

## University of Groningen

### Introduction

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# Introduction

## Locating imagination in popular culture: place, tourism, and belonging<sup>1</sup>

*Stijn Reijnders, Abby Waysdorf,  
Leonieke Bolderman, and Nicky van Es*

The Baltimore State Hospital for the Criminally Insane is a fictional psychiatric institution. It is where Dr. Hannibal Lecter, the main character in a series of suspense novels by Thomas Harris, has been incarcerated for a very long time. Dr. Lecter is highly intelligent, erudite, and intellectual, but at the same time devoid of empathy and afflicted with a macabre abnormality in that, in terms of his preferred diet, he is partial to human flesh. Hence, he has acquired the nickname Hannibal the Cannibal. Hannibal Lecter is without doubt one of the most notorious serial killers in Western popular culture. For years, he has been locked up in the deepest, darkest cellar in this establishment, where he receives visits only from mice, rats, and a stoic guard who comes to bring him food. His cell, at the end of the corridor, is small, four by four meters, with three stone walls, no window, and a wall of bars on the fourth side. How does Hannibal cope with this situation? How does he manage to counteract total madness and deal with the isolation? He uses a well-known cognitive technique: he closes his eyes for a few hours a day and enters the palace of his imagination. This palace is imaginary but constructed in great detail. It is strikingly large, made up of countless rooms, corridors, and halls, with windows opening up views onto all the places that are important to Hannibal. The walls are adorned with frescos depicting his own memories, fantasies, and dreams for the future – all these scenes have their own place in the palace of his imagination and are retrievable down to the smallest detail.

The palace of Hannibal Lecter's imagination is a compelling literary idea. Using this device, the author, Thomas Harris, manages to give the character of Hannibal more depth and connect the dark cell in the basement of an institution to all kinds of other locations that are important for the story. Yet this device is not just a matter of fiction, as the "mind palace" is not only found in literature. In fact, a similar situation occurred in reality a few years ago. The Dutch tourist Sjaak Rijke, a 51-year-old train driver from the small city of Woerden, was held hostage by Muslim extremists in Mali for three and a half years before being fortuitously freed by French soldiers in April 2015. In one of the first interviews after his release, Rijke explained how he had managed to maintain his sanity and peace of mind during his

time as a hostage in the desert: by rebuilding his actual house every day in his imagination, stone by stone and room by room.

Both examples are extreme: one is a fictional serial killer in a dark cell, while the other is a real-life Dutch citizen who was held hostage for years in the desert. Yet both examples illustrate the same phenomenon: the power of the imagination. Human beings are able to create a model of the world in their thoughts, a representation that can have a close resemblance to reality. But imaginary worlds can also alter reality by simplifying it, embellishing it, or even making it frightening. The imagination is a universal given: everyone has the capacity to transport themselves elsewhere with their own thoughts, to places that are related to the past, the present, or the future. The imagination therefore not only recreates images based on prior sensory experiences; it does more. In fact, we are surrounded by an enormous, chaotic abundance of sensations, and it takes the imagination to channel all those sensations, via our five senses, into the idea of a coherent and univocal reality.

Though the imagination is a universal given and fundamental to how human beings experience life (and conceptualize the afterlife, for that matter), little is known about what the imagination exactly is and how it operates in society and everyday life. Within the world of modern science, the concept of the imagination (defined here as the mental visualization of things that are not present) has long been viewed with suspicion (McGinn, 2004). Recent years have seen an increased interest in topics related to the imagination, but these attempts have mainly focused on the role of imaginaries – loosely defined as *representations* of the social. As Lean et al. state in their introduction to *Travel and Imagination* (2014), there is still a need for “perspectives that stretch beyond imaginaries to a more holistic view on the imagination”. In other words, we need to transcend the level of representations and explore how the imagination operates (or perhaps sometimes fails to operate) in the lives of individuals and small groups in a diverse set of practices.

This challenge is picked up by the current edited volume. More particularly, we aim to investigate the multifaceted relations between imagination, place, and popular culture in the context of contemporary society. As we will argue in this Introduction and the following chapters, questions related to the presence and effects of the imagination have become even more pressing in today’s mediatized society. In a world that is increasingly populated with stories from the media, reality is – now more than ever – governed by media technology and images. This not only works towards informing and shaping a perception of the world but simultaneously opens up way(s) of being in that world in which the boundaries between the imagination and the real are critically at stake. This development is visible in, for example, the growth and popularity of phenomena that are analysed in this volume, such as film and TV tourism (Chapters 6, 8, and 17) festival experiences (Chapters 13 and 14), and a different form and shape of heritage locations and experiences (Chapters 2, 3, 15, and 18). Diverse as these examples are, we argue they have one fruitful analytical lens in common: the imagination.

