

AESTHETIC IMAGINARY: RETHINKING THE “COMPARATIVE”

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My coinage of the term *aesthetic imaginary* follows the line of a few thinkers in a field **449** that I would like to call “imaginary studies”: Cornelius Castoriadis’s *social imaginary*, Michèle Le Dœuff’s *philosophical imaginary*, and Marguerite La Caze’s *analytical imaginary*. The space and the opportunity here do not grant me much room to explain what the different kinds of imaginary mean and potentially imply, and also descant on the points of engagement that aesthetic imaginary might have with them; this is something that I shall undertake to accomplish elsewhere.¹ However, within the spatial restrictions of this paper, I will try to bring out the nature and philosophy of my proposition and expand on the intricacies that aesthetic imaginary produces in our understanding of the notion of the “comparative.”

I

The aesthetic imaginary begins in negativity, which is why there is no avoiding the recurrent problematic of the “opposite.” Opposites exist as invisibles, and indeed, do not stagnate through time. Attraction is natural and inbuilt. Opposites construct a life of their own, inflected and emplotted; there succeeds a latent momentum that overcomes the conditions of resistance towards an imagined correspondence. If what one has coexists with what one does not, it is also about not simply being-with but being-with(out). The aesthetic imaginary flutters entropically on the edges of the being-with(out); having something is having something with a struggle that always prods it to become something else. Mostly undetermined, indeterminate, and capacious, aesthetic imaginaries aggregate around dwellings in culture, social practices, characters of imaginative reconstruction, and affiliations with religious and spiritual

denominations and preferences. The aesthetic imaginary is built inside the borders of a nation, a culture, a society, a tradition, or an inheritance; but, it disaggregates and reconstructs itself when exposed to the callings and constraints of cross-border epistemic and cultural circulations. Thus, the “complexity” that develops from the aesthetic imaginary is also a way to rethink our genetic mapping of the cultural politics of learning and reception. Cultural genomization is not all flatulent; however, it is not apodictic either. The aesthetic imaginary can be epigenetic. Recent researches in molecular biology demonstrate the importance of non-DNA (epigenetic) inheritance. Additionally, in “symbol-based inheritance” (Wheeler 14), language is the central element in evolutionary progression. In fact, the aesthetic imaginary draws on biosemiosis, working on “semiotic freedom,” often to produce a non-materialist metaphysics of experience. The aesthetic imaginary incorporates the representational and discursive politics, and, significantly, imbibes the non-reductionist energies of a creative evolution of thought. Therefore, aesthetic imaginaries are entangled figurations that bear out the promise of “shared realities” and what Toni Morrison calls “shareable imaginative worlds” (xii).²

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The Aristotelian law of non-contradiction tells us that contrariety is not in being simple opposites, that a thing or a context or an idea comes with affirmative negation, the inherent principle of affirmation without denying the possibility of its reaffirmation. Although *Socrates is ill* and *Socrates is well* cannot be simultaneous states of existence, the idea of staying healthy encloses the state of illness, keeping the desire to break free from ill health continuously alive; the comparative quotient of illness makes us skeptical about what can be considered as staying healthy. Contradiction built around affirmation and negation will produce two states of being and consequence, but the aesthetic imaginary constructs the contradiction that battles the yes-no state of understanding: “an affirmation is a statement affirming something of something, a negation is a statement denying something of something [...] It is clear that for every affirmation there is an opposite negation, and for every negation there is an opposite affirmation [...] Let us call an affirmation and a negation which are opposite a *contradiction*” (Aristotle, *De Interpretatione* 17a25-35, qtd. in “Contradiction”). In modal proposition, if something is true, as distinguished from the false, it follows that the converse is not valid. What is disturbing is that although staying “true” is a boundary, inviolably protected against the not-true, the contradictory particles cannot ignore communication beyond their supposed consciousness of separation and being. Cultural and conceptual particles do not square up in forms that are so strictly separable. The difference in any state of existence—historical, social, or political—is not always two units of non-dialogue. The entangled figurations in contrary particles of communication declare, though imperceptibly, the “intermediate,” the unperceived middle, the undemonstrated middle, and not always the indemonstrable middle. Our knowing of things is largely based on what we do not know. Contradiction creates its own unfigured, the not-yet-figured, and the intermediate; it negotiates the already “included,” apparently somnolent, middle.

What we know as true and have methodologized as true can hold an unknown particle in it that can leave one's understanding perpetually on the edge of revision: the aesthetic imaginary admits such possibilities and thus does not always appropiate balanced equations between cultures of exchanges. Double negation is creativity.

In this demon of opposition or contradiction, I would like to see, with Nico Strobach, two kinds of changes: successions or s-changes and Cambridge or C-changes:

An s-change always takes place between two positive states, e.g. between rest and motion, on and off, alive and dead, green and red or c sharp and a flat (these states following immediately upon one another) [and] *C-changes* do not take place between positive states. Instead, they consist in the beginning or ending of one positive state which is reflected by the fact that we might answer the question "Is this red?" by saying "yes" at one time and by saying "no" at another, while acting vice versa when confronted with the question: "Is it false that this is red?" (Strobach 3; cf. Ghosh, *Transcultural Poetics* 5)

