

Magia Política: Imagination in contemporary Politics

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ABSTRACT: In the theorization of Political Science, imagination has always been a segue to grasping different political constructs and yet rarely in the history of the field, is imagination developed or defined as an actual methodology. The state-of-art of imagination in Political Science provides an explanation to the development of modern historiographical knowledge, nationalism, and the modern social order respectively, and yet, nowhere in these texts do the authors provide a succinct definition of what imagination is. Through a multidisciplinary analysis of how politics is formed, I expand on the application of imagination as an epistemological method first by explaining how the term has been ephemerally mentioned in the political development of the social imaginary, proposing a definition of imagination that can be applied to a post-modern understanding of politics, and finally by analyzing two objects of study, the musical group *Cuervo Mitotero y Los Traficantes de Folk* and the dance company *México de Colores* which use imagination to visualize counter-current identities and narratives within the contemporary socio-political imaginary.

KEYWORDS: Imagination. Social Imaginary. Politics. Western Esotericism. Folklore.

RESUMO: Na teorização da Ciência Política, a imaginação sempre foi uma continuação para apreender diferentes construtos políticos e, ainda assim, raramente na história do campo, a imaginação é desenvolvida ou definida como uma metodologia real. O estado da arte da

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imaginação na Ciência Política fornece uma explicação para o desenvolvimento do conhecimento historiográfico moderno, do nacionalismo e da ordem social moderna, respectivamente, e ainda, em nenhum desses textos os autores fornecem uma definição sucinta do que é imaginação. Por meio de uma análise multidisciplinar de como a política é formada, amplio a aplicação da imaginação como método epistemológico, primeiro explicando como o termo tem sido mencionado de maneira efêmera no desenvolvimento político do imaginário social, propondo uma definição de imaginação que pode ser aplicada a uma compreensão pós-moderna da política e, finalmente, pela análise de dois objetos de estudo, o grupo musical *Cuervo Mitotero e Los Traficantes de Folk* e a companhia de dança *México de Colores* que usam a imaginação para visualizar identidades e narrativas contracorrentes no contexto sócio-contemporâneo do imaginário sócio-político contemporâneo.

PALAVRAS-CHAVE: Imaginação. Imaginário Social. Política. Esoterismo Ocidental. Folclore.

*We all have sparks, imaginations
That's how our minds, create creations
Oh, they can make our wildest dreams come true
Those little sparks in me and you
"One Little Spark" by The Sherman Brothers*

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Introduction

Tabula rasa. Imagine a blank slate. Society is merely shaping itself. Imagine how we would interact. We might be incredibly selfish as we comprehend the differences among each other. We might even act in harmony, imagining how the preservation of certain rights could ultimately build collective security. Imagine the role of a King, chosen by divine right or maybe positioned by the hierarchies you have built as a society. Imagine the role of our collective voices, working in unison to set the guidelines of what we now conceive as a democracy.

Tabula rasa. Imagine a blank slate. You perceive the world with new eyes, a *veil of ignorance*. Yet, we recognize our critical nature. We cannot assume our own prejudices, but we notice the systemic discrimination of the institutions built around us. We imagine, possibly with a false sense of idealism, justice as a virtue against the inequalities of the system in an attempt to achieve higher conditions of liberty.

Tabula rasa. Imagine an empty street. You understand the street as a public space... a space for transit. Imagine it is not just that. It is a stage. A space to take action. Imagine the impact of occupying such space in opposition for what others imagine is the norm. You are imagining change, attempting to transform what is politics to visualize your own unrepresented narratives.

Tabula rasa. Imagine a blank canvas. You see carefully crafted brushstrokes that mirror the emotions of Expressionist masters slowly filling it up. You are captivated by the imagery: you recognize childhood cartoons, lyrics that you heard your grandmother mumbling, national symbols... is that a nude body? You imagine yourself in the context of the artwork in an attempt to comprehend its concept or narrative. You experience the imagination of the artist and stimulate your own.

In the field of Political Science, the manner in which politics is construed has always been contested. Political scientists refer to *pactus unionis* and *pactum subjectionis* as the basis for the establishment of political institutions since Locke, Hobbes, and Rousseau first attempted to comprehend the concepts of freedom and equality among people. For it is how we reconcile both freedom and equality in a political system that shapes the norms, patterns of behavior, and sense of security of a given political institution. Basic social contract theory. At the hands of the rise of Western Modernity this sense of democratization, institutionalization, and secular individualization permeated society ultimately shaping how we imagine politics ought to be, and our role in it. Somehow, as we have attempted to theorize Political Science, imagination has always been a segway to grasping different political constructs and yet rarely in the history of the field, is imagination developed or defined as an actual methodology. In *The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* by Hayden White, *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism* by Benedict Anderson,

and *Modern Social Imaginaries* by Peter Taylor, the imaginary is used to provide an explanation to the development of modern historiographical knowledge, nationalism, and the modern social order respectively, and yet, nowhere in these texts do these authors provide a succinct definition of what is imagination and its implementation within the field, but rather circumscribe the term imaginary. Through a multidisciplinary analysis of how politics is formed, I expand on the application of imagination as an epistemological method first by explaining how the term has been ephemerally mentioned in the aforementioned work, developing a definition of imagination that can be applied to a post-modern understanding of politics, and finally by analyzing two objects of study, the musical group *Cuervo Mitotero y Los Traficantes de Folk* and the dance company *México de Colores* which use imagination to visualize counter-current identities and narratives within the contemporary socio-political imaginary.¹

