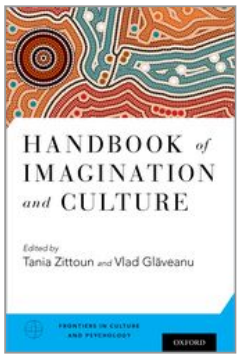

Handbook of Imagination and Culture
Tania Zittoun and Vlad Glaveanu

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The Future of Imagination in Sociocultural Research

Vlad Petre Glăveanu
Tania Zittoun

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Abstract and Keywords

In this final chapter, the authors first highlight the main contributions of the *Handbook* and show how these help us ground imagination research within the sociocultural tradition. On this basis, several new topics and questions emerging from this unique collection of chapters are identified, issues that require further study and conceptual integration. These new concerns are then used to complement the authors' initial framework—the loop model—and expand it into a more integrative, cultural perspective on the imagination using the metaphor of 'trails of the imagination'. Finally, this final chapter reconnects the emerging field of imagination as sociocultural phenomenon with other key themes in ways that place it firmly on the research agenda of scholars and practitioners interested in the relation between mind and culture.

Keywords: culture, imagination, loop model, sociocultural phenomenon, trails of the imagination

Imagining the future of imagination, a process that opens up the very possibility of relating to the future, might seem like a circular and futile exercise, reminding one of old accusations addressed to introspection: that mind cannot study itself. And yet, the imagination has been a topic of reflection and fascination for centuries in philosophy (Cornejo, 2017; see Jørgensen chapter 2), its meaning shifting and diversifying, its value continuously upheld or contested. In psychological thought, particularly during the last century, the same movements of waxing and waning can be found (see Glăveanu, Karwowski, Jankowska, & de Saint-Laurent, chapter 4). Sociocultural research, as an interdisciplinary field of inquiry, has historically been interested in the phenomenon of the imagination while, at the same time, having a strong contribution to make toward its theory, method, and practice. In this context, this *Handbook* aims to both review the field and strengthen the sociocultural study of the imagination for the present and for the future. In other words, building on a long intellectual past, the many contributors to this project envision a conceptual and methodological frame that places imagination at the center of human life and culture. In doing so, we are collaboratively engaged in imagining a future for imagination within sociocultural research and beyond. This endeavor is not futile but is essential, we think, for the development of a scientific approach to the mind, to account for how humans try to understand the mind and also try to surpass existing limitations through acts of imagination.

In this final chapter, we first highlight the main contributions of the *Handbook* and show how they help us ground imagination research within the sociocultural tradition. On this basis, we go on to identify several topics and questions emerging from this unique collection of papers that require further study and conceptual integration. These new concerns will then be used to complement our initial framework (see chapter 1) and expand it into a more integrative, cultural **(p. 348)** perspective on the imagination. Finally, we reconnect the emerging field of imagination as sociocultural phenomenon with other key themes in ways that place it firmly on the research agenda of scholars and practitioners interested in the relation between mind and culture.

The Sociocultural Study of the Imagination

Both from within and outside sociocultural psychology, the contributions to this volume define imagination as a personal and cultural phenomenon; more than this, they challenge the separation between these two categories. The study of human imagination is particularly fruitful for sociocultural analysis because it vividly illustrates its basic premise: that the intrapsychological and interpsychological are co-constitutive (Shweder, 1990) and that even our most idiosyncratic acts of imagination are, at once, personal and social, unique and shared, psychological and cultural. This is so because the origin, tools, and processes of our imagination unfold in the relational space *in between* minds, bodies, objects, traditions, and institutions. The sociocultural study of the imagination takes this complexity into account in a holistic and developmental manner (Diriwächter & Valsiner, 2008; Zittoun et al., 2013). Such a study therefore does not start from the mental outcomes of the imagination—often reduced to imagery; the cognitive processes underpinning it—often separating cognition and affect, mind and body; or the social structures that guide it—often downplaying individual agency. It considers process and outcomes, individual and social, cognition and affect as integral parts of a more complex unit of analysis: the mind in context. In this section, we examine how this sociocultural unit of analysis has been approached within the *Handbook* and, in the next one, consider how the sociocultural approach can help us advance our understanding of imagination.

In chapter 1 we outlined four guiding premises for the sociocultural study of the imagination: (1) its relational, interactional, or dialogical character; (2) the uniqueness of the person and acts of imagination embedded within this relational web; (3) the social, material, and semiotic mediation of the imagination; and (4) its developmental and historical path. We revisit each one of these premises in view of the contributions to this volume, with a focus on how they help us refine our conception of the imagination.

Imagination as Relational, Interactional, and Dialogical

Despite differences in emphasis, all the chapters in this *Handbook* are grounded in a view of imagination as a relational, interactional, and dialogical phenomenon. As a relational process, the imagination is not "located" in the mind of the person who imagines but, as Valsiner (chapter 3) aptly describes, at the meeting point between inner and outer infinities, at the border between past and future. To imagine means precisely to articulate, within the same process, person and **(p.349)** context, past experiences and future expectations. More than this, it means to constantly move between these poles in ways that increase variability and openness. Imagination is fostered by and thrives within human-world relations, and this feature is obvious when we focus on how people imagine together with others in community (Daiute, chapter 13), with the help of technology (Gillespie, Corti, Evans & Heasman, chapter 14), and in interpersonal contexts such as play (Hviid & Villandsen, chapter 7) or when attending theatre (Zittoun & Rosenstein, chapter 11). In all these instances, the resources and dynamics of the imagination are played out within interactions, both social and material. Tanggaard and Brinkmann refer to situations of "stumbling" as fertile for imagination in research as well as everyday life (chapter 5). In a broader sense, imagination is prompted by incidents that come out of the bidirectional nature of the self-world interaction: acting on the environment and being acted on in return (Dewey, 1934). This constant interchange defines our interdependence with the world of culture, artifacts, and other people that is at the core of the dialogical mind (Marková, chapter 15; Marková, 2003). The fact that our minds are dialogical in nature enables acts of imagination and, in turn, is enabled by them. Imagination is at the roots of our possibility to decenter our perspective of the world, to understand the perspectives of others, and to reposition ourselves in relation to a shared reality (Glăveanu et al., chapter 4; Glăveanu, 2015)—in this sense, a dialogical mind is always a mind that imagines.

