

International Workshop

The Impact of Imagination



**Statements by
Aleida Assmann, Hinderk M. Emrich, Dilip Gaonkar, Eva Illouz,
Charles Malamoud, K. Ludwig Pfeiffer, David Shulman**

Chair: Matthias Kroß, Potsdam

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Front page:

Sigmar Polke: Two „Stones” Celebrating Double Wedding, 1984

EINSTEIN
FORUM

**Am Neuen Markt 7
14467 Potsdam
Tel.: 0331-27178-0
Fax: 0331-27178-27
www.einsteinforum.de
einsteinforum@einsteinforum.de**

Abstracts and Bibliographical Notes

Aleida Assmann

Five Gifts of the Imagination

An important question for our conference will be: has the impact of the imagination changed in the 21st century? And if so, in which way? In this context it is necessary to reassess the workings of the imagination both in their anthropological and cultural dimensions and in particular the ways in which they are shaped by and shaping modern media.

What are the indispensable gifts of the imagination? Starting with a brief exegesis of a few lines from Shakespeare, I will try to identify and comment on five essential gifts of the imagination (irrespective of the fact whether they are used in a creative or receptive context):

1. Presenting what is trans- and counter-evidential,
2. making palpable and giving a substance to what is abstract,
3. introducing structure, order and framework into a chaotic mass of data,
4. inducing life and spirit into what is dead,
5. forming an image.

Aleida Assmann studied Anglo-American Literature and Egyptology at the universities of Heidelberg and Tübingen. She is professor of Anglo-American and Comparative Literature at Konstanz University since 1993 and was Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin in 1998/1999. In 1999 she was awarded the *Forschungspreis für Geisteswissenschaften der Philip-Morris-Stiftung*; she held several guest professorships at the Universities of Princeton (2001) and Yale (2002, 2003, 2005). Areas of re-search: History of reading, historical anthropology of the media with special focus on the theory and history of writing, and the collective memory.

Major publications: *Die Legitimität der Fiktion* (1980), *Arbeit am nationalen Gedächtnis. Eine kurze Geschichte der deutschen Bildungsidee* (1993), *Zeit und Tradition* (1999), *Erinnerungsräume. Formen und Wandlungen des kulturellen Gedächtnisses* (1999, 3rd ed. 2006), *Das kulturelle Gedächtnis an der Milleniumsschwelle. Krise und Zukunft der Bildung* (2004), *Einführung in die Kulturwissenschaft. Grundbegriffe, Themen, Fragestellungen* (2006), *Der lange Schatten der Vergangenheit. Erinnerungskultur und Geschichtspolitik* (2006)

Hinderk M. Emrich

Imagination and Dreams

Imagination plays a crucial role in therapy, be it psychoanalytical or depth psychological. Being generated by processes of conceptualization (mostly within the prefrontal cortex), imaginations are closely linked to strategies of solving contradictory or conflict laden situations in life. In fact, they *generate* dispositions of behaviour. With respect to therapy, the question of the rationality and the „intentionality” of imagination is critical because it might open up new creative options. Such options are generated interactively (described by Martin Heisenberg as „initial activity”), reflected upon, and assessed with respect to their viability. In this context, free association, dreaming, and day dreaming play an important role by unleashing acts of imagination. This process was labelled by Jung in his depth psychology as „therapy guided by imagery”. Thus imaginations are not only reflections of experiences but reactions to what *is* experienced. They may trigger further processes which possibly have a therapeutic effect.

Hinderk M. Emrich, born 1943; 1968 MD (University of Bern); 1998 PhD (University of Munich); 1972 Habilitation in Molecular Neurobiology (Technical University of Berlin); 1973–1974 patho-physiological studies at the Pediatric Hospital, University of Munich, in collaboration with the Department of Physiology of Munich; 1975–1978 Postgraduate training in psychiatry, neurology and clinical psychopharmacology; 1979–1987 Group Leader and later Department Leader of clinical psychopharmacology at the Max Planck Institute for Psychiatry; 1991–1992 Fellow at the Wissenschaftskolleg zu Berlin; since 1992 Chair of the Department of Psychiatry at the Medical School, Hannover. Several guest professorships, e.g. at the University of Witten-Herdecke and the Deutsche Film- und Fernsehakademie, Berlin.

