Autonomy is the Destiny of Man: Castoriadis' Sociology of the Possible

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A Thesis in the department of Sociology

Presented in Partial Fulfillment of the Requirements
for the Degree of Master of Arts at
Concordia University
Montreal, Quebec, Canada

December 2007

Your file Votre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-40847-6
Our file Notre référence
ISBN: 978-0-494-40847-6

ABSTRACT

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While recent debates have focused on the theme of autonomy in Cornelius Castoriadis' works, few scholars have stressed the importance of the question of praxis through which the explicit development of autonomy *is to be fostered.* This thesis will tackle the question of normativity (in other words, the question "what is to be done?") which led Castoriadis to conceive his politics of transformative action as a creative praxis. Through a hermeneutical excursion into Castoriadis' early writings, as part of the collective *Socialisme ou Barbarie: Organe de critique et d'orientation révolutionnaire* (1949-1964), we will reveal the internal dynamic between organization and spontaneity, theory and practice. The new conception of revolutionary praxis, ontologically deviating from traditional Marxism, will be central to our analysis. We argue, following Castoriadis, that the aim of autonomy is the destiny of man.

After exploring a short biography of the author, and the revolutionary project of the collective in chapter 2, the general historical context of Marxism will take shape in chapter 3. In chapter 4 our analysis of Castoriadis' critique of bureaucratic capitalism, as manifested under the veil of existing socialism, will be elaborated. A look at Castoriadis' ideal society, in chapter 5, will illuminate the possible avenues for the future of society. Chapter 6 will tackle with the necessity of abandoning Marxism in the name of the revolutionary project of autonomy. Castoriadis' critical sociology of the possible, we will demonstrate, directly engages in the normative orientation of society towards greater autonomy.

Special Thank You

Parabolik Guerilla Théâtre

For your courage to resist what is given,
and your will to create other possible worlds.

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ABREVIATIONS OF WORKS CITED

CL	*Crossroads in the Labyrinth*
CL I	*Les Carrefours du Labyrinthe I*
CL II	*Domaines de l'homme. Les Carrefours du Labyrinthe II*
CL IV	*La montée de l'insignifiance. Les Carrefours du Labyrinthe IV*
CS	*Le contenue du Socialisme*
CQFG	*Ce qui fait la Grece: 1. d'Homere a Héraclite*
FSLC	*Fenêtre sur le chaos*
IIS	*L'Institution imagainaire de la societe*
MRCM	*Capitalisme Moderne et Révolution 2: Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne*
SB 1	*La société bureaucratique 1: Les rapports de production en Russie*
S OU B	*Socialisme ou Barbarie: organe de critique et d'orientation révolutionnaire*
USALD	*Une société à la dérive*

Introduction: The End of History

The possibility of a socialist revolution may appear to a vast majority of Westerners like the distant dream of an age passed. It seems so far from our current collective demobilization, that it is almost impossible to imagine that, not even half a century ago, "revolution" was thought of as inevitable. The question posed at this time was not *if* a revolution would *eventually* occur; but *when* and *how* it would *inevitably* come to pass.

Today, even amongst those who continue to believe in the possibility of a socialist revolution, the longing for total revolution, which use to be the most characteristic and permanent trait of the Left, slowly dissipated. Remembering the bloodshed and chaos which often emerged in the aftermath of a governments' downfall, today's leftist intellectuals and militants entertain a sentiment of mistrust and doubtfulness in the revolutionary project. They are much like Alyocha who, in the *Karamazov Brothers*, refuses to salvage the world if it implies that an innocent child must suffer for the greater good. They cannot accept the sacrifice of innocent lives in the name of justice and equality. In their opinion, the death tolls of Russian, Cuban or Vietnamese experiments weigh heavily over the ideal of a total political revolution. In other words, the confidence that the route to socialism is a desirable journey for society is now more than ever dismissed, and marginalized.

The collapse of the Soviet Union, in 1989, seemed to prove to the world what liberal intellectuals had been preaching for two centuries: total revolution, defined as the

radical transformation of the relations of production, was bound to fail. Soviet Russia was the proof of this claim, for it was incapable of freeing the productive forces and terminating exploitation. The West could hence parade its victorious values of free markets to the world, as the only viable project for humanity. Triumphant capitalism and liberal democracy supposedly debunked the myths that had taken part in the construction of the Soviet Union.