The Uniqueness of People and Acts of Imagination

Related to the earlier discussion, one of the main (apparent) paradoxes of the imagination refers to its simultaneously personal and shared nature. In other words, we implicitly or explicitly imagine with other people and with the help of common cultural resources, and yet, arguably, each loop of our

imagination (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016) is uniquely shaped and takes place in irreversible time. This uniqueness, we claim, can very well be understood within the dialogical framework whereby “external” dialogues foster inner dialogicality and lead to the construction of unique constellations of experiences, beliefs, motives, and emotions—in sum, the construction of unrepeatable human selves. More than any other process, the imagination reflects the uninterrupted flow between the personal and the social, between self and culture. Hviid and Villadsen (chapter 7) convincingly make this argument in relation to the imaginative, pretend play of children, showing how episodes of play reflect both the cultivated and personalized life of the players. Children’s concerns, interests, and dreams fuel their play and games while being channeled toward others and the use of cultural artifacts as props of the imagination (see also Akkerman, chapter 10). For these authors, the player’s being-in-the-world is intentional and meaningful—two personalized features of the imagination mediated by culture and social relations. And it is not only episodes of play that reflect this complexity, but also other mundane experiences such as listening to music (Klempe, chapter 12) or attending theatre **(p.350)** (Zittoun & Rosenstein, chapter 11). The interaction with and appropriation of art—through reflection and meaning making—bear the mark of an imagination that is, at once, personal and cultural. Music and theater are, fundamentally, cultural forms of expressing the self, and they both engage the imagination of the audience. While audiences need to possess certain cultural codes for understanding art (Bourdieu, 1984), their imaginative experience of it is not reduced to shared codes but instead is unique. This is because, within the situation, people who listen to music or see a play always give it personal sense and participate in the experience from particular positions within the social field and within their own life course. Zittoun and Rosenstein’s (chapter 11) case of documentary theater using very few material props convincingly illustrates this state of affairs. The less theater shows, they argue, the more audience members have to imagine, effectively co-creating the play. The fact that the “outcomes” of their imaginative engagement with the play overlap only to a certain degree is both expected and cultivated in theatre.

The Social, Material, and Semiotic Mediation of the Imagination

To unpack further the culturally shared yet personalized nature of imagination processes, the notion of mediation is very useful (see also Zittoun, Gillespie, Cornish & Psaltis, 2007). What this concept implies is the fact that the relation between people's immediate experience of their world and the distal experiences made accessible by the imagination is *made possible* by social, material, and semiotic elements inscribed within culture. Relations between the person who imagines and other people, whether present or absent (e.g., collaborators, role models, fictional characters; see Jovchelovitch, Priego-Hernández, & Glăveanu, chapter 6), person and cultural artifacts (ranging from objects to technologies; see Gillespie et al., chapter 14), and person and systems of symbols and signs (e.g., language, music, images; see Klempe, chapter 12) are necessary for imagination to take place and shape its dynamic over time. Important to note, the sociocultural tools and resources that mediate processes of the imagination are often not neatly delineated as social, material, or semiotic; indeed, social and material relations acquire semiotic value, symbols and signs are constructed in dialogue with others, the affordances of objects carry meaning and reflect the intentionality of their authors, and so on. This complexity is well illustrated by Keightley and Pickering (chapter 8) and their discussion of Kia Kapoor's struggle to define an identity across cultures and generations. Her complicated relation between the "then and there" of one cultural context and the "here and now" of another are made sense of by both remembering and imagining—what the authors call mnemonic imagination. This imagination is enabled, at once, by social bonds (e.g., with the family, with people from her culture of origin), by material practices (e.g., the use of photography and visuals), and by the network of meanings about self and others they bring about. In Kia's case, a photograph depicting an **(p.351)** empty chair, for example, mediates her imaginative engagement with who she is and who she can be, with herself in the past and herself in the future, all within the confines of the present moment. Daiute (chapter 13) discusses these kinds of expressive media in terms of genres that allow people to understand themselves and the world around them and, oftentimes, to challenge these understandings. For her, imagination is at all times mediated by oral, written, and visual meaning and communication, and this is the very mark of relational imagining. Gillespie et al. (chapter 14) use the example of cognitive technologies—from

the simple notebook or electronic calendars to films, video games, and immersive online experiences—to strengthen this point. Not only is the use of technology increasingly mediating our relation to our own self (think, e.g., about social media, the use of avatars, up to the creation of cyborgs), but they do so precisely because they are tools for the imagination. With their help, the social, material, and symbolic come together and open up our access to what is possible, improbable, and even impossible in day-to-day life.

The Developmental and Historical Path of the Imagination

Last but not least, the sociocultural study of the imagination considers it developmentally, unfolding within historical time/at the level of society, within ontogenetic time/at the level of the life course, and within microgenetic time/within moment-to-moment interactions. Importantly, these different temporal levels are embedded within each other as, for example, acts of imagination taking place in the here and now gain their full meaning when considered against the background of one's life history (see Hviid and Villadsen, chapter 7), and the history of the society the person lives in (see Marková, chapter 15). By including this temporal aspect in the study of imagination, sociocultural research addresses some of the paradoxes mentioned earlier. The personal and social, symbolic and material, past and future orientations that define imaginative processes need to be understood in their interplay and co-evolution across time. Considered within the life course, these interplays are rooted within early development interactions between infants and their caregivers. Jovchelovitch et al. (chapter 6) follow the developmental path of children's engagement with absence—the not yet there, the elsewhere, and the nowhere—as part of their participation within cultural practices—of care, play, and storytelling. Akkerman (chapter 10) focuses on educational practices to observe what she called life-wide and lifelong imagination—the study of how children develop across time through their participation in various spheres of experience (e.g., home, school) and activities. Together, these two contributions make the case for a spatiotemporal study of the imagination, one that simultaneously focuses on children and their context in a longitudinal manner. The same focus can be found in chapter 9 by Zittoun and Sato, this time in relation to imagination at old age. If our imagination accompanies our transitions and supports us in navigating ruptures, this is the case across the

