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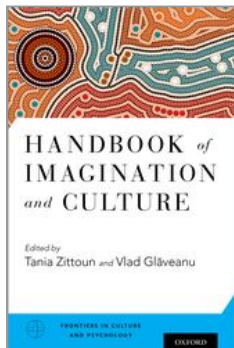

Handbook of Imagination and Culture
Tania Zittoun and Vlad Glaveanu

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Imagination at the Frontiers of Psychology

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Abstract and Keywords

This introductory chapter presents the goals, scope, and organization of the *Handbook*. The main goals are to bring back imagination from the frontiers of psychology to its center and to show the fundamental role that imagination plays in individual lives and in society. The chapter opens with a series of examples of daily imagination, suggesting the centrality of this cultural phenomenon. It then presents the paradox of bringing together “imagination”—often thought as inner and individual, and “culture”—often thought as external and collective. Here, the authors propose a sociocultural psychology that considers these phenomena as mutually constitutive. The chapter presents the four epistemological assumptions of the approach and sketches the contributions of other disciplines that at least partially share these assumptions. On this basis, a first definition of imagination is proposed. Finally, the structure of the book is presented.

Keywords: imagination, cultural psychology, human development, social change, innovation, arts, psychology, social sciences

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Why Imagination at the Frontier?

Consider these few situations. A group of children play in the schoolyard. It is autumn, and the floor is covered with a thick layer of leaves. The children start to pile the leaves up in long lines, crossing at various places. One says: “And this would be the kitchen, right?” Another opens a space in the “wall” and adds, “this is the door.”—A professional sits at his desk in front of a long list of emails, looks at the window, and sees the sun illuminating the landscape, birds chirping to announce the coming spring. He sighs. If only he could leave his office and go for a walk in the nearby park.—A family has just adopted a little kitten. All of them actively propose names for the kitten, trying them out loud, “testing” how it would be to call the cat by each name once adult, or from afar, or when angry or affectionate.—A grandmother is reminiscing about her youth in the Czech borderland at the beginning of World War II, and tells the members of her family sitting in the kitchen: “You know, when the Germans came, they put their border just behind our house, and from one day to the next, our (Czech) school became a German school.”—The citizens of a country in Europe have to vote on a new law project, initiated by a far-right party, demanding the return of all foreign criminals to their countries of origin. The main argument is that if the country accepts the flow of refugees from the Middle East, it will soon be a host of myriad terrorists and rapists. The poster of the campaign shows a white sheep kicking out a black sheep from the surface of the national flag.[1]—A group of academics is suggesting that films showing climate catastrophes allow the viewers to experience some of the anguishes these would provoke, and therefore lead them to more ecologically aware conduct (Leuenberger, 2016; Mayer & von Mossner, 2014).

These situations have been accounted for by psychologists as manifesting different types of processes: playing (Golomb, 1995; McMahon, Lytle, & Sutton-Smith, 2005; Singer & Singer, 1992), mind-wandering **(p.2)** (Fox, Nijeboer, Solomonova, Domhoff, & Christoff, 2013) or counterfactual thinking (Byrne, 2005), exploratory talk (Mercer & Hodgkinson, 2008), creativity (Corazza & Agnoli, 2015; Frith, 2012; Glăveanu, 2010; Glăveanu, Gillespie, & Valsiner, 2015), memory (Brown & Reavey, 2015), dynamics of social representations (Deconchy, 2000; Moscovici, 1976), or anticipation (Mayer & von Mossner, 2014) and innovation. It is

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assumed by most authors working within these various subdomains of psychology that these processes are linked to imagination: play is an expression of imagination, mind-wandering is useless imagination, exploratory talks demand to imagine the position of others, social representation is a form of social imagination. But imagination itself always remains at the frontier of serious consideration and is never the central concern.

