. 1926) proposed a 'new culture of jihad'. The 'global mufti' (Graf and Skovgaard-Petersen 2009) argued that there is a major difference between the concepts of jihad and war (harb). While the

first is a religious institution, the second is a profane concept often even applied for unjust causes. It is not so much the military struggle for Islam, but the 'civilian jihad' that claims priority in terms of enduring action against corruption and injustice (Qaradawi 2010, 55–57). In short, in the ideological tradition of the Muslim Brotherhood, jihad became synonymous with the task of each and every Muslim to acquire modern actorhood and, in the words of the Stanford School, claim agency for the self, for other Muslim actors, and for Islamic principles.

CONCLUSIONS

This chapter has reconstructed the imaginal politics of the Muslim Brotherhood through the conceptual lenses of Chiara Bottici's triad of imagination, imaginary, and the imaginal. We argue that drawing from Islamic and other social imaginaries of his own time, Hasan al-Banna, the founder of the Brotherhood, launched a project of an Islamic modernity whose core features have developed into one of the dominant imaginaries of Islamic politics. Even more, the worldview of the Muslim Brotherhood movement turned into a 'model' for Islamic social movements. Once the product of Hasan al-Banna's and other Brotherhood members' imagination, today the Muslim Brotherhood represents 'an organizational condensation of the intellectual heritage of nineteenth-century Islamic modernity' (Bamyeh 2019, 111). In this way, the creative imaginations of subsequent generations of Islamic reformers crystallized into a new set of structural imaginaries or cultural scripts on which contemporary Islamic movements built in designing their projects of Islamic modernities.

Thus, the example of the Muslim Brotherhood underpins Eisenstadt's argument that religion can play a decisive role in the construction of historically different forms of modernity. Yet, the discourse of Islamic modernities has not generated only one form of Islamic politics. Even in its radicalized version, Islamist and Jihadist movements, we can observe a broad variety of different political projects (see Burgat 2016). In understanding this historical diversity, Bottici's work can provide useful tools to extend Eisenstadt's theory with its tendency to disregard the observable differences within 'civilizational complexes'. The new imaginaries of the Muslim Brotherhood movement result from the imaginal that Hasan al-Banna and his associates once constructed under specific historical and social conditions. In Egypt, these conditions were largely given by the experience of late colonialism. It was these conditions that facilitated the rise of a discourse of specifically Islamic modernities in contradistinction to Walter Benjamin's assumption of the passing of tradition in a post-auratic modernity. Moreover, they contributed

to the construction of a dichotomy between Islam and the West. The imaginations of modernity may assume religious or non-religious shapes depending on specific historical contexts. So what was it, then, that the theorists of secularization got wrong?

Under the impact of classical modernization theories, considering the relationship of religion and modernity as a zero-sum game, the functional reduction of traditions to specifically religious forms of communication was interpreted as a general decline of religion in modern society. In lumping together various historical developments, the term 'secularization', however, has encompassed very different meanings. William Barbieri, for example, pointed to three different meanings (Barbieri 2015). In terms of a historical process, secularization describes the social transformation through which religion became just one realm among other functionally differentiated subsystems of modern society. This process was clearly visible in the Islamic modernists' border negotiations between religion, education, and science. The adjective 'secular', by contrast, defines specific social conditions and institutions under which religious communication does not play a role. Without doubt Muslim projects of modernity also know secular institutions in this sense. From the perspective of the observer, the Special Apparatus of the Muslim Brotherhood, for instance, was by no means a religious institution. Secularism, finally, represents an ideology according to which religion ought to disappear from the public sphere. It is this 'secularist secularity' that to a certain extent has occupied a dominant position among European intellectuals' imagination of modernity during most of the twentieth century (cf. Casanova 2015, 17). In this sense the project of 'Western modernity' was governed by secularist ideologies against which the promotion of specific Islamic modernities became a vehicle in the anti-imperialist struggle of Muslim peoples.

The case of the Muslim Brotherhood clearly disproves the assumptions of theorists of secularization who confused modernity with the ideology of secularist secularity. However, the history of its development shows also the analytical relevance of the concept of secularization in terms of social differentiation and the concomitant formation of secular institutions. Moreover, with regard to Chiara Bottici's suggestion to view the twenty-first century as a time of the 'resurrection' of religion, our case study argues that religion in modernity factually has not really disappeared. In the early twentieth century, Hasan al-Banna already used Islamic traditions as an 'endless reservoir for meaning' in his modernizing project. Yet the success of his modern project did not rely on Islam alone. On the contrary, the success of the Muslim Brotherhood movement built heavily on the application of a whole set of non-religious and therefore secular imaginaries in both its social activities and forms of organization. Empirical studies on the role of religion in politics

should learn from this experience. Imaginal politics should be analysed in terms of historically contingent processes of the amalgamation of religious and non-religious imaginaries into concrete projects of modernity.

NOTES

1. In his essay *Das Kunstwerk im Zeitalter seiner technischen Reproduzierbarkeit* Walter Benjamin argues that in its orientation towards the masses, technologies of reproduction remove the reproduced from its embeddedness in tradition (Benjamin 1974, 439–40).

2. For a more detailed critique of the deficiencies in Eisenstadt's theory of multiple modernities, see Jung (2017, Chapter 2), Jung and Sinclair (2015), Jung and Sinclair (2020).

3. The 'National Party' (not to be confused with the National Party founded in 1895 by Mustafa Kamil (1874–1908)) was a group of large landholders, delegates from the Egyptian Assembly, journalists, and religious scholars, trying to pressure for liberal reforms with the help and under the leadership of the Egyptian military. However, this coalition of forces did not advocate Egypt's formal independence from the Ottoman Empire. Therefore, Eugene Rogan argued that only in the eyes of European observers, the Urabi rebellion gave the impression of a nationalist uprising, "but this was not so" (Rogan 2009, 126–27).

4. The Dar al-Ulum was a college for the education of teachers founded in 1872. It offered an alternative to the clerical milieu of the Al-Azhar and became the predecessor for the modern Egyptian university system.

5. Dessouqi (2012, 5). In article 15 of the by-law it was explicitly mentioned, that it is forbidden for all members of the movement to get involved in politics (Dessouqi 2012, 7).

6. Archival material from the UK Foreign Office, Fo 371/41334, P.I.C. Paper, Telegram No. 49 (Revised) "Ikhwan el Muslimeen", PIC/117, 25 July 1944.

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Chapter 8

Civilizations in History and Myth

Considerations on the Imaginary and the Imaginal

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INTRODUCTION

In this chapter, I bring the arguments in *Imaginal Politics* about the myth of civilizational clash and the question of globalism under scrutiny. In order to do this from a disciplinary base with a multidisciplinary vision, I consider both from an intersection of historical sociology, contemporary civilizational analysis (as a multidisciplinary field which historical and comparative sociology has a heavy investment in), and the larger field of social imaginaries. From this intersection, I believe it is possible to gain good analytical purchase on the degree of diversity of past and contemporary constellations and the varied modes of being together, as I explain below. My principal argument is twofold. I first contend that a comparative awareness of diversity of societies and cultures can add another dimension to Bottici's general argument about political myths, without needing to sacrifice the scholarship of 'civilization'. Second, I argue that the same comparative sensibility can put into question the version of globalization analysis in *Imaginal Politics* and found elsewhere in the social sciences. The chapter proceeds by examining how *Imaginal Politics* extends the critique of political myth. I then suggest that a longer history of civilizational constellations can, first, add value to Bottici's elaboration of the myth of the clash of civilizations and, second, bring nuance to her genealogy of 'civilization'. The midpoint of the chapter contains a short account of perspectives on varieties of capitalism, constellations, and modernity. This acts to contextualize the preceding section on myth and lay the groundwork for the subsequent section on globalism. The conclusion summarizes the strength

of comparative and historical sociological perspectives on multiple constellations and imaginaries in modernity.

MYTH, THE IMAGINAL AND INTERCIVILIZATIONAL ENGAGEMENT

I begin by rehearsing key aspects of Bottici's philosophical and sociological conception of myth. Bottici elucidates political myth with a move to bypass concerns about the instituted distinctions between the real and the fictitious to directly address the relationship of the subject to social context (Bottici 2014, 3–7, 54–9, 125–7; Bottici and Challand 2010). By deploying a notion of the imaginal, Bottici argues that we can accept that distinctions between 'reality' and 'the imagined' or the 'imaginative' are already produced and given in the course of the formation of myths. In pressing a concept of the imaginal, Bottici aims to avoid connotations of fiction and the imaginative implicit in the etymology of terms historically leading to the 'imaginary', as well as the debates in the metaphysics of the individual's faculty for imagination and the collective constitution of social and cultural contexts. Once free from the baggage of common-sense conflation of imagination and the false, unreal, or fictitious, we are able to take two further steps. The first involves critically dissembling and contesting the spectacularization of politics in the global age. The second challenge is to understand how the emergence of myth informs our political horizons.

With this essential background laid out, Bottici then proceeds to explore myth in relation to imaginal politics (Bottici 2014, 127–33; 2007). Blumenberg is the main influence in Bottici's philosophical anthropology. Thus, humans are beings with a problematizing relationship with the world. Being thus, humanity is predestined to a quest for lasting meaning, that is, a grounded significance that stands the test of time. Humanity produces meaning that is emotional and sensory, as well as meaning that is cognitively knowable. To Blumenberg's conception of myth, Bottici brings an additional concept of political myth, which she defines as 'the work on a common narrative that coagulates and thus grants significance to the political conditions and experiences of a social group' (Bottici 2014, 129). Since myth always forms at a level of understanding where subjects emotionally feel as well as know the contents of myth, political myth can appear in condensed narrative form in a host of manifestations. Speeches, national anthems, statues, paintings, or the text of war memorials all, and each in their own ways, animate the core meaning of political myth.

