Editorial

The *Social Imaginaries* Editorial Collective

> *To think is not to get out of the cave; it is not to replace the uncertainty of shadows by the clear-cut outlines of things themselves, the flame's flickering glow by the light of the true Sun. To think is to enter the Labyrinth; more exactly it is to make be and appear a Labyrinth when we might have stayed 'lying among the flowers, facing the sky' [Rilke]. It is to lose oneself amidst galleries which exist only because we never tire of digging them; to turn round and round at the end of a cul-de-sac whose entrance has been shut off behind us—until, inexplicably, this spinning round opens up in the surrounding walls cracks which offer passage* (Castoriadis 1984, pp. x-xi).

The cover chosen by *Social Imaginaries*—a field of intersecting labyrinths—was inspired by this quotation from Cornelius Castoriadis's 1977 preface to his *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* (published in English in 1984). In this text Castoriadis takes up the myth of Daedalus's labyrinth as a way of positing an alternative to Plato's Cave. He draws on the labyrinth metaphor to rethink reason, thought, truth, social creation, social doing, and the things themselves.

Labyrinths are human creations: in exploring them we simultaneously create new, interconnecting corridors to negotiate. We come to know their truth in fragments, through articulation, problematisation, and debate. What Castoriadis called 'thoughtful doing' is indispensable to such a task; from this, new worlds—and counter worlds—can emerge. Such concerns are central to the overall project of *Social Imaginaries*.

Social Imaginaries is a peer-refereed, interdisciplinary journal that inquires into complexes of social meaning and cultural projects of power. It is concerned to debate the intertwined problematics of modernity, multiple modernities, and the human condition. It presupposes an understanding of society as a *political institution*, which is formed—and forms itself—in historical constellations, on the one hand, and through encounters with other cultures and civilisational worlds, on the other.

The labyrinth extends globally and in the first instance this international scope is reflected in the journal itself as its Editors are located in three different continents: North America, Australia, and Europe. In addition, several members of our Editors-at-Large and of the broader Editorial Collective are scholars with links to East Asia, an important region of interest to the journal.

Whilst the composition of the journal's editorial team echoes the geographical, horizontal extension of the labyrinth, the diversity of the texts it publishes echoes yet another dimension: the thematic. The labyrinth opens onto the interplay of many different social imaginaries and associated problematics across and within different cultural and civilisational horizons.

Why *Social Imaginaries*?

The scope and aims of *Social Imaginaries* fill an important gap in current international debates. The journal's emphasis on 'imaginaries' provides a major point of difference from other public fora. The term 'social imaginaries' points to several interrelated trends of a major shift in the humanities and social sciences (explored in greater depth in the first essay of this issue) towards a new approach to the question of modernity. First, it reveals the modern concern with—and emphasis on—the imagination as creative and no longer only reproductive, or fictive; as such, forms of social creativity are seen as the workings of the creative imagination. Second, social imaginaries highlight the phenomenon of collectively instituted meaning and its inter-cultural variations. Third, foregrounding 'imaginaries' provides a corrective to a one sided focus on 'reason' as the central tenet (or promise) of modernity. Finally, the elaboration of 'social imaginaries' underscores the ongoing, albeit incomplete, hermeneutical turn in the human sciences. Thus instead of focusing on the singular 'imagination' or 'reason' as a faculty of the individual, it seeks rather to emphasise the constitutive elements of socio-cultural 'reality', such as 'social imaginaries' and 'forms of rationality'. The more sophisticated versions of such theoretical frameworks, however, do not reject reason *tout court*, but rather do justice to the competing versions of 'worldhood' offered by Enlightenment and Romantic currents whose conflicting, co-existing interpretations partially structure modernity.

In brief, socio-cultural contexts of worldhood, imagination, reason and civilisational forms point to the need for a cultural hermeneutic of modernity (and 'multiple modernities'). Modernity is not self-grounding but rather grounded in relation to a variety of 'others', including classical antiquity, inter-cultural others, inter-civilisational others, and intra-cultural constellations. Within this context, *Social Imaginaries* is concerned to elucidate the trans-subjective, or a-subjective, aspect of cultural meaning, action and power as the precondition for inter-subjective modes of being-in-the-world. *Social Imaginaries* is therefore concerned with the comparative analysis of civilisations and concomitant elaboration of world histories. The comparative analysis of civilisations, however, has yet to fully assimilate the hermeneutical turn. There are as a result grounds for further elaboration and clarification, at the interstices of philosophy and social theory, of the central problems of civilisational analysis. *Social Imaginaries* then aims to be a forum for contributions to

what Johann P. Arnason characterises as a 'paradigm in the making'. In this, the journal locates itself within the broad constellation of the human sciences as opposed to the more conventional division of labour between the social sciences and the humanities. And thus it seeks to foster disciplinary rigour with an interdisciplinary disposition (we elaborate further on these problematics in our collective article in this issue).