The State-of-Art of the Imaginary

Let us first review how imagination has played a role in the work of White, Anderson, and Taylor. In *The Historical Imagination in Nineteenth-Century Europe* published in 1973, Hayden White analyses the contributions of 19th century philosophers and historians in shaping historical consciousness as a mode of thought and constructing historical knowledge as autonomous in what he describes as the structure of historical imagination. He discusses historical work that manifests “a verbal structure in the form of a narrative prose discourse that purports to be a model, or icon, of past structures and processes in the interest of explaining what they were by *representing* them” (WHITE, 1963, p. 2). In short, these 19th century thinkers utilize the rhetoric

¹ I would like to extend my gratitude to the International Studies Seminar on North-South Global Change and particularly to Dr. Paola Suarez whose contributions to the Faculty of Philosophy and Letters and the Center for North American Studies of the National Autonomous University of Mexico allow for this investigation to be imagined.

and discourse known to them, ideas influenced by their own perspectives and backgrounds, to develop these representations of history. White explains the framing of the stories, building blocks of history, across four archetypal forms: romance, tragedy, comedy, and satire which are combined with four modes of argumentation: formist, organist, mechanicist and contextualist (WHITE, 1963, p. 8).

Ultimately, historians gather evidence and formulate ideas about the past. Their narratives acquire the framework through which they construct this history. Both primary and secondary sources demonstrate a variety of biases and perspectives that allow these thinkers to evaluate a historical event, adopting one of the aforementioned verbal structures and modes of discourse while also using and interpreting the images and texts available to them.

The historical work of these thinkers, White concludes, therefore “represents alternative, and seemingly mutually exclusive, conceptions both of the same segments of the historical process and of the tasks of historical thinking” (WHITE, 1963, p. 4). The author builds a metaphor between history and poetry as the former evokes “the spirit of the past” in the manifestations of language that occur in a given historical imaginary. A historical narrative plotted with narrative structures (a beginning, a middle, and an end), characterized by the elements in this Whitean matrix of categories, and a deductive-nomological nature thus present historical work as mediation or rather “an attempt to mediate among what [White calls] the *historical field*, the *unprocessed historical record*, other *historical accounts* and an *audience*” (WHITE, 1963, p. 5). What this refers to is that the historical imagination that is developed by thinkers of the same time period is constructed by narratives considered *true* in the context of their archetypal form and rhetoric which build a *true* or accurate representation of the space and time from which the narratives originate. Historical context, the individualization of it at the hands of these thinkers, and the frame or plot in which these thinkers write thus

shape the historical imaginary of a given time period. As White would put it: they demonstrate the structural elements of that specific historical imagination.

While a definition of imagination is not developed, White does explain how imagination might be used by a historian, straining in two directions simultaneously: “critically, in such a way as to permit [them] to decide what can be left out of an account (though [they] cannot invent or add to the facts known); and poetically, in such a way as to depict, in its vitality and individuality, the medley of events as if they were present to the sight of the reader” (WHITE, 1963, p. 91). Two political examples are brought up in White’s work: Friedrich Hegel and Karl Marx for which I would like to examine the categorization of their historical imagination.

According to White, Hegel frames his historical perspective on two levels: “Tragic on the microcosmic, Comic on the macrocosmic” which are in direct convergence with his organicist mode of argumentation in the construction of his historical imagination (WHITE, 1963, P. 30). This refers to how Hegel builds his accounts of historical processes, possibly stemming from his thesis, antithesis, synthesis triad in understanding the relationship between thought and being under the umbrella of German idealism. Synecdoche is applied as a trope in Hegel’s historical imagination to delineate the integrative nature of both his philosophical and historical narratives perhaps into a more holistic understanding of both the spirit and human relationships.

On the other hand, White’s analysis on the historical imagination of Karl Marx departs from a different categorization: archetypally Tragic through a mechanistic mode of discourse which develop radical ideals from its reading. White justifies this categorization through Marx’s strict causal determination and his heroic yet militant tone which serve to define his ideas of historical materialism. Marxist history is therefore metonymic under the critical lens of

White since Marx pre-structures his critique through divisions and hierarchies, modifying the imaginary already constructed from Smith's neoliberalism and enforced by institutionalized capitalism. It is important to note that Marx's historical imagination employs Hegel's in order to conform with an organicist purpose as presented by White: "a metaphysical commitment to the paradigm of the microcosmic-macrocosmic relationship... governed by the desire to see individual entities as components of processes which aggregate into wholes that are greater than, or qualitatively different from, the sum of their parts" (WHITE, 1963, p. 15). Marx's definition of the relationship between base and superstructure in the maintenance of socio-economic hierarchies serves to exemplify the integration of different historical imaginations since the ideas produced by the hegemonic class in the system are proliferated through media to therefore consolidate the power of the same class. In this sense historical imagination could be defined as the qualities and characteristics of the theorization and construction of history at the hands of individual thinkers that have the capacity to build distinct narratives from the same historical background; *metahistory* if put in White's terms.