Described in this manner, political myth relates to the instituting social imaginary, as Castoriadis characterizes it (Bottici 2007, 220–6; Castoriadis

1987[1975]). The reference to Castoriadis's theory emphasizes the generative character of myth. Political myth condenses meaning, which political subjects and movements interpret in ways that 'make their moral explicit in order to prompt political action' (Bottici 2007, 216). Bottici's chief case study is the myth of the clash of civilizations (from here referred to as 'the clash myth'), a myth for which the ground had long been prepared. She indicates in terms consonant with Blumenberg that this is a myth whose work started well before Huntington penned his perceptions of it (Bottici 2007, 249–53; 2014, 133–5, 137–41; Bottici and Challand 2010). The historical evolution of the etymology of 'civilization' since the eighteenth century – concisely précised at different points by Fernand Braudel, Henri Lefebvre, Raymond Williams, and Norbert Elias – relates well to the longer history of myth-making, when it is paired with Enlightenment and Romantic interpretations of the conceptual apparatus accompanying it (Bottici and Challand 2010, 113–6).[1] Emerging from the naming and interpretation of 'civilization' was a state of mind in which it was possible to see, name, think about, and discuss 'civilizational Others' (Bottici and Challand 2010, 115). In constructing an account of language, meaning, and perceptions, Bottici gives us what I regard as a longer history of myth-making in modernity. Furthermore, she claims the myth produces singularized and de-differentiated images of 'the West' and 'Islam', creating unconscious Occidentalist and Orientalist images of others, which post-Cold War politics tapped into (Bottici and Challand 2010, 98–101). The language of the so-called War on Terror evokes the clash in phrases such as 'crusade', in/out group affirmations of 'our way of life' and 'our values', and invocations of terrorists' threats to Civilization at large. As Bottici sees it, the semantic uses of 'Islam' and 'the West' in the clash discourse strip multinational and multi-ethnic constellations of their diversity and complexity. That said, it is important to note that, for Bottici, the clash myth generates broad significations applicable to different contexts and regions. Referring to deep meaning, myth is therefore irreducible to a single ideological expression (Challand and Bottici 2010). It is possible to construct, as Bottici does, a short history of discursive formation of the clash myth to accompany the long history. I return below to the broad significations of the notion of civilization to review this perspective on long and short histories on conceptions of civilization and civilizations and the possible implications for post-colonial thought that result from them.

How do the short and long historical discursive formations work together in making myth? What matters is the manner in which political myths of the clash furnish shared meaning broad enough as to encompass political actors from many contexts. In media, religious institutions, film, and in constrictive social customs, the intelligentsia fuels the clash myth in Middle Eastern as well as Western countries (Bottici 2014, 134). At a deeper level, the myth's

general core interpretive elements are shared by supporters of the so-called Dialogue of Civilizations, hawkish opponents of all currents of Islam and states and movements associated with it, and far right movements organized around Islamophobic agenda of exclusion and expulsion of Muslims.[2] However, the clash myth goes beyond the daily content of governmental politics. It is a shared problematic of civilizations for politicians and community and religious leaders defining international politics for the past two decades. After 9/11, an atmosphere of fear of terrorism and war greatly magnified the perception of a clash. In the United States, United Kingdom, and Australia, the clash myth has been the pretext for the augmentation of state security agencies, increases in surveillance, the expansion of military operations overseas, and occupation and warfare in Afghanistan and Iraq. Add to that the curtailment of civil liberties at home (Bottici 2014, 2). Bottici's analysis strongly suggests that the transformation of the political and cultural climate in Western countries is possible in a short time because of the very work of political myth carried out over a longer period.

Visible in the last point are two temporalities of the clash myth. First, the myth's underlying coalescence rests on a three-century evolution of the conceptual and linguistic apparatus of civilizational discourse. Second, the ideological dimensions of the myth over the past three decades have formed faster and are highly context dependent. They can be highly context dependent because of the pre-existing work of myth that established a shared civilizational animus as a background to the heightened state of animosity operative after 9/11. *Imaginal Politics* gauges these two temporalities as two histories. It remains now to introduce a third longer history, which I base on my own reconstruction of contemporary civilizational analysis.

Notwithstanding the critiques of the multiple modernities current and by implication contemporary civilizational analysis in *Imaginal Politics*, I argue that an extended history of intercivilizational engagement can only help to put the myth of the clash of civilizations in perspective. In my own work, there is an accentuated emphasis on the degree of connectedness of civilizations – a connectedness that includes conflict, colonizing processes, and warfare – as well as diverse instantiations of power over an even longer period of time (Smith 2006; 2017).[3] I characterize the degree of connectedness associated with globalization as *intercivilizational engagement*. Contra Huntington, my conception of civilizations focuses on the intersection of civilizational complexes where 'civilization' becomes meaningful; the sine qua non of civilizations lies here, and not in their mutual detachment. The degree of receptivity of societies to contact, encounters, and transaction, and the porosity of borders, however constituted, also define civilizations. In addition, the degree of receptivity shapes the work of myth. Here, I point out that my notion of engagement differs

from intercivilizational encounters, which are the most intensive and visible phases of more general interaction between world regions, constellations, and societies. Regularized contact, association, and transactions have been features of creation in the Castoriadian sense for millennia, although the experiences of mutual dependence vary widely across world regions (Smith 2017, 80–2). This applies to indigenous regional worlds too, which I emphatically include as civilizations. Intercivilizational engagement varies widely in character, continuity, and degree. However, it includes violence, warfare, colonization, and closure and detachment, as well as more recognizable forms, such as trade and cultural exchanges. Specifically, I bring to light the dimensions of migration (slavery, conquest, and occupation as major spurs); economic relations (commerce, trust-based networks, and modern capitalism); cultural traffic (creative fusions in science, religion, art, language, and design); and the communication and transfer of models of polity (in asymmetrical rivalry, collision, and conflict, as much as through diplomacy and learning). 'Civilization' qua constellation or complex is only meaningful in the context of engagement and encounters across the four dimensions.

All this suggests a different picture of pre-modern worlds. For some time, world historians (such as Chris Bayly and Jack Goody) have provided evidence of a higher degree of interregional interaction challenging previously held Eurocentric assumptions about the disconnection of pre-modern societies. Remarkably, this long precedes the Global Age, even forming earlier waves of globalization (Therborn 2011). This brings to the critique of the clash myth another comparative angle. The long historical purview incorporates a higher degree of exchange between Islamicate and European societies across western Eurasia, including in the most intensive phases of European intrusion into the Middle East.[4] A delineation of interregional entanglements of societies, economies, and cultures over the *longue durée*, entailing routine contact and transaction of knowledge in major intercivilizational encounters, negates the images of detachment and moral, scientific, and political incommensurability of Islam and the West that are central to the clash myth. The incompatibility of identities and civilizations – presumed and absorbed into the unconscious because of the long-term work of political myth – has to defy an older historical record of creative combination, exchange, and learning. Returning to Bottici's argument in *Imaginal Politics*, we can see that such a denial is entirely possible because of the power of the myth in the unconscious. Even so, more of this third longer history would enhance critical counterpoints responding to the clash myth and its ideological expressions (Bottici 2014, 140). With this longer history in mind, I argue that there is a vantage point in civilizational analysis on this that can give us added purchase on the clash myth and can thereby enrich Bottici's critique.

At this point, I observe that Bottici implicitly and explicitly urges critical thinkers to abandon the language of 'civilization' due to its misleading paths to unsought conclusions (2014, 39–40; Bottici and Challand 2010, 111–30). In this important move, Bottici echoes wider post-colonialist criticism of the Eurocentric connotations of 'civilization'. To be sure, harnessing contemporary civilizational analysis to the critique of the clash myth raises serious questions about the use of the category of civilization in social science and historical analysis. Post-colonial critics question the use of language in analysis, given the complicity of the notion in the history of colonialism. I have four responses with which to argue that this should not entail abandoning civilizational analysis as a framework. First, post-colonialist criticism finds an easy target in the shallow and reductive picture of the world constructed by scholars like Huntington. To the best of my knowledge, no critic has systematically tackled the most far-reaching and serious enterprises of civilizational analysis: Braudel, Elias, Nelson, Arnason, Marshall Hodgson, or Said Arjomand to name the most significant. Eisenstadt's multiple modernities perspective has met with extensive treatment, of course. In contemporary civilizational analysis, we find a serious critical and reflexive paradigm in which the uses and abuses of the language of civilizations are put under scrutiny. This leads to my second response. Many categories developed in the human sciences have ideological applications: capitalism, nation, democracy, and human rights. All these are politically loaded. Yet, it is hard to see how social science could operate without using these terms.[5] The third response is twofold. Major scholars in civilizational analysis variously construct their own critiques of Eurocentrism. Some developed detailed critical positions decades before the rise of post-colonial studies, notably Elias, Hodgson, and Braudel. Above all, a number of scholars in this register begin with critical etymology of the vocabulary of family words associated with 'civilization' – a crucial point given the emphasis that Bottici rightly places on genealogy. For example, Elias is an underacknowledged pioneer tracing the conceptual development through German and French in the 1930s, locating it in a framework of power, and civilizing processes.[6] Fourth, civilizational analysis has contributed to the human sciences as a whole a pluralistic study of civilizations. With this, it has helped to erode the nineteenth-century unitary worldview of Civilization with an upper case 'C' counterposed to the supposed Barbarism of the colonized world. In short, there is much in the paradigm to support a valid critique of Eurocentrism.