Eric Hobsbawm, a Marxist historian, confesses that: "Those of us who believed that the October Revolution was the gate to the future of world history have been shown to be wrong." Accordingly, today "there is no part of the world that credibly represents an alternative system to capitalism," which "has once again proved that it remains the most dynamic force in world development."(Russel, 1999)

Associated with this decline of the revolutionary fervor described by Hobsbawn, is the dissolution of political utopias. It is true that the belief in the limitless perfection of humankind still pervades contemporary discourses. But this idea of progress seems evanescent, and it no longer conveys any concrete and substantial agenda. Most people continue to believe that the world is marching, and marching fast -- but they do not have a clue where to! It is not so much that the past, in the words of Tocqueville, is no longer enlightening the future, but that the future is no longer enlightening the present. It is not the point of departure that is missing; it is a vision for what is to come.

Some liberal sociologists would have us believe that we have reached "the end of history". In making such a claim, they certainly do not mean that random and significant events are no longer happening in the world, or that humankind has stopped making any

innovations; rather they put forth the idea that history cannot invent another form of society, that men and women have historically tried every single type of social organization, and that liberalism has proven to be the 'less worst' of them all. The alternative of communism had a try, and it failed. And so did fascism, corporatism, anarchism, and despotism. Fukuyama claims that 'the end of history':

> [...] is not a statement about the *is*, but about the *ought*: for a variety of *theoretical* reasons, liberal democracy and free markets constitute the best regime, or more precisely the best of the available alternative ways of organizing human societies [...] (Fukuyama, 1995; 29)

Fukuyama's discourse of the "end of history" adopts the logic at work in Hegel's philosophy. Here the socialist parenthesis proves to be the ultimate cunning of reason. According to such view, the dialectical movement animating the great philosophies of the last centuries has arrived at a standstill. At the end of the road of human progress, liberalism has apparently won: there is no desirability of an alternative to a market driven economy and to parliamentarism. According to such view, the market and democracy provide the most efficient and the most equitable regime. Or, in the words of Churchill: "the least bad way."

The end of history would coincide with the "end of ideology", a claim which was made following the Second World War by a few intellectuals, including Albert Camus. It was Daniel Bell, in 1960, however, who offered the sharpest formulation of "*the end of ideology*", in his book of the same title. As the horrors of Soviet Communism were revealed to the world, liberal capitalism appeared to be the ultimate guardian of freedom and equality. The latter, unlike communist dictatorships, seemed to provide objective and

untainted interpretations of the world: it was founded on the rationality of the real; it allowed 'real' needs to be satisfied.

Notwithstanding its apparent neutrality, however, the claim of the end of ideology is not a disinterested or objective opinion. The rough consensus on political issues in the Western world is itself an ideology; however concealed it may be under the banner of freedom and equality.

The One-Dimensional Society

Today neo-liberalism extends the arms of the so-called "invisible hand" to the global market. The legislative power of the state in domains of social rights, environmental protection, and national political economy, is virtually subsumed by international investments and world capitalist speculation (Freitag, 2005; 166). Far from being limited to the terrain of the economy, this systemic logic infiltrates all domains of society, trying to impose the law of efficiency as its universal unifying norm.

The end of ideology thesis does not correspond to the liberation of humankind; on the contrary, it corresponds to the impossibility of revolt. In other words, counter-ideologies to the dominant powers are marginalized not because people can now rule their lives according to their desires and needs but because a new form of totalitarianism reigns. In this new world order, it seems that Marcuse's one-dimensional society has been fully realized.

In *One-Dimensional Man* (1964), Marcuse describes a society that no longer pursues an alternative destiny, because it recycles the forces of change into the very system these forces aim to overthrow. Opposition is recuperated by a system that satisfies needs by dictating the needs to be satisfied. Through consumption, the reproduction of the market system is merged to the satisfaction of individual desires (created by the very system for its proliferation). A one-dimensional society materializes through a voluntary submission to the rationality of the system. Repression is thus realized immanently, rather than from the exterior, as in overtly totalitarian regimes (Rioux, 1978; 154). In this new repressive reality principle, a conformism of happiness reigns (Marcuse, 1964; 103).