Furthermore, in *Imagined Communities: Reflections on the Origin and Spread of Nationalism*, Benedict Anderson implements the concept of imagination to define the rise of nationalism. For Anderson a nation is "an imagined political community - and imagined as both inherently limited and sovereign", further establishing that it is "imagined because the members of even the smallest nation will never know most of their fellow-members, meet them, or even hear of them, yet in the minds of each lives the image of their communion" (ANDERSON, 1983, p. 21). The author acknowledges the limitation of imagination as a means to develop a fabrication and the limits to the "finite, if elastic, boundaries, beyond which lie other nations", however, the term *imagined community* comes together when addressing a sense of "deep, horizontal comradeship" where "many millions of people, [are willing] not so much to kill, as to die for such limited imaginings" (ANDERSON, 1983, p. 22-

23). First, it is important to mention the historical origins of nationalism in order to comprehend the scope of imagination as methodology in Anderson's work. The community Anderson describes takes form given the dissolution of three cultural beliefs: the idea that script-language offered ontological knowledge, the belief in cosmological driven institutions, and "the conception of temporality in which cosmology and history were indistinguishable" (ANDERSON, 1983, p. 53).

The onset of Modernity thus established imagined communities by linking "fraternity, power and time meaningfully together" through multiple modes of modern communication derived from a shared vernacular language distributed through a capitalist economic system (*Ibid*). Anderson further implies that Western Modernity sets the stage for a more holistic understanding of nationalism constrained to the rise of Western institutions, secularization, and individualization. The development of print capitalism, particularly mass-produced books and newspapers therefore help national discourse and identity become modular. These mediatic elements can be shared by multiple individuals among a community thus creating a homogeneous and analogous idea of a nation. What is contemporary at a given time becomes a means through which we can imagine this sense of nationalism. Anderson touches upon the temporality and manifestation of shared identities when reading a newspaper. We imagine ourselves becoming a part of an economic community by partaking in the consumption of information as a commodity, while further imagining ourselves linked with other readers who, perhaps every morning, in a "mass ceremony" share the "simultaneous consumption" of narrations of human experiences (ANDERSON, 1983, p. 52-54). Now in a globalized world, we see ourselves linked to "visual and aural [media] creations, always personal and particular" embedded within the newspaper (ANDERSON, 1983, p. 40). What once was transmitted through stained glass windows, sermons, prayers, and ornate tympanums, now

becomes advertisements, political propaganda, art, and opinion pieces that add fuel to the imaginary construct of our community.

Finally, in *Modern Social Imaginaries* published in 2003, Peter Taylor does not provide a definition of imagination either, but develops the concept of the social imaginary instead. For him, the social imaginary is the manner in which individuals rationalize the societal system. His explanation for the use of the term *imaginary* is threefold: he focuses on how “ordinary people ‘imagine’ their social surroundings... carried in images, stories, and legends”, how the scope of the imaginary usually belongs to a small minority that represents the interests of a majority, “if not the whole of society”, and “the social imaginary [as] common understanding that makes possible common practices and widely shared sense of legitimacy” (TAYLOR, 2003, p. 23). Taylor thus utilizes imagination as a link between the norms and behaviors of society and an overarching moral order implied by the imaginary that society experiences and expects.

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Like White and Anderson, Taylor sets the context for the development of social imaginaries with the onset of Western Modernity. Specifically, he argues that the mutation towards our contemporary understanding of moral order occurred with the rise of three imaginaries: the market economy, the public sphere, and self-governing institutions (TAYLOR, 2003, p. 2). Modernity implies the ability to rationalize our own surroundings as self-agents capable of understanding expectations, normative guidelines, and the images, texts, and overall media that consolidate the social imaginary (TAYLOR, 2003, p. 21).

Taylor thus exemplifies his points through an analysis of social contract theory. The moral background is understood through the concepts of *pactum unionis* and *pactum subjectionis* insofar as to how we choose to create and live under a political institution. In one instance our social imaginary aims for

a governing institution that achieves collective security at the expense of individual freedom as it imagines a society guided by immoral order and chaos. A Lockean imaginarium renders governing institutions on the moral realization of natural rights, stressing the order necessary for individuals to interact with each other under democratic life. Our contemporary social imaginary marries notions of freedom and equality at the hands of popular sovereignty.

I would like to note the role of the intra-worldly individual in the development of the modern social imaginary for Taylor acknowledges political institutions *by the people, for the people* across different political ideologies. Since individualization is parallel to Modernity, this actor sees themselves as a free agent constrained not only by the physical realities of the political system they live under, but also by the expectations of the moral order superimposed onto every aspect of their life. In this freedom lies imagination, perhaps a way to reinvigorate religious individualism in an attempt to understand how society is ordered in relation to nature or to the sacred since “notions of flourishing remain under surveillance in our modern moral view” (TAYLOR, 2003, p. 65).

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Plausibly, in developing imagination as methodology we are able to push beyond the demands of moral order itself. Taylor provides the example of a demonstration as a ritual in the repertory of our social imaginary to persuade the members of a larger normative imaginary in favor of plurality representation or change. Yes, it sounds a bit repetitive, but what Taylor implies is that the moral order stems from the collective experiences, transmitted through media, which allow us to imagine our social community as is and hopefully modify it when needed. We understand the power of assembly, we chant, and carry our banners with pride. We disrupt the social imaginary of the public space in building what is pre-political - a discourse among individuals. Taylor depicts this sentiment beautifully: “[the action]

opens out wider perspectives on where we stand in space and time: our relation to other nations and peoples... and also where we stand in our history, in the narrative of our becoming, whereby we recognize this capacity to demonstrate peacefully” (TAYLOR, 2003, p. 27). Imagination in this sense serves to combine a multiplicity of identities (individual, historical, national, ethnic, cultural...) to understand the role of a given individual (even an artist) in becoming integrated with or even changing the social imaginary.