This includes the longer history noted above. My necessarily all-too-brief reconstruction contains important correctives to the notion that civilizations must clash in the post-Cold War world. Continuing on the theme of diverse and connected societies, I wish also to suggest that a more extensive periodization of globalization can modify perceptions of the exceptionalism

attributed to the integration of societies and cultures in modernity. It is time to turn to that.

GLOBALIZATION AND MULTIPLE CONSTELLATIONS

As a preamble to my consideration of globalization, let us examine how civilizational scholars in historical sociology treat the question of modernity, capitalism, and civilizations. Although not a civilizational thinker, Castoriadis is a starting point. His conception of the social-historical begins with a critique of causal models of historical succession of social formation common to history as a discipline and evident in functionalist paradigms of sociology and anthropology. From this theoretical viewpoint, he elucidates the a priori breadth of forms of human existence in their creative emergence. There is a kind of synergistic movement in creation qua 'the existence of history *in toto* as well as by the appearance of new societies (new *types* of society) and the incessant self-transformation of every society' (1987 [1975], 184–5). Even societies classed as 'cold societies' exhibit 'the pace or the rhythm of this self-alteration' (1987 [1975], 1985). This characterization of the social-historical as incessant auto-transformation is a prelude to his suggestion that there is an indefinite diversity of societies and not the narrow range of 'types' of social formation delimited in causalist-rationalist models.[7] Taking historical diversity as a premise, Castoriadis thus confers on history an extraordinary variety of forms of historicity. Here Castoriadis theorizes what contemporary civilizational analysis explores in historical and empirical research: the variety and differentiation of societies and how they coalesce in constellations. I want to profile this civilizational diversity as a preliminary step towards examination of multiplicity in modernity. I do so by congregating civilizational analysis into three streams.

As a first stream, world historians call particular attention to the breadth of constellations. Fernando Fernandez-Armesto, Fernand Braudel, Arnold Toynbee, and the later William McNeill draw into relief the geological and climatic conditions for the regional, religious, multi-societal, continental, and oceanic civilizations (Braudel 1993 [1963]; Fernandez-Armesto 2001; McNeill and McNeill 2003; Toynbee 1972). All four treat civilizations as interactive multi-societal and multidimensional constellations. Fernandez-Armesto and Braudel explicitly incorporate the environment into their historiographical outlook. Toynbee's encyclopaedic work counts 31 major civilizations as geographically based constellations (Toynbee 1972). Civilizations are constellational for Toynbee since they encompass a multidimensional network of societies. They acquire a regional quality. This is not the place for critical commentary (but see Arnason 2003, 111–15). However,

one observation does serve the current purpose: Toynbee's commitment to understanding the diversity of constellations sets a standard in world history during a lull in the sub-discipline's popularity. McNeill's vision of this plurality is based on radical revision of his earlier reified conception of civilization (McNeill 1991). Once done, he focused on communication, exchange, migration, cooperation, and competition between societies, and the uneven growth of connected cultures and civilizations over twelve thousand years (McNeill and McNeill 2003). His metaphor for the construction of human sociality, worldwide webs, may be debatable, but the image of a tightening of connections and contact as a kind of homogenizing impulse should be taken seriously.[8] The longer view of history in this approach is highly laudable. It seems hard to justify distinguishing modernity's great circulation of people, goods, and capital in the manner that uncritical analysis of globalization do when the meta-pattern of human sociality is the tightening web of connection.

In a second stream, historical and comparative sociologists highlight inter-civilizational encounters. Although Benjamin Nelson is the progenitor of the most systematic study of the intercivilizational encounters, Johann Arnason best represents the most interesting recent developments in this stream. His comparative analysis takes in the civilizational constellations of Soviet modernity, Japan, Southeast Asia, Byzantium, East Asia, Islam, and Eurasia as a multi-civilizational macro-region – the latter being a subject of some debate (see Arnason and Wittrock 2004). In his estimation, there is no meaningful way to investigate civilizational constellations, except as creations situated in regions. The relationship of civilizations and world regions may remain an underdeveloped theme (Arnason 2003, 314–22), but for Arnason it is central. He sees constellations as complex combinations of regions and history emerging from intercivilizational encounters and the imaginary significations of wealth, power, and meaning.

If Arnason feels compelled to problematize constellations of regions in this way, there is little sign that Eisenstadtis that way inclined. Across his research into axial civilizations, his systematic construction of a paradigm of multiple modernities as an alternative to globalization analysis (Eisenstadt 2002), his collaborative project of early modernities (Eisenstadt and Schluchter 1998), and the provocative thesis positing a 'civilization of modernity' (Eisenstadt 2004), he examined Indian, Islamicate, and Western European civilizations. He tested his comparative civilizational analysis on Jewish, Japanese, and American civilizations. Yet he did not embrace intercivilizational encounters as fully as others. At no time did he probe the concept of ecology or region in the manner that Fernandez-Armesto, Braudel, or Arnason have as a factor in the differentiation of constellations.

Discussions of regions allude to a third stream. Two recent projects have brought the relationship of world regions and civilizations back in. In a

collaboration of historical sociologists and comparativists, Arjomand (2014) aims to generate new conceptual toolkits applicable to the examination of zones neglected by the social sciences. The new perspective forms 'on the basis of the vast, understudied, and analytically untapped historical and cultural experience of other regions and civilizations' (2014, 3). Scholars in Arjomand's project wish to relativize the notion of modernity by incorporating a wider variety of historical experiences into social theory. Katzenstein (2010) has organized an equivalent project with collaborators in international relations examining the varieties of civilizational constellations, trans-civilizational engagements, and intercivilizational encounters. Civilizations, as pluralist as well as plural, develop from a variety of processes of state formation. Like Arnason, Katzenstein conceives civilizations as constellations interacting with world regional contexts in complex ways.

Another province of diversity in the Global Age is the varieties of capitalism considered and debated in critical political economy, political science, and political sociology. Three main controversies stand out. They revolve around the political constitution of capitalism (Joerges et al. 2005), how capitalism's emergence related to civilizational and historical backgrounds, and efforts to rethink capitalism at a meta-theoretical level in the wake of the decline of post-war social democratic models of statehood. While the first controversy – the political constitution of capitalism – is more mainstream to economics and political sociology, the latter two debates have not attracted the same level of attention. Theorists from the fields of social imaginaries and civilizational analysis have much to contribute to both questions. Braudel, Arnason, and Robert W Cox have illuminated the civilizational backgrounds to the variants within capitalist modernity (Arnason 2005, 2015; Braudel 1985; Cox 2002). The variations include not only national and regional types (Anglo-American or Southeast Asian, for example) but also concrete political practices of neoliberalism and constellations of a new spirit of capitalism. There are also rich sources and much potential in the social imaginaries field. Wagner's (1994) perspective on the trajectories of modernity includes such a line of thinking that situates Castoriadis in a developed conception of late capitalism. He recomposes the social imaginary significations of capitalism as the economic *problématique* of variants within modern capitalist modernity. The further differentiation of capitalism with the exhaustion of organized modernity is evident in the emergence of new trade blocs, Asian capitalisms, and informal groupings such as the BRICs.[9] From a Wagnerian point of view, a different and phenomenological picture emerges of the situated engagements, connections, and solidarities that exist in regional zones and national states imbued with specific worldviews and historical legacies. Charles Taylor (2004) is a major reference point also. His outline of the market economy as an imagined mode of organization of wants warrants

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greater deliberation in a more expansive theoretical framework. The social imaginary significations of the imagined market may be singular in global capitalism, but actors practice and re-conceive them in a great variety of contexts in which the strategies of accumulation and patterns of resistance to commodification differ. Arnason's adventures in the re-conception of capitalism sketch a picture of the diversification of the capitalist imaginary (Arnason 2015, 2005, 2001). He qualifies the debate by emphasizing the historicity of specific figurations. Also influenced by Castoriadis, he is particularly interested in how the background of civilizations variously articulates with patterns of wealth, power, and meaning. Reading Arnason on capitalism, one walks away with the impression that there is more to regionalization than we find debated in globalization studies or the varieties of capitalism literature (see Fawcett and Hurrell 1995). Exploring this debate further is beyond the purpose of the current chapter. However, one conclusion is crucial: globalization's impulses do not always dissipate capitalism's variations. It is vital to consider this.

If we see these as diverse projections of globality, we might well notice that this seems lost *on* the protagonists of the program of neoliberal corporatism and lost *in* analysis of globalist liberal universalism in the social sciences. Some of these perspectives on the spatial and temporal reordering of the global world are one-dimensional in nature. Other sociological perspectives on plurality are outside of the scope of the current chapter.[10] They might be termed as different imaginaries: political, ecological, feminist, cosmopolitan and global imaginaries, and constitutional ones, to name a few under debate (see Calhoun et al. 2015; Gatens 1996; and Lara 1998). There are grounds here and in other regions of the humanities and social sciences for careful consideration of the variety of constellations, formations, and societies in the context of public discourse and debate about globalization. It is time, however, to examine Bottici's observations on globalism.

GLOBALIZATION AND PLURALITY

In respect of the Global Age, Bottici aims to explain how spectacle dominates our times. The notion of the imaginal is central to this endeavour since the imaginal forms spectacle and stimulates the spectacularization of culture and cultural consumption. The formation of images and the challenges thrown down to all committed to a public emancipatory politics are the key objects of inquiry. Bottici argues that the qualitative change in the political emerges from the production and management of imagery in the form of virtualized spectacles. In a direct reading of Debord, she contends that virtualized images are so densely commodified that we can claim that imagery has become the

essence of contemporary capitalism (Bottici 2014, 114–7). Going beyond Debord, Bottici states that the virtuality of images has deepened. Images modified today can end up abstracted from a place and historical period altogether (Bottici 2014, 118–20). Elections exemplify this. They are represented as episodic, *made* to be episodic (Bottici 2014, 149–51). Most importantly for Bottici, since capitalism is global, the emergence of image-saturated societies links directly to dimensions of global integration.