This is what we propose to reverse here because we believe that there is a much more parsimonious way to account for such examples. Hence, what do all the situations presented earlier have in common? They depict situations in which a person, or a group of people, engages in an experience that escapes the boundaries of the "here and now" of their actual lived situation: from the schoolyard to a house, from the office to the park, from the kitchen to the borderland 60 years ago, from the kitten to the grown-up cat, from the worrying world situation to a safe and bad-foreigners-free country, from the present world to its end. Leaving the here and now, or a proximal sphere of experience, they all engage in distal spheres of experience—an experience located in a distant past, future, or in an alternative world. The dynamic by which a person or a group of people temporarily "leave" the here and now of a proximal experience to explore a distal experience (in the past, the future, or any alternative reality), before "coming back" to the here and now, is what we call *imagination* (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). It is our claim that imagination is a very important dynamic in which we engage, alone or with others, on a daily basis—when we have to decide which shirt we wear, when we solve a difficult task, when we plan holidays, in a life-turning situation, or when defining national policies.

Hence, our main goals in this book are to bring back imagination from the frontiers of psychology to its center, and to show the fundamental role that imagination plays in individual lives and in society. To do so, we need to propose a theoretical framework that allows us to account for the diversity of phenomena that involve imagination. This will be given mainly by a sociocultural approach that we introduce and define in this chapter. This approach will also allow us to build on studies from other disciplines, thanks to shared epistemological assumptions that we will need to define. On

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this basis, we will finally present the overall structure of the book.

The Paradox of Imagination and Culture

But, before continuing, we need to face a paradox: how can imagination be cultural?

In effect, imagination has long been considered as something “done” by one person, in his or her head. In most studies, imagination is seen as private and **(p.3)** related either to one’s emotional life or to one’s cognitive abilities (Harris, 2000; Piaget, 1992; Russ, 2003)—even if sometimes supported by props for imagining, such as dolls, Legos, and books (Götz, Lemish, Aidman, & Moon, 2005; Singer & Singer, 1992; Smith, 2009; Taylor, 1999). As these examples suggest, psychologists have also often seen imagination as something belonging to children—adults being more efficiently engaged in acts of creativity and innovation. Anyway, as something primarily psychological, imagination is something that usually seems based more on individual giftedness (when it leads to creativity) or personal problems (when one has “too much imagination”). In that sense, how can this highly idiosyncratic process be cultural?

Culture is often understood as something external to people, static, and shared by many: the cultural milieu in which we are located, furnishing languages, tools, and values. In this sense, culture is often understood as a “container,” or as something that “influences” conducts. Hence, it is often assumed that all the people belonging to a certain national or religious group do, eat, or feel certain things in certain ways, because of their shared culture. Cultures are, thus, also establishing frontiers between one another, and the best we can hope for is to “learn” about the culture of others (Markus & Conner, 2013). In this book, we adopt an alternative understanding of “culture”, which we introduce below. Before that, we need to return to our previous question, and ask how can personal acts of imagination contribute to the culture of many?

Let us go back to our opening examples. If we look closer at them, we realize that, in all the situations presented, people think not in isolation or only in their mind: the children imagine together, using also the leaves on the floor; the professional lets his imagination be guided by the view of the landscape and his memories of similar experiences, perhaps

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films he has seen with promenades in Central Park; the family draws on book characters, friends' expertise, and their knowledge of each other; the grandmother is again with others, looking at picture albums, having recently read some books about her region of origin; the population of the voting country has been exposed to abundant media discourses and political posters; the cinema viewers are precisely discussing films they saw that belong to a specific genre. In other words, in all these situations, people are interacting with others and, in this process, drawing on material and social elements constituting their settings; they effectively call on various forms of available social and cultural knowledge and use them as resources. From such a perspective, imagination is always already cultural (Glăveanu, 2014). Also, it is by their work of imagination that all the people presented in the earlier examples will contribute to culture, at micro, meso, and up to macro levels: building a leaf-house, naming a cat, perhaps coming back with new ideas for one's work, participating in remembering a family history, changing a country's policy, and engaging with global issues such as climate change.

Hence, to fully solve the paradox of culture and imagination and, even more, to show the mutual constitution of culture and imagination, we need first to conceptualize culture in a way that will allow accounting for such phenomena—which we will do here from a sociocultural perspective.