As society drifts towards the currents of a techno-scientific world of systemic domination, the strategies and tactics for a radical re-orienting of society are lost. In exchange for material consumption and wealth, opposition has been silenced. Why, indeed, would revolution be desirable, if people have the possibility of consuming all that is needed to live a life of material happiness? Can the revolutionary project even be adapted to a one-dimensional society?

To continue thinking the revolutionary project is to continue to think the course of the future, and history as it is to be made. However, confronted with such discourses proclaiming that there are no alternatives to market fundamentalism, we must question the possibility of paving new avenues for our collective future. What is the possibility of revolutionary transformation in a society that does not reflexively inquire "what is to be done"?

Chapter 1: Problematic

Our current sociological investigation intends to elucidate the problem of the possibility of directing transformative political activity today. By recollecting the elements of our history which led to this impasse of revolutionary activity, characteristic of Western societies, we will situate a new horizon for revolutionary praxis. In order to achieve this goal, we will engage in a hermeneutical analysis of Cornelius Castoriadis' (1922-1997) critical sociology[1]. Our interpretative work will reveal the realm of the possible intrinsic to the work of this French (of Greek origin) political activist, revolutionary theorist, philosopher and psychoanalyst.

Re-reading the early works of Castoriadis as part of the collective *Socialisme ou Barbarie: Organe de critique et d'orientation révolutionnaire* (1949-1965)[2] we will illuminate Castoriadis' project of autonomy. This project should not be considered the panacea for a current revolutionary impasse. Rather, as will be elucidated, it is an aim to be pursued reflexively and actively by engaging with both history as we inherit it from the past, and the future, as we imagine it could be.

In this chapter, our first objective will be to position our sociological approach. Informed by the critical sociology of Marcel Rioux, we will provide a lens through which

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[1] Further detailed biographical information of Cornelius Castoriadis is provided in chapter 2.

[2] *Socialisme ou Barbarie: Organe de critique et d'orientation révolutionnaire* was a Marxist journal produced by a collective of French Leftist revolutionaries. Castoriadis was one of the founders of the group, along with Claude Lefort. A description of the journal's intellectual and revolutionary aims is provided in chapter 2.

our object is to be investigated. This foregrounding is necessary in order to understand the perspective from which our interpretative work will take place.

A review of the literature will follow, demonstrating that while Castoriadis' project of autonomy has prompted much intellectual debate, from a variety of disciplines, certain vital questions remain to be addressed. After teasing out the overlooked questions central to this investigation we will discuss our methodological approach, including our intentions as researchers. Through a hermeneutical exegesis of Castoriadis' early writings, we will bring to the forefront his critical sociological perspective. This perspective provides us with a forceful critique of, and positive direction for, contemporary society and the discipline of sociology.

1.1. A Sociology of Possible Worlds

In *Essai de sociologie critique* (1978) Rioux defines three methods by which social phenomena can be studied: *positive*, *hermeneutic*, and *critical*. These approaches follow the Frankfurt School of critical theory (particularly Jürgen Habermas). While not mutually exclusive, nor exhaustive, these three methods help reveal the major currents dominating modes of interpretation in the social sciences.

The positive current of social studies research presupposes that social facts are natural objects that can be studied using a scientific method. The French sociologist Emile Durkheim is, according to Rioux, a proponent of this sociological school (Rioux, 1978; 10). Through observation, experimentation, and simulation, positive social sciences

claim to reach an objective and neutral understanding of society: eliminating prejudice and value judgment from the analysis of facts. Since social facts determine one another, they are in this perspective considered as causes and effects, ends and means, which can be positively interpreted.