Contemporary Denotations of Imagination

When addressing the attributes of Postmodernity, the social imaginary seems rather unstable. We have seen the spread of fake news, and the rise of populism, religious fundamentalism restoring 7th century political institutions, social movements unfold both in violent and online settings at unprecedented scales, political activism at sheer extremes with conflict among white supremacist groups, social justice warriors and everyone ideologically in between, and multiple attempts to reconcile this contemporary conundrum with what we deem politics. In addressing the limitations of White, Anderson, and Taylor, I would like to re-conceptualize the social imaginary departing from a Postmodern lens to address imagination in contemporary politics. My definition of Postmodernity stems from the field of Art Politics as an explicit critical and visual analysis of art as political discourse. In the history of art, Postmodernism rejects a Greenbergian analysis of the formal elements of an art piece in favor of the concept and purpose of the art itself. The aesthetics might be subdued by action, context, audience-involvement, or commercialization. In Critical Theory, Postmodernism addresses a post-structural reality that is liquid in nature, reacting to the unstable and spectacular political, economic, and social spheres. Both deconstruct and redefine the different perspectives involved in their mediatic outcomes. I apply three main qualities to define Postmodernism: liminality, plurality, and

the spectacle. Craig Browne and Paula Diehl contribute an epistemological understanding of imagination in their article titled “Conceptualising the Political Imaginary” that directly references these qualities.

Liminality refers to a gray area or an *in-between*. It acknowledges transitions and questions processes. What might be relevant for us, might lose structure or significance altogether for another. Art and theory produce processes of self-awareness and confront their audience through dialectical interactions in a given time in a given space. The social imaginary is therefore liminal because it is imagined. It can take the shape of a theory or history at the hands of a thinker, be transformed into a contract at the hands of a nation, or even become the context for the moral order of a given society. Browne and Diehl explain how the social imaginary is composed of different layers “interconnected through the creative effects of the ‘magma’ of the imaginary, with its shifts between the molten and the solidified, or, to put it differently, the interchange between instituting and instituted” (BROWNE et al, 2019, p. 395). This reinforces the liminality of the Postmodern within the context of imagination. The deconstructed layers of identity, theory, visual culture, and political participation all become amalgamated at different times and spaces for specific individuals who might engage with the constantly shifting paradigms of who we are and how we ought to be in politics. Due to the level of globalization and liquidity at hand, Diehl posits that the different layering and temporalities of the political imaginary serve to constitute a political regime (not just a democracy as she presents) which “can incorporate and express layers of meaning, affect and intentionality that diverge from the primary reference of representation” (*Ibid*). Succinctly put, *to each their own*. When addressing the development of politics, the relationships of power involved often collide with the multiple denotations of the concepts of equality and freedom. Important to note that a democracy constitutes popular sovereignty at the hands of both liberal, fascist, and communist regimes. The way to achieve it is thus imagined differently.

Plurality is best described through a pastiche or a collage. It makes outcomes self-referential, and yet relatable across time and space. Browne and Diehl elucidate on the role of images and texts as “manifestation of the social imaginary” and motivation for “modes of perception and types of imagination” (*Ibid*). They particularly cite the work of W. J. T. Mitchell which highlights the role of pictures and political iconography in developing visual analysis to understand the political imaginary. It is important to mention the term *imaginal* coined by Chiara Bottici, feminist philosopher, who explains how the imagination is “made of images and can therefore be the product of both of an individual faculty and of the social context as well as of a complex interaction between the two that escapes any simple opposition between them” (BOTICCI *apud* BROWNE et al, 2019, p. 386). I will later provide an analysis through Art Politics of the *imaginal* that might clarify how Postmodern plurality shapes our contemporary social imaginary.

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Accordingly, the spectacle frames the appeal of Postmodernity, manipulating the texts, images, and media of the social imaginary to create and shift multiple paradigms. We have understood the contemporary social imaginary as tensions between forms of political systems, the compilation of temporalities, and the multiple forms of representation it produces to consolidate itself. These different aspects substantiate the imaginary’s Postmodern appeal. Browne and Diehl explain how most political systems have remained hierarchical even after Modernity, contrasting the ideas of White, Anderson, and Taylor. This is evidenced by the fact that political movements continue to redefine the principles of freedom and equality in the context of the social imaginary. Contentions of power still permeate individual and institutional relationships and the monopoly of power is still enforced by the government, the economy and the media as self-perpetuating institutions. I would support that this display of power makes the social imaginary spectacular.

Granted, one of the only fields of study that employs imagination as a way of knowing is Western Esotericism. For the sake of Postmodernity, I will access these occult practices to present an alternative definition of imagination that might be integrated to the conceptualization of social imaginaries in Political Science.

Western Esotericism is a transdisciplinary study of knowledge that addresses the coalescence of religious plurality and secular individualization that stems from Modernity. The field analyzes the linkage between the universal and the particular by highlighting a type of knowledge that metamorphoses our understanding of ourselves, our relationships, and a larger world order. In doing so, it assumes that imagination is epistemological in nature and provides access to direct knowledge that cannot be gained through rational thought.