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(p.4) Culture in Psychology: The Sociocultural Approach

Culture has been addressed for a very long time in psychology (Cole, 1996; Ellis & Stam, 2015; Valsiner, 2013; Valsiner & Van der Veer, 2000; Van der Veer, 2012). Historically, two main ways of considering culture can be distinguished. The first one, usually adopted by mainstream science, considers "cultures" as related to specific groups, sharing norms, forms of conduct, artifacts and values that distinguish them from each other. This has inspired a wide area of cross-cultural psychologies. Initially aimed at reducing the ethnocentric biases of the growing field of scientific psychology, cross-cultural research set for itself as a goal to "test the generality of existing theories of mind by comparing the responses of different cultural groups on standardized measures of psychological processes," the aim being eventually to "generate a more nearly universal psychology" (Berry, Poortinga, Marshall, & Dasen, 1992, quoted in Ellis & Stam, 2015, p. 298). Such an approach is based, on the one hand, on a quite essentializing definition of culture (Grillo, 2003), in which the term is typically used to define the practices or beliefs of some distant "others"; on the other hand, it uses standard nomothetic methods, aiming at identifying predictable causalities often at the expense of diversity and heterogeneity (Molenaar, 2004). Although this field of research was very useful in making us aware of cultural variations in conduct, it also raised many others issues beyond its definition of culture. Much of the criticism can also be addressed to current mainstream psychology with reference to its inherent normativity, its attempt to explain complex human conduct in terms of more or less simple causalities, its ignorance of people's reasons to engage in specific conducts and make meaning of their lives and, last but not least, its individualism and atemporal focus (Toomela, 2010).

A more open definition of culture needs to be able to account for the richness and variation of everything that constitutes a societal environment in which people live, whether established in industrial societies or in other places in the world. Schweder proposes such a definition when noting that

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> "culture" refers to community specific ideas about what is true, good, beautiful, and efficient. To be "cultural" those ideas about truth, goodness, beauty, and efficiency must be socially inherited and customary. To be "cultural" those socially inherited and customary ideas must be embodied and/or enacted meanings; they must actually be constitutive of (and thereby revealed in) a way of life. (Shweder, 2001, p. 3153)

With such an understanding of culture, the project of a culturally aware psychology also changes. Cultural psychology and its different versions (cultural-historical, sociocultural, but *not* cross-cultural) fundamentally examine the mutual constitution of mind and culture as a bidirectional and historical process (Bruner, 1990; Cole, 1996, 2007; Valsiner, 2007; Wertsch, 1991). Rather than being a psychology that compares "cultures," it becomes a psychology of humans **(p. 5)** involved in a plurality of sociocultural phenomena. In the introduction to the first edition of the *Cambridge Handbook of Sociocultural Psychology*, Valsiner and Rosa thus write: "Socio-cultural psychology deals with psychological phenomena that happen because of the socio-cultural aspects of human lives in varied social contexts—peace or war, famine or purposeful avoidance of overweight by dieting, poverty or affluence" (Valsiner & Rosa, 2007, p. 1). Sociocultural psychology examines the lives of people in worlds of culture—because these lives are enabled and shaped by culture and because culture itself emerges out of individual and communal living.

To achieve this general goal, cultural or sociocultural psychology works with a certain number of theoretical or epistemological assumptions that have been described in different ways and can be briefly summarized as follows:

> First, it is a relational, interactional, or dialogical approach: it considers that people are related to or in dialogue with others and the world, including their material environment.
>
> Second, it considers the uniqueness of each person within these relational webs—that is, social dialogicality is associated with inner dialogicality, contributing to the unique constellation of beliefs, motives, and emotions that make up the human self.

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> Third, it focuses on the mediation of human action, a mediation that is at once social (through relations with other people) and semiotic (through the use of signs and symbols).
>
> Fourth, it is necessarily a developmental or a historical science; that is, it examines interactions and human conduct as located within and shaped by time, from sociogenetic (historical) to ontogenetic (personal) and microgenetic (unfolding in moment-to-moment interaction).