developmental spectrum. It also makes it important to ask not only how we can enable children's imagination—a **(p.352)** key concern within today's education—but also how we can foster the imagination of adults and elderly people. More than this, by adding a historical focus, we can become sensitive to the positive role, but also the negative one, potentially played by society and politics in guiding imagination at different ages. Marková (chapter 15) illustrates the pressures on what she calls the dialogical imagination when living under totalitarian regimes of the past, but she also points to an atrophy of our capacity to imagine in today's bureaucratic and overtechnologized societies. Finally, Jørgensen (chapter 2) adds another interesting point of reflection: the fact that imagination itself as a concept and field of inquiry has a (long) history, and this history is consequential for how we define, discover, and foster it at present.

Hence, although the authors of this *Handbook* choose to emphasize diverse aspects of the dynamics of imagination—creative imagination (Glăveanu et al., chapter 4), dialogical imagination (Marková, chapter 15), relational imagination (Daiute, chapter 13), mnemonic imagination (Keightley & Pickering, chapter 8), life-wide and lifelong imagination (Akkerman, chapter 10), musical imagination (Klempe, chapter 12)—they all contribute to a fuller and richer understanding of imagination as a sociocultural phenomenon.

New Questions, New Research Horizons

Reviewing how the contributions to the present *Handbook* illustrate the basic premises of a sociocultural approach to the imagination needs to be complemented by another type of exercise—focusing on what new questions and issues they bring and how these can expand our research horizons. Among them, we will explore here three transversal concerns: (1) the psychological processes underpinning the imagination; (2) the role of materiality for imagining; and (3) the cultural and institutional guidance of the imagination.

Psychological Processes

Across the *Handbook,* the authors start from relatively convergent definitions of the imagination, relating it to how we experience the world and particularly to how we come to enrich this experience by exploring the possible, distal temporalities and engaging with what is absent. The question remains, however, from a psychological perspective, of what

processes underpin these achievements of the human imagination. In other words, how can we “explain” the mind’s capacity to imagine without involving a circular reference back to the concept of imagination itself (Valsiner, chapter 3). In addressing this question, two preliminary observations are required. First, by asking what psychological processes underpin the imagination, we want to avoid reductionist explanations that confine the phenomenon to a particular mental operation or psychological function. Indeed, in line with the sociocultural approach adopted here, we **(p.353)** postulate that it is the person who imagines and not a neurological structure or cognitive mechanism. Adopting a holistic perspective does not downplay the importance of cognition, for instance, but considers it in its relation to affect, motives, and, more broadly, the life trajectory of the person who imagines. Second, besides rejecting a strict and static compartmentalization of the mind, we also want to avoid reinstating a Cartesian dichotomy between the psychological and sociomaterial, the internal and the external, the mind and the body within the world. These long-standing dichotomies that haunt the discipline of psychology (Jovchelovitch, 2007) are harmful for our understanding of the imagination because they end up locating it inside the head or the brain. As argued here (see also chapter 1), sociocultural theory is defined by its critique of such strict separations, and, on the contrary, it considers mind and context as interdependent psychological processes both shaped by and “expanded” within culture (Cole, 1996; Valsiner, 2007).

With these considerations in mind, we can start our exploration of psychological processes underpinning the imagination from the side of cognitive abilities. As Jørgensen (chapter 2) notes, understanding the imagination as a cognitive and creative process has deep roots within history, from the Bible to antiquity and up to 18th-century philosophy. What most of these accounts support is a view of imagination as mediating between sensation and reason without being reduced to either. On the contrary, to imagine means to develop a new way of understanding the world, a new type of thinking that Jørgensen refers to as “sensitive,” “aesthetic” and “expanded” (Jørgensen, chapter 2). Importantly, this view of the cognitive dynamic of imagination is integrative and tries to incorporate different facets of our experience of the world, from sensations and affect to reason. However, in psychology

very often the cognitive processes of the imagination have been reduced to the mental creation and manipulation of images (see Glăveanu et al., chapter 4). The cognitive study of imagination in terms of mental imagery (e.g., Kosslyn, 1973) not only cuts off context from person but also creates an artificial separation between the processes and products of imagining. Mental scanning, rotation, or assembling of objects make sense within a narrow conception of imagination that has little to tell us about the cultural origin, dynamic, and function of imagery itself (see also Klempe, chapter 12). This approach also neglects a rich legacy in psychology, that of studying the cognitive processes of the imagination in a contextual manner; see discussions by Ribot (1906) and, later, Vygotsky (2004) (Glăveanu et al., chapter 4). These authors built on associationism to define imagining as the interplay between the association and dissociation of different elements of our experience, always with a concern for the age and cultural environment of the person who imagines.

And yet, the logic of associationism (the laws of contiguity in time, space, and by contrast) is insufficient to understand the creative powers of the imagination. This is so because, in associating and dissociating existing elements, we are ultimately constrained by the existing set and, ultimately, eliminate the possibility for something new to emerge, outside of the set. Tanggaard and Brinkmann (chapter 5), **(p.354)** drawing on Peirce (1966), discuss abduction as a form of imaginative reasoning that overcomes this limitation. Helping us deal with situations of uncertainty, the process of abduction invites us to formulate explanations to what is curious or bizarre, to imagine what might be the case without limiting ourselves neither to what we perceive (induction) nor what we reason (deduction) about the situation. In sum, mental operations that recombine what we know while bringing in new experiences and meanings (see also the ‘as-if’ and ‘what-if’ logic in chapter 7 by Hviid and Villadsen).