Publications: *Psychiatrische Anthropologie – Therapeutische Bedeutung von Phantasiesystemen* (1990); as co-author and/or co-editor: *Vom Nutzen des Vergessens* (1996), *Welche Farbe hat der Montag? – Synästhesie: Das Leben mit verknüpften Sinnen* (2001), *Psyche und Transzendenz* (2002), *On Time Experience in Depression – Dominance of the Past* (2004), *Emotional Time, Creativity, and Consciousness: On Time Experience in Depression* (2005), *Geist, Psyche und Gehirn. Aktuelle Aspekte der Kognitionsforschung, Philosophie und Psychopathologie* (2005), *Facetten der Sucht. Von der Neurobiologie zur Anthropologie* (2006).

Dilip Gaonkar

From Imagination to Imaginaries

In this paper, drawing on the works of Benedict Anderson, Arjun Appadurai and Charles Taylor, I will discuss and elaborate on the idea of „social imaginary” as an enabling but not fully explicable symbolic matrix within which a people imagine and act as world making collective agents. Within the folds of a social imaginary, we see themselves as agents who traverse a social space and inhabit a temporal horizon, entertain certain beliefs and norms, engage in and make sense of our daily practices in terms of purpose, timing, and appropriateness, and exist among other agents. It is a hermeneutic of everyday life, closer to Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of habitus. It gives us a sense of who we are, how we fit together, how we got where we are, and what we might expect from each other in carrying out collective practices that are constitutive of our way of life.

A social imaginary is a work of imagination. But the notion of imagination here departs significantly from the traditional philosophical understanding as an individual faculty preoccupied with the aesthetic realm. Instead here imagination is seen as a collective social fact and practice that is incessantly at work in constructing „imagined worlds” for people living among strangers and in deterritorialized spaces under the conditions of modernity, especially global modernity.

Dilip Gaonkar is the Director of the Center for Global Culture and Communication at Northwestern University, where he also teaches in the Program in Rhetoric and Public Culture. He is the Executive Editor of a journal, *Public Culture*, and the Director of a Chicago-based network of international scholars and cultural critics called The Center for Trans-cultural Studies.

He has published extensively in rhetorical theory and global cultural studies which include edited volumes *Disciplinary and Dissent in Cultural Studies* (1996), *Alternative Modernities* (2001), and *Cultures of Democracy* (forthcoming).

Eva Illouz

Imagination and the Experience of Modernity

Eva Illouz is Professor of Sociology at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. She studied in Paris, Jerusalem, and Philadelphia, and received her Ph.D from the University of Pennsylvania.

Her many publications on the role of culture in social action and on the history of emotions include: *Consuming the Romantic Utopia. Love and*

Cultural Contradictions in Capitalism (1997), *Gefühle im Kapitalismus* [Adorno Lectures 2004] (2006), and *Oprah Winfrey and the Glamour of Misery. An Essay on Popular Culture* (2003).

Charles Malamoud

Imagination and Ritual in Vedic India

While the link of imagination and mythology is obvious, the other side of religion, ritual, seems to consist mainly in the application of a set of rules and therefore to be quite alien to the creative faculty of mind. However in Vedic India at least imagination (not fantasy!) does play a definite role in the performance of rites. The sanskrit word for „imagination”, in the Vedic terminology of sacrifice, is *samkalpa*, which is derived from a root meaning „to fashion mentally”. The first step in the ritual process is the expression by the performer of his intention to carry it on and at the same time the mental construction of the whole project. This construction includes the sequences of the specific gestures and formulas which are the stuff of the rite but also the vision of what the performer’s body and the materials he has to deal with become as a result of the performance. I will take some examples from the Vedic ritual known as „the building of the fire altar”. In a particular form of this ritual drops of water are defined and imagined as solid bricks and a pond of water is defined and imagined as a structure of discrete layers of discrete bricks.

Charles Malamoud, born 1929, is a specialist in the history and religions of India. A linguist by training, Malamoud started his career by studying the Sanskrit language before turning his attention to the Sanskrit classics and in particular to the patterns of thought underlying the oldest of these, the Veda. He served as a research director of Indian religions at the Ecole Pratique des Hautes Etudes in Paris.