Resulting from such assumptions, the knowledge produced by cultural psychology is perspectival, dynamic, and reflexive (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016), as formulated by Ellis and Stam:

> Cultural researchers thus do not seek "objective," cause–effect models that predict and control behavior but instead aim toward increasingly adequate, historical understandings of how psychological phenomena unfold in context. Further, because cultural psychology is itself constituted by mixed contexts, research is recognized as a form of practice that cannot be separated from its practical and moral effects. (Ellis & Stam, 2015, p. 302)

Of course, such assumptions are shared at least partly by many other disciplines in the social sciences and beyond, such as certain forms of sociology, cultural studies, social anthropology, or cultural geography—although their focus is usually not on the individual. This epistemological compatibility justifies seeking to establish a dialogue with studies produced in these disciplines because they can enrich our understanding of the mutual constitution of the person and the **(p.6)** sociocultural world (Dahinden & Zittoun, 2013; Zittoun, Baucal, Cornish, & Gillespie, 2007).

It is with such assumptions that we turn back to the study of imagination. From a cultural psychology perspective, imagination can be examined as it takes place within interactions with others and the world, interactions that "enter" the dynamic of inner dialogues. While fundamentally social and cultural, imagination also becomes a unique experience to each person, depending on his or her trajectory, socially and culturally situated. Through various forms of mediation, people imagine with the support of resources from the social world or their past experience. Equally, they also externalize their imagination in language, in the making of

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objects, and in ongoing action, thus producing new mediational means that can transform self, others, and their shared sociocultural environment (Pelaprat & Cole, 2011; Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015).

Imagination in Other Disciplines of the Social Sciences

Imagination has been addressed in all disciplines of the social and human sciences, from philosophy to geography, including literature and theater. Although discussed since antiquity, imagination started to be systematically theorized in the 18th century, in the works of authors as different from each other as Giambattista Vico (Granatella, 2015; Pern, 2015; Vico, 1993; Zittoun, 2015) and Emmanuel Kant (Jørgensen, chapter 2). Given the decisive role of these authors in occidental thinking, imagination became pervasive in many studies developing at the frontiers of the growing field of psychology, as we will see in these pages.

In this section, we briefly review disciplinary perspectives in the study of the imagination that are not directly developed in this volume and focus in particular on authors who share most of the assumptions identified before: they consider the perspectival nature of knowledge, the relational construction of the social reality, the importance of mediation and meaning (collective if not individual), and the historical and dynamic nature of the sociocultural reality.

We can open this exploration by quoting John Dewey, a philosopher and pedagogue himself working at the frontiers of psychology in the early 20th century (see also Tanggaard & Brinkmann, chapter 5):

> The imaginative is not necessarily the imaginary; that is, the unreal. The proper function of imagination is vision of realities that cannot be exhibited under existing conditions of sense-perception. Clear insight into the remote, the absent, the obscure is its aim. History, literature, and geography, the principles of science, nay, even geometry and arithmetic, are full of matters that must be imaginatively realized if they are realized at all. Imagination supplements and deepens observation; only when it turns into the fanciful does it become a

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> substitute for observation and lose logical force. (Dewey, 1910, p. 224)

(p.7) Here imagination is not opposed to the real; it supplements it. Working with similar intuitions, disciplines of the social sciences consider imagination either as an epistemological principle or an object of study, yet related to the way in which people constructed the reality in which they live.

The sociologist Mills C. Wright primarily considers imagination as an epistemological tool for his discipline:

> Sociological imagination enables its possessor to understand the larger historical scene in terms of its meaning for the inner life and the external career of a variety of individuals. It enables him to take into account how individuals, in the welter of their daily experiences, often become falsely conscious of their social positions. Within that welter, the framework of modern society is sought, and within that framework the psychologies of a variety of men and women are formulated. By such means the personal uneasiness of individuals is focused upon explicit troubles and the indifference of publics is transformed into involvement with public issues. The first fruit of this imagination—and the first lesson of the social science that embodies it—is the idea that the individual can understand his own experience and gauge his own fate only by locating himself within his period, that he can know his own life chances in life by becoming aware of those of all individuals in his circumstances . . . . The sociological imagination enables us to grasp history and biography and the relations between the two in society. That is its task and its promise. (Mills, 2000, pp. 5–6)