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Antoine Faivre presents an essentialist understanding of imagination in the esoteric tradition by building a historical trajectory for the field from the early-Modern period. In *Access to Western Esotericism*, Faivre develops a paradigm surrounding the esoteric way of thinking which encompasses six distinct components: 1) *Correspondences*: the visible and invisible relationships established between a microcosm and a macrocosm, 2) *Living nature*, which calls for an understanding of the world as a larger sum than its parts that is interwoven with life, 3) *Imagination and Mediation* as a means through which knowledge is acquired and revealed as *truth* in the context of correspondences in living nature, 4) *Experiences of transmutation* which allows a departure from the material plane to build a parallel between external and internal experiences which are metamorphosed towards a higher understanding of the self and its role in the context of the living world, 5) *The practice of concordance* in finding a common denominator among traditions for the sake of esoteric knowledge, and 6) *Transmission* which implies that

esoteric teachings can be passed on between individuals (FAIVRE, 1994, p. 10-15).

These components of Esotericism as a form of thought serve to place imagination at the forefront of esoteric doctrine. For Faivre, imagination “is a kind of organ of the soul, thanks to which humanity can establish a cognitive and visionary relationship with an intermediary world, with a mesocosmos, what Henry Corbin proposed calling a *mundus imaginalis*” (CORBIN, 1964, p. 12). First, Faivre mentions imagination as a vital function of the soul, somehow appealing to a notion of the resacralization of the secular individual after Modernity in a Neo-Platonic sense. Additionally, it is important to notice the direct link between imagination and cognition in the development of the human psyche. However, I would like to focus on the term *mundus imaginalis*.

In his paper *The Imaginary and the Imaginal* delivered at the Colloquium of Symbolism in Paris in 1964, Corbin categorizes an order of reality separate from the conception of Utopia or the unreal that is usually equated with the imaginary (CORBIN, 1964, p. 1). He departs from issues with the semiotics of translating the word imagination from Arab to modern Western languages. In his translation, he grasps a key difference between the superficial denotation of imagination as fiction and the esoteric qualities of the use of creative imagination. He therefore describes the imaginary as a space that “envelops, surrounds, contains so-called material reality” and provides cognitive experiences that lead to knowledge. By utilizing multiple Arabic terminology, he furthers the scope of what imagination entails. In the context of the imaginary Nâ-Kojâ-Abâd refers to “the country of non-where”, the Malakût as “the supersensible world of the Soul”, the city of Jâbalqâ formed by pre-existing and pre-ordained images of the sensible world, the alam al-mithal designated as the world of “the archetypal images of individual and singular thing”, mazhar considered a place of epiphanies, and Hûrqalyâ which corresponds to the Heavens (CORBIN, 1964, p. 3-7). Together these different

spaces propel imagination to validate desires and dreams, visionary perspectives, and symbolic rites to get closer to a revelation. As a conclusion, however, Corbin posits the following question: is it possible to construe imaginal objectivity?

Perhaps by placing the esoteric imaginary in the context of the Postmodern this transmutation can be better understood. I would like to recall the words of Kocku Von Stuckrad, who develops a structuralist analysis of Western Esotericism: “Modern man is oblivious to myths but still receptive to their music” (VON STUCKRAD, 2014, p. 135). In *Western Esotericism: A Brief History of Secret Knowledge*, Von Stuckrad addresses contemporary Esotericism through the study of currents of esoteric thought. These currents are not labelled explicitly as Western Esotericism, and yet share similar characteristics imbued with Faivre’s paradigmatic esoteric components. Arguably the work of White, Anderson, and Taylor subtly call forth the application of the *mundus imaginalis* to achieve their conception of the historical and social imaginary, while still commending secular values and modern institutions. Taylor even states that we have reached “a decisive stage in the development of our modern predicament, in which belief and unbelief can coexist as alternatives”, very clearly illustrating the liminal qualities of contemporary spirituality (TAYLOR, 2003, p. 187). Corbin might even concur by placing imagination at the foundation of knowledge that permits “us to evade the dilemma of current rationalism, which gives us only a choice between the two banal dualistic terms of either ‘matter’ or ‘mind’” (CORBIN, 1964, p. 7). This oxymoron finds coherence in the New Age Movement as an object of discursive analysis. Von Stuckrad recognizes the plurality of identities that arise with the deconstruction of Modernity across different spheres (political, economic, social, historical, Marxist... queer) (VON STUCKRAD, 2014, p. 133). He places the individual at the center of these spheres “as the master narrator of [their] life and as a voyager beyond time and space, into the mirror world of his soul” (VON STUCKRAD, 2014, p.

139). Through the lens of transpersonal psychology, Von Stuckrad therefore develops the concept of *unus mundus* (the unity of the world), in which man and cosmos form a living whole” through self-awareness of inner transformation (VON STUCKRAD, 2014, p. 144). Imagination serves to align the multiple identities exposed to esoteric discourses as a possibility to establish a dialectic between the exoteric, inner experience, and the realm of knowledge. The esoteric discourses, Von Stuckard gathers, are presented as Jungian archetypes integrated among a collective unconscious (even mentioning the *Star Wars* trilogy), and as such appear as texts and images that lie close to the formulation of individual identities and are self-perpetuating through narratives of what is deemed good and bad (VON STUCKRAD, 2014, p. 139).

Ontologically, this demonstrates the possibility of integrating imagination as knowledge in the construction of political social imaginaries because it justifies self-sublimation at the hands of imagined communities or an imagined social order in which we accept the expectations but go beyond the materiality implied by the system to understand the transpersonal realm. In this context, I take the risk of implying that imagination as methodology in Political Science is epistemological in how we are able to learn our place as political individuals beyond what is expected by a given political institution or a shared notion of a nation, but also as to how we exchange and internalize power within and among individuals in an extremely complex and lively world.

