Imagining the Ineffable:
Elucidating Tacit Knowing Through Deliberate Imagining

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Introduction

Michael Polanyi famously stated that "we can know more than we can tell,"[1] but is it possible to know more than we imagine? Or, on the contrary, does imagining play a role in elucidating what we feel we know but cannot fully express? In this article, I will argue that imagining can elucidate knowledge by helping us to name and color in the contours of the fuzzy but existentially significant aspects of our phenomenological experience. Specifically, I will claim that if we initiate deliberate imagining, as a conscious, flexible process of meaning-making, we may be in a better position to express the ineffable qualities of our tacit knowing, notably through interpretive acts of meaning-generation that are affectively charged. To start on a metaphorical note, this article deals with concepts that cannot stand still. Concepts like imagination, tacit knowledge, affect and embodiment imbue richness and texture into our mental landscape—that vast expanse of intertwined knowledge, memories, beliefs and feelings that make up the scenery of our mind—but they do not stick around long enough for our direct contemplation; if chased, they move in so many different directions that it seems only definitional dizziness can ensue. In some sense, these concepts all share an ineffable quality, one that has alienated many theorists and rendered the prospects of the obscured illuminating the obscure hard to fathom. After all, how can that which is tacit itself elucidate tacitness elsewhere? Accordingly, putting these restless concepts in relation is no easy task, and the connections and demarcations this article proposes will likely not satisfy all readers, but will hopefully lessen the conceptual fidgeting. To begin, in the first section, I will present some of imagination's lovers and haters from intellectual history and a handful of key criteria garnered from the interdisciplinary contributions of contemporary imagination theory. The subsequent sections will examine tacit knowledge from major theoretical frameworks in an effort to reveal a relative subspecies of tacit knowing that deliberate imagining can help elucidate through immersive philosophical exploration. Finally, in the concluding section, I will briefly outline why formal education should be concerned with the process of elucidating relative tacit knowing through deliberate imagining, notably through the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) pedagogical model.

I. Under Heated Observation: Construals of Imagination

The concept of imagination is like a wild animal in captivity: if observed from too close when confined, it appears not to behave like it might in a natural setting. Studies done in a vacuum, or detached from the everyday context of living, have painted pictures of imagination that seem removed

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[1] Plane, 1967, 4.

from how many of us would describe our everyday imaginative activities. For instance, we can undergo experiments of imagining specific objects under increasingly complex circumstances to learn about our capacity to produce diverse mental images on command. One example from imagination theory involves starting with a simple visualization of a cat, followed by a more complicated visualization of the same feline with the added supposition that his parents have left him behind to tour France.[2] Yet such an orchestrated process, while illuminating in some senses, will not necessarily enhance our understanding of the ways our imagination quietly colors our perspectives and worldviews in the background of our thought by invoking our memory and orienting our reasoning.

On the other hand, if imagination is studied unrestrained in its natural habitat—that is, in our phenomenological experience—it seems almost too vast to behold, assigned traits and behaviours so disparate that it appears contradictory and implausibly heterogeneous, responsible for sparking everything from our greatest scientific innovations to our finest poetry. As phenomenologist Edward Casey remarks, imagination has been "cast into exceedingly diverse roles, ranging from that of mere understudy to that of the leading character in the drama of the mind" and as a result has "come to promise more than it can possibly deliver."[3] With such a diversity of characterizations, imagination becomes difficult for us to spell out, making our knowledge of its functionings in some sense tacit despite the abundant attempts—not all of them charitable—to provide a unified picture. Educational philosopher Kieran Egan has attributed this vagueness of imagination to the "compound of residues of various meanings people have had of it in the past...due in part to its complexity but also in part to its containing a number of elements that do not sit comfortably together."[4] Given such difficulties, in this section, I will consider some of these conflicting elements by briefly surveying historical impressions of imagination, then narrowing in on features that can contribute to defining the kind of deliberate imagining I will be associating with the elucidation of tacit knowledge.

Historically, imagination has not enjoyed the noblest reputation, being routinely equated with fantasy and frivolity. Plato infamously dismisses imagination as an inferior faculty prone to deceiving us through shadows of reality that can lead our reason astray and result in corrupting artistic pursuits like poetry, which excites our passions and distorts our values.[5] In Greek mythology, the rebellious Prometheus, Titan god of forethought, is described as stealing fire from Mount Olympus to fuel the imagination of humans, enabling creative pursuits once strictly reserved for the divine, then suffering eternal punishment chained to a rock where he is visited daily by a liver-eating eagle.[6] Similar conceptions of imagination as a symbol of resistance to holy command and spiritual upheaval permeate Judeo-Christian traditions, resulting in its being branded as profane and relegated to realms of the occult.[7]

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[2] This example is offered by Dominic Gregory to suggest that our mental imagery is not largely imagistic—some additional supposition-like information can be imagined without contributing anything more to the imagined image. Gregory, 2016, 99.

[3] Casey, 1976, 19, 1.

[4] Egan, 1992, 9.

[5] Book VI of The Republic in Jowett, 1999: 258-264.

[6] Adapted from Aeschylus' Prometheus Bound in Blackie, 1850: "The secret fount of fire / I sought, and found, and in a reed concealed it; / Whence arts have sprung to man, and life hath drawn / Rich store of comforts. For such deed I suffer / These bonds, in the broad eye of gracious day, / Here crucified."

[7] Egan, 1992, 13, 16-17.