In the dimensions of finance, production, trade, technology, communications, and speed, transnational reach matters more than statehood or location in the instantiation of power. Thus, when it comes to investment, production, or policy formulation in relation to global problems like climate change or stockpiles of nuclear and chemical weapons, globality trumps particularity (Bottici 2014, 108–11). Yet, note how a 'puzzling tension' persists in this respect. In the society of the spectacle, both the books of information and images produced and the velocity of their transmission in daily life have increased, causing a 'hypertrophy' of politics, or a diminution of capacity to imagine alternatives, with which social movements can confront the technocratization of government (or the reign of 'governance' if you will).[11]

Overall, globalization is an indispensable backdrop to Bottici's theory of the imaginal. In exploring the literature, she conducts both analysis and forecast in her observations. Her analysis carries a conviction about globalization's impact: secular tendencies of growth in transnationalism coincide with the demise of national states. Singularizing imaginaries or societies in space and time is problematic in the wake of global integration and the redefinition of the social through the tightening chains of interdependence and the connection of cultures (2014, 198). In this context, social scientists engaged in the demarcation of multiple modernities, civilizations, or imaginaries risk unwittingly reproducing reified entities with closed boundaries.[12] The fluidity of borders renders the conceptualization of multiple constellations not only redundant but also dangerous, Bottici argues.

With globalization, spectacle mediates social relations. Bottici takes Debord's case for the society of the spectacle further by rethinking contemporary capitalism and democracy. The post-Fordist institutional figuration of capitalism and the parliamentary elections of formally democratic societies are domains both wholly saturated with imagery. The imaginal dominates the production process and the sphere of consumption integrating both at a higher level. De-territorialized imagery now supplements – nay, *subsumes* – techniques of neoliberal governance that came in the 1990s. The nation state is vanishing from sight in this process (2014, 108–12). In a society preoccupied by the virtual, the digital spectacle becomes the central tenet, standard, and paradigm in everyday life and politics. Authenticity of product, cultural work,

or political argument no longer matters in a world in which virtualization integrates the production and dispersal of culture and politics. Globalization, moreover, gives imagery a potentially vast worldwide audience, as well as dispersing the technologies of simulation, such as Photoshop and, we can add, the successor design software now surpassing it (2014, 119–22). This amounts to a 'global imaginary' in which the central myths of the world civilizations and societies circulate through a supra-regional public sphere of multiple media forms.

The prospects for freedom might appear bleak. Bottici does not think so. Instead, globalization, by effecting the dispersal of state sovereignty, has generated conditions of latent federalism. To date, this has primarily promoted biopower, severely constraining the freedoms essential to the realization of a federalist configuration of autonomous, self-determining powers. Hopes lie in the collective agency of 'new global' movements (2014, 199); the first of what I argue are hints in Bottici's work of the influence of multiple secular dynamics. Let us examine this first hint. Global movements contesting neoliberalism with alternative projects of globalization create new spaces and alternative kinds of politics. In form, they resemble 'free federalism'. With horizontal networks and cultures of mutual respect, the more recent Occupy movement, for example, connected with a lineage of opposition to neoliberalism from the late 1990s. Commenting soon after the efflorescence and decline of rebellion, Bottici observed that the Arab Spring revolutions also connected with this lineage (2014, 200–1). To the society of the spectacle, the social movements bring agency, different values, and practices, as well as effective uses of social media, privileging integration of peoples.

In highlighting the projects of alternative globalization creatively envisaged by the movements around the World Social Forum, Occupy, and the turn of the century opposition to neoliberal globalism, Bottici throws into relief projects that problematize the globalization thesis through promotion of emancipatory alternatives. Far from a flat plane of globality, the picture of globalizing processes looks considerably more complex when one factors in different projects and models of globalization alongside the resilient emancipatory visions of the anti-neoliberal social movements as alternatives. The picture then becomes one of countervailing tendencies of different kinds disrupting the uniformity promoted by neoliberal globalization. This collision of universalizing and particularizing processes is contingent and, indeed, contingency prevails.

A third hint lies outside of *Imaginal Politics*. In a separate work (with Benoît Challand), Bottici describes responsiveness to globalism as a central problem for the EU as a supranational body (Bottici and Challand 2013, 21, 123). In its executive and centralist form, the European project has a strong orientation to regionalizing neoliberalism. This is built upon concrete

historical experiences of nation state formation (Bottici and Challand 2013, 29–31). By adopting a perspective of the *longue durée*, alongside a dia-chronic methodology of analysing content and interpretation, Bottici and Challand gain considerable purchase on the specificity of the social-historical informing the imagination of Europe. Arguably, similar approaches to the open regionalism of APEC in Asia or ALBA in Andean-America, or formal treaties such as NAFTA or the South Asian Free Trade Area, could produce valuable, if highly variable, insights into the relationship of the social-histor-ical to regional solidarities (see Fawcett and Hurrell 1995). There is immense value in diachronically comparing phases, while also periodizing the past to explore continuities and discontinuities in the social-historical (Smith 2019). I find Bottici and Challand doing something comparable in their evaluation of collective and social memory, cultural myth, and political myth in relation to European identity and democracy.[13] If an awareness of regional variation inhabits *Imagining Europe*, it does not re-surface in discussions of globalism in *Imaginal Politics*.

In addition to the regional configurations diversifying models of globality and the demonstration effect of an alternative global coordination performed by social movements, we ought to make mention of the powers of counter-globalism arising since the publication of *Imaginal Politics*. Right-wing pop-ulism has made considerable headway in the United States, United Kingdom, Brazil, the Netherlands, Hungary, Poland, Italy, and India. Conceptualized in a social imaginaries framework, we can meaningfully theorize a 'populist imaginary' to help us understand the new surge (Blokker 2019; Gauchet 2017). Populist politics is counter-globalist in at least three ways. First, it exercises isolationism, as Trump has in foreign policy, Johnson in respect of the EU and the Schengen Agreement, and Bolsonaro in his government's defi-ance of international obligations under the Paris Agreement. At the time of writing, what the implications of the isolationist turn are remain very unclear in the wake of COVID-19. However, the global pandemic would seem to have all but established a radically different international arena, perhaps per-manently. Second, in the United States, the rhetoric of economic nationalism has been followed by a selective reactivation of policies of protectionism – where they can still be effective – in the framework of fresh protectionist strategies. New tariffs installed as part of Trump's trade war manoeuvres with China and tough talk in negotiations with the EU and NAFTA partners are cases in point. Trump was not reversing globalism but taking a new isolation-ist approach to major rivals of American power. Third, populist movements in government seek a re-negotiation of the authority and limits of liberal constitutional law in order to remove constraints on the leader's executive powers via a radicalization of 'the popular authorship of laws' (Blokker 2019, 132) in which the leader appears as the quintessence of the people (Blokker

2019, 131–8). With the re-location of sovereignty to an imagined 'people', the populist reconstruction of a constitutional polity would be complete. No government has achieved this in the twenty-first century. Nevertheless, the impact of populist constitutionalism on the Westphalian order of nation states has counter-globalist implications. Those implications may not be clear for some time. In these three areas, counter-globalist myths and symbols of nationhood erode globalism, especially when they undergo conversion into policies and practices of major states.

CONCLUSION

In this chapter, I bring a synthesis of the fields of contemporary civilizational analysis and social imaginaries to bear on the seventh chapter of *Imaginal Politics* and other work by Chiara on myth, on one hand, and perspectives on globalization, on the other. The common theme of this approach is that the varieties of civilizational background, of capitalism, and variants of modernity cast a different light on these two aspects of *Imaginal Politics*. The critique of the clash myth can be extended and strengthened. The image of globalization in *Imaginal Politics* could more critically reflect the impact of countervailing tendencies that constrain and circumscribe actually existing globality. A more nuanced and multidimensional understanding of constellations of these kinds, if incorporated into the notion of the imaginal as the other space between the imaginary and imagination, could significantly fortify the work's explanatory and political framework.

NOTES

1. See Braudel (1993, 3–8) and Mazlish (2004) for a summary of the genealogical literature on concepts of civilization.
2. Compare with Mazlish (2004, 112–37) on the Dialogue of Civilizations.
3. In focusing on connected formations, histories, and constellations, I take Castoriadis's position on the diversity of the social-historical as a question for further inquiry as well as a political stance. With respect to the latter, the position is one of opposition to, first, the closure of critical thought and emancipatory agency and, second, processes of homogenization and de-differentiation of the complexity of modes of social and historical life, particularly authoritarian figurations of polity and neoliberal versions of globality.
4. See Fernandez-Armesto's list of major European breakthroughs that originated in inputs from "Eastern" sources (2000, 311).
5. I elaborate this insight from Arnason's critique of post-colonialism (2003, 323–59).

6. Mazlish's (2004) approach follows Elias in this respect.

7. Applied sociologically, his concept of the social-historical could complement other perspectives capable of compensating for two gaps that otherwise trouble his approach. Those gaps are, first, his socio-centric focus on society at the neglect of other types of collectivity (ethnic groups) and constellations (regions, civilizations, empires). Second, in itself, his elucidation of the social-historical would be stronger with a clearer connection to empirical projects exploring the interconnections of social formations and historical constellations (such as intercivilizational encounters). Mindful of both of these lacunae elucidation of the imaginary institution, I nevertheless posit Castoriadis's ontology as a contribution best located at the intersection of historical and comparative sociology, civilizational analysis, and social imaginaries.

8. To my mind, McNeills's work invites comparison with Goran Therborn, another student of connected constellations, and his historical sociology of the waves of globalization (2011).