A detailed discussion of cognitive processes of the imagination makes the point that looking at cognition alone does not suffice. Memory, motivation, and affect participate and “color” the cognitive dynamic of imagining, often taking the lead of the entire process. Remembering is a type of process that, as argued previously, is intrinsic to the imagination. Association and dissociation, abduction, and other thinking processes depend on memory, on what we can actualize and use as

resources from the stock of accumulated life experiences. However, to speak of memory and imagination as completely separate or of memory as simply supplying material for our imagination is reductionist. Keightley and Pickering (chapter 8) coined the term “mnemonic imagination” to capture the synthetic function of mobilizing the past to create meaning in the present, oriented toward the future (see also Glăveanu & Wagoner, 2015). The mnemonic imagination reminds us not only of the fact that remembering and imagining are intertwined processes but also that to imagine is based on memory and to remember always involves the work of imagination (see de Saint Laurent & Zittoun, in press; de Saint Laurent, in press). To the complexity of this relationship we need to add an understanding of when and why people engage their mnemonic imagination. Keightley and Pickering (chapter 8) discuss at length the case of a second-generation Indian woman trying to make sense of her identity and experience of belonging. Behind imaginative activities there is always a more or less diffuse or explicit motive, a “concern” as Hviid and Villadsen (chapter 7) aptly put it. To understand the why and how of imagination, one cannot disregard motivational aspects and the way they give directionality and meaning to one’s existence. More than this, we cannot disregard affect, another key topic for many chapters within this collection.

The relation between imagination and affect, often neglected within purely cognitive frameworks, was historically central for understanding the special position of the imagination between the senses and abstract thinking (Jørgensen, chapter 2). Musical imagination, as discussed by Klempe (chapter 12), for instance, is characterized precisely by its ability to reunite cognitions and sensations with feelings. It is in the incongruity between expectations and sensations that Klempe locates affect and imagination in music. The relation between the two is bidirectional: music generates feelings that fuel the imagination, while at the same time, the imagination itself drives our engagement with music and the wide array of sensations it occasions. This observation reminds us of Vygotsky’s (2004; see also Jovchelovitch et al., chapter 6) **(p. 355)** own conclusions concerning affect and imagination. For him, the “nonreality” of an imagined situation evokes emotional states, and these, in turn, aid further the imaginative recombination of experience. Zittoun and Rosenstein (chapter 11) offer us an edifying example of this

dynamic in the case of documentary theater. Setting up a play as an immersive experience for viewers depends on their emotional responses to what is enacted. At the same time, these affective responses help viewers make sense of what is presented on stage and preserve the proposed imaginative situation.

The example of theater opens up another category of psychological processes underpinning the work of the imagination—sociopsychological ones, such as perspective taking and reflexivity. Zittoun and Rosenstein (chapter 11) consider reflecting on one's knowledge to be one of the central aims of documentary theater and the imaginative situations it constructs. Such reflexivity is made possible by the capacity to engage with multiple perspectives on the same reality and understand one's position in view of other positions (Gillespie, 2006; Mead, 1964). In the case of the play described by the two authors, *Décris-Ravage*, a multitude of perspectives are proposed concerning the events being dramatized, from witnesses, historians, artists, and so on. In this case, being able to adopt and move between perspectives is an essential aspect of what it means to imagine. Starting from a similar observation, Glăveanu et al. (chapter 4) propose a sociocultural model of the imagination that places perspective taking and the construction of scenes at the core of imagination itself. Analyzing children's drawing of the Greek goddess of Victory, they notice how imagination relies not on the capacity to create images but perspectives in relation to a given task. Daiute (chapter 13) further exemplifies this basic social psychological process in the case of children, adolescents, and adults who experience difficult life conditions such as poverty, war, and segregation. In each case, she considers the diversity of positions as a precondition for (relational) imagining, a diversity that connects the psychological and the sociocultural context of the person who imagines, the multiple social positions and contexts involved in it, and the struggles, challenges, and opportunities raised by them.

One possible way to account for the various psychological processes involved in imagination, identified by different fields of psychology, and recalled earlier—reasoning, association, and dissociation, or what in more complex ways, Freud called "primary processes", new synthesis as in abduction, intentionality and motivation, remembering and feeling-in,

perspective taking and dialogicality, and so on and so forth—is to propose a semiotic analysis. In the works of Pierce and Vygotsky, the underpinning model is less one of a “cognitive” brain, than that of a semiotic mind, where traces of experiences are organized, hierarchized, generalized, and go through specific dynamics (Valsiner, chapter 3). A semiotic approach to imagination and the mind could account for many processes involved (for instance, see Salvatore, 2016; Valsiner, 2007, 2014; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016) but a lot of integrative work would be necessary. In effect, as we have seen, imagination is not only “in the head”; as a psychological phenomenon, it also involves the body and the world, as we will now see.

(p.356) Body and Materiality

A second significant set of issues and questions emerging from the chapters in this collection refers to the embodied and material nature of the imagination. Contrary to common conceptions that associate the imagination only with the immaterial and even the unreal (for a critique, see Vygotsky, 2004; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016), to imagine means to act in the world, an action often mediated by material tools and having very concrete consequences at least for the person who imagines, if not for others as well and, sometimes, for larger communities. Even those seemingly solitary and intrapsychological instances of imagination, such as daydreaming, are often accompanied by specific forms of externalization (e.g., doodling on paper, talking to oneself). However, it would be a mistake to consider only the visible and immediate as a measure of imagination becoming materialized, and to understand this, we need to expand our temporal focus. When loops of the imagination temporarily “disconnect” us from the here and now, in microgenesis, they do so with the means of what is present and in response to concerns raised by our immediate situation (Hviid & Villandsen, chapter 7; Tanggaard & Brinkmann, chapter 5). Jovchelovitch et al. (chapter 6) make the point that relating to absence—the “not there”—doesn’t take place in a material and social vacuum but rather is actively scaffolded by what is “there.” When we continuously observe imaginative processes at work, in children, adults, or elderly people, we see that they use the material world as support, prompts, and tools for the imagination. In this section, we review the role of the body and

instances of materiality that are discussed across different chapters and, in our view, deserve further elaboration.