In this changing mediatized landscape, what are the potential innovations of a theorization of imagination, as envisioned in this volume? Most importantly, the concept of the imagination can serve as a – thus far – missing link between media studies, cultural geography, cultural studies, and tourism studies. After all, it is the imagination that connects the consumption of mediated landscapes and the act of visiting actual places in physical reality. Imagination is the device to both process media content; to integrate those media narratives into existing geographies; and to move individuals around the world in search of validation, authenticity, belonging, or whatever it is that may drive them. This circular process can be playful or serious, and it might reflect desires or fears, but in all cases, it will be based on individual emotions and memories as well as culturally and historically grounded notions about one's own subject position in the world. If imagination is indeed such an important tool for understanding notions of selfhood and belonging in today's globalized media society, its further conceptualization is expected to prove a very rich enterprise for all disciplines involved.

Furthermore, for media and cultural studies, the concept of imagination might prove to be a prime opportunity to strengthen a non-mediacentric approach to media culture (Morley, 2009). Advocates of this approach urge a shift in focus from the rapidly changing media forms and outputs towards how people actually use media within the context of everyday life, including the investigation of more permanent characteristics underlying media-related practices (Couldry, 2012). In this respect, imagination as a universal given, yet culturally shaped capacity, may provide an innovative starting point for such practice-oriented perspectives. Instead of starting from the media and their possible effects on society, the concept of the imagination starts by asking: How do people experience living in a mediatized culture, and how do they conceptualize and visualize their own lives within that larger society? This approach differs fundamentally from more traditional related concepts within media studies, such as “reception”, “encoding/decoding”, “appropriation”, and “active audiences”, because ultimately, these latter concepts one by one still start from the idea that the media are (at) the centre of our society: *the media* are actively being received, encoded, decoded, appropriated or loved. This “fetishization” of the media has played an important and logical role in showing why media mattered during the early development of media studies. The issue of mediacentrism, however, has increasingly been raised with the maturation of the discipline and is being explicitly questioned in the current era (cf. Couldry, 2006). A focus on the imagination shifts the perspective by taking the human mind as its starting point and thus allowing for a more nuanced and holistic perspective on the role and importance of the media in everyday life.

Last but not least, for cultural geography, a theory of the imagination has the potential to strengthen the theoretical base of core notions such as “topophilia” and “sense of place” that explore ways people feel at home in the world. The term “topophilia” refers to the emotional attachment to

place that is central to human experience (Tuan, 1974). Yi-Fu Tuan's work on topophilia has been celebrated by many, but as of yet, little has been done to further develop this idea or theorize how humans relate to and develop a love for specific places and how this phenomenon might differ from culture to culture as well as within cultures. In more recent work, the broader concept "sense of place" is used, encompassing three related dimensions of place experience (Lewicka, 2011): a cognitive dimension (often consisting of cultural meanings attached to place that are shared among groups – the concept of "place identity"), emotional meanings (often relating to personal experiences – conceptualized as "place attachment"), and finally particular behaviour, which can strengthen the sense of place (Scannell & Gifford, 2010). The question is how these dimensions relate and become intertwined in lived human experience. In our opinion, the imagination is a fruitful way to explore these processes. In short, the way people connect to places; come to love places; and make connections between cultural identities, places, and ways of belonging still leaves a lot of ground to be covered in terms of theorizing and research. The imagination, as mediator between cognitive, emotional, and practiced experiences of place, could be an important concept for future efforts in this direction.

The imagination is therefore a multifaceted concept that in this volume is used in diverse ways to analyse and explain contemporary phenomena and to expand on current theories and ideas that relate to social life and human belonging in the world. Before we can turn the page to these different parts of the book, we would like to further clarify our conceptual approach to the imagination, since, as we have stated, this is not done often enough. Following an overview of the development of thinking about the imagination, we will zoom in on the role and importance of imagination in today's mediated world, thus paving the way for the chapters to come.