In the hands of 17th century philosophers of science, imagination has not fared better, with Bacon describing it as a mere pleasure of art with no scientific potential,[8] and Descartes viewing it as "nothing more than to contemplate the figure or image of a corporeal thing,"[9] engendering "blundering constructions" and "misleading judgments" that negatively affect our knowledge acquisition.[10] In the field of psychology, Freud has conflated imagining with acts like fantasizing, daydreaming and hallucinating, attributing it no special role besides "constructing composite images"[11] that express our inner desires and drives, whereas Piaget confines it to a phase of "symbolic play" and make-believe in child development that evolves into fuller cognitive capacities with age.[12] On these accounts, it is as if imagination is being analyzed in a captive state from too close a range, with theorists focusing on the ways its image-creation can distract us through flights of fancy that distance us from what matters, revealing our hubris and immaturity. However, this perspective neglects the broader potential of imagination to assist with meaning-making by offering new modes of envisioning.

In contrast, theorists that offer a wider lens of analysis have tried to pinpoint some of imagination's essential qualities without straying too far from the significations we tend to attribute to it in our lived experience. Kant's account of imagination distinguishes between reproductive and productive types, arguing that the former works to mentally represent items that are not currently accessible to our senses and help to name them, whereas the latter involves the spontaneous "free play" of ideas toward our greater understanding of experience, notably through artistic expression and aesthetic appreciation. For his part, Hume maintains that the imagination facilitates our generation of ideas—which he understands as images—to connect with our impressions of the world, thereby helping us understand our experience and build knowledge accordingly.[13] These mental representations have an emotional counterpart since, as he writes, "the imagination and affections have a close union together...nothing which affects the former can be entirely indifferent to the latter."[14] Romantic thinkers push this emotional connection further, extolling imagination's capacity to draw on our feelings to freely express and shape our thoughts, with Coleridge viewing it as a "mediator between reason and understanding,"[15] and Wordsworth referring to it as "reason in her most exalted mood"[16] —a vital source of personal meaning.

From an existentialist standpoint, imagination is associated with the very formation of selfhood: Sartre claims it is through imagination that "consciousness discovers its freedom"[17] and shapes identity. In the words of Sartrean scholar Jonathan Webber, "We can imagine the world or any part of it being different from the way it in fact is. This ability is necessary to motivate changing the world."[18]

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[8] Francis Bacon in Spedding et al., eds., 1864-74, 406.
[9] René Descartes in Tweyman, ed., 1993, 53.
[10] René Descartes in Haldane and Ross, eds., 1931, 7.
[11] Freud, *Standard Edition*, IV, 324.
[12] Piaget, 1962, 212.
[13] Warnock, 1976, 15, 26.
[14] Hume, 1896, 424.
[15] Warnock, 1976, 94.
[16] William Wordsworth in De Selincourt and Darbishire, eds., 1940-1949, 192.
[17] Kearney, 1988, 227.
[18] Webber, 2004, xxvi.

Last but not least, Dewey's wide angle perspective on imagination points to its far-reaching effects: for him, "all conscious experience has of necessity some degree of imaginative quality."[19] Because it couples meanings from our previous experiences with our current lived circumstances, imagination can be seen as "the conscious adjustment of the old and the new"[20]—a faculty required for any human production, from engineering and technological invention to the artistic realm where it thrives best. On these accounts, it is as if imagination is being studied in the wild where it has free rein. Its energy appears boundless and positive, though it needs harnessing to enable productive endeavors like idea generation, emotional expression, identity formation and aesthetic innovation.

And so, from the pages of intellectual history we are left with the "compound of residues" described by Egan, which have paved the way for a handful of assorted, contestable criteria in interdisciplinary contemporary imagination theory—as the following paragraphs will strive to itemize. In recent accounts, imagination is described as the "action of forming ideas or mental images"[21] which are multi-sensory and "can cover visual, auditory, tactile, olfactory, etc., imagery."[22] This process can be active or passive, conscious or unconscious, but any visualization it enables will lack the "phenomenal oomph"[23] of perceiving objects in real-time through the senses. We can envision abstractedly or in an "egocentric visualized space"[24] from a particular perspective: either we are the subjects of the imagined scene or we envisage the scene from a set vantage point—like from the side or up above—as if viewing it as spectators.[25] When we visualize objects and circumstances coming together to form a state of affairs, we are *imagining-that*, whereas when we envision ourselves experiencing something we have not undergone—the actions, thoughts, feelings that might be involved—we are *imagining-how*.[26]

The contents of our imaginings can also be non-imagistic, that is, not involve any visualized images: we can "talk quite properly of imagining reasons, differences, dilemmas and lies, of imaginary wants and happiness, of imaginable caution and torment, of imagining what, why and how…yet none of this is imageable."[27] Moreover, imagination is seen as distinct from belief, although it shares some of its motivational force. We can imagine X without having to believe it since "we intend our beliefs to be true, while we have no such intention regarding our imaginings."[28] Yet while our imaginings are not true, they are nonetheless experienced as real: "The contents of imaginings are fictional propositions in the trivial sense that they are to be imagined, not in the ordinary sense that they are a species of falsehood."[29]

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[19] Dewey, 2015, 283.

[20] Ibid, 283.

[21] Dominic Gregory, "Imagination and Mental Imagery" in Kind, 2016, 97.

[22] Bruce Nanay, "Imagination and Perception" in Kind, 2016, 125.

[23] *Ibid*, 128.

[24] *Ibid*, 125.

[25] Gregory, in Kind, 2016, 125.

[26] Casey, 1976, 42-45.

[27] White, 1990,

[28] Neil Sinhababu, "Imagination and Belief" in Kind, 2016, 120.

[29] Kieran and Lopes, 2003, 4.