First, our bodies are key contributors to the imagination, as entities that are both material and sentient, as well as an integral part of who we are as persons, how we experience the world and act within it. Klempe (chapter 12), through his discussion of sensations within musical imagination, comes closest perhaps to underlining the phenomenological aspects of the body as a resonance chamber for the rhythms that fuel our imaginative experiences. Hviid and Villendsen (chapter 7), in their analysis of children playing together, also vividly illustrate the ways in which bodies co-construct and, at times, lead the imaginative scenarios of common play situations. Building on these observations, theater directors and actors exploit the affordances of moving, interacting bodies to guide the imagination of viewers and prompt meaning making and affective processes. Finally, bodies are essentially related to our sense of self and, as Gillespie et al. (chapter 14) show, altering or "changing" bodies in deciding, for instance, for an online avatar, are very fertile conditions for (re)imagining the self. In sum, bodies initiate, carry, and transform imaginative loops. Beyond the few examples of this dynamic covered in the *Handbook*, a new and exciting field of research awaits those interested in embodied imagination (see, e.g., Gfeller, 2015).

More commonly conceptualized in this volume are imaginative uses of objects. From the hedge that turns into a wall with bullet holes in play (Hviid & Villandsen, chapter 7), the picture of a past home that triggers memories and new imaginings for the future (Zittoun & Sato, chapter 9), to the photography **(p. 357)** used to understand oneself and others better (Keightley & Pickering, chapter 8), objects are in fact omnipresent in acts of imagination, whether they occupy our attention or not. To begin with, objects can serves as props for the imagination. The blocks wrapped in scarves serving as Christmas gifts at the child care institution (Hviid & Villadsen, chapter 7) or the balls of wet white Kleenex thrown onto a door to symbolize PowerPoint projections (Zittoun & Rosenstein, chapter 11) are only two clear examples of how the meaning of objects can be subverted in ways that open up spaces for the imagination. This is the dynamic Vygotsky (1994; also Jovchelovitch et al., chapter 6) referred to when arguing that, in imaginative action, the meanings we give objects overrun and sometimes run counter to their concrete properties and functions.

Interestingly, new and canonical meanings and uses of objects are easily switched in play, for instance, see Hviid and Villadsen's description in chapter 7 of young boys using shovels as guns, just to return to their normal use a moment later without interruption. This is also the premise of using different cultural elements, such as movies, books, or songs, as symbolic resources (Zittoun, 2006), thus in other ways than originally intended and other contexts than the ones they were first encountered in. However, as free as the imagination might be in relation to objects, their material properties ultimately set powerful limits to what can be imagined with their help—a shovel can be a machine gun in children's play, but a tennis ball is not as likely to become one (Harris, 2000).

The role of objects as vehicles of the imagination (Keightley & Pickering, chapter 8) is perhaps best understood when they resist our action or when we deliberately limit our use of them. The former is well illustrated by Tanggaard and Brinkmann (chapter 5) in their discussion of stumbling moments. Building on Dewey's (1910) philosophy, they consider obstacles and frustration with the material setting as an intrinsic part of the imagination, indeed as its very origin. Objects and situations that resist our intentions and desires disturb our habits and prompt us to imagine new solutions and experiment with new ideas. To stumble onto problems or obstacles is, from this pragmatist standpoint, a privileged position that fosters imagination and reflexivity. This process resembles Baldwin's (1906) persistent imitation as a way to master practices and situations that pose some difficulty to the person (see Valsiner, chapter 3). As Tanggaard and Brinkmann conclude, imagination is not that which sets us free from the world but rather is precisely our capacity to engage with the world and move forward within it. When the material support is scarce, this can have either limiting or enhancing effects on the imagination, depending on activity, age, and context. On the one hand, as famously noted by Vygotsky (2004), the richer the cultural environment—including its material artifacts—the richer the imagination in children. On the other hand, adolescents and adults are less dependent on material support and, at times, constraining or simplifying its use can actually boost the imagination, a situation Zittoun and Rosenstein (chapter 11) describe when setting up a documentary theater production.

Finally, another important aspect of material processes and the imagination is represented by technology. From material to digital technologies, our **(p.358)** imagination—and, more broadly, our thinking and action in the world—is commonly mediated by the tools we create to communicate and exchange with others. Language, writing, and digitization not only make social life possible but also qualitatively change the way in which we imagine, something that chapter 14 by Gillespie et al. discusses at length. The authors review different types of technology that either shape or fuel our imagination, including the creation and use of dynamic real-world avatars and cyborg bodies. While the focus of the chapter is on imagining potential selves, the discussion it opens has deeper implications for a material theory of creativity. If, as the authors note, technology is defined as artifacts used to extend human abilities in the physical or symbolic world, then this extension necessarily enables (and is, in turn, enabled by) the imagination. In that sense, we can understand imagination as a "technology of the mind" (along a general Vygotskian view of this phenomenon), extending it beyond the immediacy of a given environment. However, this romantic view of technological enhancement of self and imagination can also be questioned, and Marková (chapter 15) raises the issue by asking whether we are witnessing the demise or expansion of the imagination in the Internet age. Her answer, grounded in a historical analysis of how totalitarian systems attempted to stump and control people's imagination by manipulating images, warns of the dangers of excessive bureaucratization and technicization in today's age of connectivity. One important implication from this analysis is that it invites us to reflect further on what the use of technology nowadays implies for the dialogical and imaginative mind. Second, we are invited to consider further the societal order we live in and the ways in which it "organizes" bodies, objects, and technologies to channel our imagination.

Cultural Practices

The third important area of concern emerging from this collection of chapters refers to the societal and institutional context of imagination. This issue is important not only because this *Handbook* focuses on imagination and culture but also because the psychological and material processes discussed before can and should be understood in view of the cultural and institutional practices that support them,

orchestrate their dynamic, and render them intelligible. Each and every chapter in this volume adopted a situated way of exploring the imagination, making direct reference to the sociocultural world “around” and “within” the person or people who imagine. And yet, despite this position, integrating culture and mind is inherently difficult, particularly when it comes to the seemingly internal and personal acts of the imagination. In this sense, this theoretical integration remains both the unifying premise and also a “new” horizon for sociocultural research.