### **Defining imagination**

Although the imagination seems to be a universal given, little is known about its exact role in and meaning for human consciousness. As mentioned previously, the concept of the imagination has long been viewed with suspicion. Classical philosophers gave primacy to the thinking mind: mankind had to rely on reason in order to achieve true insight. The imagination was seen as the antithesis to logic. In the eyes of many philosophers – with a few exceptions – it was a dangerous distraction or an illusion, which would only lead to delusion. Within Rationalism and Enlightenment thinking, the imagination was even interpreted as an obstacle to the progress of mankind. Romanticism admittedly offered an important alternative viewpoint, with thinkers such as Rousseau and artists like William Blake, who praised the imagination as the sixth sense forming the basis of the most beautiful things humanity had ever produced. But despite this evolution, the imagination as a concept has never really established a foothold within modern science – and

certainly not when it comes to the role and meaning of the imagination in everyday life (Streminger, 1980).

One of the most important exceptions is the work of the 18th-century philosophers David Hume and Immanuel Kant. In 1740, the 29-year-old Hume wrote that “It has been observ’d, in treating of the passions, that men are mightily govern’d by the imagination” (Hume, 1740/2000: 123). According to Hume, the imagination is an essential part of cognitive ability, responsible for the creation of ideas (which he called “mental images”). According to Hume, these images were always reproductive, because they were derived from sensory perceptions. Over time, these ideas could grow into a broader framework, in which old experiences were ranked and new experiences were interpreted. Thus, individuals became aware of the world surrounding them without having to experience every aspect of that world constantly; the imagination created “the absent present”.

Almost half a century later, Immanuel Kant continued to build on Hume’s line of thought by stating that in addition to reproductive power – the power to process sensory experiences into more abstract ideas – there also has to be a productive capacity. According to Kant (1781/2015), people are surrounded by a torrent of sensory stimuli. It requires imagination to categorize and interpret that chaos on the basis of so-called “schemata” (thinking patterns). Without such a predetermined categorization, the whole idea of an unambiguous and coherent experience of reality is simply impossible. Therefore, in Kant’s approach, the imagination did not *follow* the sensory experience (Hume’s “copy principle”) but *preceded* it.

Although Hume and especially Kant have become regarded as leading philosophers over time, their ideas about the imagination have remained largely unexplored. In fact, it is only in recent decades – against the background of postmodernism and discussions about contemporary visual culture – that the imagination has once again been adopted as a serious philosophical and scientific subject. One of the important sources in this respect is the book *Imagination and the Imaginary* by the British philosopher Kathleen Lennon (2015). What makes her book relevant is that she combines Kant’s theory of the imagination with insights from phenomenology. The phenomenological method is ideally suited to bridge the gap between Kant’s abstract, sometimes somewhat mechanical, logic and the practicalities of everyday life. In order to understand the workings of the imagination, Lennon asserts we must first of all accept that individuals do not operate in isolation and according to a fixed logic but that they live in and with the world. Individuals are an integral part of reality, while they also help shape that reality.

This phenomenological approach has three main consequences for thinking about the role of the imagination within the context of everyday life. First, it presupposes a certain form of “agency”. The imagination is not fixed, ingrained in the “schemata” transferred to us via external sources; human beings themselves also influence the design and selection of “schemata”. This implies that reality is represented and experienced in diverse, individual

ways. Second, it means that imagining is an affective matter. Forming images of other places and localities in which we are not present at that moment is not a cold and technical operation but is strongly connected to the feelings – both positive and negative – that individuals can develop about specific places. In other words, feelings of belonging are integral to the imagination – as are feelings of fear or horror (cf. Tuan, 1974). Finally, Lennon (2015) assumes that the development of the imagination takes place within a social context. Individuals learn from the people around them to look at the world in a certain way and to interpret new experiences.

Building on the work of Hume, Kant, and Lennon, we would like to state that the imagination is a crucial part of human consciousness and is almost constantly present within the context of everyday life, albeit on a semi-conscious level as a “silent force”. This power of the imagination is twofold. On the one hand, it makes it possible to turn the chaotic flow of sensory experiences into an unambiguous and coherent perception of the immediate surroundings. On the other hand, it is the imagination that lifts people above the temporal and spatial limitations of sensory perception and situates their own “existence” within a broader context: a larger world that extends beyond our horizon and that has its own past and future. It is a world to which people feel connected in some way, but also one that can inspire fear (cf. Klinkman, 2002: 7). To put it differently, through the imagination, human consciousness is extended in time and place.