Strobach further notes that every s-change will have two C-changes in it: "the ending of the old and beginning of the new state" (3), the change between rest and non-rest, non-motion and motion. Change, then, is not merely an alteration but is obtained through a simultaneity inscribed in a contradiction—the opposition of two states of existence. Border-thinking, therefore, haunts the question of whether paradigms and dimensions of thought system are really at rest, reified by accepted modes of reception, or in motion all the time. If in motion, how can they be considered as reified and established? If being in rest is being in motion, we encounter consequences that become contradictory because the instants of rest and motion seem to function simultaneously. The aesthetic imaginary conceals the contrariety of the instant of motion with the instant of rest or the tangle of limiting instants—the "both-state" option. Is aesthetic imaginary, then, a kind of non-philosophy in that the notion of difference comes to mean differently? It is both about understanding difference as contextual and historical and formal on the one hand, and engaging with difference as ahistorical and *causa sui* on the other: "amphibology of creative upsurge and historical conditioning" (Gangle 6) comes to premise difference itself. I am eminently tempted to regard aesthetic imaginary within Francois Laruelle's non-philosophy in that all readings within aesthetic imaginaries cannot be well cited grounds for comparativity, not necessarily a critique of being in and out of tradition or modes of reception. The aesthetic imaginary can also provoke a structure non-analogously and non-referentially, building a position of difference which is not different because it breaks away from the extant or radicalizes a future of reading over the ruins of the present. The non-philosophy of the aesthetic imaginary supports its own self constituting structures.

Producing realities that are shared and intra-active—both supercession and superposition—are obvious pointers to "trans-belongings" in comparative literary understanding. What we inherit are possessions in transit. What exist as our belongings remain forever in motion, apparently with us but also fundamentally alien. We own only to know that owning is an elusive-illusive possession, a judgement with sus-

pect validity. When cultural contacts, protocols of tradition, determinate judgements over exchange principle, and formalistic understanding of requirements of discipline make for the “belongings” of studies in the humanities, knowledge production is hurt, critical understanding is debilitated, and a disciplinary claustrophobia becomes the reality. There is a slight neopositivist bias in the ways cultural belongings are shared or exchanged in that laws of contract are clearly spelled out as much as their operative ethics. But a quantum understanding does not necessarily mean that distractions or perturbations happen at the micro level; it is pervasive indeed and impacts on a wider compass with fresh self-interiority. Scales of reading in literary studies are difficult to settle: if matter and energy settle their ways in comprehensible and familiar patterns in classical physics, the equation is disrupted in subatomic dynamics where things, as Richard Feynman notes, become “absurd.” Literature has its own subatomic settlements that are continuously grappling with “position” and “momentum,” measurement (in the sense of understanding a meaning) wave-particle problematic.

- 452 The matter and energy of literature has a “deep down” syndrome where its angular momentum unveils the gap and, hence, the discontinuity in discrete allowable meaning-units. What comes to us as electromagnetic radiation is my understanding of *trans-force* in literature. Literature’s belongings come with continuity and macro-understanding of phenomena at the cultural, social, and political levels. It is with this energy—the radiation invisible to the naked eye—of literature that trans-belonging has its deepest connect. Literary texts across culture and tradition can surely come with comparative procedures of understanding, the notions of congruence and competence, viability and legitimacy. However, the heat of great writing changes the glow of understanding as meanings with shorter wavelength and, hence, higher frequencies uphold their presence. What we, most often, fail to understand is that all texts are black bodies and the energy of trans-belonging can build and manifest on and from unexpected quarters and positions. Trans-belongings then speak of an incapacity, an unforce or adynamism in language and other forms of socio-cultural engagement. It is possession and an exposure to appropriations—a force and unforce that have dynamic ontological attribute or privation and a deprivation to contest and contend (see McLaughlin). Any belonging is a “withdrawal,” *steresis*, which haunts it with a certain diffraction having as its own the force of “not,” a reminder of the repression of borders. This alters the politics of aesthetics of communicability; trans-belongings exist as an ongoing phenomena which is both being and constructivism requiring certain norms of validation and judgement.

Speaking of autonomous society and instituted social imaginary, Cornelius Castoriadis, negotiating with Aristotle’s discussion of primary imagination in *De Anima*, sees radical imagination as essential to the functioning of social imaginary. This also takes him beyond Kant’s understanding of imagination both in his *Critique of Pure Reason* and *Critique of Judgment* by staying more keen on the “shock” factor that imagination can import. Without remaining within the *a priori* and pure forms of intuitions, imagination “shocks” itself to open onto the other, develop forms of

disclosures, and stay aware of the power of the formable or formability. However, imagination is not just the product of a shock; it is creativity that profoundly embeds the operation of imagination. Castoriadis's understanding of the imagination comes with the inevitability of engaging with the "other," the predominant fact of the inability of a substance to stay radically "alone" or singular. If creation is a product of historical condition, tradition, and zeitgeist, it is not always a product of history, especially when emergentist forces are invisible. The explanation of the conditions of creation cannot be wholesome, resulting in certain constraints in understanding; the constraints are the limit points that urge us to find more productive ways of thinking. John V. Garner has argued that "Castoriadis's notion of creation is not equivalent to the epistemic notion of unpredictability," which is something that Castoriadis writes about in *World in Fragments*:

unpredictability might mean simply that not all of the relevant producers, factors, or laws of inference are known or knowable: an unpredictable event or phenomenon could still be determined by unknown factors. Unpredictability could a function of the limitations of knowledge. Thus unpredictability is not equivalent to creation. While Castoriadis agreed that knowers are not, as far as we know, omniscient, he argued that with each creation there emerges something ontologically new, something that is not merely seemingly new "for us" due to some subjective lack of knowledge. Separating radical creation from the merely epistemic notion of unpredictability, Castoriadis defends the notion that creation brings about something genuinely new. (Garner)

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The aesthetic imaginary believes in this "new," but does not ignore the conditions in and with which formations of cultural, political, and poetic thought happen. The potentials are not always pre-formed or pre-existing, but can form new experiences of understanding and can speak outside our rational, knowledgeable circles of understanding.

