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Perspectival Collective Futures: Creativity and Imagination in Society

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Collective futures are a product of both imagination, helping us envision beyond the here and now of our existence, and creativity, acting on imaginative constructions in ways that bring the future closer and make it possible. The story I propose here of how we construct collective futures has its origin in a basic observation: the fact that we imagine and create—I will use these terms interchangeably for the time being—in *relation to other people*. For as basic as this observation is, it is rarely acknowledged or, at least, seriously engaged with. Against it stand both a long cultural tradition of individualising genius (for a critique see Montuori & Purser, 1995) and a more recent scientific one of studying creativity and imagination as mainly intra-psychological processes (increasingly contested as well, see Hanchett Hanson, 2015; Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). The sociocultural approach I am building on in theorising both phenomena takes me away from the isolated self and towards self–other relations and interactions. The paradigm of distributed creativity (Glăveanu, 2014)

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starts precisely from this premise: that creativity is best understood as a form of action in and on the world, performed in relation to others, and leading to the continuous renewal of culture. While creative action is distributed along several lines, including material and temporal, my focus here will be on its social aspects, above and beyond group creativity (e.g., Sawyer & DeZutter, 2009).

The topic of collective future invites a deeper reflection on the social. By definition, the collective future is “collective” in a double sense. First, and most obvious, it refers to the future of the collective (either a group, community, etc.). Second, future-making always grows out of collective life, of interpersonal and inter-group interactions. While distinct, these are two sides of the same coin (as we are reminded by studies within related areas such as collective memory; de Saint-Laurent, 2014). By placing self–other relations at the core of creativity, imagination, and collective futures, we are not losing sight of the individual that imagines and/or creates, but locating this individual within a broader society. In the end, it is individuals living and acting together that envision and built the future for themselves and for others.

This chapter starts by considering the relation between imagination, creativity, and society. I will argue that creativity and imagination are similar yet distinct phenomena, brought together by their dependence on and, at the same time, contribution to a social environment. Moreover, both processes help us engage with what is possible and, as such, contribute to the future orientation of our thinking and action. Then, I proceed to a discussion of collective futures and elaborate a perspectival approach to this subject. The ways in which creativity and imagination contribute to developing perspectives on society and its future will be discussed here in view of self–other relations. Three ways of building collective futures come out of this analysis: imagining the future for others (monological), with others (dialectical), and towards others (dialogical). In the end, reflections are offered on why the notion of perspectival collective futures matters and why we need to acknowledge the psychological, social, and political dimensions involved in its study.

Creativity, Imagination, and Society

Creativity and imagination are firmly interconnected, yet not synonymous. Despite being often used interchangeably in everyday language and even scientific discussions (see, for example, Vygotsky, 2004), these two notions have different intellectual histories and contribute to different literatures (for more on this, see Glăveanu, Karwowski, Jankowska, & de Saint-Laurent, 2017). In essence, both creativity and imagination designate the human capacity to generate *meaningful novelty* in thought and in action. Both processes express our agency and help us expand our range of mental and cultural resources (e.g., ideas, schemas, images, objects, norms, and so on). The most commonly assumed difference between them is that, while creativity leads to material or materialised outcomes and requires social validation, this is not the case for imagination (Zittoun & Gillespie, 2016). But is this so? When imagining, we might appear to “dive” deeper into the depths of our own minds and away from the gaze of others. And yet, these resources are, at once, psychological and sociocultural, just as the gaze of others can be external as well as internalised. So, then, are we talking about the same process?