There is, however, an intrinsic paradox to the imagination. On the one hand, the imagination sets us free. It offers individuals a way of imagining other worlds, where they are not present. Almost everything can happen out there. The world of the imagination does not seem to obey the law of gravity or other rules of our known reality. On the other hand, the imagination is not fully detached from real life, either. As Immanuel Kant already pointed out in his *Kritik der Reinen Vernunft* in the late 18th century, human beings can only imagine things that are close to what they are familiar with. In other words: the imagination lets people float a little bit, meaning that it gives them the liberty to leave this world temporarily but only one minor step and never far away from the presence of their known reality.

Moreover, the imagination is coupled with an urge to *locate*. People want to relate their imaginations to what they consider reality. One clear example of this is the fact that almost all of the stories we enjoy are set in a known environment. Whether we are talking about beloved TV series, movies, novels, or oral stories, they all take place in environments and landscapes that seem more or less familiar to us. Even genres like science fiction and high fantasy are to a large degree place based. Think, for example, of the fantasy world of *Harry Potter* and how that is intimately connected to stereotypes of Britishness through its abundant use of the red phone booths, double-decker busses, school uniforms, and wizards. Or think of the *Lord of the Rings* film trilogy and how fans of these movies relate this diegetic world to the landscape of New Zealand. In these examples, the power of the imagination

lies not in offering an escape but in its potential to refurbish and transform the known world, to change the ways we deal with ourselves and the people around us, the ways of being in *this* world.

In some cases, the will to locate the imagination takes on actual form and literally moves people around the globe. There is a centuries-old tradition of readers trying to locate and visit the locations associated with their beloved stories, a tradition that possibly started with the work of Petrarch in the 14th century and took high flight during the Age of Romanticism. Recent decades have seen a dramatic, worldwide increase of this type of tourism, further sparked by the rise of film, television, and, more recently, video games and social media. This type of “media tourism” (Reijnders, 2011) is saturated by imaginative practices. After all, the phenomenon of media tourism is not limited to the actual act of tourism but is embedded in a longer process of the imagination, which stretches out over time, a process that begins with the consumption of the media narrative and fantasizing about the “fictitious” locations concerned and ends with a look back on the experience (Connell, 2012: 1024; Lean et al., 2014; Urry & Larsen, 2011). Novels, television series, and films create elaborate imaginary worlds. These worlds are reproduced in the imagination of the readers/viewers while they are reading, watching, and/or listening. In many cases, the readers/viewers identify with one or more of the characters in the story and in their minds transport themselves into and through this imaginary world. When the media tourist finally makes his or her journey to “places of the imagination” (Reijnders, 2011), this trip more or less represents a realization of an earlier imaginary journey (cf. Adams, 2014; Ehn & Löfgren, 2010: 142; Laing & Crouch, 2009).

One could state that this tension between imagining and locating, as described previously, has always been present and is part and parcel of the ontology of the imagination. We would agree with that, but only to a certain degree. It seems like more is going on: the increasing tension between imagining and locating cannot be seen separately from major transformations in our society. The mediatization of our world has created a situation in which our imagination is booming. More and more stories are on offer, stories that bring us all over the world and beyond. At the same time, our society is going through processes of globalization, bringing the world closer to home. In this increasingly mobile world, people will search for new and inventive ways of creating a sense of home, a sense of belonging. As such, consuming and appropriating stories from popular culture has become an important way of doing so.

### **Imagination, place, and popular culture**

In 1984, the American anthropologist John Caughey wrote an elaborate book about the role and meaning of the imagination in present-day society. In *Imaginary Social Worlds*, Caughey suggests that people live in two different worlds simultaneously. On the one hand, they live within a reality



perceptible to the senses, contained within time and physical space. By means of sight, smell, touch, taste, and hearing, they create an impression of their immediate surroundings. On the other hand, people move in an inner spiritual world built on memories, visions of the future, fantasies, daydreams, and stories which play out *elsewhere* – in a different time or place, a world that thrives by virtue of the imagination.