9. I refer to Wagner (2015), Kim and Pieterse (2012), and Therborn and Khondker (2006) among a large field of literature. However, compare with Part II of Domingues (2012), which incorporates a provocation to the use of ideal typology in comparative analysis in classifying the variation of figurations of polity, capitalism, and culture in the BRICs.

10. For the best sociological works on globalization, see Therborn (2011) and Robertson (1992).

11. Zygmunt Bauman framed this as a loss of the sociological imagination qua capacity to imagine an alternative society. He regards the condition as a paradox: at a time of supposedly unprecedented freedom, people seem unable to change things in society. A "clinical" approach to governance has colonized the space of politics, leaving little room for imaginative critique and transformative agency. *In Search of Politics* mounts an argument analogous to Bottici's version of neoliberal capitalism (see 2014, 1–3 for opening remarks).

12. See Bottici (2014, 37–40) and relevant endnotes on page 210 as well as Bottici and Challand (2010, 123). In her commentary of Charles Taylor in this passage, she notes that he avoids this danger by identifying with Gadamer's fusion of horizons.

13. Compare with Jan Assman on cultural memory as a category defined explicitly by historicity (Assmann 2011).

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Chapter 9

Debating Imaginal Politics

A Response

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I would like to begin with the three ships. First, there is the poem, 'The galleon', quoted at the end of *Imaginal Politics* as 'A Conclusion and a New Beginning': it is the galleon of the 'freedom of equals', meant to convey the sense that, in the current predicament, we are either all free or all slaves of the one-per cent master. As the Occupy Wall Street slogan that I used as epigraph of that chapter put it, 'we are all on the same boat and the boat is sinking'.[1] Thus, not only are we all slaves, but that slavery is now threatening the survival of life on the planet. Eduardo Mendieta eloquently associates this galleon with two other ships. The first is that of Earth as spaceship floating in the universe, which was first available to humanity in 1972, when the Apollo 17 crew, the mission that went to the moon, took a picture of the earth and thereby made it possible for humanity to first literally see the globe as a unity, as the one and only ship we have as we navigate through the universe: a technological but also a hermeneutical turning point in the history of humanity (Oliver 2015). The second ship is that evoked by Mendieta's magnificent interpretation of Melville's 'Benito Cereno' novella: that of a white American captain, who sees a ship which he believes to be in distress, and approaches it to help, talking to its members as if it were a normal slave ship, with the white captain in command and the black people enslaved, without realizing that the white Spanish captain, whom he believes to be mentally weird, is actually a captive of the black slaves who have rebelled and are now in control of the ship heading it back to Africa. The ignorance of the American captain (who is unable to see what is happening in front of his eyes because he keeps seeing it through the imaginal patterns he is accustomed to) can be interpreted, according to Mendieta, as an example of what today we

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could call epistemic ignorance, and thus of the freedom that we do not, and cannot, see (Mendieta 2017). These are three images that aptly convey the sense of what I wanted to do in *Imaginal Politics*, that is, asking how, in our times so full of images, can we preserve our capacity to imagine differently and thus to realize that things may actually be different from what we are accustomed to see.

Both Eduardo Mendieta and María Pía Lara raise the important question of how we should choose between images, and they invite me to make my 'normative ground' more explicit. María Pía Lara argues that 'doing politics now deserves a new kind of normative ground for the imaginal if we need to discriminate between the good and the bad' (p. 31), whereas Eduardo Mendieta proposes to read *Imaginal Politics* along with *A Philosophy of Political Myth* in order to go beyond the 'Bottici of mere images' and invites us to compare my philosophy with that of Drucilla Cornell and her reappropriation of Immanuel Kant's moral philosophy.

To begin with, I should therefore clarify my stance on normativity. I believe the fortune of the term is linked to the resurgence in popularity of Kantian ethics and political philosophy, a way to frame issues that implicitly brings with it the underlying ontological assumption of a separation between the world of phenomena and that of noumena. Speaking about 'normativity' implies that there is a plane of norms, of abstract moral laws that can be used to judge and gauge the empirical world of facts, as if the two were separate realms. Along with Hilary Putnam, I find this dualism highly misleading and rooted in an antiquated view of the world, that of modern mechanicism, which depicted a natural phenomenal world deprived of any values and thus called for the elaboration of some form of metaphysical dualism in order to save some space for ethics, morality, and religion (Putnam 2002).

I believe this metaphysical dualism is the philosophers' way of saving the Christian dualism from the potentially lethal attack of modern science, and that it is through such a dualism that the same social hierarchy that Christian theology propagated has been re-produced under other names. Whereas Christianity justified the special position of man as the top of the *scala naturae* on the basis of the Genesis story, modern philosophy did so on the basis of the metaphysical dualism that assigned a special position to humans as creatures able to participate in both the empirical world and the noumenal one, where freedom, immortality of the soul, and the existence of God are assured and justified. It is this assumption of a 'nonhomogeneity of substance',[2] of a fundamental dualism between the heavens and the earth, the soul and the flesh, the mind and the body, that helped to justify a political order that dominated some bodies in the name of the ontological superiority of others; hence, the idea of a *scala naturae* of man>woman>slave>animal>plant>inanimate matter.

In the contemporary opposition between normativity and factuality, I see another version of the same dualism between a mind that dictates norms and a body that receives them, which I find problematic and which has consistently led me to avoid the language of 'normativity' whenever possible. By using that very term, one implicitly assumes that there could be a world of phenomena which is not by itself normative. In contrast to such a view, I have always implicitly or explicitly adopted a monist Spinozist ontology, where no facts versus values dichotomy can subsist, because there is no space for a body versus mind dichotomy. Speaking about a 'normative ground' implies opposing it to something that is 'non-normative' and thus merely 'factual', but within a monist ontological framework this opposition does not make any sense. In *Imaginal Politics*, I derived the notion of imaginal from the notion of a *mundus imaginalis*, but with a different religious and ontological framework than the original Arab Neoplatonist one. Subsequently, in other parts of my work, I made it clear that the ontological framework I had implicitly assumed is a Spinozist one (Bottici 2019).

This rejection of the language of 'normativity' does not mean that 'everything goes'; it means to conceive of critique not as 'normative', but as 'immanent', that is, as a critique exercised from the point of view of the awareness that there is only one world, and that reason operating within it cannot, therefore, ever be 'pure'. By combining Karl Marx's understanding of critique with a Spinozist framework, I developed a form of immanent critique understood as the clarification of the struggles of our time in thought.[3] In particular, the struggle that *Imaginal Politics* tries to identify is that created by a post-Fordist mode of production that has inundated us with an endless stream of images, so much so that we may have lost our imagination. Within such a scenario, more than finding universal criteria for separating a priori good from bad images it is crucial to understand how the process of production-reception-and-reproduction of image works, what kind of subjectivity it generates, how it affects the nature of political power, and our understanding of reality. As Simona Forti also suggests in her chapter, by focusing on the difference between the 'dark' and the positive role of the imaginal (p. 52), mine is an investigation that itself embodies some values and which I make explicit in the conclusion of the book as those of 'the freedom of equals'. As I also argued in *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, the criteria for navigating the imaginal turn of our time are indeed trying to understand which images enable the work of critique and which, on the contrary, preclude its possibility.

Such a form of 'immanent critique' fully escapes the double bind that emerges for Eduardo Mendieta and Drucilla Cornell. According to Mendieta, we are 'either inside the rule of law and the rights that a state can legislate and use to coerce, thus legislating a certain conception of gender, of being

a sexuated being in a certain way, or we turn our backs on the state, and its language of rights, and forego the coercive power of the state, and the language, and voice, of rights, and thus consign ourselves to a legal and political silence and voluntary invisibility' (p. 14). Yet, this double-bind emerges only for those who, following Immanuel Kant, are looking for universal law that establishes a priori whether submitting oneself to state laws or not. From the point of view of an immanent critique, it is very clear that there are cases in which state laws and their language of rights can be one of the tools for realizing a freedom of equals, but there are (and have been) others in which state laws have been the mere tool whereby a minority ruled over and abused the majority of people. The form of immanent critique put forward in *Imaginal Politics* escapes such a double bind because it rejects from the very outset the program of a 'normative ground' from which to exercise a purely rational critique and thus to stay away from the 'Cartesian anxiety' that characterizes so much of the Western philosophical tradition, that is, from that anxious search for a universal anchoring point that would enable us to defend ourselves from the spectre of relativism.[4]

Similarly, it is from the perspective of such a search for a universal anchoring point of critique that questions such as that of the role of 'individual agency' raised by María Pía Lara can emerge (p. 36–40). As a Spinozist, I believe that all individual beings are endowed with agency to some degree: even a stone strives to persist in its being and is thus endowed with agency. Every being is endowed with some form of agency, but the degree to which they can achieve freedom cannot be established a priori; it is only through the a posteriori consideration of specific political scenarios, as Simona Forti does in her chapter, that we can provide a reply to the question of freedom (which is in my view different from that of agency). I would also be sceptical of the use of the term 'individual agency' because, as I recently argued, I believe that (properly speaking) there is no 'individual' existence, since we are all transindividual (Bottici 2021, Chap. 5).

Consequently, I very much agree with María Pía Lara's claim that 'we need not to separate the faculty of imagination and the contexts of the social imaginary as if they were two independent entities'. She claims that 'we should understand that they are interrelated and interact dynamically' and that 'the German philosophical tradition allows us to better explore the interrelation between individuals and societies as complex processes mediated by the role of language defined as form of life' (p. 32). Although I agree with this point as well and have myself made recourse to such a philosophical tradition in the past,[5] I have more recently come to perceive its limits.