His published works include: *Le Svadhyaya, recitation personnelle du Veda, Taittiriya-Aranyaka II* (1977), *Lien de vie, noeud mortel, les représentations de la dette en Chine, au Japon et dans le monde Indien* (1988); *Cuire le monde. Rite et pensée dans l’Inde ancienne* (1989), *Le jumeau solaire* (2002), *Féminité de la parole dans l’Inde ancienne* (2005), *La danse des pierres. Etudes sur la scène sacrificielle dans l’Inde ancienne* (2005). Many of his books have been translated into several languages.

K. Ludwig Pfeiffer

The Impact of Breakdown: From (the) Imagination to (the) Imaginary

Theories of the imagination have failed. Philosophers and poets were not able – not even in its heyday roughly linked with the period normally called „Romanticism” – to establish imagination as a substantial faculty of the mind or as a controlled mode of cognitive processes.

At the same time, it has become clearer than ever, not least through present-day brain research, that imaginative processes play a crucial role in human cognition. Their importance appears to be as urgent as their validity always in doubt. My guess is that this is why the term „imaginary” has enjoyed such prevalence for quite a few decades. It points to the inevitability, but also to the lack of systematic status of what is beyond the defined modes of both rationality and irrationality. A bit in the mode of Kant (and in the wake of the much-neglected Gilbert Durand) I would like to inquire whether there is, „instead” as it were, something like an anthropological structure to the oscillation between imagination and the imaginary.

K. Ludwig Pfeiffer was born 1944; since 1979 he is Full Professor of English and Comparative Literature, Critical Theory at Siegen University; from 2007 he will be Professor of Literature, International University Bremen. Several Visiting Professorships at Universities in Japan, USA, and Brazil; several fellowships, amongst others of the Humanities Research Institute, University of California, Irvine (1991) and of the Japan Society for the Promotion of Science (1996, 2003); since 1983 he is referee for national and international tenure reviews and search committees (including UCB, UCD). He is member of the Committee Media Studies Wissenschaftsrat Federal Republic of Germany.

Major publications: *Bilder der Realität und die Realität der Bilder. Verbrauchte Formen in den Romanen George Merediths* (1981), *Das Mediale und das Imaginäre. Dimensionen kulturanthropologischer Medientheorie* (1999), as co-editor: with H. U. Gumbrecht: *Stil – Geschichten und Funktionen eines kulturwissenschaftlichen Diskurselements* (1986), *Paradoxien, Dissonanzen, Zusammenbrüche: Situationen offener Epistemologie* (1991), with R. Kray, and K. Staedtke: *Theorie als kulturelles Ereignis* (2001); with J. Fürnkäs, M. Izumi, and R. Schnell: *Medienanthropologie und Medienavantgarde* (2005), with K. Vondung: *Jenseits der entzauberten Welt. Naturwissenschaft und Mystik in der Moderne* (2006).

David Shulman

Why Fiction Works: A Perspective from Sanskrit Poetics

One of the cornerstones of Sanskrit poetic theory is the recognition that the „reality” enacted in a drama or embodied in a poem is fictive. Sanskrit poetics also completely rejected the notion of Mimesis as a basis for describing what happens in these fictive settings. How, then, does the artistic production succeed in producing far-reaching transformations in the spectator or listener/reader? For, if the performance succeeds, the person who leaves the theatre is not the same person who entered it. Such a question is bound up with a second one that has to do with the understanding of „truth” as distinct from what is „real”. The medieval poetics have their own way of defining the peculiar amalgam of real and unreal that constitutes a poetic world. We will look at some examples of this understanding as it is worked out in classical verses.

David Shulman is Professor of Indology and Comparative Religious Studies at The Hebrew University of Jerusalem. He received his Ph.D from the School of Oriental and African Studies, University of London.

His many publications on Tamil and Sanskrit literature and mythology include: *The Wisdom of Poets: Studies in Tamil, Telugu, and Sanskrit* (2001); as co-author and co-editor: *Self and Self-Transformation in the History of Religions* (2002), *Siva in the Forest of Pines: An Essay on Sorcery and Self-Knowledge* (2004), *God on the Hill. Telugu Songs by Annamayya* (2005), *The Demon's Daughter: A Love Story from South India* (2006).