What Caughey goes on to assert is that this world of the imagination is not an individual matter but has largely a social character. Fantasies, daydreams, visions of the future, and memories are normally about our relationships (whether real or not) with other places and people. Our imaginative world is populated by people – either people we know from our immediate environment or celebrities whom we have become acquainted with via the media. Almost no dream, fantasy, or memory is protected from the appearance of our peers. At a more fundamental level, it may be argued that the whole fabric of our imagination is shaped by a sociocultural context. It is culture that provides the building blocks for the composition of the fantasies and dreams that populate our inner beings. Instinctive, organic emotions such as fear, love, hate, and lust will also excite the imagination, but then it is the schemata of our culture that determine how these emotions take shape and result in certain scenarios, roles, and locations.

As we have argued elsewhere (Reijnders, 2016), narratives play an essential role in this process. Stories are crucial to the way we interpret the world around us, and they provide meaning for us. Some cultural scholars even claim that we are not *homo sapiens* (the thinking man) but in fact *homo narrans*: creatures that like to tell and hear stories in order to provide meaning to the chaos that surrounds them (Berger, 1997: 174). Narratives give order to a complex and often chaotic reality: they form a causal connection between events, creating the appearance of stable identities, and – last but not least – they give shape and colour to our imagination (Gottschall, 2013).

Without doubt, popular culture plays a pivotal role in producing and circulating narratives in contemporary society. For example, it has been reported that the average person in the West spends more than three hours a day watching television. Television offers the viewer the promise of literally being able to see events far away, of being able to consume images and sounds from other places far from the location the viewer is in, places where the viewer cannot or need not physically be. News and current affairs programmes bring stories about the big bad world of terrorist attacks, wars, disasters, and elections (Bird, 1988). Genres such as action, romance, and reality TV take the viewer to luxuriously rich or notoriously poor neighbourhoods, far-away cities, and exotic places (cf. Orgad, 2012), without having to leave the safe confines of the home.

All these stories, circulating in the media and beyond, together create a rich associative imagination of the world. We can imagine what Indonesia is like or what it is like to live in an igloo or to visit the native people of the Amazon in a canoe. The vast Russian steppes, the summit of Kilimanjaro,

the lakes and highlands of Scotland – these are all “tourism imaginaries” (Salazar & Graburn, 2014) stored in our imagination. Sometimes these will be nothing more than stereotypes or loose associations and far removed from what the landscape looks like in reality. In other cases, the representations are richer and more detailed. But it is important to note that every person has to a greater or lesser extent such an imagination, which is based to a significant degree on associations derived from popular culture. For many people, television, film, and other forms of popular culture act as a depot for the imagination or, in the words of André Malraux, a “musée imaginaire” (Malraux, 1947, quoted in Lukinbeal & Fletchall, 2014: 225). According to the American anthropologist Arjun Appadurai (1990), globalization has brought momentum to this development. In a world of intercontinental migration and free movement of people and goods, according to Appadurai, it is the well-known stories from movies and TV shows that still provide something to hang on to for world citizens far from whatever place they consider “home”.

How to pinpoint this relation between imagination, place, and popular culture? Partly, that is what the rest of this edited volume is about – exploring this pressing question in a wide variety of contexts. But in order to take a first step, it is worthwhile to first zoom in on the definitions used in this discussion. If we define stories as a causal concatenation of meaningful events (Bal, 1994: 5, 43) and events in turn as “something that happens”, then it follows that stories always literally *take place* somewhere. Stories do not occur in a vacuum but in particular areas, whether these are identifiable or not. The areas in which the story takes place are not randomly chosen but serve to support the narrative. They create an atmosphere in which certain fictitious actions may take place which are, to varying extents, considered credible by the audience. In other words, the narrative space plays a supporting role in almost all stories. This leads to a situation in which many sites are known for the stories that take place in them, which may be symbolically associated at a later stage with the plot and moral themes of the story concerned. There is also a certain reciprocity here: locations are chosen because they fit well with the story, but at the same time, these stories reaffirm and empower the associations that the location inspires, creating powerful “imaginative geographies” (Urry & Larsen, 2011).