Similar uses of the imagination can be noted in geography and other disciplines (for instance, in anthropology; see Appadurai, 2000). Then, imagination can designate not only the researchers' intuition of what is beyond the immediate but also the laypersons'. Inspired by Mill, the geographer David Harvey defined the "geographic imagination" in the 70s as:

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> "spatial consciousness" or the "geographical imagination" which: enables the individual to recognize the role of space and place in his own biography, to relate to the spaces he sees around him, and to recognize how transactions between individuals and between organizations are affected by the space that separates them. It allows him to recognize the relationship which exists between him and his neighborhood, his territory, or, to use the language of the street gangs, his "turf." It allows him to judge the relevance of events in other places (on other peoples' "turf")—to judge whether the march of communism in Vietnam, Thailand and Laos is or is not relevant to him wherever he is now. It allows him also to fashion and use space creatively and to appreciate the meaning of the spatial forms created by others. (Harvey, 2006, p. 212)

From a slightly different angle, the anthropologist Crapanzano addresses imagination as *Hinterland*, or "beyondness" of specific cultural and symbolic systems, that is, the way in which the members of the group sharing that system define and **(p.8)** live with the nonreal, and how their relation to the nonreal in return shapes the nature of the "reality" in which they live:

> I am then particularly concerned with the paradoxical ways in which the irreality of the imaginary impresses the real on reality and the real of reality compels the irreality of the imaginary. These ways cannot be separated. They are in dialectical tension. They are like lovers so entangled in each other that any determination of a singular body—or soul—is almost arbitrary. (Crapanzano, 2004, p. 15)

Other anthropologists observed that such imagination is likely to evolve with the variations of cultural elements accessible to people—what feeds their imagination. Appadurai thus notes that people's imaginings of possible lives have changed with their new and increasingly easy access to all kinds of information (e.g., in films, popular culture, new technologies of information):

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> More people than ever before seem to imagine routinely the possibility that they or their children will live and work in places other than where they were born: this is the wellspring of the increased rates of migration at every level of social, national and global life. Others are dragged into new settings, as the refugee camps of Thailand, Ethiopia, Tamil Nadu, and Palestine remind us. For these people, they move and must drag their imagination for new ways of living along with them. And then there are those who move in search of work, wealth and opportunity . . . . But in every case, these diasporas bring the force of the imagination, as both memory and desire, in the lives of many ordinary people, into mythographies different from the disciplines of myths and ritual of the classic sort. The key difference is that these new mythographies are charters for new social projects, and not just a counterpoint to the certainties of daily life. (Appadurai, 1996, p. 6)

All these social science approaches, and others covered in this *Handbook* (see Keightley & Pickering, chapter 8), seem to suggest that imagination is somewhere at the junction between the individual understanding of the world and the cultural world itself; it evolves through time, it permeates certain sociocultural situations, and it is made possible by existing cultural and symbolic elements acting as mediators. In all these cases, imagination seems to function at the frontiers of what can be thought, experienced, and dreamed of (see also Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016)—it supplements or, as we will see, expands our experience of the world.

However, all those disciplines referred to previously are not particularly interested in the subjective experience of imagining, or in the psychological processes it involves. This is, of course, the preferential entry for a psychology concerned with the interdependence between person and world, between lived experience and culture, between personal and collective forms of imagination.