Conceptual formations within the aesthetic imaginary, to borrow Castoriadis's understanding of monadic structures, are loyal to structures of contextual thinking, historical specificities with a life built around monadic radicality, because fragmentation is networking. They are not always reducible to individual creativity, but acknowledge the social imaginary as much as the imagination that is integral to the imaginary. This definition clearly agrees with Castoriadis on how psyche and the "anonymous collective" are irreducible to each other and, significantly, remain interactive. The encompassing dimension and the connective strength of monadism are what the aesthetic imaginary acknowledges. Epistemes across cultures and the metaphors and rigour of other human thoughts and enframed disciplines live (in)dependently: they group, constellate, implode, and connect at (un)usual places, increasing the supply of wonder and the unexpectedness of communication and correspondences. Formations are entangled without being all-inclusive or border-oblivious. Inclusivity is not necessarily about ignoring the exclusiveness of certain things; this brings the dynamics of "magma" and "ensembles" into play. The logic of magma holds ensembles as much as ensembles leave a magma as residue. To qualify

magma as a deficient mode of understanding, as opposed to traditional ontology or ensidic ontology, is to miss a deeper point. The aesthetic imaginary would like to call itself magmatic through an understanding that supports an unconscious and “unaware” category of critical growth. Understanding is critical in its committed formations as much as in its unconsciously being made critical, which is not always anthropic. Realizing magmatic formations with judgement is missing the magma in its potential and formability. It is on this note that I seek a delicate intervention through Carl Jung’s notion of synchronicity, both in its physics and metaphysics. Jung’s synchronicity, macerated with generous doses of Pauli on quantum and atomic physics, speaks of a psychic energy with its investments in tension, compensation and purported unity of opposites—the conscious and unconscious in a “coming together” event that is seriously enacted on a different plane from Freud’s emphatic concern for sexuality. The aesthetic imaginary seeks a flicker of synchronicity in magmatic formations: the unexpected, the unexplained, the emergent, the failure of determinate judgement, and the paradox of strength in the unaware. Somewhere, the growth and the “massing up” are in an oppositional friendship with the axiomatic, what Castoriadis would describe as the ensemblist-identitarian. Synchronicity is somewhat anti-art in that it is not mystic, not naively assigned as an acausal principle, but a happening that emerges out of an emptiness, a pregnant nihilism. Not every formation can be aestheticized, for, as Petronius mentions, chance has its reason. Numinosity and affectivity are parts of the synchronicity that aesthetic imaginary cannot fully ignore. A serious dimension that I have always found in aesthetic imaginary is the presence of a “chance connection” manifested through correspondences between, say, Tagore and Derrida, Frost and Heidegger, Philip Sidney and medieval Arabic poets: intersections disclosing on me for further elaborations. I see here the irrationality of aesthetic formations, a gradient between the formality, the transcendental patterns of thinking, and the irrational energy that I qualify as synchronicity. Tension is not always built through opposition, through networking, or through a poetics of relationality, because it is also brought over through the anxiety that chance can bring.

Thus, the “comparative” comes under the interpretive sweep of what I have elsewhere called “trans-habit” (see Ghosh, *Transcultural Poetics* 1-20).³ The rhythm of life and our ways of seeing are habits caught in *hexis* and *praxis*—emerging from the verb *ekhein*, which is about having a state and disposition (Ravaisson 14-15). Felix Ravaisson looks into an active agency that habit is capable of concealing: disposition transforming into a potential (*dunamis*) that can trigger change and counter-change (*hexeos*). A potential for mutable disposition and for more actualization (*energeia*) is acquired. Clare Carlisle and Mark Sinclair explain Ravaisson’s understanding of active force in habit as a drive or tendency that comes close to Leibniz’s interpretation of the law of inertia: “if *hexis* signifies a “way of being”, it is a way of being of the body, which is not the mere mechanism or material thing envisaged by Descartes and Kant, but intrinsically active and dynamic. If, through habit, “the idea becomes being, this is

a process that involves the body and its movements” (Ravaisson 59). Will and instinct are complicit in habit-manifestation or abilities of habit which, while staying apparent antipodes, are yet not incommensurable opposites: “habit is the dividing line, or the middle term, between will and nature; but it is a moving middle term, a dividing line that is always moving, and which advances by an imperceptible progress from one extremity to the other” (James 131). Therefore, trans-habit declares an existence which is always a part of a wider happening and event—arguments centring on what I call the “more than global.” The possibles come through resemblance, which is an intricate circuit of connections that are not facile equivalents. The acts of comparison or resemblance are riddled and spooked by the foreign, the strange, the uncanny: the provincial, the national, the European, the hegemonic, and the traditional go under the anvil to realize their own in the other, their locomotion in the travel they undergo with the others. Trans-habit is also about “decreation,” a sort of destruction enabling an escape from the configured: habit murders habit, knowing habit is about killing habit. The aesthetic imaginary is about the trans-plasticity of habit.