In many cases, the symbolic meaning of these imaginative geographies is not invented for the story but related to the morphological characteristics of the landscape in question (Stedman, 2003). Deserts, forests, seas, and urban landscapes too have a significant amount of symbolic potential because of their distinctive character (Riley & Van Doren, 1992). In this regard, care must be taken to guard against essentialism (Ehn & Löfgren, 2010: 159–160; cf. “environmental determinism” in Riley & Van Doren, 1992: 20). For example, it is tempting to see “the island” as a place of isolation. However, this association is not universal and timeless but typical of the contemporary era in which traffic often takes place via motorways and

railways and water usually forms a barrier. In earlier times – when traffic was still largely by water – islands were seen as important junctions in (inter-)national traffic routes (Kinane, 2017). Another example concerns the sea. In the tradition of Jung and Freud, the sea is often associated with the subconscious (cf. Nash, 1997: 64–66). However, the question is whether the sea carries a similar meaning for all people and cultures. Perhaps people who spend a large part of their lives at or near the sea, such as divers, fishermen, or seafarers, attribute a completely different meaning to the sea than these two psychoanalysts from Central Europe – far away from the coast. The symbolic meaning of landscapes is not static and intrinsic but tied to time, place, and social group, as Andrea Trdina and Maja Turnšek explore in detail in Chapter 12.

These associations between story and place can go in two directions. On the one hand, stories can contribute to a positive evaluation of certain sites where the relevant (urban) landscape is associated with positive values such as security, nostalgia, happiness, freedom, and safety. Thus, a form of topophilia (Tuan, 1974) may occur: the love of a place, which in this case arises from the love of a story that takes place there. Certain landscapes seem particularly well suited to stimulating the imagination in this way. In this regard, Ehn and Löfgren (2010) use the term “dreamscapes”: these are specific landscapes, such as the desert, the hills, the woods, or the beach, which because of their distinct physical characteristics can easily serve as carriers of meaning (ibid: 157–160). Comparable is the term “symbolic environment” in the work of Donald Meinig (1979, cited in Riley & Van Doren, 1992). An example of such a dreamscape would be the mountains of New Zealand that have set the scene for several mythical narratives, ranging from Samuel Butler’s Utopian society of Erewhon, published in 1872, up to the more recent *The Lord of the Rings* trilogy (Buchmann, 2006; Jones & Smith, 2005).

Equally, stories can lead to forms of topophobia: fear of a place. Popular culture has a colourful mix of narrative genres in which horrific, frightening, or dramatic events take place, ranging from classical genres like the ghost story or the murder song to more contemporary (media) genres such as the thriller or horror story. These stories are usually played out in recognizable, topographically identifiable locations but at the same time concern locations that can be traced back to certain archetypes that we, developing the themes of Ehn and Löfgren (2010), could label “fearsapes”. Examples of these might include abandoned houses, remote hamlets, basements and forests, wild and deep seas, or dilapidated neighbourhoods. The imagination can recognize many of these dark points of reference where evil seems to have nested.

Related but not identical to the dichotomy between topophilia and topophobia is the contrast between the “Self” and the “Other”. According to cultural sociology, these two categories are the basis of how individuals and groups define and categorize the social reality around them. People are constantly trying to highlight their own identity vis-à-vis an imaginary “Other”

(Goffman, 1959). This cultural categorization has a spatial counterpart: certain locations are considered their own territory by individuals or groups (the home, the office, the place they were born, the homeland, the place where they live), while other locations are considered the territory of the “Other” (the city of a rival football team, a neighbouring country, another continent).

Territories of the “Self” usually have explicitly positive connotations: these are related to safety and security, to the *Heimat* and the roots of people’s own identity. While territories of the “Self” are often appreciated, territories of the “Other” frequently coincide with forms of topophobia. However, there is, of course, no iron law in this regard. In practice, many different variations are conceivable, for example, when the “Other” is associated with positive values and the distant, unknown land has an exotic if not mysterious pulling power (e.g. Laing & Crouch, 2009). In those cases, the “Other” is not home to the danger of attack but quite the opposite: it represents the promise of transformation or transgression – a desirable adaptation of what is considered the current “Self”.

Essentially, what we are saying here is that the imagination is a universal phenomenon: every human being has the capacity to create mental constructions of places where one is not present at that moment in time. At the same time, the imagination is bound up and intertwined with concrete, sensory experiences of space and place. We have argued that it’s precisely this double nature that makes the imagination a fundamental part of our consciousness – of how we experience dimensions of time and place. Furthermore, while acknowledging the continued importance of the imagination throughout time, we also underlined the topical character of our volume’s topic: in today’s mediatized society, imaginative practices are omnipresent. Popular media culture offers important building blocks for our imagination: stories inject the imagined landscape with meaningful, emotional associations, either positive or negative, and locate the “Self” and the “Other” symbolically in this imagined space. What we presuppose is that these associations are at the root of the phenomenon of tourism, in particular the niche of media tourism. Based on the processes of topophilia/topophobia presented in popular stories, and identification with these, people may take the decision to make a journey, visit the related locations, and thus come closer to their beloved story through *materializing their imagination*. It is now time to further scrutinize these claims and to investigate in detail how the connections between imagination, place, and popular culture are made in cultural practice.