A Case Study in the Application of Imagination in Political Science

The musical group *Los Traficantes de Folk* and the dance company *México de Colores* serve as relevant objects of study to analyze how imagination is applied as a method in defining the contemporary social imaginary and the possibility of change to it. Folklore arises from an ethnographic understanding

of the traditions and customs that define the identities of a particular group or place. Through its rites, beliefs, crafts and songs, which are expressive and representative, folklore takes an institutional direction to validate itself, face repression and transmit the teaching of our shared history. In contemporary Mexico, folklore derives not only from cultural syncretism and miscegenation but now converges with ideologies and themes that represent a diverse and sometimes discouraging reality. I therefore analyze the outcomes of these two artistic groups as demonstrations or rituals, facilitated by the images and texts of the social imaginary, that push to transform or even transmute how politics ought to be. Justified through Taylor's approach to understanding change in the social imaginary, it is therefore possible to place the creation of art as part of a repertory within the social imaginary to propose these societal or even political transformations: "the actors have to know what to do, have to have (practices in their repertory that put the new order into effect); and the ensemble of actors have to agree on what these practices are" (TAYLOR, 2003, p. 115). This process thus legitimizes transpersonal understanding of the *mundus imaginalis* within the larger context of an amalgamated imagined reality in virtue of the relationship established between artist, art piece, and audience.

In the Social Sciences, Hayes, Sameshima and Watson develop an explanation of imagination as a central method in ethnography. Imagination serves to posit explanations of our (un)conscious experience parallel to the generation of the material world. As researchers we delve in a mesocosm of what can be imagined in emergence in contrast to what is imagined as canon, especially in a highly interconnected globalized society in which imagined communities are separated by spatial and temporal boundaries. Their argument follows that "our historical, and distinctly modern, understanding of an individual/society dichotomy disintegrates so that acts of imagination are simultaneously acts of social generation" allowing ethnographic work to demonstrate potentialities rather than mere descriptions of the role of individuals in society and culture

(HAYES et al, 2015, p. 38). Globalized interconnectedness therefore defines the space of the imaginary as fluid and dynamic characterized by the liminality and plurality of identities, ideas, movements and institutions as they transition towards what is deemed normal by the standards of Modernity. The only caveat, however, is that this method is limited since it implies that the researcher can generate new possibilities through their analysis, but these possibilities are restrained in the scope of frames applied to it (*Ibid*). What this entails is the contradiction in the definition of imagination previously addressed by Corbin in describing the dual qualities of mind and matter. Imagination as method has the purpose of envisioning and generating epistemological correlations between micro-macrocosmos, but when placed as a synonym of the utopic, it loses its essence.

Folklore as a synthesis of ethnographic perspectives therefore demonstrates elements of the mesocosm when understood through imagination. The performances of *Los Traficantes de Folk* and *México de Colores* apply the modes of discourses, images, texts, and transpersonal experiences, as references of the social imaginary from which they originate, further adding a transcendent layer of understanding by applying individual imagination to shape or change the construction of the social imaginary at hand. As artists, they assume the role of a mediator between imaginary and true knowledge in the context of the art piece to integrate their creative contributions to a holistic understanding of the (political) relationships that shape our reality.

México de Colores is a dance company created and directed by Carlos Antúnez, who received professional training through the *School of Folkloric Ballet of Amalia Hernandez*. The all-male company focuses on developing narratives that perform gender across the spectrum. These performances are inspired by a multiplicity of elements: satire, the sensuality of cabaret, traditional Mexican folklore, and the lives, identities and personal

experiences of the queer men involved. Antúnez explains the purposeful employment of imagination through performance; he states that:

what media campaigns, laws or decrees cannot do, a single show can achieve, because it does not tell the viewer what is the correct way to address another person; it goes deeper, to the feeling. It is not what you should say, but what you feel and, then, you perceive that the other person is like you. That is where true acceptance begins and not tolerance (translated from PALAPA QUIJAS, 2021).

By employing imagination as a means to validate the performance, Antúnez bolsters the role it has in integrating the concept of acceptance across the social imaginary. Although this correlation is not explicit, the sense of “going deeper to the feeling” speaks to Faivre’s paradigm in acquiring knowledge through imagination. As the audience we are able to empathize with the dancers as they perform their chosen ritual to engage with us. They are successful in appealing to our shared imaginal, the archetypes, stories, images, and myths that now make up the Mexican social imaginary and in doing so, successfully achieve their goal.

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In their hour-long performance, *México de Colores* presents a sequence of acts that directly address Mexican regionalism while also accounting for the gender performativity of the dancers as they employ the usually feminine act of *faldeo* (skirt swinging) transformed by their male bodies. In costume, with full makeup, these dancers attempt to break heteronormative prejudices by literally feeling like women, free from the constraints of society, and sharing this self-appreciation with their audience (ROMERO, 2017). They imagine themselves as another, maybe by putting on masks, but acquire a distinct understanding of their identities as Mexican, male, artistic and queer - a sense of belonging. Antúnez, the director, identifies the performance as a façade from which it is possible to extrapolate hidden meanings (*IBID*). Costume changes occur on stage, and little by little the dancers expose their

bodies, at one point adopting contemporary clothing to demonstrate their *true* female selves, and later shedding their tops, exposing their masculinity. In this way, the audience is able to come full circle, imagine the spectrum of gender performed by the dancers and understand the scope of their work as artists.