Compared to other faculties of the mind, imagination is characterized as uniquely accessible: "it is nearly always available to us as an alternative to whatever else we may be doing at a given time, whether it be perceiving, remembering, reflecting, or whatever," and with enough concentration, we can freely choose what and how we want to imagine.[30] In terms of focus, then, imagination is concerned with possibility—it explores the possible without assuming its realization, making it "a fallible guide."[31] Still, some argue that "the patently impossible cannot be imagined"[32] since our imaginings are composed of pre-existing knowledge. Within that repertoire, however, the capacity to be imaginative entails "being inclined and able to conceive of the unusual and effective"[33] to enrich human endeavor. On current ontogenetic accounts, imagination through pretend play is no longer seen merely as a phase, as Piaget has suggested, but rather as "the first indication of a lifelong mental capacity to consider alternatives to reality,"[34] one that can enhance our decision-making skills by enabling us to think through the implications of possible courses of action.

Imagining possibility also lays the foundation for our empathic dispositions: when faced with an uncertain future, we need to "envisage possible but perhaps non-actual states of affairs…imagine how [our] tastes, aims and opinions might change and work out what would be sensible to do or believe in the circumstances" and we can use our "ability to imagine in order to yield an insight into other people without any further elaborate theorising about them."[35] By extension, imagination has socio-political dimensions since it can empower us to envision the world differently for ourselves and others—it makes possible "a view of society as an ongoing process of self-constitution through the continuous opening up of new perspectives in light of the encounter with the Other."[36] Engaging with the imaginary further helps us to resist problematic social codifications—it is "both a medium of experience and an interpretation of that experience in a way that opens up new perspectives on the world."[37]

For present purposes, it is worth keeping in mind these historical impressions and varied criteria of imagination theory, but focus our attention on a few key features of what I call deliberate imagining. As Casey asserts, in terms of our phenomenological experience, "imagination as a fixed faculty is indeed dead…but imagining is very much alive."[38] So rather than define imagination as a faculty, this article will focus instead on imagining as "a particular flexibility which can invigorate all mental functions,"[39] to borrow from Egan. More specifically, I will define deliberate imagining as a conscious, flexible process of meaning-making that occurs in our mental landscape but in response to

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[30] Casey, 1976, 6.

[31] Ninan, in Kind, 2016, 276.

[32] Vendler, 1984, 105.

[33] Barrow, 1990, 108.

[34] Further, Paul L. Harris argues "that the capacity to imagine alternative possibilities and to work out their implications emerges early in the course of children's development and lasts a lifetime." Harris, 2000, 28, xi.

[35] Heal, 2003, 13.

[36] Delanty, 2009, 13.

[37] *Ibid*, 15.

[38] Casey, 1976, 3.

[39] Further, Egan argues that "imagination is an intentional act of consciousness rather than a thing in consciousness; it is one way in which our consciousness works, rather than a distinct part of it that might be studied separately." Egan, 1992, 36.

an actual phenomenological experience, and that is purposefully initiated to assist with achieving a particular goal, notably bringing to light what is tacitly known. This imagining process is pre-critical—it is concerned with exploring possibility in the here and now but not yet making judgments about the meanings it seeks to elucidate, whether they be ethical, political or societal.[40] In the words of Maxine Greene, its role "is not to resolve, not to point the way, not to improve. It is to awaken, to disclose the ordinarily unseen, unheard, and unexpected."[41]

Further, deliberate imagining can be considered an aesthetic practice in a wide sense, without requiring artistic pursuits—our case study will be immersive philosophical exploration—since, to draw on affect theorist Ben Highmore's conception of aesthetics, it is "primarily concerned with material experiences, with the way the sensual world greets the sensate body, and with the affective forces that are generated in such meetings."[42] And this practice, as we shall see, is not only embodied and affectively charged but may also be supportive of agency. In keeping with this section's metaphor, throughout the rest of the article, I will strive to observe deliberate imagining "in the wild" in that I will be concerned with real phenomenological encounters of tacit knowing, and I will try not hold the imagining process captive by imposing, as Dewey put it, "a ghostly metaphysics irrelevant to actual aesthetic experience."[43] Yet I will also attempt some gentle taming of deliberate imagining by considering ways to make planned use of its elucidation powers for educative purposes.

II. Accessing the Ineffable: Relative Tacit Knowing

In an environment where formal, propositional knowledge is privileged, tacit knowing can be unfairly perceived as an invasive alien species threatening the stability of our epistemological ecosystem. It can seem unnecessarily messy and unappealing—even dangerous—to consider the notion of an embodied, incommunicable type of knowing that operates below the surface of intelligibility and defies the language and codification systems we establish to facilitate knowledge exchange. Why spend time trying to illuminate that which will never allow itself to be fully verbalized or transmitted, and risks irreversibly muddying the epistemic waters? Moreover, if we have oblique access to this tacit knowing, the urge to discover what we already know seems like a paradox, and a rather useless one at that. Yet, in my view, this kind of perspective reflects an outdated understanding of what ought to count as knowledge—as pedagogues Timothy Leonard and Peter Willis note, "We never know 'just the facts,' for they are mediated by myriad versions and visions."[44]

Varied examples suggest that we have access to unspoken knowings that significantly impact our phenomenological experiences yet do not lend themselves well to the kind of direct, accurate

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[40] Elsewhere, notably in a chapter of *The Routledge Handbook of the Philosophy of Imagination*, I have written about the moral and political dimensions of imagination but this essay will focus on pre-critical imaginative activity.

[41] Greene, 1995, 28.

[42] Highmore seeks to recover a lost sense of aesthetics as concerned with "creaturely, experiential life" rather than only art theory: He asks: "Anyone interested in the history of aesthetics must be faced with this odd predicament: how does a form of inquiry that was once aimed at the entire creaturely world end up as a specialized discourse about fine art? How did an ambitious curiosity about the affects, the body, and the senses end up fixated on only one tiny area of sensual life-beauty and the sublime?" In Gregg and Seigworth, 2010, 121-122.

[43] Dewey, 2005, 306.