In order to answer this question, it might be useful to focus, first of all, on what is essential for imagination and then for creativity. When it comes to the former, the psychological dynamic of “de-coupling”, in psychological terms, from the here and now and exploring “spaces” such as the past, future, general, or possible, has been proposed by Zittoun and Gillespie (2015). Indeed, a key characteristic of imagination is the fact that it connects us with *the absent or the not-there* (Jovchelovitch, Priego-Hernandez, & Glăveanu, 2017). This capacity is fundamental for any act of creativity and, from this perspective, imagination becomes a key engine of creative production. However, it is still one of multiple processes involved in creativity. This is because the essential characteristic of creating is *action, doing, or making*, rather than simply “thinking” (despite a long-standing association in creativity research between creativity and divergent thinking; see Runco, 1991). Creative action builds on the relative “freedom” from the here and now provided by the

imagination while engaging, as part of its unfolding, a multitude of actors, audiences, and cultural artefacts (Glăveanu, 2013). In other words, creativity is, to a greater degree than imagination, a distributed, action-based process.

Considering the above, constructing collective futures involves an act of imagination *and* creativity; in fact, it illustrates well the deep connections between the two. First of all, engaging with the collective and with the future both require imagination since, in a literal sense, they are both outside of our perceptual horizon. This is clearly the case for the future, defined by what is not-yet-here. It is also the case for our experience of the collective which—even when interacting with others, in large groups, on a daily basis—is still a matter of imaginative construction (see, for this, the notion of imagined communities in Anderson, 1983). Indeed, while there are clear and tangible “traces” of our collective lives—materialised in the presence of others, in public spaces, in institutional settings—imagination is called on to fill the gaps (Pelaprat & Cole, 2011) of our perception and understanding of others and our shared society. At the same time, imagining the collective future is different from imagining a new dish or even imagining one’s (personal) future. It is a *political form of imagination* (de Saint-Laurent & Glăveanu, *in press*; Glăveanu & de Saint-Laurent, 2015) in that it constructs experiences of others and otherness in view of dealing with them, at least symbolically (for an empirical example focused on refugees, see Glăveanu, de Saint-Laurent, & Literat, 2018). No act of imagination escapes the influence of power and ideology and none illustrate this more vividly than the imagination of collective futures.

What does it mean to talk about imagining collective futures as a creative act? First of all, according to the distributed view of creativity, collective futures need to be materialised or expressed in (inter)action; that is, they need to go beyond individual mental constructions and reflect how mind and society—through institutions, technology, mass media, and so on—collaborate in shaping views of self, others, and the future. Second, imaginations of the collective future need to be studied in terms of their social, material, and temporal expression. Who are the actors involved? How are their audiences? What defines their exchanges in shaping a view of the collective future? What kind of cultural artefacts,

material and/or symbolic, are used to construct these views? How are new ideas and practices integrated within the existing cultural system? How are old ideas and practices transformed? These are only a few examples of questions raised when approaching the topic collective futures through a creativity lens. More importantly, just as the imagination involved in building collective futures is fundamentally political, the creativity associated with this process is best understood as societal. Elsewhere I elaborated the notion of *societal creativity* (Glăveanu, 2015a) as the creativity involved in addressing collective challenges. These are challenges that go beyond isolated individuals and even isolated communities; they concern entire societies and, oftentimes, have a global dimension (e.g., climate change, terrorism, migration, debates about the political system, etc.). Envisioning collective futures poses similar difficulties. In this sense, creating new and meaningful collective futures has rarely been as urgent as it is today when we are witnessing a global, growing wave of extremism, intolerance, nationalism and populism.

So, when it comes to collective futures, do we imagine, create, or both? The easy answer would be to say that we engage these two processes at once, but this assertion still supports a sharp distinction between the two. A more complex answer, building on the discussion above, points to the *synergy between political imagination and societal creativity in constructing collective futures*. More specifically, what is of interest here is the dynamic between imaginatively constructing images of self and others, while creatively using them to produce change in society. This change can take many forms, from individuals advocating it in conversations or online forums, on issues that concern the collective, to the action of groups such as protesters or social activists reaching out to broader audiences. In all these cases, the intertwined processes of imagination and creativity simultaneously rely on and build networks of sociability (Simmel, 1950), as well as orient individuals and groups towards a shared future. The collective future is, therefore, not merely an end product of the collaboration between political imagination and societal creativity; this future is equally the driving force behind our urge to (re)imagine and (re)create society. Existing views of the collective future (for instance, the utopias and dystopias circulating for centuries in literature and mass culture; see Carriere, Chap. 3, this volume) actively participate in this process. And so do

alternative views of the future, coming from less vocal or even marginalised communities within society. To understand how exactly this happens, we need to shift our attention from creativity and imagination to the notion of the collective future itself—or rather, that of collective futures.