The second current of research, is the hermeneutical approach. Hermeneutics has for object the interpretation of human discourses. Originally, it aimed to reestablish the authenticity of the "word". From the platonic tradition *hermeneia* is to be understood as the art of telling the truth; that is, transmitting the will of the Gods (from Hermes the messenger of Gods to humans), as well as reading the signs of the future (Gadamer, 2006; 30). Historically, the hermeneutic was constituted from an exegesis of the Bible, searching through the different traditions, and interpretations, the truth that was corrupted across centuries of (re)reading (Rioux, 1978; 11).[3]

The third possibility of understanding human society and history, to which Castoriadis is intimately associated, is the critical method. It utilizes a value-judgment in order to, on the one hand, criticize the existing order, and on the other hand, participate in the creation of history and society. The critical method proceeds from an interest of emancipation, as Marx's scientific and political engagement forcefully exemplifies. The problem of critical sociology is to justify the values that are being promoted. Can theory establish what could or should be practiced? Or, alternately, should theory merely elucidate, support and diffuse the types of innovative and creative practices of man?

[3] However, the hermeneutical method has undergone many transformations, and can no longer be understood merely as a quest for the authentic or truthful word. Precisions on the hermeneutical mode of interpretation this research will be engaged with are provided in section 1.3.

(Rioux, 1978; 25) As we will discover, through a hermeneutical exegesis of Castoriadis' critical sociological writings, practice and theory are always mutually influencing and transforming one another.

While the positive sciences aim to *describe* what is established, instituted, and determined; and while hermeneutical sciences aim to *understand* the chains of signification in historical and social creation; the critical sciences aim to *elucidate* the advent of what is to come, and what could come into being. Critical sociology is thus founded on the presupposition of human creativity (Rioux, 1978; 15). It is for critical theory vital to detect, at any given moment, what inhibits human development towards a greater freedom. Furthermore, it intends to promote, based on the fundamental values that it defends, a direction of emancipatory activity.

> Des trois démarches, c'est elle qui est la plus périlleuse parce que, par définition même, elle sort du cercle répétitif et invariant sur lequel se fondent les sciences positives pour s'intéresser, d'autre part, à ce qui est devant l'homme, à ce qui est radicalement nouveau dans le social-historique et qui comporte destruction et création, fondées sur le caractère original de l'homme: l'imagination. (Rioux, 1978; 16-17)

Characterized by the quest for the possibilities of emancipation, critical sociology allows us to propose alternatives to the dominant "end of history" theses; against conservative discourses. Castoriadis is, in this respect, a pertinent choice for intellectuals interested in revisiting the critical school of thought. Although Rioux (1978; 165), and Howard (1977; 262) have mentioned Castoriadis as one of the prominent leaders of critical (or radical) theory (usually associated with the Frankfurt School), he has received only meager attention amongst sociologists. Such silence needs to be explained as well as corrected.

In discerning what has been investigated about the project of autonomy in Castoriadis' studies, we will be excavating the questions orienting this current research. Elucidating the project of autonomy, as conceived by Castoriadis, we will carve out possible avenues towards transformative political action found to remain in our contemporary society. Although many intellectuals have undertaken to elucidate the project of autonomy (Caumières, 2007; Poirier, 2004; David, 2000), few have revealed the heart of its relevance: the praxis of autonomy for critical sociology against the ideologies denouncing the possibility of transformative action.

1.2. Castoriadis and the Question of Autonomy: Review of the Literature

As a thinker "outside the norm", Castoriadis' singular and dense intellectual course is not sufficiently understood in sociology; despite its radiance in other disciplines, such as philosophy, history, and political science (Caumières, 2006; 2007; Poirier 2004; Grottaux, 1997; David, 2000). While many intellectuals have wrestled with Castoriadis' writings, few have illuminated its critical sociological perspective.

Dick Howard's *Marxian Legacy* (1977) remains the best introduction to the topological situation for the early writings of Castoriadis as part of the collective *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Howard places Castoriadis and Lefort, the two founders of the journal, within the tradition of the New Left. Castoriadis and Lefort are situated by Howard as *critical* inheritors of Marx: using Marx as the point of departure for a *project*

of autonomy, which was not a dogmatic theory to be concretely applied to social movements and political activity (Howard, 1977; 10).