II

It is worth our sustained argument to see how the complexities of aesthetic imaginary provide a fresh understanding of T.S. Eliot’s notion of tradition, lending a serious refigurative dynamics to the idea of the “comparative.” Tradition is sacred: a zealously guarded truth in its exfoliation and trajectory is pinned down to an immovable wholeness. The sacred of tradition is common to all, breeding a community of believers, inculcating a stability in high seriousness and sovereignizing a communitarian unity. David Gross shows us that the term “comes from the Latin verb *trader* meaning *to transmit, to give up, or to give over*. *Traditio* indicates the process by which something is transmitted; *traditum* refers to the thing transmitted” (9). The OED sees in tradition an act of handing down of knowledge from one generation to the next. However, “the root word *tradere* means not only to transmit or to give over, but also to give something to someone for safekeeping, as in giving one a deposit” (Gross 9). The person trusted with the gift is obligated to keep the inheritance or transferred material in his safe custody, intact and protected. The strong implications of surrender and betrayal in acts of giving over or giving up reaestheticize the nature of transmission. This stirs a relational politics with the word *traduce*, which means both “to transfer” and “to speak falsely,” “misrepresent,” and “betray” (Blank 23). The vexed parentage and fraught epistemic establishment of the word throw the debate of sensing tradition within a secular sacred—a profanization, a disruption of organic thinking which is not a romantic indulgence. The sacred of Eliot’s tradition has hidden curiosities—monuments that lose their charm after the discovery but that enable resonant manifestations beyond their sedate and stodgy monumentality. The historical sense is the specific archaeology of the sacred. The whole idea of being

“together” or togetherness is deeply problematic and indebted to an “unpeace” that the sacred inheres—the *smoulders* that “everyday” and our encrusted thinking hide, leaving us with the intimations of the inapprehensible, the unconceptualizable, the inassimilable, the irrecuperable. It speaks about both the categoric and the unconditioned. A historical sense inhabits the incommensurate—the hiatus between what we think and what can be thought, what exists as sanctioned reality and what awaits our subversion and sutures. The sacred of the historical sense is “what makes a writer most acutely conscious of his place in time, of his contemporaneity” (Eliot). This implicates a betrayal of what one does not know, surrendering to things one does not have a precise idea of, giving in to substances that one who is both conscious and unconscious of, passing or transmitting gifts whose value and merit do not stay fixed and inviolable—the trans-belongings. The loaded conceptual signposts in the secular “sacred wood”—simultaneous, existence, order, timeless and temporal—problematize the “contemporary” approximating a Janus-faced figure: “when it turns
456 one of its two faces toward us, it appears as a figure of emptiness, secluded from time, endlessly or eternally circling inside the abyss into which the tip of the present collapses again and again, caught in an empty time that only mirrors eternity, sharing nothing except for an insatiable hunger fed by the revulsion that the passing of time inspires” (qtd. in Düttmann). This is an art of collapse, swing and vibration—Albert Einstein’s “relativity of simultaneity.” So the notion of tradition as hegemonic gate keeping is resisted through an understanding that rewrites its functionality as an ever alive transmitter of meaning. Eliot’s tradition demands labour, a search, a possibility and often a production of sense that meaning cannot convey. Forcing a way out of the habitus of remembering and consciousness, tradition leaves a small doorway through which the past presentifies itself.

Although in the Virginia lectures, Eliot recapitulated tradition to encompass “every sort of habitual, customary, conventional, and ritual material which represents the blood kinship of ‘the same people living in the same place’” (Frank 153), disabling, in the process, the fecund capaciousness of the concept and its link with literature, his 1919 essay was more proleptic in its impact. Armin Frank notes that Eliot repeated the idea in “Reflections on Contemporary Poetry [III],” explicitly “limiting it to the field of literature, and ironically tagging it on to the British: “England puts her Great Writers away securely in a Safe Deposit Vault, and curls to sleep like Fafner” (Frank 157). Eliot signed this contribution “T.S. Aptéryx,” as if to dissociate himself halfway from a view he may formerly have shared, the view that “Tradition is a safe place in which to keep a country’s writers of the past, unexamined, undisturbed” (Frank 157). It is about seeing literature “steadily” and “seeing” it whole and this is “eminently to see it not as consecrated by time, but to see it beyond time; to see the best work of our time and the best work of twenty-five hundred years ago with the same eyes” (Matthiessen 3). In this way, the aesthetic imaginary of Eliot’s notion of tradition gets us to believe that tradition is not a mere repertoire of knowledge awaiting connection and correspondence. The archaeology of knowledge, with its

living in the present through the respiration of the past, is superseded by agential intra-activity. Tradition is much more than what it thinks it is: not always wary of the wires that interweave, for interweaving is not always a conscious activity.

Eliot's sense of tradition is largely about naming and yet not always a fixed territorialization of discourse and power. This is not "touchstoning" the past, a sort of adherence to monuments of immovable depth and merit. Ellis rightly points out that while "Arnold advises us to establish connections with the future and to study the classics, he gives no suggestion as to how these three stages, the past, present, and future, are connected. Periclean Athens may very well represent the peak of culture, but it is not through the monuments alone that the main current of tradition flows" (292). Unlike Arnold, Eliot and Paul Elmer More believed in criticism that involved "a sense of growth and change", and an "ever-acting memory of things" (Ellis 292). Tradition need not flow "invariably through the most distinguished reputations" (Ellis 292), but forms itself through an ordering principle that conceals its life in the "muddle"—a mix of disparities, hauntings, a Coleridgean "savage mind." Tradition, I believe, builds its own taste. The aesthetic imaginary makes us see his tradition *with* Eliot and *with-out* him. This builds the across-factor in our aesthetic imaginaries. 457