To begin with, such a philosophical tradition (and the linguistic turn to which María Pía Lara refers) has relied mainly on language and words to convey this point about the intersubjective nature of the self. On the contrary,

through the concept of imaginal, I firstly wanted to emphasize that words are not the only possible way to convey images and that there are other pictorial significations that circulate both in the public sphere and in the social unconscious which differ from the way in which words and discursive formations operate. Think, for instance, of the Mohammed cartoon controversy that began in 2005 when a Danish newspaper published images of the prophet with a bomb in his turban. Within a few weeks, those images went viral on internet, leading to violent clashes in some Muslim-majority countries, where they were perceived as an insult. If, instead of images, which could travel immediately and beyond any linguistic barriers in the incendiary climate of the post-9/11 global public sphere, they had been words (and written in languages like Danish, spoken by a mere six million people globally), there would not have been any such diffusion and certainly not the same sort of passionate and violent reactions worldwide.[6] It is to such a novelty, certainly made possible by recent technological developments, that the concept of 'imaginal politics' refers. María Pía Lara invites us to consider the 'disclosive power of new terms' (p. 42), which is certainly a very important task, but (along with it) imaginal politics is meant to invite us to consider also the disclosive (and potentially explosive) power of 'new images'.

Secondly, with its emphasis on intersubjectivity, the German philosophical tradition invoked by Lara moves itself between the two polarities of individuals and society. She writes, 'as intersubjective beings we are never just individuals, and language as a social institution provides us with our connections to others as we share the world with others through the same cultural and social practices and its institutions' (p. 39). Thus, whereas language helps us to understand the intersubjective space created between individuals in a society, the concept of the imaginal points to an overcoming of the polarity of individual and society and invites us to scrutinize a different social ontology where the question is no longer that of 'intersubjectivity' (i.e., of how individual human beings share their world with other human beings), but rather that of 'transindividuality' (i.e., of how humans share their world both with other human beings and with the other-than-human beings, including animals and plants [Bottici 2019, 2021]). Although the notion of transindividuality was not yet present to me when I wrote *Imaginal Politics*, the conceptual movement of the book already signals a desire to overcome this polarity between the individual and the social towards an exploration of the more-than-human; hence, the emphasis not only on 'intersubjectivity' (i.e., the space between 'subjects') but also on 'trans' individuality (i.e., on the infra- and supra-individual level as well, where processes beyond the linguistic and social mediation become integral to our transindividuality). To what extent are the more-than-human (the world of animals, plants, and even the earth itself) also constitutive of our individuality? How are the molecules we inhale, or the

food we eat, or the hormones we englobe, part of our transindividual nature? This is a question for which the German philosophical tradition, from Kant to Wittgenstein, can only provide some hints (such as Kant's remark that the earth is round so we cannot expand on it indefinitely). Nevertheless, even Kant's cosmopolitanism – entrenched as it is in its humanist hubris, in the idea of *scala naturae* that places man on top – cannot tell us much about our transindividual nature.[7]

When I stated that the concept of imagination has often been understood as an individual faculty, whereas that of the imaginary has often been understood as a social or psychological context, I did not mean to endorse such a separation. Quite the contrary – the concept of imaginal does not make any a priori assumption as to the individual or social nature of the images produced, and is therefore a better tool than both imagination or imaginary to convey two insights: first, as Eduardo Mendieta also emphasizes, that 'there is no subjection without subjectification and no subjectification without subjection' (p. 18); and, second, that in the context of our current explosion of images, the line between the individual versus social nature of images is further blurred. Precisely because virtual images are not just objects created once and for all but rather processes of constant manipulation, it becomes even more difficult to establish whether a single image is the result of the single mind of an individual or of a social process of production-reception-reproduction of images.

This virtualization of images also implies a change in their phenomenology, that is in the way in which we perceive and approach them, which, in turn, further calls into question the traditional understanding of the reality of images – a technological change that explains the proliferation of images but does not mean that we have lost any criteria for judging their reality. It means that we need to reflect upon what reality means, since the most unreal of the images can indeed now become the most real in our current world. The virtualization and spectacularization of images in the age of social media are indeed what explain a new quality of politics, a novelty that different authors have tried to grasp under different names – 'post-factual politics', 'post-reality politics', or 'post-truth politics', to mention those highlighted by Simona Forti in her contribution. The names change (and each category would require a book in itself), but they all point to the same transformation: what we can call the 'imaginal turn' in politics. Politics has always been imaginal to a minimal degree, but the extent to which it relies on images today – images of its leaders, images of the people, images of its spectacles, images of crises, catastrophes, and emergencies – is unprecedented. There is a point where the quantitative increase turns into a new quality and the project of *Imaginal Politics* was indeed that of signalling such a novelty.

Although this dynamic process presents a democratic potential because everybody endowed with a smartphone can now intervene in a virtual image, it also opens terrifying new possibilities. We have no secure criteria to determine the authenticity of the images inundating us every day, while also being scattered in a condition of alleged permanent crisis that requires immediate political action. In this hyper-accelerated stream of images, the winner is the image that can capture the audience's attention, make sure they will not scroll down, but rather stick with that message, re-post and re-tweet, and thus generate an immediate action. Only by taking this deep transformation of the phenomenology of the images into account can we come to terms with phenomena such as the rise of new authoritarian populism and neofascism globally. The latter does not simply result from a manipulation of our capacity to imagine, like the traditional fascism or the totalitarianism that Simona Forti invokes; it feeds on the more recent qualitative and quantitative transformation of the imaginal that made it possible in the first place. In other words, we need to understand why people were ready to exchange 'fake news' for 'real news' when it comes to their political choices, and there is no way to make sense of this paradox without considering the 'imaginal' turn in politics along with the power of the new social media that sustain it.

Social media such as Twitter, Facebook, and Instagram are a crucial component of today's resurgence of authoritarianism worldwide, and their power can hardly be overestimated. When you are navigating on social media, with their promise of friendship and community, you are literally navigating a certain form of mass psychology that is tendentially populist in nature because it invites one to identify with certain images of leaders, which thus become representative of the people at large. It is not simply that authoritarian personalities such as Donald Trump can skilfully manipulate their followers, but that these media have a manipulative logic by themselves because they deeply feed on and exacerbate affects circulating in the social unconscious. Think, for instance, of how the algorithm which determines which tweet, which Facebook post to show next on a newsfeed works: by selecting the image and content that is most likely to keep you glued to the media itself, the one able to capture your imagination and your emotions. Hence, the tendency to produce emotionally polarized versions of reality that progressively alienate those who literally see it and feel differently. By reading mainly (or only) the news that confirms your own opinion and looking at images that fuel the emotions that the algorithm expects from you, you become entrenched in a view of reality that is self-fulfilling. By selecting content that elicits similar emotional responses, the algorithms regulating social media tend to produce polarized views of reality, generate friend/enemy divides, and aliment the psychological symbolic reservoir that sustains them. The point is not deeply believing that the enemies are evil, but performing that hate, except that such

a performance can then become self-fulfilling. Just to make an example, many of Trump's 88.8 million social media followers ended up living in their own reality, one in which Democrats had really rigged the 2020 presidential elections, in which democracy was really stolen – so it appeared natural to them, if, in order to save it, they had to storm the Capitol as they actually did on 6 January 2021. But this actual storm of violence had been prepared by an imaginal storm of tweets and posts that Trump and his followers had been feeding for months and even years.

Although I believe that this imaginal turn is crucial to understanding the surge of populism globally, the mass psychology fuelled by the new social media is not the entire story. Technology and psychology can at best explain how these phenomenological and psychological mechanisms work, but this does not explain why they are triggered in the first place. We need an entire theory of society in order to explain why such authoritarian propaganda arises in the first place and what kinds of interests sustain it. That is clearly beyond the scope of this chapter, but I would like to offer a few key remarks in that direction. First, the very fact that the global surge of neo-authoritarianism and white nationalism has been accompanied by financialization and the consequent increase in economic inequalities cannot be a mere coincidence. The crisis is there, with its surge in inequalities and polarization of wealth, and with some literally speculating on uncertainty through the game of finance and derivatives, and others paying all the prices for a life marked by debt and financial, or even food, insecurity. However, by ideologically depicting such uncertainty as the result of those evildoers who dare to question 'our values and tradition', neo-authoritarian digital demagogues can protect their own interests (those of financialized capital), while pretending to protect those of all everyday people. The feeling of uncertainty is there and is real in its effects, but its sources are fundamentally displaced through the spectacular performance of scapegoating. The same globalization that brings us together thus also separates us in a spectacular opposition between 'us' and 'them', an opposition that fuels hate, resentment, and violence. That is where authoritarian populism proliferates.

How much of this imaginal turn is in continuity with the totalitarian experience of the twentieth century and how much is new? Simona Forti powerfully reminds us that totalitarianism has been a laboratory where 'the phantasm or the collective and those of the individual can coincide to the point of producing a totalizing universe, completely locked in on itself' (p. 52). and that such an experience is still there to remind us that it is possible to go very far in bending reality to make it fit ideological assumptions. Yet, as Forti also emphasizes, totalitarianism is very different from the 'post-democracy' of today, where the formal institutions of democracy are preserved and where every individual can now participate in the manipulation of images – even

though there is no reassurance that individuals themselves will not be mere dupes of ideology. I agree with Forti that there are also some alarming continuities with the past; requests for social redemption are indeed often woven into an imaginal that can, on occasion, become aggressive to offload one's own feeling of frustration on someone else: 'if there are no jobs, it is because some people undersell their labor at a price that makes it impossible for us to be competitive' (p. 60). In this way, the neo-authoritarian performance of scapegoat mechanisms reproduces what Forti, following Hannah Arendt, calls 'image-making', a process where 'factual truth is dismissed if it does not fit the image' (p. 60).