It is important to note here that a large part of mainstream psychological approaches to imagination prioritize the level of cognitive, inner processes **(p.9)** and do not share most of the assumptions identified previously. For instance, in the *Rational Imagination*, Byrne focuses on counterfactual reasoning, that is, the types of daily exploration in which we consider what

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would have happened if we had done things differently, or if only this or that event would not have taken place. Her analysis is precisely focused on the logical underpinnings of such reasoning and its benefits (Byrne, 2005, 2007). As a cognitive scientist, Bogdan approaches imagination as “mindvaulting”—temporarily putting reality in brackets—but, this time, to examine the evolutionary purpose of this type of reasoning constituting “inside loops” (Bogdan, 2005, 2013). Most often, imagination is reduced in cognitive science to a study of mental imagery that, although part of the phenomenon, cannot account for its sociocultural origin and dynamic (see also Glăveanu, Karwowski, Jankowska, & de Saint-Laurent, chapter 4). Of course, this kind of work contributes to understanding of at least certain aspects of what we call imagination today; only, in our view, it offers a narrower grasp of imagination than we aim at here, and fails to account for the diversity of phenomena we wish to address in this volume.

Our first proposition is that the fields of inquiry from the social sciences located at the frontiers of psychology can help us to reconceptualize imagination, and thus bring it back from the frontier of psychology to its core. Second, because these approaches from the social sciences precisely examine cultural dynamics, our proposition is that they can help us better grasp the cultural nature of imagination, something mainstream psychological research still struggles with. What we propose in this *Handbook* is a sociocultural psychological approach that can hold together both the psychological processes and the cultural dynamics involved in imagination and consider their interplay in a historical and developmental manner.

Imagination as a Sociocultural Phenomenon

Within psychology, the sociocultural tradition finds one of its main inspirations in the work of Lev Vygotsky, for whom imagination is clearly an expansion of human experience. Rather than being a primitive or childish conduct, people’s imaginings increase in complexity with the complexity of the semiotic means they have internalized and use, and with their expertise in a given domain (see Glăveanu et al., chapter 4). These imaginings offer the material and the operations needed to create something that is not there yet. Hence, imagination appears to be at the core of change and development, whether

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at an individual or a collective level. In an often quoted sequence, Vygotsky wrote:

> When, in my imagination, I draw myself a mental picture of, let us say, the future life of humanity under socialism or a picture of life in the distant past and the struggle of prehistoric man, in both cases I am doing more than reproducing the impressions I once happened to experience. I am not merely recovering the traces of stimulation that reached my brain in the past. I never **(p. 10)** actually saw this remote past, or this future; however, I still have my own idea, image, or picture of what they were or will be like. All human activity of this type, activity that results not in the reproduction of previously experienced impressions or actions but in the creation of new images or actions is an example of this second type of creative or combinatorial behavior. (Vygotsky, 2004, p. 9)

Drawing on this type of understanding, enriched with our reading of the social sciences as well as more clinical approaches to psychology (see Hviid & Villadson, chapter 7; Jovchelovitch, Priego-Hernández, & Glăveanu, chapter 6; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016), we can thus consider imagination as a fundamentally sociocultural process that functions as an *expansion of experience*.

More precisely, we can recall the sequence of imagining for a person (or a group of people) in a given situation (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). First, imagining usually has certain antecedents, often some form of triggers within the sociocultural environment, or in our relationship to it. This has some variations. Boredom (as in the workplace) can be one invitation to disengage form the situation. The unknown, uncertain, or unusual character of a situation is another typical reason to disengage, as is the rather agreeable occasion to choose a name for a new cat. Also, often our imagination is triggered by specific cultural techniques: the thresholds techniques used to enter in the fictional world of a tale, the browsing of a photo album to explore the past, the aesthetic experience of an art piece, or the reversed, ludic experience of a carnival.

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Second, we can identify the processes of imagining per se: engaging in a distal experience, drawing on a wide diversity of semiotic resources available in the environment, imagining as part of one's present and past experiences, using material and social mediation. It also requires a variety of psychological, emotional, and embodied processes that allow for creating, experiencing, and exploring that distal experience—from hearing the leaves crackling under one's feet and enjoying their smell when tossing them, to "vicariously experiencing" feeling the cold of an apocalyptic world represented in a movie theatre.

Third, there is the moment of leaving the distal experience and re-engaging with the "here and now" proximal sphere of experience, now at "time + *n*," where *n* is the time-clock duration of the imaginative experience. Re-engagement brings to the fore the consequences, or outcomes, of imagination: a new name for a cat, relaxation at work, or a new ecological conduct. The sequence described previously can be referred to as the "loop of imagination" (Zittoun & Cerchia, 2013; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2015; see also Zittoun & Sato, chapter 9).