Perspectival Collective Futures

It would be wrong to talk about “collective future” in singular, for a number of reasons. To begin with, views of the future are constructed by someone (person or group) in relation to (often opposition to) someone else. They are not static constructions either, but evolve over time in the implicit and explicit collaboration between social actors. Last but not least, as noted above, the mere existence of a perspective on the collective future, particularly a hegemonic view, invites individuals and groups to position themselves towards it, a process resulting again in a multiplicity of perspectives (see also Maarek & Awad, Chap. 10, this volume). It is, in fact, the notion of perspective that comes through in the arguments presented here. Any perspective on the future, and in particular of the collective future, is “produced” from particular positions in dynamic relation to other positions. In other words, collective futures are intrinsically perspectival.

In advocating this understanding, I need to clarify first my use of the notions of position and perspective. Drawing on the pragmatist scholarship of G. H. Mead (1934) and its more recent elaborations (Gillespie, 2005; Martin, 2005), I consider *positions* as the location of the person or group within the physical, psychological, and/or social field, a location that allows the person or group to develop certain views or *perspectives* on him/her/themselves, others, or the field of perspectives itself (in this latter case, we are talking about a meta-perspective). This definition of positions is deliberately broad. A narrower one would associate positions mainly with social and institutional roles. However, identifying positions with roles in society reduces their diversity and dynamic (for a critique, see positioning theory as explained by Davies & Harré, 1990). Indeed, positions “cut across” the material, psychological, and the social and

articulate the three in the elaboration of perspectives. Collective futures are a point in case. In constructing perspectives on the future, individuals and groups use their physical presence, social networks, and cultural resources at once. For example, indigenous and rural populations in Colombia might advocate for more just and environment friendly policies (Sierra & Fallon, 2016) not only because they reflect the position of “members of their community”, but because they are also occupying a particular space and participating in a certain worldview.

The view of the future as perspectival fits well with the overall perspectival philosophy of Mead and his followers:

What is perhaps less well known is that Mead’s entire thought (...) was grounded in a conception of reality understood as a field of perspectives (...). According to this relational view, perspectives are not the sole possession of individuals, rather ‘the perspective is the world in its relationship to the individual and the individual in his relationship to the world’ [Mead, 1938, p. 115]. The reality that matters to human beings is not simply ‘out there,’ independent of individual actions, nor is it something ‘in’ the individual. Rather, human reality consists of the dynamic, ongoing interrelation of individual and environment that yields perspectives. Perspectives emerge out of ‘the relationship between the individual and his environment, and this relationship is that of conduct [i.e., action]’ [Mead, 1938, p. 218]. (...) For Mead [1938], sociality itself is understood as a coordination of perspectives, such that participants in interaction are able simultaneously to act within their own and others’ perspectives, recalling and anticipating their own and others’ conduct. (Martin, Sokol, & Elfers, 2008, pp. 298–299)

A few essential points are made in this passage. First of all, the relational nature of perspectives is clearly highlighted, as well as the fact that they are grounded in action and orient it, rather than simply being cognitive constructions. Second, the social and psychological life of individuals and communities is best understood, from a pragmatist standpoint, as the coordination between perspectives. This equally applies to the ontogenetic development of the person as well as community relations. Third, as an extension of these ideas, imagining and creating collective futures becomes *a matter of coordinating perspectives on the future and articulating*