What is the real or actual in the aesthetic imaginary? This is an interesting question because reality, at times, ceases to be real and becomes the dynamic actual. So the Eliotian scheme of things, within the matrices of historical sense (similar in nature to aesthetic imaginary), comes close to Heisenberg's uncertainty principle. The velocity of thoughts, ideas, and accurate contextualizations are clearly under question and, most often, are momentary stays against confusion. There is a serious implosion of energy (*acta*) within such a system; for instance, Eliot's "The Waste Land" is entropic and works against the gravity of a Newtonian world-view of fixed modes and nodes (*res*) of understanding, revealing most often its subatomic actuality, as what it is and is not combine to generate its own activist philosophy. With an immanent tradition permeating poetic consciousness, the ratios and proportions in creative input are often caught in the *plex* of measure, calculation, and claims. If historical sense is considered as the "total field," epistemes, concepts, and cultural codes are particles that keep accumulating and condensing around intense singularities—interacting, falling off each other, and yet not external to the wholeness of tradition. David Bohm shows us that *analysis* comes from the Greek root *lysis*, which is also the root of the English *loosen*, and which means "to break up":

[A] chemist can break up a compound into its basic elementary constituents, and then he can put these constituents back together again, and thus synthesize the compound. The words "analysis" and "synthesis" have, however, come to refer not merely to actual physical or chemical operations with *things*, but also to similar operations carried out in *thought*. Thus, it may be said that classical physics is expressed in terms of a conceptual analysis of the world into constituent parts (such as atoms or elementary particles) which are then conceptually put back together to "synthesize" a total system, by considering the interactions of these parts. (Bohm 159)

However, Eliot's logos of tradition is *legein*, which is both conative and constitutive in fashions of measure and non-linearity. Every particle of thought in the whole force-field bears a *signal*—as observed and arbitrary particles. What Bohm calls implicate order is evident in Eliot's understanding of epistemology where patterns of enfolding become inevitable realities. There is multiple folding in changes of order, breakdown of what Eliot calls "handing down," and the inability to value a particle alone, isolated and set apart from the greater field of activity—the creative mind, as Eliot notes, cannot be valued alone. This enfolding cannot, however, be without an order—"the relations, proportions, values of each work of art toward the whole are readjusted" (Eliot). There is a mechanistic order—the word *manifest* coming from the Latin *manus*, meaning hand, and hence, something obvious and visible—alongside relativistic ensembles that stand for an understanding which says that a phenomenon precedes the instrument that measures it.

458 In Eliot's historical sense, there is a mourning for moods and ideas, though not as opportunism and casualness. Does this bring us to an aura of perception, a sensitive-ness to historical and literary transformations? I would interpret the aura in tradition as the points of intersection that crystallize a thought, give aleatory and entangled thinking a dignity and meaning; auratic experiences, thus, puncture knowledge with separate events of truth, (in the words of Alain Badiou). Walter Benjamin notes:

What is aura, actually? An extraordinary weave of space and time: the unique appearance of a distance, however close it may be. While resting on a summer afternoon, to trace the crest of a mountain range against the horizon or a branch that casts its shadow on the beholder, until the moment or the hour becomes part of its appearance—that is what it means to breathe the aura of these mountains, this branch. (II. 378, qtd. in McCole 4)

The auratic impact of tradition produces interweaving, which guarantees both authority and transmissionability. Historical sense then is a kind of construction which happens and is made to happen, but is nowhere a living in empty time. In its dialectical existence it stays invaded by *Jetztzeit* (presence of the now) where flashes from the past are not merely what Marx calls "world-historical necromancy." Creativity imbibed by such historical sense is "pregnant with tensions" (Adorno 14), where thinking is a happening that has a "revolutionary chance in the fight for the oppressed past" (Adorno 14). Tradition builds the urge to think *more* or muse over a *remainder*, for tradition laboured over and reached out has a kind of elusive feature to its ontology. Caught between polarities of dialecticism and organism, tradition delivers concepts and contexts through an unrealisable gap, which is why poetic creation has not ever considered a concept as aged, arcane, and anachronic. Riding a negative dialectics, tradition can be seen as cheating the agent into a satisfying appropriation of object-concept ensemble without exhausting its inherent possibilities—the clownization of the agency for being denied the knowing of nonidentity and the singularities of literary-aesthetic realizations. What is troubling for me is whether tradition in being laboured over, whether it can be considered as an "orphaned royal throne once occupied by the subject" (Adorno 181). The difficulty that the sacred of

tradition has is in the factoring of subjectivity—the vexatious formation that owes its emergence to poetic subjectivity and, the “lost gods” and dark promises that the poet has as his unpredictable co-passengers through the “assemblage” game. Taste is in the concrete and the counterfeit—figuring forth that tradition builds on us. It is being-in, being-for, and being-with tradition. Historical sense is not about losing history; it is a “principle of aesthetic,” a complicated entanglement in contrast and comparison, having a conative power whether Eliot would admit or not. The “taking place” (to use a Jean-Luc Nancyean terminology) in poetic creativity or expressive vitality of tradition owe to authorial investment and formations that authorize themselves—vitalism of happening and dynamicity of doing.

The ingrained trans-habit in our understanding of aesthetic imaginary helps us to see Eliot’s tradition as having its own impotentiality—the “not being able” is connected to the “enabling powers.” It is a vexed domain formed through a positive capacity which, also, connects with a lack—Agamben’s “I can, I cannot” syndrome (177). Eliot’s encompassive notion of tradition—“that the whole of the literature of Europe from Homer and within it the whole of the literature of his own country”—has a “potential not to be” which does not point to an unredeemed failure but a possibility that remains as a potentiality unactualized—the “luminous spiral of the possible” (Agamben 257). This, therefore, makes possible the existence of an other which thrives in its relation to the poet’s incapacity, to his own lack. Tradition is an ambiguity that tries to reform the violence of representation, resisting the distinction like the kind Arnold’s touchstone method brings and the juridical premises of interpretive law. Turning into an exception, tradition should keep one open to non-sovereign possibilities—the abandonment, withdrawal, and absorption of a rhythmic movement in “bewilderment and lucidity, discovery and loss, between agent and patient” (Agamben 257).