As always, a developmental perspective is invaluable for unpacking this issue further. Jovchelovitch et al. (chapter 6), in their discussion of children entering culture, point from the start to the fact that human imagination is not born out of an innate impulse trying to find its expression, but rather is “met” and scaffolded from infancy by self-others relations and participation in cultural **(p.359)** practices. It is these established practices—of care, play, and storytelling, for instance—that guide and also nurture the imagination. Their established rituals, conventions, and tools, inscribed within processes of socialization, offer young children the opportunity to appropriate culture by imagining (initially, using signs and objects to deal with absence and unmet needs). As children grow, they not only expand their temporal horizon but also access new spaces and, thus, new spheres of experience. Akkerman (chapter 10) refers, in this context, to the act of traveling within and between institutional spaces and, most of all, creating meanings and experiences that cross boundaries as an achievement of (life-wide) imagination. Indeed, for children at school to integrate experiences from home in their learning and, conversely, bring home concerns and questions from school, means to carry into their here and now something from elsewhere, turning “absence” into “presence.” This use of the imagination doesn’t only have great developmental value in terms of learning and the development of interests but also contributes to solving identity dilemmas and crises (see Keightley & Pickering, chapter 8).

What is important to notice in this section is that young children, students, and adults imagining do so in relation to a broader cultural context, even when their actions seem to concern nobody but themselves. Listening to music stimulates the imagination and is part of a long-lasting cultural tradition (Klempe, chapter 12), and so is going to the theatre (Zittoun &

Rosenstein, chapter 11) or playing a video game at home (Gillespie et al., chapter 14). Living in and through institutions (see Zittoun, 2016), an ever-present condition of our lives as social and cultural beings, cannot be discounted from any discussion of the imagination. In fact, in the spirit of the sociocultural approach adopted here, the cultural guidance of human imagination can actually be the starting point for theory construction. With these observations in mind, we revisit in the next section our conception of the imagination outlined in the introductory chapter and elaborate it further.

Imagination and Culture Revisited: The Trails of Imagination

We started from a conceptual model that considers imagination as a three-stage process (see chapter 1; also Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). First, we noted that, in our experience of the immediate environment, we are often triggered—by curiosity, by certain obstacles we encounter, or even by boredom—to engage with other elements that are not part of the current experience. Bringing to mind stories from the past, envisioning what will happen in the near or distant future, exploring possible scenarios, and even creating images of what is impossible in the real world—all of these are signs of exploring distal experiences, the experience of things, people, and events that are not part of our here and now but are the "then," "there," or "nowhere" of our lives (see also Jovchelovitch et al., chapter 6). Following this exploration, we "reconnect" to our here and now **(p.360)** (again, symbolically, as indeed our experience of the immediate environment still goes on while imagining), and depending on our motives for imagining and the situation we are in, we either continue or change our actions accordingly. In any case, as Vygotsky (2004) also remarked, imaginative explorations of distal experiences, although they seem unreal and perhaps useless for the present moment, are never inconsequential. They can be at the root of new ideas, give different affective tones to our ongoing experience of the world, transform our understanding of the present, or, on the whole, accumulate in ways that contribute to a sense of self and to building a life trajectory (see also Zittoun & de Saint Laurent, 2015). This three-step process of disengagement, exploration, and reconnection is what we call imagination and, metaphorically, conceptualize as a loop, a spontaneous or prolonged

movement of the mind “out” and then “back” to the proximal and the immediate.

What is the role played by culture in relation to the loops of imagination? As illustrated within this *Handbook,* this role can be conceptualized in different ways. First, culture can *trigger* the imagination, by placing people in situations that call for engaging with distal experiences, for example, in theatre (Zittoun & Rosenstein, chapter 11), music (Klempe, chapter 12), and more mundane transitions from home to school (Akkerman, chapter 10). Second, culture offers *resources* to imagine, from the toys used in play (Hviid & Villandsen, chapter 7) to symbolic resources needed to overcome rupture (Keightley & Pickering, chapter 8; Zittoun & Sato, chapter 9). Third, culture also contributes various *mediums* for imagination, for instance, technology (Gillespie et al., chapter 14) or expressive media (Daiute, chapter 13). Fourth, culture *integrates* the outcomes of our imagination in either creative products (Glăveanu et al., chapter 4) or, at a more basic level, increased variability in action (Valsiner, chapter 3). Fifth, culture *constrains* our imagination by guiding it (Marková, chapter 15) or facing the person with obstacles (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, chapter 5). Finally, at a more fundamental level, the existence of culture and its many practices and institutions *makes imagination possible* by fostering our capacity to build representations of the world (Jovchelovitch et al., chapter 6) and, ultimately, by turning imagination itself into a cultural theme for reflection and inquiry (Jørgensen, chapter 2). In turn, the capacity to imagine cultivates personal and collective cultures (Valsiner, 2000) by using and rearranging their elements in a novel manner, inspiring new solutions for existing problems, and envisioning a future for self and others (see also Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016).

In view of this close relationship, how can we expand the basic loop model in ways that bring forward the cultural triggers, tools, processes, and outcomes specific for acts of imagination? In other words, what would a theory of imagination loops look like conceived from the perspective of culture? One answer we propose here, drawing inspiration from the contributions in this volume, is to envisage successions or chains of loops as *trails of the imagination*. The metaphor of the trail might be more concrete than that of the

loop and, in this sense, might restrict its own applicability. At the same time, however, it does seem to capture some essential sociocultural aspects of imagining, as explained next.