different positions over time. As action orientations, these perspectives do not only create mental or materialised representations of the future (in conversations, narratives, images, etc.), but guide behaviours in more or less subtle ways, from clear expressions of preference in voting to more implicit choices of interacting with some people, rather than others. Importantly, Mead pointed to some concrete processes leading the coordination of perspectives, key among them being the possibility of taking a perspective. Becoming able to think and act from the position of the self as well as that of others is a crucial developmental achievement with significant consequences for society. This ability is cultivated, from early childhood, by position exchanges in play and games, whereby children adopt different roles and shift between them as they interact with present or imagined others (Gillespie, 2006; Gillespie & Martin, 2014). What underpins this process is the possibility of *distantiation* from any one position and perspective, including one's own, and *re-positioning* within the perspective of the other (Martin & Gillespie, 2010). While in play and games this dynamic is physical, with children exchanging places or props, it soon becomes internalised and relies on the work of the imagination.

This last remark helps us bring together our initial discussion of creativity and imagination and the notion of a perspectival collective future. If envisioning and enacting a collective future is a matter of formulating and coordinating perspectives, then imagination and creativity play a central role in this process by precisely enabling acts of distantiation and the emergence of novelty. As discussed earlier, imagination is the main psychological phenomenon relating us to absence and the possible. In turn, creativity exploits this relation in (inter)action and gives it a materialised form. Previously, I have conceptualised the creative process as a dialogue of perspectives (Glăveanu, 2015b), a conception that fits well the analysis of perspectival collective futures. The imaginative construction of perspectives, acts of re-positioning, and position exchanges performed by individuals and groups in relation to the collective future are all essential for our analysis of this phenomenon. They are different from recent proposals of “collective mental time travel” (Merck, Topcu, & Hirst, 2016) and “collective future thought” (Szpunar & Szpunar, 2016), which emphasise the interdependence between past and future (see also

de Saint-Laurent, Chap. 4, this volume; Power, Chap. 11, this volume). While zooming in on the temporal aspect of collective futures, these proposals leave the social under-theorised. In contrast, the present discussion of collective futures and their relation to creativity and imagination deliberately starts from society, and more broadly, from self–other positions and relations. The key question it raises is the following: *How are perspectives on the collective future taking into account the position of others and what are their pragmatic consequences for self, others, and society?* In other words, what kinds of (political) imaginations are enacted in building visions of the collective futures and how do they translate into concrete, societal forms of creativity?

In addressing this question, I propose and exemplify below three types of “imagining”: for others (within monological relations), with others (within dialectic relations), and towards others (within dialogical relations). This is not meant to be an exhaustive list of mutually exclusive processes. In practice, these ways of imagining the collective future coexist and come to reflect various “struggles” between different groups and communities within society. In what follows, I will try to distinguish them as much as possible using several concrete examples of imagined collective futures.

Imagining for Others

Perhaps one of the most direct ways of building a collective future is to construct them for others. This is the case when, for example, parents imagine the future of their children even before they are born. And, just as this situation illustrates, an imagination of the future projected onto others, who might be too young or weak to respond to it, has important developmental consequences (see the notion of prolepsis in Cole, 1996, and its application to collective memory; Brescó, 2017). Views of the future play the role of catalysts in the life of individuals and communities. They constitute perspectives that need to be answered or engaged with, both when accepted and especially when resisted. In order to understand the dynamic of imagining the future for others we need to start from examining the *power relations* established between the two positions,

that is, of those who develop a certain (political) imagination and of those who are subjected to it and defined by it. This process does not always end in the pragmatic consequence of exploiting or marginalising others. In the example of parents, for instance, it is reasonable to assume they would desire the best possible future for their children. However, when it comes to larger groups and the future of the collective, such paternalistic tendencies tend to backfire by, for example, rendering the dominant group stronger and the less powerful one even weaker. A grim reminder of this is offered by Francis's (2011) insightful book, *The imaginary Indian*, and his discussion of Amerindians portrayed in Canada. He writes:

Ignoble or noble? From the first encounter, Europeans viewed aboriginal Americans through a screen of their own prejudices and preconceptions. Given the wide gulf separating the cultures, Europeans have tended to imagine the Indian rather than to know Native people, thereby to project onto Native people all the fears and hopes they have for the New World. If America was an alien place, then Indians must be seen to be frightful and bloodthirsty. Europeans also projected onto Native peoples all the misgivings they had about the shortcomings of their own civilization: the Imaginary Indian became a stick with which they beat their own society. The Indian became the standard of virtue and manliness against which Europeans measured themselves, and often found themselves wanting. (Francis, 2011, pp. 23–24)

The Natives and the non-Natives, the “Indians” and the Europeans—two dichotomic positions that historically allowed few actual interactions for most people, but actively fuelled the imagination of the colonising nations. The perspective on Amerindians constructed by the latter is fundamental for their own self-understanding and, at the same time, imposed onto the other without dialogue. As in many other colonial projects (see Said's, 1979, discussion of Orientalism), the dialogue between perspectives is *internal to the dominant group*: it is a conversation between the self and the image of the self-resulting from the construction of others. The flexibility of adjusting this construction to serve the dominant group, even allowing some positive features (e.g., closeness to nature, primitive wisdom) is denied to Amerindians who find themselves trapped within

the White Canadians' monologue. What were the consequences for the collective future of Amerindians and inter-group relations in the New World?

In this view, a modern Indian is a contradiction in terms: Whites could not imagine such a thing. Any Indian was by definition a traditional Indian, a relic of the past. (...) White society was allowed to change, to evolve, without losing its defining cultural, ethnic, and racial characteristics, but Indian society was not. (...) Canadians did not engage in the outright extermination of their Native population. However, they wholeheartedly endorsed the assimilation of the Indian, which in the long run meant the same thing, an end to an identifiable Indian people. In this view of the world, the only good Indians were traditional Indians, who existed only in the past, and assimilated Indians, who were not Indians at all. Any other Indian had vanished. (Francis, 2011, p. 74)

There is no collective future for Amerindians as a group. The imagination of Natives as belonging to the past is highly political precisely because of its pragmatic consequence: "good Indians" are meant to disappear and "assimilated Indians" lose their identity. Francis dedicated a lot of his book to an analysis of how images of (or what we can call here "perspectives" on) Native Americans were created, presented, appropriated and, ultimately, implemented. Many examples of societal creativity are highlighted in his discussion, including the role of policies, literature, and movies in materialising the abovementioned perspectives. As he notes, "images have consequences in the real world" (p. 207), and one of the most direct consequences concerns the absence of a collective future outside of extinction and assimilation. Interestingly, even recent uses of Amerindian culture—for example, at the Vancouver Winter Olympics—are meant to orient our view to the past rather than the future.

Sadly, the history of native populations in Canada is not unique. It illustrates the logic of colonialism that was at work, and continues to function, within large parts of the world. The type of societal creativity this dynamic fosters is exploitative, plundering local communities, and depleting their natural resources (for an expanded discussion, see Sierra & Fallon, 2016). The collective future of these marginalised, oppressed communities is *set for them monologically*, excluding dialogue and, with it,

the potential for contradiction. It is the same logic that applies within totalitarian states where the party manipulates the imagination of the collective future and “creatively” exploits the population while claiming to represent it (Marková, [forthcoming](#)). In both cases, the positions from which the collective future is constructed are rigid and the power of their perspectives to define reality is asymmetrical. Imagining for others, for as benevolent as the ones who imagine are, reduces the agency of those imagined, particularly in what concerns their future within society. Fortunately, even within the most extreme examples of this dynamic, there is always room for resistance—an example we turn to next.