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Eliot wanted to produce spaces of literary experiences and here, space and time are entangled into entrepreneurship. The process of poetic creativity works in an instant—the conjugative point of disparative forces or things—and through a repetition of the principle where the suffering poet and the creative mind are sundered. However, this repetition is always a re-presentation of new orders, a redoing on each occasion of literary moments. Diffractive poetic formations are manifestations of repetition and difference, a variation of surface and depth. Here, time is not abandoned, lest historical contextualization be decimated. Eliot insinuates a delicate and highly complex engagement with time and its alliance with space in that every literary formulation achieved in an instant through poetic acts of creation leave behind a loss, possibilities for detours and detournements, and dissipative energy. History is in contextual linkages as much as in unlinked events outside the conscious rationality of creation. Tradition, thus, is living in and out of time, in history and staying outside history without being ahistorical, a radical break and reappropriation of historical continuity. History, rather transhistorialization, in Eliot’s scheme of creativity both in the sense of *aujheben* and *uberwinden* (*surmonter*) is deeply underwritten in a dia-

lecticism where history overcome is history surpassed is history transformed.

Eliot's sense of tradition and the point of creativity are modalities in "splits"—or "counterparthood" (Butterfield 224). The creative mind is a quantum evolution of point particles in time and history, in cultures and heritage, in epistemology and existence. Tradition then, appropriating Barad's arguments,

is not merely that the future and the past are not "there" and never sit still, but that the present is not simply here-now. Multiply heterogeneous iterations all: past, present, and future, not in a relation of linear unfolding, but threaded through one another in a nonlinear enfolding of spacetime mattering, a topology that defies any suggestion of a smooth continuous manifold. Time is out of joint. Dispersed. Diffracted. Time is diffracted through itself. It is not only the nature of time in its disjointedness that is at stake, but also disjointedness itself. Indeed, the nature of "dis" and "jointedness", of discontinuity and continuity, of difference and entanglement, and their im/possible interrelationships are at issue. ("Quantum Entanglements" 245)

460 It is when electrons jump from a higher energy state to a lower one that a photon is emitted. This demonstrates that the electron is not caught in a relentless depletion design, and hence, there is scarcely any possibility of an uninterrupted spectrum of light. The quantum leap of the atom resulting in fluctuation and emission of energy is discontinuous, and photon-emission does not come through a conventional causal chain; Barad points out that the "paradoxical nature of quantum causality derives from the very existence of a quantum dis/continuity in the cutting together/apart that is the nature of all intra-actions. These

quantum "leaps" are not mere displacements in space through time, not from here-now to there-then, not when it is the rupture itself that helps constitute the here's and now's, and not once and for all. The point is not merely that something is here-now and there-then without every having been anywhere in between, it's that here-now, there-then have become unmoored—there's no given place or time for them to be. (Barad, "Quantum Entanglements" 248-49)

Tradition unmoors all the time to stay traditional, teethering on the cusp of stability, relationality, possibility, tangentiality and transgression. Concepts change or jump or leap levels to emit photons of thoughts, which are never continuous, and hence, mostly unpredictable. This disrupts the interpretive thought spectrum in varying shades of visibility, and consequently, the energy of poetic creativity. Settled in a predominant principle to meet the universe of thinking and understanding halfway (see Barad, *Meeting the Universe Halfway*), tradition contributes to poetic creativity through an odd game in which acausality and determinism are both problematic but also productive and contributory. Reading Eliot, then, is reading a radioactive body: a complex phenomenon in emission, radiation, measurement, uncertainty, and spectrum formation.

The aesthetic imaginarity of Eliot's historical sense or idea of tradition is a way of affiliating with what Stuart Kauffman calls the "phase transition":

we will see that the genomic networks that control development from zygote to adult

can exist in three major regimes: a frozen ordered regime, a gaseous chaotic regime, and a kind of liquid regime located in the region between order and chaos. It is a lovely hypothesis, with considerable supporting data, that genomic systems lie in the ordered regime near the phase transition to chaos. Were such systems too deeply into the frozen ordered regime, they would be too rigid to coordinate the complex sequences of genetic activities necessary for development. Were they too far into the gaseous chaotic regime, they would not be orderly enough. Networks in the regime near the edge of chaos—this compromise between order and surprise—appear best able to coordinate complex activities and best able to evolve as well. (*At Home* 16)

Our understanding of humanistic thinking is not always a “frozen ordered system” or a “chaotic regime”; the aesthetic imaginary forms around our edge-of-chaos existence in all spheres and levels of humanistic understanding, whether in religion, cultural establishments, natural sciences, technological incarnations, or literary and romantic thinking. The aesthetic imaginary, as this reading of Eliot’s notion of tradition shows, has an element of spontaneity and self-growth, but not always without a certain rationalization involving self-organization. The way Kauffman complicates the philosophy and performance of the biosphere bears out an intriguing relationship with my line of argument in contouring this aspect of the aesthetic imaginary. How far is it possible for us to prestate the biosphere and accept Darwin’s “preadaptations” for eventual selection of species? Imaginaries co-opt imagination to construct their own aesthetic. Kauffman notes that

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biospheres expand their own dimensionality as rapidly, on average, as they can. And the coconstructing behaviors of autonomous agents spill over to the economy, with surprising implications for the foundations of economics, for economic growth, and for the development of adaptive firms that coevolve in corporate ecosystems whose dynamics almost certainly express the same laws as do biological ecosystems, with small and large gales of Schumpeterian creative destruction, weeding out old species and technologies, ushering in the ever new species and technologies whose nonprestateable features are expressions of the very creativity of the universe. (*Investigations* xi)

It is the “taking place” of aesthetic imaginary, which is not always autotelic, autocatalytic, or autoimmune, that matters. The formations are both about forming a system of thought and allowing the form-ability of thinking, the conscious and conditioned co-existing with “what happens,” what emerges and defines us non-algorithmically. This is where thinking breeds—*wissen* versus *können* entanglements. Should I then be audacious to suggest the presence of *elan vital* in humanistic thinking?