(p.361) What does a trail involve? To begin with, it involves a traveler—a person who follows the trail or tries to create a new one, who travels faster or slower, with a clear image of the outcome or wandering around and enjoying the landscape. Then there is the trail itself, short or long, suggesting some kind of directionality but also considerable freedom: trails are usually there to orient or guide, but also to give us freedom to explore around or change our path. Often, a trail also returns us to the place of departure—a strong similarity with the premise of the loop. Third, we have the tools or means used for the journey, from walking sticks to maps, different "resources"—physical or symbolic—aid us along our path. Fourth, a trail usually helps us explore a territory, typically a natural or city environment, in any case a "domain" traversed by more or fewer other trails (and travelers). There is also always the possibility of walking together with others, people who join us up to a point or the whole way through and, even if our personal experiences of the journey might very well differ, we can nevertheless share it as an activity. This brings us to a final important element: the experience of going on a trail and, with it, the accumulated "history" of having explored the land, of becoming familiar with it, and of getting oneself accustomed to this kind of exercise.

What does all of this have to do with imagination and its loops? It seems that the metaphor allows both to emphasize the historical or temporal location of loops of imagination, which never occur in isolation, and to highlight their cultural nature, in terms of four main aspects: (1) the cultural channeling of the imagination ("beaten tracks"); (2) the uniqueness of imagination loops ("alternative roads"); (3) the predominantly recursive nature of imagination loops ("familiar paths"); and (4) the materialized traces of the imagination ("souvenirs from the road"). Next, we will briefly discuss and illustrate each aspect, leading toward the concluding section.

Beaten Tracks

It is a common assumption, particularly in lay conceptions, to assume that imagination is a “personal” psychological function, displaying highly idiosyncratic processes unique to each of us. Such a precondition makes it difficult to share one’s imagination with others, and forcing this on someone can be equated with violating his or her privacy. After all, what one person imagines cannot be imagined (experienced) the same way by any other, including by the same person at a later moment in time. And yet, is it the case that each loop of our imagination is completely unique, hard to predict, and impossible to repeat? If we reflect on what people tend to imagine, in general, and even how they imagine, in particular, we will probably encounter many similarities. From children being introduced to a certain universe of imagination through specific stories and toys (Jovchelovitch et al., chapter 6), to the video games played as adults (Gillespie et al., chapter 14), to the stories we hear and tell about ourselves and our group (Daiute, chapter 13), there are many shared cultural resources we use to imagine from early on. While the metaphor of the “beaten track” when it comes to imagining doesn’t mean to **(p.362)** imply that we imagine exactly the same things, it does suggest there are strong cultural “attractors” to certain themes, images, and stories that our imagination often wanders toward. In some circumstances, for example, when attending a theater play (Zittoun & Rosenstein, chapter 11), our imagination is more or less directly channeled toward people and events we are meant to understand; in totalitarian regimes, to take an extreme case (Marková, chapter 15), society might even punish those who deliberately go off “beaten tracks.” Between these examples, there are the more mundane experiences of watching movies, reading books, and attending similar educational contexts that fuel but also direct our imagination in a more or less obvious manner. At times, we become very much aware of these beaten tracks when, for instance, we find ourselves attending big Sci-Fi conventions and see others around wearing similar costumes and enacting familiar roles.

Alternative Roads

To continue with the example of science fiction, the “beaten tracks” of shared imagining are reinforced every time we go back to the book or movie, but it is also the case that our creative imagination (Glăveanu et al., chapter 4) is at work in

each case, helping us appropriate the story, change it, and "make it our own." Metaphorically, the person thus explores roads not taken by the author of the story or by other audiences in the form of alternative trails. These trails, more or less distant from the general storyline, are at the origin of a widespread phenomenon: fan fiction, the rewriting or even complete transformation of popular stories (Hellekson & Busse, 2006). How and when are we prompted to take such alternative roads? When stumbling onto situations that challenge us (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, chapter 5), when trying to deal with trauma (Zittoun & Sato, chapter 9), or when negotiating our identity (Keightley & Pickering, chapter 8). Over time, these roads initially not taken can become our preferred areas of imaginative exploration, leading to the development of personal interests and new trajectories (Akkerman, chapter 10).

Familiar Paths

Whether in the form of the beaten tracks forged by the imagination of other people or the roads not taken that, when explored, become a personalized way of engaging with culture, we rarely travel the trails of our imagination only once. Imagination loops are often engaged in recursively, as when we revisit and develop a fantasy for the future, play a similar game again and again, or rework in our mind, repeatedly, a certain argument we had with someone. This "accumulation" of imaginative loops that take us on similar trails—with variations of course—form what can be symbolically called familiar paths. Gillespie et al. (chapter 14) illustrate well such instances when they discuss the way in which we construct and periodically visit alternative selves with the help of technology. Vicariously **(p.363)** living out our dreams and cultivating these experiences is one of the key benefits cultural technologies have to offer, although not the only one. Importantly, the familiar paths of imagination are very often traveled together with other people. Referring back to chapter 14 by Gillespie et al., we have numerous examples of people participating together in the construction of immersive, alternative realities, a process that takes both time and effort. Such activities have parallels with children's play episodes. Hviid and Villadsen (chapter 7) remind us of this when they describe the continuous play activity of children as they develop and revisit joint imaginative scenarios.

Souvenirs From the Road

Finally, the notion of trails of the imagination points us to the possibility of materializing imaginative loops. Building on the discussion about Sci-Fi universes and video games, our possibility of engaging with them is not only mediated by technology but also objectified in all sorts of artifacts that serve as props for future acts of imagination (think, for instance, about memorabilia and gadgets that “accompany” culturally successful stories, attracting their audience to the beaten tracks of their cultural universe). But it is not only commodified props that serve as souvenirs from the road; it is also the things we make and traces we leave of our own imaginative activities. Keightley and Pickering (chapter 8) capture an instance of this in their case study of Kia and, in particular, her use of photography to reflect on experiences of transition and rupture. One of her motives for taking, keeping, and exhibiting photographs, as the two authors report, has to do with her need to leave this body of work behind, for people in the future—mainly her family—to make sense of her experience. The mnemonic imagination discussed in their chapter is thus not only creating specific trails for the person but also documenting them for others, should they want one day to share her experience and take part in her personal story.