[44] Leonard and Willis, 2008, 1.

descriptions we have come to expect from our knowledge bases. Such examples vary from humor and artistic taste to business savvy and the application of moral concepts, as well as especially embodied activities like dance, surgery or woodworking. In this section, I will examine tacit knowing from the perspective of the concept's originator, scientist and philosopher Michael Polanyi, as well as through the categories of tacit knowledge proposed by sociologist Harry Collins. This examination will seek to to show how this species of knowing may destabilize our epistemological ecosystem for the better, recognizing the fuzzy but existentially significant ways we draw on our conceptual and sensory information to interpret our circumstances.

For Polanyi, tacit knowledge is part of what he calls the "ineffable domain" of knowing which designates those things "that [we] know and can describe even less precisely than usual, or even only very vaguely."[45] Weaving issues of language and embodiment with the human drive for discovery, his theory offers the now famous example of bicycle riding as an illustration of a tacit type of knowing that enables us to operate successfully in a certain task without having to operationalize it—we can know how to proceed but not how to clearly express the particulars involved. According to Polanyi's theory, tacit knowledge remains intact and largely unproblematic to us until we attempt to explain it and find ourselves hitting a wall of linguistic limitations, realizing it eludes articulation despite our embodied grasp and genuine valorizing of it. In his words, "To assert that [we] have knowledge which is ineffable is not to deny that [we] can speak of it, but only that [we] can speak of it adequately"—it therefore lurks low in the "domain of sophistication" presided by propositional types of knowledge that are more readily codifiable.[46]

On Polanyi's account, language includes not only words spoken and written but also all other symbolic representations from mathematic equations and geographical maps to diagrams and graphs.[47] We make sense of linguistic communication largely because many of our words connect to our experiences of embodiment: as he argues, "To a disembodied intellect, entirely incapable of lust, pain or comfort, most of our vocabulary would be incomprehensible," since so much of it refers "to living beings, whose behavior can be appreciated only from an experience of the drives which actuate them."[48] While formal knowledge cooperates better with language than its tacit counterpart, Polanyi insists that all our knowing retains an element of vagueness since "we remain ever unable to say all that we know...[and] we can never quite know what is implied in what we say."[49]

And so, our tacit knowledge should not be discounted despite its reluctance to be made explicit since it comprises the personalized repository of conceptual and sensory information that compels us to problem-solve and innovate, notably in the sciences, where Polanyi focuses much of his theorizing. In his estimation, "originality must be passionate."[50] Human inquiry is fuelled by the inexact, unspecifiable but fervent knowings that help us intuit problems worth solving far before we have established what precisely we hope to discover. For Polanyi, it is our imagination that strives to fill the

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[45] Polanyi, 1962, 91.

[46] *Ibid*, 95.

[47] *Ibid*, 81.

[48] *Ibid*, 104.

[49] *Ibid*, 99.

[50] *Ibid*, 151.

gap between what we tacitly know in intuition and what we seek: "it will be persistent, deliberate, and transitive; yet its whole purpose is directed on ourselves; it attempts to make us produce ideas...and the action induced in us by this ransacking [of our brain] is felt as something that is happening to us...we are actually surprised and exclaim: Aha! when we suddenly do produce an idea."[51] Whether the knowing is stored in our muscle memory or in our sensory responsiveness, we apprehend tacit knowing through and within our bodies, via imagination, and according to Polanyi it has "existential meaning"[52] for us; what we understand about it is personally significant even if not easily explicable.

While sociologist Harry Collins agrees that tacit knowledge is important, in response to Polanyi's theory, he underscores what he deems a key distinction between tacit knowledge being inexplicable and inexplicit—the former suggests it cannot be explained whereas the latter hints only that it is not plainly expressed.[53] In his view, the tacit is "made mysterious by its tension with the explicit"[54] : it is because as humans we insist on talking things through that our tacit knowing seems problematic to us; animals do not share our concern. To help with demystifying this explicable-explicit tension, Collins proposes three categories of tacit knowledge. First, relational tacit knowledge refers to knowing that is explicable but not made explicit for various reasons: for instance, it may intentionally be kept secret (an elite society wanting their agenda to remain classified); it may unintentionally be kept hidden (an employee leaving out procedural steps, assuming his colleagues are more informed than they are); or it may simply be unrecognized (a specialist not being aware of the important know-how she routinely applies in her work). In theory, relational tacit knowledge can be explained but due to constraints of time, tradition and incentive, its complete elucidation is logistically unlikely: "any one piece of relational tacit knowledge can be made explicit, because the reason it is not explicit is contingent on things that can be changed."[55]

Second, somatic tacit knowledge refers to knowing that is explicable in principle by scientific means but in practice is hard to grasp because of our bodily limitations. For Collins, Polanyi's bicycle example fits best in this category because the process is in fact explicable; it is just that we have difficulty translating the explanation (involving angles, equilibrium, laws of gravity, etc.) into action through our bodies due to the nature of our brain and its information acquisition—in such cases, we are dealing with "knowledge that is tacit because of our bodily limits."[56] In contrast, a computer could be trained through artificial intelligence to implement such complex principles and act in accordance with them. Third, collective tacit knowledge refers to social knowing that we have not determined how to make explicit because it involves the intricacies of socialization across particular contexts, including assimilation and application of rules, practices, mores, values and conventions—or the "cultural fluency" resulting from social immersion. In these instances, according to Collins, "to

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[51] Polanyi, "Creative Imagination" in Krausz et al, eds., 2009, 159. Polanyi's offers a rather broad description of imagination as constituting "all thoughts of things that are not present, or not yet present—or perhaps never to be present" and argues that "the imagination must attach itself to clues of feasibility supplied to it by the very intuition that it is stimulating; sallies of the imagination that have no such guidance are idle fancies." *Ibid*, 155, 160.