## Structure of the volume

In the following 18 chapters, we will investigate the connections between imagination, place, and popular culture in contemporary society from a wide variety of perspectives. To this end, the volume is structured in four parts – the first of which is conceptual, whereas the latter three are empirical in nature.

In the first part, *Theorizing the Imagination*, the concept of the imagination is critically reflected upon in a variety of contexts. The latter three, more empirically oriented, parts, are divided along the lines of the three stages of every journey: preparing to go (*Mediating Place*), being there (*Being There*), and eventually returning home (*Returning Home: Memory and Belonging*).

Starting out with Part I, *Theorizing the Imagination*, Stijn Reijnders opens the theoretical discussion by arguing for a holistic and process-based perspective on the development of media tourism. By conceptualizing “imaginative heritage”, the chapter reflects on the active involvement of a multitude of actors – fans, tourists, creative and tourism industries, governments – in (co-)creating “places of imagination” through projection of, or appropriation by, popular fictional narratives on specific sites and throughout different times. André Jansson, in the second chapter, analyses the role of “imaginative authenticity” in contemporary (post-)tourist practices, utilizing an illustrative case study of urban explorers to expand upon the tensions between, at one end, pushing towards a more “authentic” imaginary of a place than professional media offers, and, at the other, social media’s capacity to codify particular practices and concepts that might interrupt this.

In Chapter 3, David Morley presents a more critical take on the role of place-narratives in their ability to create a sense of place. Or rather, how the top-down enforcement of rapidly changing place-narratives can destabilize or even destroy a certain sense of place. Through scrutinizing Birmingham’s recent history of rather failed place-making projects, the argument is being put forward that numerous attempts to re-brand and re-imagine the city have rendered its identity obsolete. As a result, Birmingham has become a quintessential non-place, lacking a coherent sense of place and increasingly problematizing the potential to belong and feel “at home”. Leonieke Bolderman expands on the visual focus of many conceptualizations of the imagination in Chapter 4, based on a discussion of contemporary music tourism. Arguing that music puts into focus the affective and embodied dimensions of imagining, she makes a compelling argument for looking beyond vision in thinking about mediated experiences of place and belonging.

David Crouch, in the final chapter of the first part, closes out the theoretical discussion by critically reviewing the role of the imagination in everyday life and how a variety of media interrelate in the process of shaping the imagination. Media, as argued, is not a prime determinant of shaping the imagination but rather one of many. As such, the imagination can at best be perceived of as a “hybrid site”, one in which located memory and mediated influences and affectivities come together, intertwine, and commingle. Whether being at home or far away, it is this constellation of located and mediated impressions and experiences that provide the framework through which mankind makes sense of the world around them and their place in it.

In the wake of this theoretical discussion, a more empirical engagement with the imagination kicks off in Part II, *Mediating Place*. In the sixth chapter, Anne Marit Waade sets out to closely investigate the ways in which the

Danish West Coast is utilized and represented in the production process of the *New Nordic Noir* series. Predominantly focusing on the role that locations play in the early stage of the production of a new series, Waade adopts a multiactor perspective in outlining the ways in which local governments, and both private and public institutions are internationally collaborating in the creation of an increasingly popular television drama series. The chapter shows how the creation of “places of imagination” and popular TV series are from the outset intimately connected to each other, building on and consolidating the imagination of Denmark – or Scandinavia as a whole – in line with its particular dark and raw representation in *Nordic Noir*.

Bianca Freire-Medeiros places the focus in Chapter 7 on Brazil. More specifically, she examines how the Hollywood musical *Flying down to Rio* (1933) significantly contributed to putting Rio de Janeiro on the map for the international public. In managing to shape the collective imagination of an international audience, a subsequent desire to visit Rio was sparked in many after the musical hit the stages. As a result, inbound tourism to Brazil’s capital city witnessed an increase as people came from far and wide to fly down to Rio and see it with their own eyes. Timo Thelen and Elisabeth Scherer shift the focus to Japan, taking a close look at the historical development of Japanese morning drama series (*asadora*) in Chapter 8, shedding light on the historical development of representations of different regions of Japan and their connection to “Japaneseness” in this popular television genre. Engaging in a comparative analysis between two popular series *Oshin* (1983) and *Amachan* (2013), Thelen and Scheeren illustrate how the popular imagination and representation of locality in Japan in popular morning dramas has developed over time and stimulated a diverse range of tourism practices in the transition from the analogue into the digital age.