This project of autonomy may appear to be naïve optimism. For, it does not guarantee a final result, nor does it entitle theory to prescribe concrete strategies for political activity. However, it is engaged in the social by providing a 'hermeneutical mirror' of the possible. This mirror, Howard insists, allows for an explicit unpacking of that which was otherwise accepted as determined (Howard, 1977; 9). Such an interpretation is very close to the one adopted by Gerard David, a researcher in political science, who uses Castoriadis in order to further remind us that the horizon of contemporary political societies is not closed. Excavating from *Socialisme ou Barbarie* the project of direct and radical democracy, which Castoriadis continued to pursue until the end of his life, David brings to the forefront the question of liberty. *Le Projet d'autonomie* (2007), by Philippe Caumières, also unravels this project as the focal point of Castoriadis' oeuvre; through which the apparent eclecticism of his concerns and questions can be understood as unity. Did not Castoriadis himself state that autonomy was the thread of Ariadne, running through the labyrinth of his intellectual pursuits?

> Dans mon travail, l'idée d'autonomie apparait très tôt, en fait dès le départ, et non pas comme idée 'philosophique', 'épistémologique', mais comme idée essentiellement politique. Son origine est ma préoccupation constante, avec la question révolutionanire, la question de l'autotransformation de la société. (Castoriadis, CL II, 1986; 413)

Castoriadis' quest for autonomy is intuitively present from the beginning of his intellectual course. However, as we will show, the project undergoes significant metamorphoses, in correspondence with changing social-historical realities. While it

emerged as a direct political response to an increasingly bureaucratized society, it found deeper ontological roots in the imaginary as source of human creation.

The issue of bureaucratization

It is surprising that *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and Castoriadis' early works have received scant attention in academic circles, in comparison to Castoriadis' later writings. Especially surprising since the germinal seeds of what became in *l'Institution Imaginaire de la Société* (1975), a systematic ontology of the radical imaginary, were sown in Castoriadis' militant years. Most specialists acknowledge that Castoriadis' thought cannot be fully grasped without going back to his Marxist militancy (Quiriny, 2006; Howard, 1977; David, 2000). As Howard reminds us, it was through roadblocks on a strictly materialist path that Castoriadis discovered the forgotten forces of the imaginary.

Brian Singer notes, in his article "*The early Castoriadis: Socialism, Barbarism and the Bureaucratic Thread*" (1979), that it was the discovery of bureaucracy which forced Castoriadis to think further than Marx, and gave him the tools to theorize the struggles of the late 1960's (47). In other words, it was from Castoriadis' unraveling of the thread of bureaucratization, or heteronomy, that the project of autonomy was brought to life (Singer, 1979; see also Lieblich, 1977; Grottaux, 1997; Van der Linden, 1997; Hastings-King, 1997). According to Hastings-King (1999), the attention Castoriadis devoted to bureaucratization led to a re-articulation of revolutionary theory, in correspondence with emerging historical contingencies (82). In light of a fragmenting working class struggle, this position allowed Castoriadis to pursue the development of revolutionary theory.

While the specifically political grounds of Castoriadis' project of autonomy are historically elucidated as counter-weight to an increasingly bureaucratized society, no one has retrieved the significance of these writings for the current contemporary impasse of revolutionary theory and activity. Most studies of Castoriadis' early writings confine themselves to a strict historical approach (Singer, 1979; Lieblich, 1977; Grottaux, 1997; Van der Linden, 1997; Hastings-King, 1997). The common view, as Caumières expresses, is that the relevance of the question of bureaucracy for us today is essentially *passé* (2007; 20). Even Philippe Grottaux's sociological article, "*Une revue iconoclaste dans la France de l'après-guerre*" (1997), is limited to a historical comprehension of *Socialisme ou Barbarie's* trajectory, internal conflicts and debates. In other words, these studies do not retrieve the contemporary sociological relevance of the journal.