[52] Polanyi, 1962, 94.

[53] Collins, 2010, 4. For Collins, "the tacit is that which has not or cannot be made explicit"—his definition thus includes the inexplicable along with what is difficult or unlikely to be expressed. *Ibid*, 85.

[54] *Ibid*, 85.

[55] *Ibid*, 98.

[56] *Ibid*, 101.

understand how these things are to be done we have to engage with social life."[57] Here, the prime example would be riding a bicycle but in traffic, which adds myriad factors whose interpretations will vary from one context to another thus requiring a social embeddedness to properly "know" how to proceed—something a machine could not do with our current technology.[58]

Though imagination could arguably play a role in illuminating the explicable-explicit tension in all three categories of tacit knowledge that Collins identifies, I want to focus on the collective form. Specifically, I will focus on how, as individuals, we "borrow"[59] from this socially owned knowledge to make sense of our phenomenological experience—a process that stands to be greatly elucidated by deliberate imagining as the next section will strive to show. Examples of collective tacit knowledge seem to center on socially embedded knowing regarding performed acts: beyond the bicycling example, Collins describes the skills required for improvised dancing in public, noting that "social sensibility is needed to know that one innovative dance step counts as an improvisation while another counts as foolish, dangerous or ugly, and the difference may be a matter of changing fashions, your dancing partner and location."[60] Yet, as I seek to argue in this article, the challenges of cultural fluency seem to also apply to interpretive acts conducted in our mental landscape in response to the performed acts we witness—we draw on collective tacit knowledge to make sense of how socialization is enacted in befuddling ways that give us an itch for elucidation. It may not be clear whether the itch is felt by others too but at the phenomenological level that does not matter since we experience it as problematic. As Polanyi notes, "nothing is a problem in itself; it can be a problem only if it puzzles and worries somebody."[61]

So the question becomes: For whom is this kind of knowing ineffable?[62] For instance, some might find the intersubjective intricacies of justice obvious to explain because these do not present interpretive hurdles for them—political philosophers who have thought extensively about the topic's myriad manifestations and associated levels of cultural fluency will be able to verbalize what they know in the face of, say, crimes against humanity, which may not be true of a young child whose comparatively limited but no less profound encounters with justice and attempts to interpret them remain genuine problems of articulation.[63] In this sense, from my perspective, though fed by "the rich

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[57] *Ibid*, 120.

[58] *Ibid*, 123.

[59] As Collins notes, when it comes to collective tacit knowledge, "we can only 'borrow it': it is not our property but is social and collective." Collins, 2010, 30-31.

[60] *Ibid*, 123.

[61] Polanyi, 1962, 129.

[62] Carroll asks a similar question when he dismisses the banality argument against the morally educative potential of literature: "Conclusions that might appear utterly banal or obvious for experts in ethics may not be banal or obvious to nonprofessional audiences...What the philosopher discounts as trivial may in fact be revelatory for the plain reader and, for that very reason, can have a fair claim to being informative and educative for the intended audience." Carroll, 2002, 10.

[63] Fuzzy but existentially powerful concepts like justice present particular challenges for articulation. As Polanyi writes, "we must use the word 'justice', and use it as correctly and thoughtfully as we can, while watching ourselves doing it, if we want to analyze the conditions under which the word properly applies. We must look, intently and discriminatingly, through the term 'justice' at justice itself, this being the proper use of the term 'justice', the use which we want to define." Polanyi, 1967, 122.

layers of meaning from our collective history,"[64] the degree to which this tacit knowing in interpretive acts is ineffable is relative to the person experiencing it based on her present mental landscape, yet it is felt as existentially worth elucidating because it points to something significant but fuzzy in her phenomenological experience. As moral philosopher Mary Warnock argues, this "sense that there is always more to experience, and more in what we experience than we can predict" is felt as very real to us, and the yearning for elucidation, notably through imagination, imbues our lived encounters with purpose.[65]

III. Elucidating Imaginatively: Tacit Knowing Unfolded through Interpretive Acts

At last we arrive at a fine-tuned version of our original question: How can deliberate imagining elucidate our relative tacit knowing? If we think of the elucidation as taking place in our mental landscape—which combines not only our personalized repository of fluid conceptual and sensory information, but also socially owned knowledge on extended loan, so to speak—we can begin to see how deliberate imagining can elucidate our relative tacit knowing by helping us to name and color in the contours of those fuzzy but existentially significant aspects of our phenomenological experience. I want to argue that deliberate imagining, as a conscious, flexible and pre-critical process of meaning-making, can facilitate carefully constructed interpretive acts—notably figurative language constructions and thought experiments, as we will soon see—with the aim of unfolding tacit meanings existing within our mental landscape. When effective, these interpretive acts can become what I call arresting aesthetic encounters: they seize elements of our embodied knowing with affective force and bring them to the surface of intelligibility, illuminating both details and context—in Dewey's words, they "concentrate and enlarge an immediate experience."[66] In this section, I will strive to illustrate this process of elucidation and its affective force with an example of immersive philosophical exploration, then elaborate on two interpretive acts that are typical of this exploration: figurative language constructions and thought experiments.

By way of illustration, let us consider an example from personal experience that I think reflects the elucidation features considered so far. Elsewhere, in an article inspired by Merleau-Ponty and by my own experiences with collaborative philosophical dialogue, I introduce the notion of body taunting to describe what takes place when disagreement is communicated nonverbally in antagonistic ways that contradict voiced arguments, through the combined "vocabulary" of flesh—gestural, postural, physiognomic, kinetic expression—used to provoke, dismiss, intimidate or alienate.[67] This process of naming and coloring in my extremely fuzzy but very existentially significant phenomenological experience can appropriately be described as a case of deliberate imagining purposely initiated to elucidate my relative tacit knowing. After undergoing repeated instances of what I only later dubbed as "hostile interventions of body language" during philosophical dialogues, I tried to express for myself

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[64] Collins, 2010, 30-31.

