Introduction

Welcome to the fourth issue (vol. 2, no. 2) of the International Journal of Social Imaginaries! We face an exciting year ahead in 2024 for the field of social imaginaries and the study of imagination with the expected publication of two important books on the topic: Paul Ricoeur’s 1975 Lectures on the Imagination and Kiyoshi Miki’s—or to follow the traditional Japanese ordering of names, Miki Kiyoshi’s—Logic of Imagination from the 1930s and 40s. Ricoeur’s work will be covered in the following issue (in vol. 3, no. 1) and Miki’s work is covered in the present volume. The publication of Ricoeur’s Lectures on Imagination has been long awaited. To mark the occasion, two essays that critically engage with the lectures will be published in our next issue (vol. 3:1), and a book review essay and “reply” will be published in a future issue (vol. 4:1). In addition to the article on Miki, the present issue contains essays on both the faculty of imagination and the problematic of social imaginaries—and the relations between the two.

The social imaginaries field and discourses on productive imagination both inform each other and are characterized by productive tensions. Both in this and other issues of the journal, the editors wish to underscore this conceptual bond that ties the analyses of social imaginaries to discourses on productive imagination. Cornelius Castoriadis and Paul Ricoeur, among others, have highlighted the deep connections between social imaginaries and productive imagination as it has been conceptualized by Kant in his Critique of Pure Reason and Critique of Judgment, and further developed by various post-Kantian thinkers. These connections are especially important for phenomenologically and hermeneutically oriented thinkers, such as Martin Heidegger, Hannah Arendt, and Paul Ricoeur.¹ This means that the discourses on the social imagi-

¹ As far as phenomenology is concerned, in a recent study, Geniusas has addressed the link between productive imagination and social imaginaries in Geniusas (2022).
inary and productive imagination, which for the most part have developed in isolation from each other, can and ultimately must overlap. This journal, and in particular this issue, reflects this overlap. Moreover, the editors of this journal also hold the view that this overlap must extend globally beyond the confines of Western discourse. This issue therefore includes articles on social imaginaries as well as on different ways in which the imagination can be understood, whether in the Americas—both in Latin America and in North America—or in Asia (this issue of IJSI features Japanese perspectives). An additional contention of the journal has been that the concept of social imaginaries is vital to historical and comparative analyses of modernity and multiple (and alternative) modernities. Hence the issue closes with a piece on alternative modernities, focusing on the issue of totalitarianisms.

Our issue opens with “What are Social Imaginaries?: A Pathway through the Labyrinth” by Suzi Adams. The essay is an insightful guide for the intrigued and learned reader unfamiliar with the conceptual ground that this journal represents—or perplexed by the highly contested social imaginaries field, more generally. This is an important article which further develops the demarcation of the social imaginaries field undertaken by members of the journal’s Editorial Collective in past research (Adams et al. 2015; Adams and Smith 2019; see also Calhoun et al. 2015). Vitally, Adams aims to supply some answers to this recurrent question that is often posed for us. Taking a developmental approach, the essay charts five steps through the labyrinth, along the way travelling through the thought of Charles Taylor, Paul Ricoeur, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Johann Arnason. Often the problematic of social imaginaries is associated with a heavy emphasis on ontology (especially in the writings of Castoriadis), which limits the intelligibility of its key insights. Adams breaks this down by looking at social imaginaries as implicit background meanings in society, central social imaginary significations that are world creating, creative interpreting, as varieties of doing (or, if you will, social agency), and as the impersonal dimension of society. Giving proper credit to dimensions of interpretation and praxis, this is a fuller explanation of what social imaginaries are. A future companion piece on political imaginaries promised by Adams will provide readers with an intersecting pathway. Such guides are very much part of the spirit of this journal project. We hope that this will be a landmark work in demarcating and clarifying the power of the concept of social imaginaries for the human sciences. The language of “social imaginaries” is increasingly used in scholarship in several languages (English, Spanish, French, and Italian seem to be the
main ones) and the problematic is gaining more attention than ever. Adams’s article therefore appears at an opportune time and will be indispensable for anyone seeking to negotiate the labyrinth.

The second article, Martin Plot’s “History, the Mother of Truth” advances the bold thesis that the literary legacy of Argentine writer Jorge Luis Borges can be interpreted from a political angle and in terms of the pragmatist imagination. Through a re-examination of some of his most significant works, first, in the context of his engagement with William James and, second, in connection with other key figures in the pragmatist tradition, Plot generates an original analysis of Borges as “a thinker of the political.” He takes the reader on a pithy tour of pragmatism designed to highlight philosophical debates about Truth and contextualize them against the background of modern science. Finding resonances between Borges’ writings and James’ and Rorty’s re-articulations of pragmatism, Plot argues that the ethical threads in Borges’ thought point to an open political horizon that would—in terms consonant with Castoriadis rather than Borges or Plot—prevent closure. Borges lived in a time of energized politics in Argentina. It should therefore perhaps not be surprising that his treatment of themes in pragmatism like Truth would carry social and political implications. What may be more surprising is the absence of a reading of Borges and the political from the literature on this writer’s legacy. Plot’s essay is highly significant in this respect and, like a forthcoming book he has authored on the subject of Borges, Chaos and Cosmos: The Imaginary and the Political in Jorge Luis Borges (Plot forthcoming) it begins to fill a significant gap on culture and literature in Argentina and indeed Latin America as a whole. Roughly contemporary with Borges, on the other side of the globe there brewed in the early to mid-20th century, a Japanese school of modern philosophy in which the imagination was a key focus of at least for two of its thinkers.