I would like to recount two of my favorite acts from the performance or rather two ways in which the dance company successfully employs their imagination to redefine the political imaginary. The first is titled *Migrantes Soñadoras* which imagines the migratory patterns of monarch butterflies in the state of Michoacan, not only through astounding winged dresses, but through the song *Tecalitlán* by Mariachi Vargas de Tecalitlán which sets the geographical context. The performance has a twofold layer of meaning: an allusion to immigrant women and their narratives as they attempt to cross into the United States on a daily basis, and an allusion to the term *maricón* a derogatory word for effeminate men or homosexuals which appear to be fragile or flimsy just like a butterfly. Power is therefore allocated in the bodies of these dancers as they take up the stage, reference these archetypes and symbols, and metamorphose into an aesthetic representation of the narratives and rights of these migrant dreamers to push the boundaries of the normative imaginary already in place.

The second, *Las chavas del 8*, builds a parallel with the 1970s television comedy sitcom created by Roberto Gómez Bolaños which Joseph Campbell would certainly place deeply ingrained into the collective unconscious of the Latinoamerican imaginary. The archetypes present in the developing world, particularly within a local community (a *vecindad*), are developed through this television show. Nevertheless, in *México de Colores*, the typical narrative of the show is transformed to fit with the narratives of the queer individuals who perform it. In essence, the act encompasses the story of growing up gay and being rejected by your own family. Kiko, a character once played by Carlos

Villagrán, wants to play with a doll, yet their mom, Doña Florinda, scolds them for their effeminate nature. Kiko then runs away from home and finds acceptance among the other characters of the TV show, but ultimately cannot return to their family. The dance company plots this queer struggle within an extremely popular narrative to aid the audience in imagining how it is to feel rejected as a gay kid. They call forth imaginary knowledge by employing their own imagination, perhaps just like historians and philosophers plot their narratives in the context of their metahistory.

By comparison, *Cuervo Mitotero y Los Traficantes de Folk* are a self-proclaimed “popkloric” Mexican band with the objective of establishing a “Revo(so)lution” through education, conscience, and culture. They too utilize satire, cabaret, traditional Mexican and Latino folklore in the form of song, and their own experiences to shed light on controversial or unjust topics across the political, economic, and social spheres of Mexico, going so far as to describing their art as folkloric activism. The plural and liminal aspects of their work as Postmodern art helps facilitate the discussion of how imagination is utilized to find knowledge in the unseen amalgamation of the images and texts of the imaginal, in the space of the mesocosmos. The so called “Revo(so)lution” again makes a reference to the actions in the repertory of the social imaginary, discussed by White, Anderson, and Taylor through revolutions, historical paradigm shifts, and demonstrations within the field of Political Science, to transform and possibly transmute (if Western esotericism applies) our understanding of the relationships of power that define who we are, who we ought to be and our expectations of the interconnectedness of reality. To imply there is a solution, would be to assume that the collective (un)consciousness of the people intertwined in the social imaginary has reconciled values such as freedom and equality presuming the distinction between the two serves as the main debate in political representation. I again reinforce the notion that we imagine our own

sense of belonging and attempt to place ourselves within the larger context of the social imaginary as diverse and contradictory as it already is.

La Trilogía del Maíz, a set of three songs performed by this band, renders how transpersonal imagination takes the shape of lyric and song, again by proposing counter-narratives to the norm. The trilogy addresses the importance of corn to Mexican culture by interweaving multiple layers of meaning, identities, and stories from our shared national past - considering the nation as an imagined community. I invite you to reference the song lyrics in the appendix provided. In *Tacos de Flores*, the band makes a direct allusion to the myth of the origin of corn as a staple of Latin American Pre-Colonial civilization. The song addresses the collective identity of Mexicans as children of the corn due to the historical significance of this crop in the development of Mesoamerican agriculture. In addition, the song reveals two different realities about the Mexican imaginary, one that stems from cultural mestizaje since the song lyrics are both in Spanish and Nahuatl, and the other that speaks to the conditions of precarity of indigenous communities referring to a strong “cinnamon-colored” people that is now poor.

In *Kikiriki*, the second song in the trilogy, *Los Traficantes de Folk* imagine how chickens would react to the political and economic corruption in the Mexican agricultural market. The song begins with the use of imagery as a rhetorical device to explain the effects of genetically modified corn: it has lost its golden color... tortillas do not taste the same. The capitalist vultures have swept in, corrupting the crops through commercial exploitation and chemical interference from which the chickens have to suffer. The song directly alludes to the displacement of active corn in Sinaloa by Monsanto’s transgenic corn. The chickens, representative of the Mexican rural community, thus resolve to fight for their fields and their crops. Somehow, it seems that the band’s activism places imagined inequalities and injustices, rendered with the imaginal, to integrate this satirical and political commentary into the larger

social imaginary, therefore creating some type of awareness of the exchanges of power in place.

Finally, the *Son del Totopo* (feat. Regina Orozco) imagines the fried tortilla, personified as a man, crossing the border into the United States and falling in love with Nacho to later regret leaving behind his culture. It is no coincidence that the band's pet is a chihuahua named Totopo. In a Postmodern pastiche of food, queerness, and immigration, the band integrates these ideas to recognize the multiple identities that shape the contemporary Mexican self and to highlight the importance of culture across physical spaces. The role of imagination for *Los Traficantes de Folk* is therefore to create possibilities to capture the flaws in the social imaginary and to transverse fixed notions of identity in shaping our knowledge.