The question therefore emerges: 'how can we become subjects capable of exercising their freedom through critical imagination?' Simona Forti answers by invoking the 'desire not be governed by an institutionalized lie', and I believe the response given by *Imaginal Politics* goes in a similar direction. The reason for writing this book, as well as the previous *A Philosophy of Political Myth*, was precisely to explore the resources at our disposal for cultivating such a desire, while being all too aware that it can be lost. Coming from a family that has been deeply affected by the institutional lie of totalitarianism, with one grandfather killed by a Nazi soldier and the other deported to a Nazi work camp in August 1944, I could not but be drawn to those questions over and over again. While *A Philosophy of Political Myth* helped me to understand how certain narratives become the lens whereby we experience the world and act within it, and thus provided the tools for understanding which narratives open the possibility of social critique and which close that possibility, *Imaginal Politics* was driven by the question: 'where is the new coming from?' Its answer is, in my view, even more valid today than in 2014 when the book was published: the new comes from what, paraphrasing Cornelius Castoriadis, we can call a 'radical imaginal', an imaginal that triggers a critique of the status quo and that is ontologically guaranteed by that miracle that can save the world from its total ruin, which is *natality*, the fact that, as Hannah Arendt argued, new beings constantly come into the world. Even in the most oppressive totalitarian regime, where reality is constantly bent to fit the image, even at times to the point of the total destruction of reality itself, there is always the possibility of something different to be said, at least in as far as new human beings will keep coming into the world and thus grounding that plurality which is a precondition for politics to take place.

While Forti focuses on the imaginal turn in politics and the differences and continuities between the past and the present, Peter Goodrich looks at the law. By focusing on the notion of the imaginal, Goodrich points to the fact that judges are now increasingly 'fond of inserting screenshots, cut and paste pictures, emoji, gifs, memes and not infrequently photographs that they have taken themselves into their reasoning' (p. 70). The virtual image here

becomes probative because of 'what it shows', transforming justice into what Goodrich defined as a 'retinal justice', to which, we could add, the maxim '*video ergo est*'.

'Retinal justice', writes Goodrich in the homonymous chapter, 'references a pre-reflective visual apprehension that mobilizes a shadow archive of images, a preconscious relay of emblematic affects, archetypes, and adumbrations of persons, things, and actions that constitute both social structure and positive law'. The image precedes thought because the imagination triggers discourse – the unconscious, as Sigmund Freud put it, thinks in images. However, as yet, jurisprudence has failed to accord a distinct status to the pictures that precede, subtend, and now increasingly manifest in judgements. The starting point for an analysis of retinal justice must accordingly be an accounting of a distinct conceptual and analytic third space of the image, a heterotopia of the visual, a haptic and hepatoscopic (divinatory) site within the imaginal recognition of law (Goodrich 2021: 245–46). In his contribution to this book, Goodrich continues his investigation into this 'retinal turn' in justice, one for which 'imaginal politics' provides useful tools precisely because it emphasizes the specificity of the image, 'its materiality, a haptic quality which in imaginal terms is its visibility as an apparition and so temporal locus of affect and desire' (p. 65). Despite his reliance on the conceptual apparatus of *Imaginal Politics*, Goodrich very aptly notes a paradox at its heart: the book that makes the case for the intrinsic difference of the visual depiction has no images, an 'absence that matters, it is significant, a sign of philosophical restrain that has juridical implications' (p. 65). Thus, as he further remarks, 'the imaginal does not live up to the image, it lacks aura but paradoxically it has force and perhaps even a greater power, effect and affect, allure and seduction, than plastic depictions' (p. 71). This is a paradox worth reflecting upon, because the book indeed has no visual depictions, no figures that are analysed aesthetically, as it is customary in the case of books dealing with images. Yet, as Goodrich remarks, this perhaps gives the imaginal even greater power, 'effect and affect'. I agree with this point and would add only that this 'restraint', this refusal to dilute the imaginal into occasional 'illustrations', gives even more power to the only image that is present in the book, that on its cover: an image which is not just an occasional commodity to sell another commodity (the book itself), but a commodity that has been carefully chosen to convey the ongoing commodification of the imaginal and the consequent turning of politics into a 'global society of the spectacle', one that is fragmented and multiplied into an infinite game of mirrors. As in politics, so in the law we have seen a similar process: 'the law in this logic is becoming a spectacle and the event of this spectacularity overdetermines the reasoning of the decision' (p. 83), as Goodrich eloquently shows through many examples. This is an extraordinary change in the Western tradition, where (ever since

the Renaissance) the image was reduced to an ancillary role, mere illustration for the illiterate. In a context where the law was by definition in the words (*Lex est in verba*), the image was relegated to the role of a mere '*liber pauperum*', the book of the poor and illiterate (p. 68). Outcast, vilified, and thrown out of the main door of the law, the image is now back and taking its revenge with its specific and inexhaustible difference – a difference that, it is worth repeating, 'requires viewing and not simply reading' (p. 85). As Goodrich insightfully put it, 'the qualitative difference of the imaginal lies precisely in what cannot be said or cannot only be said' (p. 85). All images are, in this sense, *imago dei* – images of god – the bodily, palpable incarnation of what cannot be said.

This fundamental insight not only confirms but also goes beyond the Lacanian intuitions invoked by both Jamieson Webster and Patricia Gherovici in their contributions to this book. Webster suggests that the place for the imaginal in Jacques Lacan's theory is not that of the Imaginary register, but that of the Symbolic, whereas Gherovici emphasizes a change in the very concept of the Imaginary that, in the later Lacan, brings his notion of the Imaginary very close to the imaginal. Both readings are very helpful and complement *Imaginal Politics* in important ways. Whereas in the book I was mainly interested in developing the notion of the imaginal, for which the early Lacan of the mirror stage (and thus of the image as alienation) was of little help, returning to Lacan with this notion of the imaginal is an illuminating exercise. This brings to the fore the importance for Lacan himself of the images that exhibit a 'characteristic state of anarchy in the human order' (p. 90) as well as the disclosive possibilities of his notion of the '*sinthome*' which, as Gherovici puts it, 'comes from the Real . . . touches in the Imaginary, while it unfolds in the Symbolic' (p. 118), the three registers being ultimately interdependent as in a Borromean knot. If that is the case, then the imaginal can be found in different junctures of the knot, even though, as Webster argues, it is in the Symbolic that it most strikingly emerges, since 'so much of Lacan's account of the Symbolic is stretched between phonemes, images, signifiers, sounds, letter, as a network or field that account for the production of meaning, but is not meaning itself, which is more imaginary than symbolic' (p. 89–90).

Thus, whereas the imaginary for Webster belongs to the ego, which is the 'organ of illusion' (p. 90) because of the fictitious unity and coherence that it portrays, the unconscious is instead 'transindividual'. Indeed, whereas in *Imaginal Politics* I discuss the notion of the 'social unconscious', as a space between the individual and the collective unconscious, in my subsequent work, following that insight of Jacques Lacan, along with other theorists of the transindividual, I have moved towards an emphasis on the 'transindividuality of the unconscious' (Bottici 2019, 74). With the latter expression I mean

that the unconscious escapes the dichotomy of the 'individual' versus 'collective' and even blurs the line that separate the 'individual' from the 'social': properly speaking, there cannot be an 'individual' unconscious, because even the most individual and private of the traumas are always cast in networks that go beyond individual experiences. In this sense, when it comes to the unconscious there is not such a thing as an individual unconscious, because any individuality is always a transindividuality. Hence, the importance of approaching 'the letter as imaginal', as Webster does, thereby illuminating 'the radical sliding of the signifier, traces of words, ideas, images' (p. 96) and thus also the materiality of language, a materiality that can itself become the vehicle of imaginal sounds, pictures, visual presences. I agree with Jamieson Webster that, when Lacan states that the unconscious is 'structured *like* a language', this does not mean that it is *only* language, words. I should also insist, with Goodrich, that the specific difference of the imaginal, a difference that 'requires viewing and not simply reading', is not, however, necessarily at the forefront of psychoanalysis, a discipline whose principal medium of operation is words. We can certainly look for the imaginal deposited in the words spoken during analysis, and that is certainly an important component of a successful analysis, but it still remains that, as a 'talking cure', psychoanalysis by definition operates through words before operating through images. This is perhaps its own specific 'way of viewing' a verbal, which can also, become fully imaginal. As Webster's illuminating analysis of the *In nomine matris* poems shows, there are moments when the name cannot contain the matter, and thus the body itself revolts: 'this body must be spoken, which is what this poem does as a kind of image-sound, a prose poem, that speaks the mother as much as it speaks about the mother' (p. 100). Each of the three poems that Webster analyses, along with the short story *The Thread*, are certainly very imaginal works – not only in the sense that they are very imagistic and full of images, but in the *literal* sense that the word becomes an image, or better, a flux of images that 'requires viewing, and not simply reading'. A retinal poetics, which brings to the fore what Webster calls the Lacanian account of the symbolic as 'stretched between phonemes, images, signifiers, sounds, letters' (p. 89).