Kauffman’s working beyond the “Darwinian aegis of mutation and selection” argues for sources of energy that link the exergonic to endergonic reactions, “coconstructed by the activities, accidents, striving, and failures of these autonomous agents, exapting persistently into their adjacent possible” (*Investigations* 159). At some levels, thinking literature and the constitution of the aesthetic imaginary work on coconstruction, coassemblage, making allowance for phase transitions and developing autonomy that evolves through the dynamic “edge of chaos.” The aesthetic imaginary works on state cycles which Kauffman describes as “attractors”: the conditions

and dynamicity that enable the infusion of states of thoughts and acts of thinking. Some states of thinking and thought grow over the long term, as attractors build through complicated perturbations happening through a certain duration of time. Some formations owe their existence to the flexibility of “fitness landscapes,” how changing situations, deformations, and torques rebuild landscapes of correspondence and negotiation. Kauffman’s example of the frog and the fly shows how, in the fitness landscape of the aesthetic imaginary, concepts and discourses are buckled and transformed, allowing for further possibilities of understanding and greater substantiation of critical consciousness:

If the frog develops a sticky tongue, the fitness of the fly is altered. But so too is the fitness landscape of the fly, what it should do next. It should develop slippery feet, or sticky stuff dissolver or a better sense of smell to smell sticky stuff before the frog gets too close or... So, due to coevolution, the fitness landscape of each species heaves and deforms as other species make their adaptive moves. (*Investigations* 198)

- 462** The aesthetic imaginary created around Eliot’s notion of tradition produces its own fitness landscape. It is here that “energy” resides, and we approximate the fourth law of thermodynamics of understanding.

III

The aesthetic imaginary is principled in “embeddedness”: thoughts, images, ideas, and figures are in a state of permanence and in motion, belongings of culture and simultaneously trans-belongings. Embeddedness is not in fixation, the founded, and the existent; rather, it sponsors disembedding, where concepts age and moult, images manifest and mould, ideas settle and ferment. This is not always strictly performed to a method, as imaginaries are not always subservient to a collectively sanctioned and heuristically attested understanding. The aesthetic imaginary involving Eliot’s notion of tradition bears witness to such embeddings. Metaphors of reading are not always rationalities of understanding. Embeddedness makes us responsible for the invisibility of the invisible: the power and discourse, the images and the imagination, the figure and the fable that any work of art has both visibly and invisibly—here, for instance, Eliot’s idea of tradition as embedded in/with quantum philosophy, Walter Benjamin, Giorgio Agamben, and other trans-belongings. Thus, aesthetic imaginary is much more than intertextuality or palimpsestism; rather, it is “intra-active transculturality” (see Ghosh, “Intra-active Transculturality”), which is the aesthetic of trying to rationalize the irrationality—however, not confined to—in the “comparative.” What this implicates is an “open-ended philosophy” that Le Dœuff considers as important in the building of epistemological arguments—open-ended in the sense of demonstrating interest across disciplines and, by extension, across cultures. Le Dœuff suggests a “new metaphor of philosophy—a Brechtian dramaturgy, a play that always has an act missing, so is ‘left wide open to history’” (La Caze 39). Aesthetic

imaginary accepts its “intrinsic incompleteness” in the way philosophy must and should, acknowledging the “importance of other disciplines in what should be a collective enterprise” (La Caze 39). Arguably, my thinking on Eliot’s idea of tradition was a collective enterprise in threshold encounters in which opposites behave as contradictions.

It is also from the domain of the “imaginal” that the “comparative” in the aesthetic imaginary derives a new circulation. In fact, it is the centrality of images, and not the processual reality of images through the combination of the individual agency and social imaginary, that becomes our state of experience. Chiara Bottici sees this as “embarking on a double Copernican revolution: beyond the philosophy of the subject (imagination as an individual faculty), but also beyond the equally problematic metaphysics of the context (the imaginary as a given social context). The starting point is neither a subject separated from the world nor a world independent from the subject, but simply images” (7). The aesthetic imaginary looks into this dimension, in that imaginaries can develop their own potency and impotency through chronometric time, non-synchronousness, and the power of invisibility, which subjectivity and social spatialization cannot always understand. The formation of the aesthetic imaginary includes such imaginal readings, which cannot be put into “linguistic descriptions,” for these interpretive efforts end up not being able to enframe the original. This comes close to what I have interpreted elsewhere as the *postaesthetic*, the “becoming aesthetic” (“Aesthetics of Hunger”).⁴ Bottici argues further that “the concept of the imaginal is meant to signal the fact that there are different possibilities that go from the freedom of individuals to its erosion in oppressive social imaginaries. Of course, the spectrum has its extremes, but in the middle of it there are many intermediate variants. The imaginal can be understood as a field of possibilities” (8).