Imagining with Others

People, even within the most oppressed communities, are not passive recipients of the perspectives of others. They do respond to them and attempt, at least, to shape societal discourses in ways that demonstrate their creative agency. However, self–other relations depend on both terms and on the sense of *mutual recognition* that depicts others and their knowledge as valuable. Imagining with others refers, in this context, to the interaction and communication involved in building a more open and perspectival collective future. While power relations do not miraculously vanish, they are accounted for and, in the best scenario, balanced in order to allow the fruitful co-creation of a shared future by multiple social actors. The example of community and grassroots action is powerful in this case (Pilisuk, McAllister, & Rothman, 1996). It illustrates how different groups talk to each other and mobilise their members in order to achieve change. In this process, different perspectives on the collective future are formulated and various voices are heard before reaching a (temporary) consensus about “the way forward”. Unlike situations of imagining for others, position exchanges and perspective-taking mark these dialogues with others in an effort to strengthen and promote a shared view of the future.

A good example of imagining with others is offered by rural (campesino), Afro, and indigenous communities in Colombia who mobilise for the recognition of their rights against abuses from both the national

government and multinational companies (Gedicks, 2003). In response to the latter, grassroots forms of resistance emerge with the aim of both resisting the exploitation of local communities and their resources and defining a vision of the collective future. They subscribe to what has been aptly theorised by Catherine Walsh (2012) as *decolonial thought*, which

finds its base in the particular ways Andean indigenous and Afro-descendant intellectuals and movements understand and use epistemic production as a key component of their political projects, projects aimed not simply at confronting the vestiges of colonialism (decolonialization), but rather at the radical reconstruction of knowledge, power, being, and life itself. Projects aimed at ‘decoloniality’, understood as the simultaneous and continuous processes of transformation and creation, the construction of radically distinct social imaginaries, conditions, and relations of power, knowledge. (p. 11)

Decolonial thinking, and by extension, decolonial imagination is not assuming the end of colonialism (a critique often addressed to the work on postcolonialism) but aims to understand its present-day transformation and consequences. The completely asymmetrical relations of power between the coloniser and the colonised and the monological relationship established between them (see the previous section) continue to leave their mark on the construction of knowledge about the self. This ongoing colonisation of knowledge translates into a *colonisation of the collective future*, still constructed mainly from the perspective of the coloniser and the logic of neoliberal markets and consumerism. Concretely, this future envisioned by others continues the oppression of rural communities and the exploitation of their natural resources by the government, in cooperation with multinationals. These colonised futures are increasingly challenged by collective acts of creativity based on the mobilisation of community members and the organisation of peaceful protests, artistic acts of resistance combined with taking legal action. I briefly analysed elsewhere (Glăveanu, 2015a) one such instance—the community action in San Luis for the protection of the local river, Rio Dormilón, against the construction of a hydroelectric power station.

What is interesting for our discussion here is the role played by visions of the collective future in building a unitary response from the community. The manifesto published in the local newspaper, *El Arriero* (2014), includes clear evidence of this:

The river is a fundamental part of our cultural identity and, as such, without it we would lose our connection to the water, the forest and the earth. At the same time, many of our roots and ancestral values like solidarity, peaceful coexistence and dignity, would risk being harmed through ruptures and processes not well understood. We, the inhabitants of San Luis and of this region, who love our river, are bound today by spiritual and cosmic unity, a superior value that has no comparison with what is intended for our river. In addition, today the river Dormilón is a structural axis around which the ‘social economy’ of San Luis is organized. (...) We see that the river Dormilón moves a great part of our local economy and will do so even more in the future if we keep our dreams clear and act to offer locals and visitors services of rural tourism in accordance to our values. (translated in Glăveanu, 2015a, pp. 196–197)

The use of the future here goes beyond the rhetorical. It demonstrates the dynamic relation between past and future and it is pragmatically employed to defend a specific identity and set of values against the interests of others. In other words, community action builds a position from which the community can speak and formulate its own perspectives on its own future. This process has only intensified in San Luis after the successful campaign for Rio Dormilón. During my last visit, in 2015, one of the local leaders, Luis Evelio Giraldo García informed me about a proposal to strengthen the local community, including a public consultation on the notion of “public goods” and their defence. The small leaflet circulated among the inhabitants of San Luis offered a brief definition of the term (“Public goods are those goods that should belong to us equally and towards the dignity of all”), a few examples (the river, public spaces, the forest, ancient roads, local culture, health and education, etc.), as well as a schema showing the interdependence between “participative society”, “public administration”, and “the private sector” in promoting more just, equitable, and sustainable forms of development. On the back, members