[65] Warnock calls this sense "the feeling of infinity." She argues that "our experience is significant to us, and worth the attempt to understand it...without some such sense, even at the quite human level of there being something which deeply absorbs our interest, human life becomes perhaps not actually futile or pointless, but experienced as if it were." Warnock, 1976, 202-203.

[66] Dewey, 2005, 285.

[67] Fletcher, 2014, 11.

and a few friends the affective intensity of what felt like a disingenuous incongruity between verbal and corporeal language on behalf of some of my co-inquirers—their dialoguing bodies seemed to be communicating something different than what they had voiced, resulting in mixed signals that were estranging to me and (I sensed) to others as well. In terms of the relative degree to which my tacit knowing was ineffable, since I am decidedly not an expert in body language or group dynamics, I had comparatively little to draw on in terms of cultural fluency in this area, although I knew something was amiss.

On some level, I was drawing on collective tacit knowledge regarding what counts as socially acceptable in the context of intellectual conversations among adults, including appropriate gestures, delicate dealings with disagreement, cultural sensitivity, and subtle but palpable effects of gender disparities, to name but a few. Yet my attempts to articulate this profound but messy phenomenological experience betrayed the coherence it enjoyed in my mental landscape; that is, until an arduous brain ransacking reached a Polanyi-esque "Aha!" moment of elucidation through imagining. Indeed, it was only when I started to engage in figurative and counterfactual thinking through interpretive acts enkindled by my deliberate imagining that I had the impression this particular knowing of mine was being elucidated. Taken together, my imagining of possibly useful labels and analogies—zeroing into potential significations and zooming out again—represented an arresting aesthetic encounter: it seized those elements of embodied knowing I was trying in vain to articulate and morphed them into the concept cluster of "body taunting" that approximated the experiences I had, then was further validated by some "Aha!" moments in others who shared in my newly found elucidation. The small but personally meaningful social critique resulting from this pre-critical, flexible imagining process reflected what Greene describes as "the creation of new interpretive orders as human beings come together not only to 'name' but to change or to transform their intersubjective worlds."[68]

It is worth noting that in all likelihood, this process of elucidating our tacit knowing through deliberate imagining is, more often than not, highly affectively charged. Why? Affect is what motivates our itch for elucidation by shrouding a given situation in confusion, wonder, curiosity, and the like, so that we experience it as problematic and put our imagining to work. To be clear, affect in this sense is not merely a synonym for 'atmosphere' or 'emotion,' as colloquial descriptions might suggest—it denotes "impersonal intensities that do not belong to a subject or an object,"[69] "forces of encounter...[that] need not be especially forceful,"[70] "vivacity of context,"[71] and "vital forces insisting beyond emotion" that "arise in the midst of inbetween-ness: in the capacities to act and be acted upon."[72] Affect is indeterminate, pre-individualized and volatile,[73] yet it is also "sticky"—"it preserves the connection between ideas, values and objects" and explains "how we are touched by what we are near."[74] So when our phenomenological experience confronts us with enactments of social knowing

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[68] Greene, 1995, 61.
[69] Anderson, in Gregg and Seigworth, eds., 2010, 161.
[70] Gregg and Seigworth, eds., 2010, 2.
[71] Massumi, 2002, 220.
[72] Gregg and Seigworth, eds., 2010, 1.
[73] Wissinger, in Clough and Halley, eds., 2007, 238.
[74] Ahmed, in Gregg and Seigworth, eds., 2010, 30-32.

that we find hard to interpret, the affects of that situation travel into the process of deliberate imagining that we initiate to elucidate what we have witnessed, then intermingle with the affects already connected with our collective tacit knowledge, and continue to resonate throughout the interpretive process. In this sense, no matter what emotions are subsequently evoked in our bodies, "the atmosphere is already angled; it is always felt from a specific point."[75] Returning to the example of body taunting, the affects of hostility and antagonism that sparked the imaginative process entwined themselves with the fervor of wanting to label the felt incongruity which itself carried affects of chaos and bewilderment—all tinged with affects of estrangement and even righteous indignation culled from socially owned knowledge.[76] In short, in the process of imaginative elucidation, affect can be described as what spurs our recognition of our relative tacit knowing so that we may get to a point where it is no longer ineffable to us.

Once spurred into immersive philosophical exploration, certain imaginative interpretive acts become especially useful to our elucidation process. First, figurative language constructions draw on our imaginative resources to manage the fuzziness of phenomenological experience by at once clarifying and clouding it—as Warnock puts it, while "our imagination is at work tidying up the chaos of sense experience, at a different level it may, as it were, untidy it again."[77] One the one hand, when we attempt to explain our tacit knowing and find ourselves hitting a wall of linguistic limitations, figurative devices like metaphors and analogies help to provide a circuitous but often more existentially satisfying route to express what once felt ineffable. Their aim is not precision but meaning generation that is intersubjectively compelling—as Polanyi notes, "In order to describe experience more fully, language must be less precise."[78] As interpretive acts, they encourage us to imaginatively align two things that are distinct but comparable in some intuitive way, testing the comparison's worth by extending it along various avenues across different contexts. In so doing, we change that which we are trying to name and color, and our tacit knowing is transformed—metaphors and analogies become "actual carriers of knowledge" and "the basis for the transfer of tacit knowledge,"[79] because they "create novel interpretations of experience by asking the listener to see one thing in terms of something else...and create new ways of experiencing reality."[80] A time-tested case is myth: as an allegorical device, it is a prime example of collective tacit knowledge elucidated by imagining so that it can be borrowed by individuals and put to use in their own phenomenological experience—it endures because of what Egan calls an "affective tug;"[81] the vivacity of its affects survives through time and interweaves with our imagining's drive to interpret meaning. The aforementioned myth of Prometheus powerfully demonstrates this contribution to our cultural fluency.