The aesthetic imaginary is at once the existent and the medium, a space that is tenseless and “tense,” combining the reality of the dead with the not-yet-born. This makes our understanding suffer for the good, connecting us to my earlier argument of the inclusive middle. It is here, perhaps, that the “truths” of the comparative comes under scrutiny. This leads me to argue briefly—a more elaborate understanding will be attempted elsewhere—about the “chance” in aesthetic imaginary, working through Jung’s and Pauli’s combined understanding of synchronicity. Understanding Eliot and the *aesthetic mundi* would involve “meaningful coincidence, acausal connection and numinosity”—a “complexity” exceeding Jung’s figure of the fish. The connection among ideas, thought-strains, traditions, myth, mere images, are not only meaning-connection, Hans Driesch’s psychoid, but meanings that are formed through numinous connections in which understanding fails but serendipities are promised. This comes close to “meaning time”, the complexity of meaning energy. It is in the chaos of chance, as Jung would explain in a letter to Erich Neumann, that synchronistic phenomena set about to work, “operating both with and against the known laws of nature to produce, in archetypal moments, synthesis which appear to us miraculous” (Cambray 21). Coleridge implicated such a synthesis, and indeed, the

aesthetic imaginary looks into the value of such miracles. The force of the aesthetic imaginary comes both from the asymmetry and the struggle to achieve symmetry. It produces the miracle.

The notion of the opposite in Jung defers, however, to modes of the psyche, which is considered a self-regulating system expected to balance and moderate. The acausality principle is the counterbalance to certain phenomena. The aesthetic imaginary does not ignore such a principle, but goes a bit further in declaring its inherent interest in “incommensurabilities,” something I have described elsewhere as “dystopic unease” in our reading and understanding of literature and humanities. There is a mind within what we call the arbitrary, a principle inherent in the random and the aberrative, compensating our one-sided conscious attitude; these are my arguments towards building more apartments of thought in the complex of immanent critique. For Jung, the harmony achieved through the unity of opposites is not well composed, because its activation depends on “individuation,” which is about becoming “in-dividual”—the “coming to selfhood” or “selfrealization” (qtd. in Main 21). If concilability is high on Jung’s agenda, confrontation stemming from irreconcilability matters to the aesthetic imaginary, and, hence, its entangled formability.

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The critical rationality of the aesthetic imaginary, then, is both reductive and non-reductive: relating with the other, being made to relate with the other, and staying related prior to a relationship. In an Adornian manner, the movement in the aesthetic imaginary is dialectical and transformative, critical and yet unreduced, objective and yet with possibles. The true remit and merit of aesthetic imaginary is in the “negative” philosophy of knowing how and where an object is both objective and possible, conclusive and prospective, determined and undermined. This is not simple incoherence, but a metacritique of thinking: the saturation of thought and the state of “cannot not be in thinking”. The aesthetic imaginary builds a sociopolitical critique as much as an internal critique of meditative discursive transformation. A significant point of contact is that a critique that the aesthetic imaginary builds becomes, often in a non-Hegelian way, its own critique in a kind of undercutting, enabling intensified inquiries into our exchange-paradigm of both life and intellectual experiences. The philosophy of the aesthetic imaginary entails a critique of life, social and political experiences, and our perception of the humanities and humanistic thinking. It is both “dialectic as entanglement” of identity and non-identity of thinking. Sometimes, the endpoint is more of a journey, not achieved in a movement that is telic or forward; sometimes, failing an evolutionary progression is about building an involution, often without the promise of a conscious finality.

Cartographic understanding of culture and transmissions across culture are increasingly common phenomena, with the insistent urge and relentless drive to bring a kind of epistemic “contentment” to our understanding of literature across culture, and the comprehension of capital flow that determines the networks of the globalized economy. The identification of the other, the framing of the other, are part of an “imperial genealogy of cognitive mapping” (Toscano and Kinkle) in which the

aesthetic of visibility is prominently in place. But how does one map when the other is lost in our representational discourses, becoming invisible, unseen, and unseeable? The aesthetic imaginary has its entangled presence, and also its invisibility, because representational order is never without a subversion, uncovering what is always a continuous trial. Cultural interface is much more than simple understanding, bad generalizing, or compromise because communication is expected to begin through culture's very own transcendence of itself: the non-identitarian, the non-temporal, the *meditative*. This builds a fresh ethics of responsibility in our aesthetic imaginary, which becomes more interested in interrogating the *why not* than the *why*. Engagement with non-identity is simply not about finding a fresh topos to inhabit, but an intelligible manifestation: by beginning with *why not?* the existent turns to uncover itself, shows up the politics of the incommunicable, and builds its own suspicion of concepts, which exists in the form of co-conceptualizing the regnant forms of conceptuality without seeking its replacement. Not all concepts can be suspicious nor inexhaustible. However, the fragility of concepts is, most often, their creative incarnations building on the *quantité négligeable*. The aesthetic imaginary enticingly espouses *both, and, neither, nor, and or*. The non-identity of the aesthetic imaginary is built around these nodes, which gives a more "secular" face to its workings, sublations, and fractal embraces. The aesthetic imaginary is my negativistic "way"—not always a method—of thinking, of thinking knowledge, of not thinking about thought, producing the reenchantment of thinking.

NOTES

1. My forthcoming book *Aesthetic Imaginary* features an elaborate engagement with a variety of aspects of the aesthetic imaginary.
2. I first introduced the concept of aesthetic imaginary in my essay "The Figure that Robert Frost's Poetics Make: Singularity and Sanskrit Poetic Theory."
3. The whole book is worked out within what I call trans-habit.
4. For a greater elaboration of this concept, see Chapter 9 of Ghosh and Miller, *Thinking Literature across Continents*.

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