Psychoanalysis has been an invaluable tool in my research and creative practice because it enables us to complicate naive and common-sense understanding of both images and reality. As Jeremy C.A. Smith aptly notes, that is a crucial move for my work: 'once free from the baggage of common-sense conflation of imagination and the false, unreal, or fictitious, we are able to take two further steps. The first involves critically dissembling and contesting the spectacularization of politics in the global age. The second challenge is to understand how the emergence of myth informs our political horizons' (p. 144). This is indeed the move that enabled me to move beyond

the Enlightenment view of modernity as an exit from myth and explore the way in which myth and modernity actually went hand in hand. The last two chapters of this collection refer to a part of my work where the philosophical framework elaborated in *A Philosophy of Political Myth* and *Imaginal Politics* is nourished by, and proceeds alongside, the interdisciplinary research I conducted with Benoît Challand, which culminated in *The Myth of the Clash of Civilisations* and *Imagining Europe*, two works devoted to unpacking the force of myth within contemporary politics. While Jeremy Smith focuses on the analysis of the myth of the clash of civilizations, with the consequent discussion of the notion of 'civilization' and 'modernity', Dietrich Jung and Ahmed Abou El Zalaf explore the relationship between modernity and religion by focusing on the specific case study of the Muslim Brotherhood. The latter, as the authors argue, proves indeed that Islamic fundamentalism is not the result of a regression into pre-modern forms of politics but is instead a product of modernity itself. In this example, whose history they carefully reconstruct, we see how 'in a Muslim context religious traditions were actually able to facilitate the formation of a modern mass movement' (p. 122). If we keep in mind that human beings are not only rational animals but also (and even prior to that) 'imaginal animals', then one is able to argue, as Jung and El Zalaf do, that the early modernization theories that equated modernity with secularization were highly mistaken, particularly because they led to neglect the incredible varieties of modern formations around the globe, including those where religions, rather than secularization, were the vectors of modernity. Giving due attention to an analysis of these varieties is crucial to get rid of the emanative (colonial) phantasy of modernity as an intrinsically European development that has been emanating to the rest of the world. I agree with the two authors that Shmuel Eisenstadt's multiple modernity paradigm is an advancement over those simplistic and Eurocentric modernization theories, but it still presents many problems. To begin with, talking about 'multiple modernities' does not eliminate the problem of Eurocentrism; it can actually further aliment it, if the European type of modernity is still used as a yardstick to evaluate which cultural constellations deserve the patent of 'alternative modernity' and which do not. Secondly, it risks hiding the fact that modernity was from the very beginning a truly global phenomena, since the sugar plantations in the Caribbean and cotton plantations of the Americas were as central as the spinning machine of Lancashire to the development of a capitalist mode of production that is a central pillar of modernity. Speaking about 'multiple modernities' therefore risks leading to the misleading picture of different modernities that proceeded next to each other and not as regional constellations of the same capitalist world system.

Furthermore, I agree with Jeremy Smith's point that, when seen from the perspective of world history with its emphasis on *longue durée* processes,

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'it seems hard to justify distinguishing modernity's great circulation of people, goods and capital in the manner that uncritical analysis of globalization do, when the meta-pattern of human sociality is the tightening web of connection' (p. 150). All these categories ('civilization', 'modernity', 'globalization') point to a tightening of the web of connections, some of which are regional and some of which are global. It becomes, then, a question of empirical analysis to determine their contours and specific configurations. As a philosopher and critical theorist, however, I tried to provide a form of clarification of the ideological implications that each of these categories implies, a critical exercise that, when applied to the notion of 'civilization', for instance, led me to argue for the need to abandon that language altogether. The notion of 'civilization', even in its 'multiple civilizations' version, seemed to me too imbued with its colonial history and thus the axiological opposition between the 'civilized' and the 'savages' that accompanied it. Jeremy C.A. Smith criticizes that move, putting forward multiple arguments in favour of keeping the language of civilizational analysis – a multiplicity of arguments that, for the sake of brevity, I will group into two axes.

The first axis points to the fact that, in contrast to the belligerent version of Samuel Huntington's thesis, a significant part of civilizational analysis has actually emphasized the porosity of borders, cultural exchanges, and a pluralistic agenda that 'eroded the nineteenth century unitary world view of Civilization with an upper 'C' counter-posed to the supposed Barbarianism of the colonised world' (p. 148). This is certainly an important point, but one that in my view does not ultimately solve the issue that the concept of civilization implies a hierarchical ordering of the different cultural formations around the globe according to their more or less 'civilizational' status. For instance, the fact that 'Toynbee's encyclopedic work counts thirty-one major civilizations as geographically based constellations' certainly adds a plurality to the concept of civilization but does not automatically solve the question of the hierarchy implied in such a conceptual apparatus, which still props us certain formations as 'civilizational' while deeming others to be mere 'cultures' – of which there are certainly more than the 31 counted by Toynbee.

The second axis of Smith's defence of the notion of civilization emphasizes that, like 'civilization', many categories in the human sciences have ideological reverberations and are politically loaded, but this is not an argument for abandoning them. Smith quotes 'capitalism, nation, democracy and human rights' as examples. Although I believe that there are big differences between these examples and the notion of civilization, I also think that more than an absolute ban or endorsement of certain categories, we should assess each of them according to their specific history and the way in which such genealogies reverberate politically in the moment they are used. In the time of Huntington's self-fulfilling prophecy of a 'clash of civilizations', and the

consequent war on terror that followed it, it seemed to me imperative to abandon the vocabulary of 'civilizations' or to only use it when accompanied by a critical engagement with its genealogy. Simply substituting the vocabulary of a 'clash of civilizations' with that of a 'dialogue of civilizations', for instance, as many did in the post-9/11 world, risked purporting the same misleading view of cultural formations as discrete, divided entities that can either potentially dialogue or clash as if they were individuals. On the contrary, what I thought was needed in that political scenario was a vigorous critical engagement with the concept of 'civilization' – and, when not possible, better to abstain from making recourse to it.

This brings us to María Pía Lara's question, 'can genealogy become critique?' I have used the genealogical method as a form of critique extensively (both in *A Philosophy of Political Myth* and in *Imaginal Politics*), so I certainly respond in the affirmative to this question. However, I have recently come to add another question to this one, namely: *are genealogies sufficient for a critique?* What a genealogy does is indeed to focus on specific breaks and ruptures within a tradition; in doing so, it enables us to understand which forces sustained them and which interest(s) lie behind such breaks. Nevertheless, it also reinforces a certain idea of a tradition along with its implicit presuppositions. For instance, the genealogies I have put forward in *A Philosophy of Political Myth* and in *Imaginal Politics* necessarily reflect the European and Eurocentric philosophical canon I was educated in. Although *Imaginal Politics* breaks out of the Eurocentrism by recovering the notion of a *mundus imaginalis* from the Arabic notion of an *alam al-mithal* (Bottici 2014, 55), the idea of a genealogy in the singular risks presenting the history of Western philosophy as though it were 'The History of Philosophy'. Precisely to avoid the white epistemic ignorance (and arrogance) invoked by Eduardo Mendieta, I think it is pivotal to always make clear that the genealogy we have embarked upon is done from one among many traditions and thus to always invite pursuit of genealogies in plural, to break the boundaries and bonds of many centuries of Eurocentrism which continues purporting the history of the West as if it were 'History with a capital H'. Although we are all on the same spaceship, Earth, we must be aware that the traditions and languages we have to make sense of our journey are multiple and that there may always be, as Mendieta reminds us, a 'freedom that we do not, and cannot, see'. This does not mean that we should stop pursuing it – rather, that, as European scholars, we must pursue it by unlearning those pervasive privileges that may prevent us from realizing what is happening in front of us. Among these are the privileges that I mentioned in *Imaginal Politics* as crucial in shaping our understanding of humanity, namely, those of race, gender, and class (Bottici 2014, 161–76). It is to further unpacking these privileges that my current work on 'anarchafeminism' is devoted.

NOTES

1. Notice that the original poem "The galleon" is an invitation to rebel to avoid death and not, as one may wrongly interpret, to provoke it. The published English translation of the original Italian 25–26 verse "*Remiam finche' la nave si schianti sui frangenti*" may indeed be misleading; it is currently rendered as "Let us row until the ship dashes against the reef", but *frangenti* does not primarily mean the "reef" but rather a particularly big wave, or the point where the waves break, and thus, figuratively, a particularly difficult situation or turning point. Thus, a better translation might have been "until the ship dashes against the waves".

2. Ibid., 274.

3. See, for instance, the way in which Karl Marx's 1843 definition of critical theory as the "self-clarification of the struggles and wishes of the age" has been taken up by Nancy Fraser (Fraser 2013: 19–51), and by Martin Saar, who also combines it with a Spinozist philosophy of immanence (Saar 2013: 424–26).

4. I derive the notion of "Cartesian anxiety" from Richard Bernstein's work. See, for instance, the following passage: "I felt the need and urgency to work through the 'rationality debates' that were becoming so central in a great diversity of cultural contexts, to sort out what were the under-lying issues, to see how they might be related to each other, and to confront the specter of relativism that always seemed to be hovering in the background of these discussions" (Bernstein 1983: x).

5. See, in particular, chapters 4 and 5 in *A Philosophy of Political Myth* (Bottici 2007).

6. Together with Benoît Challand, I have analysed this controversy more at length in *The Myth of the Clash of Civilizations* (2012: pp. 37–38, 102–8).

7. I have developed these insights in my *Anarchafeminism*, which is built on the notion of transindividuality (Bottici 2021).

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Acknowledgements

during the related conference in early 2020, and then the first months of its evolution after that. During the later subsequent stages in which Suzi was unable to contribute in the written word, her thoughts given in conversation continued to influence and enhance the form of the collection. I look forward to the friendship and conversation continuing.

I wrote the editorial from the lands of the Wadawurrung, part of the Kulin nation of the traditional Aboriginal custodians of the land. I pay my respects to their elders, past, present, and emerging. The lands I mention, and other Aboriginal lands, were never ceded; they remain and will always be Aboriginal land. Not a topic in this collection, the Wadawurrung and other Australian Aboriginal peoples bear a rich imaginal culture of the oldest continuous living civilization in the world, as well as deep wells of indigenous knowledge. They continue to care for country.

<div align="right">Jeremy C. A. Smith, Federation University Australia</div>

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