Yet at the same time, figurative language constructions can be destabilizing: since we cannot co-imagine—our imaginings never coincide exactly—the best thing we can do through metaphors and

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[75] *Ibid*, 37.

[76] Borrowing from Brian Massumi, if affect is intensity, then "emotion is qualified intensity...It is intensity owned and recognized." Massumi, 2002, 88.

[77] Warnock, 1976, 207.

[78] Polanyi, 1962, 89.

[79] Fock, in Göranzon et al., eds., 2006, 103.

[80] Donnellon, Anne et al., 1986, 48.

[81] Egan, 1992, 32.

analogies is "put together what [we] know in new ways and begin to express what [we] know but cannot yet say."[82]   In these circumstances, ambiguity is not a failing since the imprecise explanations that figurative language offers may be more honest than some forms of explicit knowledge, recognizing the messiness of phenomenological experience and accepting the by-product of tacit residue. It is no coincidence that metaphors and analogies are used liberally throughout this article to grab hold of concepts that pose a flight risk. As products of deliberate imagining about the mystifying character of tacit knowledge, what they might end up elucidating is the extent to which tacit knowing is indeed obscure but profoundly integrated into our everyday context of living, and thus worth our conceptual attention. Importantly, they try to convince us of imagining's potential for knowledge elucidation, making us see that "the more energetic and lively the imagination, the more are facts constantly finding themselves in new combinations and taking on new emotional colouring as we use them to think of possibilities, of possible worlds."[83] Under imagining's tutelage, figurative language constructions elucidate our tacit knowing by awakening us to new but unfinished meanings.

Second and similarly, the imaginative interpretive act of thought experiments can help to unfold and reconfigure tacit meanings existing in our mental landscape. Understood as imaginative hypotheticals deliberately devised to probe a concept and its implications, thought experiments elucidate the fuzziness of phenomenological experience by "reconfigure[ing] our conceptual commitments, thereby rendering our concepts newly meaningful," to borrow from aesthetics philosopher Noel Carroll, and as such we can "regard them as productive of knowledge, since they make what in some sense is already known accessible and salient."[84] When well-constructed and sensorially detailed, thought experiments become arresting aesthetic encounters because of the affectively charged, creative world-making they encourage in us by invoking our tacit knowings, enabling us to move from actualities to possibilities and back again—to "see as" in the words of Paul Ricoeur.[85] Thanks to imaginative fuel, the specificity of details they provide helps to concretize concepts for us, involving our bodies affectively in the visualizing of what could happen if the hypothetical obtained—"we feel in ourselves some of the affective aspects of the scene"[86] —so "although the world-frames of imaginative presentations lack the depth, breadth and persistence of the perceived world, they do present themselves as evanescent constellations of specific imagined contents, as momentary mini-worlds of imaginative experience."[87]

If we imagine, for instance, a world without imagination, the myriad elements of our pre-factual and counterfactual thinking can evoke strong emotional reactions because of what we already know to be the case in our social interactions (by appeals to our collective tacit knowledge), and due to the affects sticking to the atmosphere of our endeavor—at times consternation at the possibility of the hypothetical coming true, other times playfulness with the freedom of imagining different scenarios. In thought experiments, imagining flexes its muscles. As Egan writes,

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[82] Richards, 1936, 89.
[83] Egan, 1992, 50.
[84] Carroll says that thought experiments "rely upon what competent users of a concept already, in some sense, know in order to clarify our understanding." Carroll, 2002, 7-8.
[85] Egan, 1992, 18.
[86] Warnock, 1976, 169.
[87] Casey, 1976, 51.

> The flexibility that is central to imaginativeness seems to enable the imaginative person to conceive of a wider than normal range of states or actions that do not exist or that do not follow by literal extrapolation from current states or actions or from conventional representations of states or actions. In conceiving an indeterminate range of such states or actions the imaginative person can hold them in the mind, consider potential implications, assess their appropriateness, scan their features, selecting whichever might be most unusual and effective.[88]

This complex imaginative thinking is crucial because it sheds new light on our existing tacit knowing, and may even contribute to our shaping and moulding the collective tacit knowledge that governs so much of our intersubjective exchanges. Indeed, by painting alternative possibilities that engage us affectively, thought experiments, as imaginative explorations, "suggest the contingency of the reality we are envisaging,"[89] and can move us to challenge the contents of our cultural fluency. Moreover, in both cases of immersive philosophical exploration—figurative language constructions and thought experiments—we can often benefit from a "reflective afterlife"[90] that continues to color in the contours of the concepts and phenomena we have sought to name, bringing a creative philosophical literacy to our everyday context. We gain new understanding through imaginative "readings" of our tacit knowings.

Through examples of immersive philosophical exploration, we can already start to see the educative powers of deliberate imagining with respect to our tacit knowing. In closing, it is worth briefly reflecting on a few specific reasons why formal education should be concerned with this imaginative process of elucidation, namely: to prevent "affect aliens" and to increase agency by personalizing knowledge. We have seen how deliberate imagining—as a conscious, flexible and pre-critical process of meaning-making—can facilitate carefully constructed interpretive acts "in the wild" of our actual, day-to-day phenomenological experience, to help unfold the tacit meanings of our mental landscape, but this process may also be adapted to thrive "in captivity" within a school setting. With some gentle taming of deliberate imagining into a pedagogically useful aesthetic practice, we can envision some planned uses of its elucidation powers for educative purposes.