Conclusion

This investigation cannot be constituted without the multidisciplinary approach taken. From Political Science, I borrow the term social imaginary placed in the context of metahistory, nationalism, and moral order to describe how imagination has been applied in the past. From Art History, I apply the categories of liminality, plurality and the spectacle to describe what is Postmodern in order to develop a definition of imagination that fits the contemporary conundrum of deconstruction that we currently face. Using the field of Western Esotericism, I expand on the definition of imagination to articulate its epistemological capacity as a method. Combined, these fields demonstrate the way change can occur within the social imaginary by taking advantage of our own imaginative capacity. This is achieved by utilizing the images, texts, archetypes, modes of discourse, and other variety of tools in our imagined repertoire to integrate transpersonal knowledge into the *mundus imaginalis* in hopes that the moral order recognizes such contribution.

We have seen this integration very evidently unfold through political theory. It has been first rendered through an individual's imagination, then integrated into our moral order, and put into practice as political regimes and ideologies which are nowhere close to the epistemological value of these imagined orders. Hinted throughout the investigation, Marxism, Nazism, Hobbesian and Lockean social contract, John Rawl's social justice theory, and Adam Smith's neo-liberalism serve as examples of the impact of imagination on our imagined political reality, which is fundamentally manifested across the spheres established by Modernity in this material and not-so-secular plane.

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Appendix

La Trilogía del Maíz by *Cuervo Mitotero* y *Los Traficantes de Folk*

Tacos de Flores

Raza mítica de bronce, eran los hijos del sol, pueblo fuerte de canela que un día pobre se volvió. Serpiente emplumada ven, ayudanos.

Tras la montaña, escondida una flor tiene el poder de traernos abundancia y así la hambruna vencer.

Serpiente emplumada ven ayudanos.

Quetzalcoatl sabiamente una hormiga se volvió, así se adentró en la tierra y con un grano regresó, serpiente emplumada que a los hombres dio;

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(Coro)

Semillas de esperanza, llenas de abundancia.

Mazorcas de colores, pa' hacer tacos de flores.

Ah Tlamiz Noxochiuh / No acabarán mis flores -Nezahualcóyotl-

"Ah tlamiz noxochiuh,

ah tlamiz nocuic.

In noconyayehua zan nicuicanitl.

Xexelihui, ya moyahua.

Cozahua ya xochitl

zan ye on calaquilo

zacuan calitic."

"No acabarán mis flores,

no cesarán mis cantos.
Yo cantor los elevo,
se reparten, se esparcen
Aún cuando las flores
se marchitan y amarillecen,
serán llevadas allá al interior de la casa
del ave de plumas de oro."

Kikirikí

Algo raro le está pasando a los maizales de este lugar, han perdido en color dorado, ni las tortillas saben igual.
Pobre gallo que está llorando por sus mazorcas desde el corral, ya no puede cantar tan alto, modificaron todo su "maiz.

(Coro)

Unos Buitres se agandallaron con las semillas de este lugar, inyectaron sus porquerías pa' que se vieran de comercial, las hicieron muy resistentes a sus venenos pa' fumigar y 'ora el pobrecito de gallo toda esa mugre se ha de tragar.

(X2) Kikirikí, kakaraká lloran las aves por su maizal,
Kikirikí, kakaraká porque no encuentran lo natural.

El gallito de pluma negra ahora quiere recuperar la riqueza que hay en su tierra y por su huerto va a comenzar, muchas aves se están sumando a la lucha por el maizal, ya no quieren comer mentiras sus propios huertos van a sembrar.

(Coro)

Unos Buitres se agandallaron con las semillas de este lugar, inyectaron sus porquerías pa' que se vieran de comercial, las hicieron muy resistentes a sus venenos pa'

Kikirikí.wav

fumigar y 'ora el pobrecito de gallo toda esa mugre se ha de tragar.

(X2) Kikirikí, kakaraká lloran las aves por su maizal,
Kikirikí, kakaraká porque no encuentran lo natural.

Son del Totopo (con Regina Orozco)

Acérquese paisa le voy a platicar con mucho sazón cantado este son, la historia de un Totopo que se fue de ilegal con mucha ilusión cambiando su nación.

(Coro) x 2

Totopo se brincó y a Nacho conoció, quedó tan deslumbrado que hasta su fogón negó. Gabacho se volvió de queso se bañó, sin chile el guacamole y los frijoles olvidó.

Tehuana era quien te tostaba en el comal, redondo e amasó con hoyos te dejó, aunque 'ora digas chili naciste en el nixtamal. (Agua, maíz y cal.) x 2

(Coro) x2

Totopo se brincó y a Nacho conoció, quedó tan deslumbrado que hasta su fogón negó. Gabacho se volvió de queso se bañó, sin chile el guacamole y los frijoles olvidó.

Así Totopochtli se comercializó, en grasa se bañó, frito se quedó.

El sueño americano mentira se volvió, prieto se quedó no se le quitó.

Un día despertó extrañando aquel sazón, su salsa le faltaba y solo Ketchup encontró. Al pueblo regresó, ya nadie lo peló, las chicas lo prefieren con nopal y con frijol.