Speaking of digitality, Chapter 9 presents Bobby Schweizer’s investigations of the videogame tourist, looking at how certain players seek to “possess” the cityscapes of digital worlds and share these virtual touristic experiences with others. Nicky van Es, in closing out the second part with the tenth chapter, brings forward the venerable tradition of literary tourism, expanding its scope to the digital age. Based on five years of empirical research, a critical reflection is offered on the distinctive role (*nay*: place) of literature in imagining, experiencing, and reflecting on place and locality in an environment increasingly characterized by digital and multimedia.

Though the previous chapters have also already touched upon the role and importance of the imagination when it comes to having an embodied experience of place, the chapters contained in the third part all present empirical research on instances of *Being There*. Katriina Heljakka and Pirita Ihamäki analyse in Chapter 11 how the idea of wanderlust not only includes human travellers but extends to human-created objects through an exploration of toy mobility. By teasing out the different online and offline practices of toy tourists, they explore how the imagination, its realization in travel practices, and its spreadability through social media are driven by elements

of play. Andrea Trdina and Maja Turnšek analyse in Chapter 12 how Slovenian fans of the German-Austrian TV series *Der Bergdoktor* appropriate the imaginary and real region of Tyrol through diverse narrative layers, with a special focus on the role of Slovenia's post-socialist reality in the practices of these media tourists. Esther Hammelburg and David Cashman explore the central notion of *being there* in relation to embodied and aural experiences of place. As we have defined the imagination in this introduction as a primarily visual capacity, Hammelburg expands upon this idea of imagining in Chapter 13 by focusing on the notion of "liveness" and the role of media in creating experience "bubbles" during festivals. Last, David Cashman focuses in Chapter 14 more explicitly on the role of music in media event "bubbles" during festivals through an analysis of cruise ship music festival tourism.

After experiencing "places of imagination", there inevitably comes a moment of returning home, filled with memories and a potential strong longing to go back. The final part of this volume, *Returning Home: Memory and Belonging*, reflects on ways in which memories and stories are connected to place(s), creating spaces of belonging. Jason Grek-Martin expands on the theme of ambiguous narrativity in Chapter 15, in which he juxtaposes the reflections of literary tourists and heritage tourists at slavery sites in the Gambia, showing a complicated relationship between place and, at times conflicting, mediated memories connected to it. Marie-Laure Ryan, in Chapter 16, elaborates on how spaces are converted to places via stories and narratives, imbuing it with meaning and significance. In doing so, Ryan analyses how literary narratives in particular are powerful in stimulating the imagination and subsequently providing a place-narrative. Through looking at Orhan Pamuk's novel *Museum of Innocence* (2008) and the corresponding real-world Museum of Innocence located in Istanbul, Ryan shows how the worlds of imagination and reality collide and are intertwined *in situ* through Pamuk's fictional narrative. Chapter 17 sees Abby Waysdorf reflecting on the role of fandom in film tourism, exploring the multiplicity of ways fandom, place, and notions of belonging influence each other in the contemporary media environment. Matt Hills provides the final chapter of the volume and investigates the convergence of theatre and architectural fandom in looking at how iconic buildings function as part of a "mnemonic imagination".

With these diverse chapters, this collection shows the variety of ways the imagination, place, and popular culture intersect, challenge, and nurture each other. In investigating media narratives and their related places, we show here the depth and range of these connections and how they can both imaginatively and figuratively move audiences. It is to these explorations that we now turn.

## Note

- 1 The first section of this chapter is partly based on the (unpublished) inaugural lecture *Lights in the Forest*, written by the first author. For the second section, we have made use of text fragments from the paper "Stories that Move", written by

the first author and published in the *European Journal of Culture Studies* in 2016. We are grateful to the editors of EJCS for their permission to re-use parts of this publication. This project has received funding from the Netherlands Organization for Scientific Research (NWO, grant number PR-11-77), as well as the European Research Council (ERC) under the European Union's *Horizon 2020* research and innovation programme (grant number 681663).



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