of the community were asked to give their own examples of public goods and reflect on how they participate in their production and maintenance. These initiatives, as well as similar ones, reflect a particular way of imagining the collective future, together with others. I have termed this process dialectical, considering the fact that exchanges between equal participants are meant to generate multiple perspectives, yet ultimately *harmonise them into a shared vision of the future*. This vision can then be used to defend the community members against future abuses of their rights and illegal exploitation of their land. The dialectic move encourages diversity, but it ultimately prioritises consensus (Sennett, 2012).

Imagining Towards Others

The last type of collective future-making is defined by what can be called “imagining towards others”. This rather vague formulation is used to point to a fundamental difference between this process and that of imagining with others. As discussed above, an underlying characteristic of imagining with others is its dialectical progression: formulating opposing perspectives and working through them towards a resolution, in iterative steps. In contrast, when imagining towards others we aim first and foremost to engage with the position of the other, rather than his/her or their perspective. This implies a certain degree of openness towards what the other says, thinks, and does that sidesteps the need for consensus. *Polyphony and divergence of perspectives* are placed at the core of this type of imagination, two features that illustrate dialogic self–other relations (Bakhtin, 1981; Marková, 2003). Dialogism is an old philosophy with deep consequences for how we understand imagination, creativity, and society. Applied to the study of collective futures, it emphasises the act of reaching out towards others, trying to understand their position “from within” and, most of all, cultivating difference over uniformity of perspectives (Glăveanu & Beghetto, 2017). In this sense, it is the process that most reveals the perspectival nature of collective futures because it deliberately builds on it, augmenting its strengths and makes us aware of some of its dangers.

A fitting illustration of this dynamic is the culture of public protests that has animated many communities across the world in recent years, from the Arab Spring movements to the most recent anti-Trump protests. While deliberately disruptive and most of times short-lived, manifestations of this kind are unique for bringing different individuals and groups together and fostering diverse perspectives. At the same time, there is little integration between these perspectives and, often, they *coexist* in the juxtaposition between different forms of expression (e.g., slogans, banners, the use of music, street art) and different interests (e.g., to protest a decision, to protest the government, to promote a new candidate, and so on). Nonetheless, demonstrations do also have long-term consequences, as argued by Yalcintas in his analysis of the Gezi protests of 2013 and their importance for the Occupy Turkey movement:

The Gezi protests inspired musicians, film-makers, novelists, poets, writers, social scientists, and other members of the creative class out of a concern for the aesthetics of the protests, rather than the seizure of political power. The ever-growing variety, amount, and quality of artwork, in the forms of documentary, music, photography, poster, banner, slogan, graffiti, stencil, anthem, novel, short story, poem, and theatre play, in addition to the social research on the forms of artwork produced during and after the Gezi protests, suggest that these protests should be studied and interpreted as well as *action art* [and not only] a social event with political consequences. (Yalcintas, 2015, p. 7)

The use of action, political art in the age of activism captures the dialogical processes behind building collective futures. It reflects the polyphonic nature of collective mobilisation and the multiple voices, interests, and values embedded within it. As I argued elsewhere (Glăveanu, 2017), such episodes cultivate collective wonder by presenting participants and society at large with images of the possible, particularly possible futures. Imagination and creativity both enable and are enabled by social activism precisely because of their orientation towards others and towards the collective future. While the people who participate in demonstrations have a variety of motives for doing so, the process of expressing one's view builds upon a shared sense of sociability and the playfulness and joy of

being with others that usually underpins collective life (Jovchelovitch, 2015). More than this, because of the meeting of different people, groups, and perspectives, social action enhances the possibility of becoming *reflexive* and seeing the world, including the future, through the eyes of other people. This is, for researchers working in this area, such as Silas Harrebye, a defining characteristic of creative activism:

Creative activism can be defined as a kind of meta activism that facilitates the engagement of active citizens in temporary, strategically manufactured, transformative interventions in order to change society for the better by communicating conflicts and/or solutions where no one else can or will in order to provoke reflection (and consequent behavioral changes) in an attempt to revitalize the political imagination. (Harrebye, 2016, p. 25)

Of course, we should not romanticise the study of these movements. Behind the seemingly dialogic exchanges, fostering diversity, and self-expression, often lay the interests of different individuals and groups in society. The apparent lack of leadership also contributes to the failure of such protests to achieve durable social change. The case of Turkey in the aftermath of the Gezi protests is a remainder of this. And yet, as Harrebye and others argue, the value of social activism rests not in finding the (one and only) way forward, but fostering debate about it, including about whether we should all aim towards a single, consensual future. Imagining towards others does not imply imagining towards the same goal, and this is both the great strength and weakness of dialogical forms of social engagement (Sennett, 2012). Their main contribution is to *remind us* of the perspectival nature of the collective future and challenge monological and even dialectic forms of moving towards it.

Final Thoughts and a Critical Agenda

In this chapter, I advanced the notion of perspectival collective futures and used the lenses of creativity and imagination to examine it. These two phenomena are important here since imagination creates the conditions for distancing oneself from a singular position in the world while creativity

exploits this potential in action. Concretely, I proposed and illustrated, albeit briefly, three forms of imagining collective futures—for others (monological), with others (dialectical), and towards others (dialogical). Imagining *for others* is characterised by the absence of real dialogue and the imposition of perspectives regarding the collective future. Imagining *with others* is grounded in exchanges of both positions and perspectives with the aim of reaching some form of consensus when it comes to the collective's future. Finally, imagining *towards others* shares the emphasis on dialogue while striving towards diversity and accommodating difference.

Each one of these processes involves a multitude of positions, and yet, their existence is differently recognised and valued. *Monological* forms of future-making implicitly or explicitly deny the position of the other. *Dialectical* forms invite them as a step towards consensus, whereas *dialogical* forms actively maintain plurality and cultivate the tensions specific to it. Important to note, each one of these processes can have negative or positive pragmatic consequences (depending for whom), and they are not mutually exclusive. While, conceptually, it is hard to reconcile monologism with dialectics and especially dialogism, in practice, they may alternate or even coexist, depending again on whose point of view we consider and at what moment in time.

Beyond formulating categories, what else can this framework offer us in times of deep social transformation, times in which the forces of nationalism, xenophobia, and populism threaten the existence and future of liberal democracies in the West and elsewhere? How are we to nurture a different political imagination, one based on tolerance and inclusion, rather than fear and separation? How can creativity help us cope with the post-normal times we are experiencing (Montuori, 2011), and help us build a more promising future for all, instead of the powerful and the wealthy few?

These are important and difficult questions. To properly engage with them, we would need to turn our analytical framework into a practical, intervention tool. We would need, as researchers and practitioners, to recognise our own position in society as one of agency and personal responsibility towards others and towards the future. We should ask ourselves which positions and perspectives are systematically unrecognised or made invisible in our communities. Who do we assume has the least to

say about the collective future and why? We should not be afraid of encountering resistance and we should try to cultivate difference for as long as each perspective we engage with recognises the shared humanity between self and others. We must stop constructing false boundaries *between science and politics* and participate in public debates as citizens as well as researchers (Glăveanu, 2017). This is not a call to politicise our research but to recognise the ways in which it is already political.

For Bakhtin (1984, p. 166), “nothing conclusive has yet taken place in the world, the ultimate word of the world and about the world has not yet been spoken, the world is open and free, everything is still in the future and will always be in the future”. But if the future, both personal and collective, is always open to change, we have the obligation to try and shape it, even when we feel powerless. As this chapter hopefully shows, whether it is for, with, or towards others, we never imagine or create alone. There is always a future for the collective, but this future is also always measured by *how* the collective came together in shaping it. History teaches us as much.

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