In the first half of the 20th century, this school of modern Japanese philosophy developed around its purported founder, Nishida Kitarō2 (西田幾多郎), comprising his former students and colleagues. Nishida, who had published his maiden work of 1911, Inquiry into the Good (『善の研究』) was hired to teach at Kyoto Imperial University and, as chair of the Department of Philosophy, attracted around him a number of promising scholars, both students whom he taught and professors whom he hired. This group of thinkers, students, graduates, colleagues and former colleagues who went on to take positions elsewhere, exchanged ideas, often critiquing and disagreeing as well as developing each others’ ideas further. This resulted in an informal school of thought that

2 Here we are using the traditional ordering of Japanese names with family name first and personal name second.
came to be known as the “Kyoto School of Philosophy,” which in the post-war years continued to its third or fourth generations. The following two articles in this present issue introduce the thinking of two philosophers belonging to the second generation of the Kyoto School, Miki Kiyoshi (三木清) and Nishitani Keiji (西谷啓治), both of whom were students not only of Nishida but also of Nishida’s departmental colleague Tanabe Hajime (田辺元). When Tanabe began harshly criticizing Nishida, the tense relationship between the two led to a dynamic sprouting of creative thinking among their shared students, including Miki and Nishitani. In addition to their shared professors at Kyoto Imperial University, both had spent some time in Germany, studying with Martin Heidegger—Miki in the 1920s and Nishitani in the 1930s. When they returned to Japan each bore the influence of existentialist phenomenology although in the case of Miki, this was mixed with his new interest in Marxism during the 1920s. We see in these two papers how the Kyoto School philosophy was taken in different directions by Nishitani and Miki, especially in their understanding of the imagination. Nishitani had a stronger predilection towards religion, mysticism, and Buddhism, in particular Zen, while Miki early on developed a strong interest in social and political issues, issues he developed as a journalist when he lost his academic teaching post. This in turn led him to political adventures and misadventures with both the Left and the Right, leading up to his two arrests and imprisonment by the military police during the war and then his death in prison right after the war. Nishitani was not without his political adventures as well with his involvement in several symposia critical of the regime before and during the war, to the point of being censured from the Right during the war and then from the Left after the war.3

The first of our two papers on the Kyoto School, “Imagining and Reimagining Imagination via the Ontology of Imagination in Miki Kiyoshi” by John Krummel is especially timely and relevant, considering that Miki’s Logic of Imagination translated by Krummel is scheduled to be published in 2024. The paper explicates what Miki calls the logic of imagination and logic of forms in terms of an ontology or what Krummel calls “anontology.” The productive function of the imagination for Miki is technological in working upon the environment through human embodied praxis or “enactive intuition”—a term Miki borrows from his mentor Nishida. This productivity—ontological, historical, and social—unfolds the historical world, its significance, in an ongoing formation of the formless that Miki described in the Kantian terms of synthe-
sis, a synthesis of *logos* and *pathos*. The paper shows the influences on Miki of both Heidegger and Nishida working upon Kantian concepts, especially in the second part (and final chapter) of *Logic of Imagination*, “Experience,” but without reducing the richness of Miki’s thought. Krummel develops this idea of imagination’s productive synthesis in terms of an auto-determination of the indeterminate. The paper also focuses upon the progress technology has made today perhaps beyond what Miki had anticipated in his lifetime, such as in the recent digitization and virtualization of the real. The paper also raises ethical questions, in particular those that concern the relationship between human beings and nature, especially as a consequence of modern technology.

In the second paper on the Kyoto School, “Imaging Emptiness: Nishitani on Imagination,” Raquel Bouso focuses on Miki’s slightly younger colleague and classmate from their Kyoto University days, Nishitani Keiji and his writings and lectures devoted to image and imagination, reconstructing his theory of imagination. Bouso begins her article, explicating Nishitani’s conception of the “elemental imagination,” closely related to Aristotle’s *phantasia*, from which, according to the Japanese philosopher, artistic and religious images emerge. As this raises the question of the degree of reality accorded to the images, she unfolds Nishitani’s examination of the ontology of images in the Greek, Christian, and Buddhist traditions, in which the image serves as a means of manifesting the real. As Nishitani’s theory of imagination moves between the being and non-being of images, their subjectification and objectification, Bouso thus attempts to situate the imagination with respect to two opposing tendencies in contemporary philosophy, that is, to recover the ontophanic value of images or to de-ontologize them. We hope that the inclusion of these two articles on two major Kyoto School thinkers provides a synergistic introduction, for our readers, to an important East Asian school of thought from the 20th century.

If the imagination provides perhaps a kind of ontological, existential, and ethical, and, certainly, an epistemic, foundation for a social imaginary, the concept of the social imaginary in turn relates to the issue of modernity in the current and recent centuries of human history. Our issue closes with this final piece by Johann P. Arnason, “The Totalitarian Schism: Alternative Modernities of the Twentieth Century.” In this article Arnason engages with the ongoing debate on multiple modernities by discussing the notion of *alternative modernities*, in particular in relation to totalitarianisms. Alternative modernities are understood as a “pattern or constellation structured in the opposition to a pre-existing one and implying a claim to broader historical ... meaning and validity.” As Arnason rightly indicates, in current times China reminds us of such a form of alternative modernity. The article however sets out to shed light on the main examples of the twentieth century, that is, Soviet communism, Ger-
man national-socialism, and Italian fascism. Arnason shows the complexities and historical stages of the totalitarian reactions to representative, liberal democracy, but also to each other, identifying significant differences between the totalitarian projects, which constitute an effort to “unify economic, political and ideological power”. The in-depth historical analysis importantly qualifies the nature of alternative modern projects in contemporary times.

References