Of course, the "loop" model emphasizes the idea of disconnection from the real; from the examples given in this chapter, we hope that it clearly appears that imagination takes place *within* or, rather, emerges *from* the here-and-now (Pelaprat & Cole, 2011), and that very often, imagination as distal experience is deeply braided with, and intertwined with our proximal experience (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016).

(p.11) What we want to emphasize here is the sociocultural nature of the psychological dynamics involved in this sequence. The antecedents are situated at the level of the engagement of the person with her social, material, and cultural situation; the sequence of imagining itself is enabled by sociocultural means and mediators, whether one imagines alone or with others, both in the material and semiotic mediations; and the outcomes affect the person's relation to her environment, and if shared by many, can actually transform the sociocultural world—as when the voters' opinion changes a policy, or the hundreds of thousands of viewers of a film change their consumer practices.

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Such an understanding thus invites us to see imagination not as a marginal, individual, and psychological phenomenon. Rather, we now can reconceptualize imagination as a sociocultural process: it is situated within human relations and in dialogue with others and the world; it takes place in specific settings; it is materially and semiotically mediated while highly individual in the way it is experienced; and it is situated in time, having both antecedents and consequences. As a whole, it is because imagining fundamentally changes human experience that it is worth examining it.

Structure of the Book

This *Handbook of Imagination and Culture* aims to explore imagination, presently at the frontier of psychology, and to show its centrality for understanding the development of people throughout their lives, their activities in a wide diversity of settings, and the implications of imagination for both individuals and society. Hence, the book is organized in four main sections.

Section I sets the theoretical foundations for the study of imagination, retracing the philosophy of imagination (Jørgensen, chapter 2) and the history of imagination in psychology (Valsiner, chapter 3). It examines the proximity and differences between imagination and creativity (Glăveanu et al., chapter 4). On the basis of this theory and its epistemological implication, the section finally proposes methodologies for the study of imagination (Tanggaard & Brinkmann, chapter 5).

Section II adopts a longitudinal view and examines the emergence and development of imagination in the life course. First outlining the basic conditions for imagining in infants (Jovchelovitch et al., chapter 6), it then explores imagination in children’s play, with its positive and, at times, negative implications (Hviid & Villadsen, chapter 7). It then presents the role of imagination in the life of young people—here in situations of migration (Keightley & Pickering, chapter 8)—and the important role it continues to play in aging people (Zittoun & Sato, chapter 9).

In contrast, Section III proposes a more transversal view and examines a variety of socially situated settings in which imagination takes place. It explores imagination in formal

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settings—at school (Akkerman, chapter 10)—and in informal settings, at the theatre (Zittoun & Rosenstein, chapter 11) and in music (Klempe, chapter 12).

(p.12) Section IV then adopts a more prospective view to identify some of the implications of imagination for collective life and society at large. It shows the role of imagination in rebuilding community life after war (Daiute, chapter 13); focuses on how new technologies, produced thanks to the work of imagination, can push its limits further (Gillespie, Corti, Evans, & Heasman, chapter 14) and, finally, argues that imagination is at heart of democratic societies (Marková, chapter 15).

Each section offers a review of the state of the art and advances it through original work. Each section aims to show the richness of the imagination—what it allows and also what it endangers—and, equally, what might be lost without it. Finally, the volume closes with a synthetic reflection on imagination, highlighting the main contributions and critical points of this approach. Hopefully, we will by then have convinced the reader that imagination deserves to be at the center of sociocultural research in psychology, as well as helped open new routes for its study in psychology and beyond.

Note

(1.) This refers to an actual vote that took place on February 28, 2016 in Switzerland. In fact, the proposed law punishes people who are born in Switzerland, from second- or third-generation migrating families, and that might have had two speeding tickets. The law would have been against the Constitution and against all international human rights agreements. Eventually, the initiative was refused by a large majority.

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