Philosophically, *Social Imaginaries* draws on the resources of phenomenology and hermeneutics. The journal understands phenomenology as a movement broader than its self-labelling turn with Husserl. The journal particularly seeks to emphasise those currents of phenomenology that move beyond a philosophy of consciousness, and welcomes phenomenological perspectives that open onto the problematisation of society, culture, politics, history and anthropology, on the one hand, as well as contributions that interrogate the lines of continuity and discontinuity between *anthropos* and nature on the other. It invites contributions that offer an alternative to deconstruction and post-modernism, or that elaborate phenomenology as an hermeneutical endeavour, as well as perspectives that build bridges with analytic philosophy, particularly concerning 'the meaning of meaning'.

Social Imaginaries reflects on questions of contemporary politics and the political, including in relation to the construction of the economic. The recent trend in civic disengagement in Western societies has resulted from the rise to dominance of a new social imaginary that expresses itself in the ideologies of neo-liberalism. These individualistic ideologies have masked the profound crisis that now affects Western modernity in its specific relationship to the natural world. In Asia, distinct 'new modernities' (to invoke Jan Pieterse) have been able to navigate past global downturns by way of responsive institutional constellations and flexible political economic strategies, and hint at the possibility of alternative experiences with political and economic modernity. As East Asia is deeply affected by the economic dimension of the crisis, it is also confronted with the environmental implications of its projects of modernisation which are, in part, inspired by the experience of the West. The theoretical response to this exhaustion of the central imaginary significations of modernity, including 'postmodern' cultural studies, has failed to articulate the full significance of the crisis, counter the loss of collective vision, and inspire a new political imaginary. There is thus an urgent need to find new theoretical approaches and interpretative frameworks that can re-assert the capacity of human societies for political autonomy and at the same time conceptualise its fundamental connection to the natural world.

The journal is thus distinct in concerning itself not only with the constitution of *worldhood* and *history*, but also with the neglected other of the social: *nature*. Beyond current debates concerning the environment, the journal will pursue questions that interrogate the images of nature underpinning these accounts and the various imaginaries of nature. Modernity has seen the realm

of history invested with meaning, whilst concomitantly the *kosmos* has been stripped of inherent significance. *Social Imaginaries* aims to interrogate the lines of continuity and discontinuity drawn between the human and non-human world. In so doing, the cultural images of nature intersect with the cultural projects of power concerning nature, and here new forms of ecological worldhood and environmental movements come into focus and a comparative and intercultural approach becomes a necessity.

In sum, *Social Imaginaries* aims to pursue intersecting debates on forms of meaning, knowledge and truth as they have been historically instituted and reconfigured, both within disciplinary confines and beyond. It seeks to elucidate 'the world in fragments', and, in demanding the continued problematisation of existing horizons, the journal, as symbolised by Castoriadis's labyrinth, refuses ultimate closure.

Social Imaginaries therefore invites contributions from social theory, historical sociology, political philosophy, political theory, and, more broadly, anthropology, cultural and social geography, and phenomenology. Although the journal will publish English language manuscripts, we shall also occasionally translate significant essays from a variety of other languages, European and Asian.

In its diversity and geographical scope, the first issue illustrates the journal's ambition.

We open this issue with the programmatic essay *Social Imaginaries in Debate* by the Editorial Collective that scopes the field of social imaginaries qua interdisciplinary field. As well as constituting a major statement of the field's coalescence, Adams et al contend that the theoretical frames underlying social imaginaries are inherently pluralistic, with the contributions by Castoriadis, Ricoeur and Taylor constituting its core, and argue that social imaginaries as a mode of analysis of contemporary phenomena involves reconceptualisation of social formations as politically-instituted collectivities. Furthermore, emergence of the field expands an understanding of the imagination from a singular faculty of the individual (counter-posed to reason) to an understanding of multiple collective imaginaries and rationalities that are creative as well as reproductive. The essay bears this out in a history of the imagination before turning to specific contemporary imaginaries and problems of the human condition, including ecology, political-economic modes of life and inter-civilisational encounters. In all these respects, Adams et al. cast the field as a paradigm-in-the-making that is strengthened by a diversity of perspectives. Thus constituted as a rich terrain for debates, they contend that 'social imaginaries' stretch beyond critiques of current social practices and towards the elucidation of movements for social change.

We are excited to publish the first English translation of Cornelius Castoriadis's *The Imaginary as Such*. He wrote it in the late 1960s, and envisaged it as the introduction to his ultimately unfinished work, *The Imaginary Element*.

The below excerpt was published posthumously. *The Imaginary as Such* provides a reflection on anthropological preconditions that seeks to avoid the errors of Husserl and Heidegger, on the one hand, and of foundationalism, on the other. Castoriadis clearly understands the imaginary as elemental to the human condition. He emphasises the imaginary both as human activity (as social doing) and as a dimension of human existence (as representation); this dual emphasis was gradually marginalised in his later works. Of particular note, is his consideration of the imaginary dimension of language.