In conclusion, from a sociocultural standpoint, one never imagines truly alone but rather images in dialogue with others and with the means offered by culture. The trails of the imagination are an expansion of the loop model that points to the fact that we are not isolated individuals imagining but instead do so, in all cases, as part of larger communities of imagination, in ways that continue and renew traditions of imagining (see also Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). Importantly, this conception does not contradict the uniqueness of our imaginative loops or the fact that we phenomenologically experience them as personal. It is not meant to be a structuralist or deterministic framework pointing to how people imagine in the same ways or the same things. On the contrary, it is because we imagine in dialogical relations with so many present or absent others, and always from a position in the world shaped by personal histories of relating with others, that our imagination never takes us to the very same “places.” And yet, by the very act of imagining we partake in “transcendental” forms of sociality (see also Hviid & Villadsen,

chapter 7; Jovchelovitch, 2015). This type of sociality is unique to **(p.364)** humans, and it is referred to as *transcendent* precisely because it goes beyond concrete interactions with other people. The symbolic universe traversed by the trails of our imagination, each one of them personalized and made unique, is an outcome of this type of basic sociality, which thus becomes the enabler of imagination itself. By participating in transcendent sociality, we maintain, pass on to the next generations, and, in this process, continuously expand the space of the possible for human imagination.

Imagination, From the Frontiers to the Center

We started this volume (see chapter 1) by arguing that the study of the imagination is often placed at the frontiers of the social sciences and humanities, including psychology. In fact, as a topic at the frontier, the concern for imagination also crosses disciplinary boundaries—a premise for the sociocultural approach developed here. While being more "marginal" has the advantage of escaping unifying orthodoxies and disciplinary monopoles, there is scope and value in moving the imagination from the frontiers to the center, at least within cultural psychology. In this final section we briefly consider what this would mean for the field and how it can help bring together traditional areas of research and rethink them from the perspective of imagination.

There are deep links between the imagination and other key psychological and sociocultural topics, and the chapters included here already made reference to several of these. To begin with, imagination is closely related to *creativity*, itself a topic moving from the frontier to the center of social and cultural psychology (see Glăveanu, Gillespie & Valsiner, 2015). Contributors to this *Handbook* discussed different facets of this connection: creativity growing out of the imagination (Hviid & Villadsen, chapter 7; Klempe, chapter 12), imagination at the root of creativity (Valsiner, chapter 3), imagination as always potentially creative (Glăveanu et al., chapter 4), and creativity as essentially imaginative (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, chapter 5). Although there is an undeniable link between exploring the possible and creating new artifacts, further conceptual work needs to be done to integrate the two processes without subordinating one to the other. If both creativity and imagination are, still, relatively marginal in the work of many sociocultural researchers, *agency and freedom* have been, for a long time, at the center of ongoing debates about individuals and society, mind and culture (see, e.g., Gruber, Clark, Klempe & Valsiner, 2015). Placing imagination at the heart of human experiences of freedom (Jovchelovitch et al., chapter 6) and empowerment (Akkerman, chapter 10; Daiute, chapter 13) is an exciting conceptual avenue for interdisciplinary research, at the border between psychology, philosophy, and education. Grounding such an approach in a dialogical perspective allows to raise

important moral and epistemological questions (see Marková, chapter 15).

A second important area of connection with traditional cultural psychology themes is that between imagination and *language*. The use of signs and symbols to mediate human action is at the root of both phenomena; however, **(p.365)** understanding the work of imagination in concrete domains, such as music, for example, cannot and should not be reduced to language alone (Klempe, chapter 12). Imagination processes are situated at the interface between our sensorial experience of the world and our abstract understanding of it (see Vygotsky, 2004; also Jørgensen, chapter 2), and this position grants the imagination possibilities of expression that go beyond language itself. At the same time, the use of language as a form of distantiation from the here and now in the direction of generalization (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016) fuels complex expressions of the imagination; in turn, the sensorial traces of the latter infuse the use of language with concrete and embodied elements. Finally, the issue of *communication* is also important to consider here. Daiute (chapter 13) convincingly argued for the role played by expressive genres in acts of imagination. Their use both channels the imagination and allows users to take a reflective distance from them, enabling new possibilities for going beyond the "beaten tracks" of imagining self and other.

Finally, in relation to the last point, the study of imagination has been consistently linked in this volume with that of *identity and the self*, another important area for sociocultural research. Akkerman (chapter 10) noted the intricate connections between imagination, learning, and development of the self. Focusing on how interests emerge and travel across time and contexts, not least with the help of imagination, offers new conceptual means to theorize the development of students. While the use of imagination often leads to difference and variability (Valsiner, chapter 3), increasing the number of possible and alternative selves (Gillespie et al., chapter 14), Akkerman's research directs us to the complementary role of imagining: constructing a sense of continuity for the self as it travels through multiple and distinct spheres of experience (see also Gillespie & Zittoun, 2013). The same function is well illustrated by Keightley and Pickering (chapter 8), in the discussion of how Kia Kapoor struggled to stabilize a sense of self in the face of various

discontinuities: past and present, family and society, English and Indian culture. What these cases point to is the involvement of the imagination in helping us navigate moments of rupture that are essential for the construction of self (see also Zittoun & Sato, chapter 9). By mobilizing the past, the future, and the possible, imagination carries our efforts toward making sense of the world and of self within the world.

Creativity and agency, language and communication, self and identity—these are only a few topics that would benefit from mutual exchanges with the emerging field of imagination studies. In developing these links further and adding new ones, we would be able to complexify our understanding of both the imagination and what it means for the mind to imagine within, through, and toward a cultural world. Moreover, we would contribute to moving imagination from the margins to the center of sociocultural research in psychology and the social sciences at large. Symbolically, however, the imagination is and remains a phenomenon that thrives at the frontier. It is by gaining a deeper understanding of the frontier itself that we can actively use our imagination and move it further.

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