First, formal education should be concerned with elucidating tacit knowledge by imaginative means so as to prevent students from becoming "affect aliens,"[91] a term coined by Sara Ahmed to designate individuals who are estranged by the prevailing affects of their context. For our purposes, affect aliens are in a sense forced to exist on the margins of collective tacit knowledge because it does not represent what they find meaningful. Ahmed's examples of "feminist kill-joys, unhappy queers, and melancholic migrants"[92] can be translated to the realities faced by students whose difference may preclude their sense of belonging at school and surface in the form of resistance, warranted as it may be. Relative to their current mental landscape, such students may find that what they know to be morally wrong or problematic in a classroom that, say, privileges whiteness or heteronormativity, is

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[88] Egan, 1992, 14.
[89] Greene, 2013, 30.
[90] Carroll, 2002, 12.
[91] Ahmed, in Gregg and Seigworth, eds., 2010, 29-30.
[92] *Ibid*, 30.

extremely ineffable to them, notably compared to the politicized adults that Ahmed references, but their phenomenological experience is no less existentially profound. Here, the kind of immersive philosophical exploration we have been considering could help engage students imaginatively with their tacit knowing so as to awaken them to new but unfinished meanings and move them to challenge the cultural fluency of their school so they do not get affectively alienated from their educational experiences. In this case, pre-critical deliberative imagining can pave the way to the more critical envisioning that we associated earlier with empathy and socio-political engagement.

On a related note, formal education should also be concerned with the imaginative process of elucidation so conceived to increase the agency of students by helping to personalize their knowledge. By focusing on the tacit knowing relative to students in their present circumstances, we can give them a chance to voice what they find fuzzy but significant in their phenomenological experiences—regardless of whether we as educators share in their itch for elucidation or have already figured out our own articulations. As a result, they may become better acquainted with themselves as knowers and become more active participants in their knowledge construction. As epistemologist Ingela Josefson writes, "There is a tacit knowledge in every word we say. A person's language is a fingerprint of her meeting with the world; it is loaded with the individual fabric of life that has given concepts meaning."[93] For instance, what students are able to communicate through thought experiments can help them figure out what matters to them in light of tacit knowings they already have, all the while giving these a new coloring. As development psychologist Paul Harris writes, "the landscape of reality may look different after they return from an excursion into the counterfactual world."[94]

IV. Educative Elucidation: Deliberate Imagining of the Tacit at School

But how might this process of elucidation happen in schools? Educational theorists Douglas Thomas and John Seely Brown have proposed that we cultivate students' imaginative engagement by creating "a bounded learning environment that strikes a balance between constraint and freedom, and exercises based, for example, on 'what if' questions that allow the imagination to flourish."[95] Many pedagogical methods are likely to contribute to such a learning environment, and to these ends, pedagogical pluralism is probably worthwhile.[96] But let us briefly consider the Community of Philosophical Inquiry (CPI) as one viable approach. As conceived by co-founders Matthew Lipman and Ann Margaret Sharp, the CPI aims to develop responsible, relational agency through multidimensional thought (or combined critical, creative and caring thinking), by challenging youth to confront the contestable questions they deem central to their lives and seek reasonable judgments through structured group dialogue.[97] If used specifically with deliberative imagining in mind, this model can purposefully integrate thought experiments and narratives rich in figurative language to encourage youth to pinpoint fuzzy but significant elements of their tacit knowing that they would like

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[93] Göranzo, 2006, 44.
[94] Harris, 2000, 118.
[95] Thomas and Brown, 2012, 54.
[96] Although beyond the scope of this particular article, it would be important to examine the possible downsides and dangers of this kind of approach, notably with respect to issues of neurodiversity and different learning styles.
[97] For more on the nature of the CPI as method, please see Matthew Lipman's *Thinking in Education* (Cambridge, MA: Cambridge University Press, 2003).

to elucidate. Given its philosophical commitments, the CPI can also easily offer youth the challenge of crafting effective metaphors and analogies that extend the breadth of their mental landscape through imaginative world-making, while problematizing their repository of conceptual and sensory information toward new meanings and knowings.

This potential has not only educative but also epistemological potential for childhood. It stands to reason that youth's mental landscape likely contains more tacit elements given they are generally less experienced and language-savvy than adults—they might "know" a lot more than they can explain yet the fuzziness of this knowing still stands in the way of its transformation into concerns and commitments despite its felt importance. Powerful philosophical concepts like justice (as we have seen) as well as freedom, power and identity may present particular challenges for articulation, which is why the CPI is such an interesting candidate for a collaborative practice of deliberate imagining that enables youth to illuminate their tacit knowings with others in a purposeful way. Such envisioning can act as a useful stand-in for the experiences that youth have yet to encounter—they can deliberately imagine in their mental landscape through a kind of Deweyan "dramatic rehearsal" in which possibilities can be tested without the "irrevocable" consequences of "an act overtly tried out," until they live out the real thing, so to speak.

In contexts where formal, propositional knowledge tends to be privileged, children's tacit knowing risks being unfairly neglected in part because they draw on sensory, affective information to interpret their circumstances—that is, the often-confusing adult world they will eventually inherit but currently experience as newcomers. Yet this very freshness in the face of philosophical concepts carries with it possible tacit knowings that could greatly contribute to knowledge production if only these could be elucidated. In this light, deliberate imagining could contribute not only to youth's education but also to their emerging agency—thereby fighting against their epistemic exclusion—by helping them to spell out concerns and commitments that may otherwise seem ineffable to them despite their personal significance. If successful, the CPI and its collaborative interpretive acts could become arresting aesthetic encounters for youth that are intersubjectively meaningful, preventing the accidental creation of affect aliens while heightening possibilities for agency at school and beyond.

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