The essay, *'The Logic of Place' and Common Sense* by Nakamura Yūjirō represents one significant current in contemporary Japanese philosophy and social thought. Originally a 1983 lecture Nakamura gave at the Collège international de philosophie in Paris, the essay discusses the 'logic of place' as developed by the Kyoto School founder Nishida Kitarō in connection with Nakamura's own theory of common sense, while tying both to the 'logic of the imagination' developed by another important Japanese thinker Miki Kiyoshi. Nakamura here calls 'common sense' the faculty constitutive of the horizon of meaning, thinking and acting, within a society through the integration of the senses and its intimate connections to place in its various significances. There is an overlap in meaning here with the creative imagination. By tying the three concepts of common sense, place, and imagination together, Nakamura suggests an alternative to the modern Cartesian standpoint that has formed the paradigm of Western modernity but has led to a certain crisis. His understanding of the way they work to construct a meaningful picture of the world interestingly resonates with contemporary developments of the concept of the social imaginary.

Peter Wagner's contribution *Interpreting the Present – A Research Programme* explicates and further expands Wagner's historical sociology of modernity, also by moving beyond European experiences. His sociological endeavour stresses the way in which current social practices are experienced and interpreted by the human beings who enact them as parts of a common world that they inhabit together, drawing attention to the significance of world interpretations. Wagner's focus in this essay is in particular on how the dismantling of 'organised modernity' since the 1970s involves rather radical attempts at erasure of historical time and lived space. But this period has equally seen the emergence of reactions in the form of a variety of re-interpretations of modernity, attempting at re-constituting spatiality and temporality, without, however, overcoming tensions and imbalance, informing an ongoing struggle over the interpretation of the present.

Johann P. Arnason's essay *The Imaginary Dimensions of Modernity: Beyond Marx and Weber* continues his critical dialogue with Castoriadis's thought. It focuses on Castoriadis's notion of social imaginary significations—in particular, of 'autonomy' and the 'unlimited expansion of rational mastery' as the dual institution of modernity—and reflects on their connections to—and

critique of—Marx and Weber's intellectual projects. The key part of his essay develops an interpretation of Castoriadis's understanding of modernity as post-liberal and post-Marxist, through a greater focus on the historicising of autonomy and rational mastery in modernity, especially in relation to capitalism and democracy. In a post-script written especially for this publication, Arnason emphasises the importance of Gauchet's thought (for which Castoriadis was an important intellectual source) for a deeper understanding of historical projects of autonomy and their links to the human condition in modernity.

Marcel Gauchet is today considered as one of France's leading intellectuals. Yet, only two of his books, and a small number of articles, have ever been published in English. *Social Imaginaries* is happy to publish the first English translation of the programmatic text, *La Démocratie d'une crise à l'autre.* Published in 2007 the text presents a synthesis of Gauchet's latest project, an intellectually ambitious theory of the historical genesis of liberal democracy, of which three volumes have yet been published in French. This dense and rich text speaks to the contemporary crisis of Western democracy whose paradoxical character Gauchet interprets though the lens of his earlier theory of 'religious disenchantment', a theory considerably developed and refined over the last three decades. Whilst Gauchet does not actually use the term imaginary, his understanding of modernity is informed by an understanding of human societies that stresses their political self-institution and their essentially cultural foundations. In his interpretation of the crisis of western societies he advocates the need for greater 'thoughtful doing' in the pursuit of democracy which he defines as self-reflexive historicity.

The roundtable discussion *Modern Social Imaginaries: A Conversation* resumes a dialogue from 1999 amongst Craig Calhoun, Dilip Gaonkar, Benjamin Lee, Charles Taylor and Michael Warner (published in 2002 as a special issue of *Public Culture* on *New Imaginaries*). The initial dialogue and this iteration test the boundaries of established conceptions of the imaginary and the imagination in the wake of Taylor's well-known *Modern Social Imaginaries*. In a wide-ranging debate, the discussants interrogate existing conceptions of ecology, risk, the limits of normativity and market cultures by reconfiguring meaning and social and cultural practices in relation to social imaginaries. In doing so, they question the finite number of social imaginaries and bring into consideration deeper notions of a 'risk imaginary', an 'ecological imaginary' and a 'market imaginary'. At the same time the discussion begins to clarify social imaginaries in relation to culture, power, religiosity, representation and simultaneity. Throughout the debate, the exchanges acquire a distinctly sociological accent in the form of urban geographies that are probed for instantiations of modern social imaginaries. Ending with problems of climate change and the amplification of global risk enveloping 'a community of fate', the

discussion remains necessarily open to further elaboration. The Editorial Collective made a decision not to align the roundtable discussion with the *Social Imaginaries* Harvard referencing system in order to maintain a smooth flow of the text of the discussion. Consequently there are no in-text references and all references are in endnotes.

Acknowledgments