Creativity: philosophical and political praxis

Nicolas Poirier implies, in his book *Castoriadis: L'imaginaire radical* (2004), that the political notion of autonomy cannot be fully grasped without considering its philosophical and ontological implications, which were explicitly schematized in Castoriadis' *magnum opus:* l'*Institution imaginaire de la société* (1975). Castoriadis' philosophy of the social imaginary, as Poirier elucidates, expounds an original form of being, the social-historical being, which is irreducible to the physical, the biological, or the psychical aspects of human existence. From this ontological position, Poirier reads Castoriadis' work as a philosophical reflection on the possibility and efficacy of individual and social creation.

The ontological juncture between the mode of being of the individual, society and history is, Poirier reiterates, Castoriadis' notion of the radical imaginary (Poirier, 2004; 31). The radical imaginary is the force for the creation and emergence of the new. Creation is thus at the ontological root of the political project of autonomy (Poirier, 2004; 30). Only from this ontological anchorage, Poirier maintains, is it possible to grasp the project of autonomy as an active situation rather than an end point to be achieved.

Many scholars have tackled this specific trait of autonomy as creative action, and auto-institution. For instance, Delacroix's article "*Agir, c'est créer: Penser la démocratie en compagnie de Hannah Arendt et Cornelius Castoriadis*" (2006) brings to light that the praxis of autonomy is a creative engagement in the pursuit of the project of an alternative society. The *praxis* of autonomy illuminates the concrete measures to be engaged with in order to foster the development of individual and collective autonomy.

Autonomy as a political praxis, grounded in the ontology of human creativity, committed many researchers to the influence of Greek thought in Castoriadis' work (Klimis, 2006; Gregorio; 2006). In fact, many have argued that (Klimis, 2006; David, 2000) the project of autonomy originates in the Athenian project of democracy, since for Castoriadis, the one was not possible without the other.

One cannot conceal that Castoriadis' idea of direct and radical democracy has been profoundly influenced by Greek history (Delacroix, 2006; David, 2000). Direct democracy, as a project for society, requires of individuals and collectives, the deployment of their creative potential in the global society (Delacroix, 2006; David, 2000). *Paieda*, designating socialization and education of public and community affairs,

is the most radical and fundamental institution of the project of autonomy. For Castoriadis, education must constantly foster critical reflexivity and creative activity.

The aim of the project of autonomy as the destiny of man

A note in Caumières' (2007) book struck our attention and will serve as our point of departure for this current research. Caumières is attracted to a perplexing statement made by Castoriadis: "...la visée d'autonomie c'est le destin de l'homme..." (Castoriadis, IIS, 1974; 149). For intellectuals interested in Castoriadis' oeuvre, such a declaration is indeed problematic; enough to make us willingly overlook the complex issues it arouses. In part because Castoriadis' discovery of the social-historical being, resulting from his abandonment of Marxist determinism and eschatological conception of history, appears contradictory to any relation between destiny and autonomy.

Notwithstanding his extreme reluctance to engage in any sort of secular messianism or teleological interpretation of history, Castoriadis retained a strong belief in the possibility of continuing the movement animating human history. However, one has to wonder: how did Castoriadis conceive the destiny of man in the indeterminate terrain of history? How did he conceive of destiny, without reverting to a teleology? What does his imagining of the *possibility* of autonomy reveal about the future for the present?

These questions are all the more important in a society that claims to operate according to the 'least bad alternative' —a society ready to abandon the search for new and creative modes of social expression and organization. By framing Castoriadis' early writings within the context of a society adrift in the exigencies of market

fundamentalism, which has drained the political realm of significance, we will foreground Castoriadis' relevance for sociological thought today. His intellectual course provides avenues for rethinking history and society, and the possibility of transformative political activity. All the while, maintaining an acute awareness of, and sensibility to the dangers of falling prey to the programmatic discourses which have infiltrated past revolutionary utopias.

Our approach will extract both the axis of bureaucracy as well as axis of autonomy constitutive of Castoriadis' early works, in order to elucidate the meaning of praxis as socially and historical contingent. Informed by the perspectives discussed above, we will disclose the critical sociological theory of possible worlds which was central to the revolutionary endeavors of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Thus, we will reveal that the early writings of Castoriadis are not only relevant for their historical, political or philosophical meaning, but also for their sociological perspective: informing a revolutionary praxis, whose openness is the destiny of man.

1.3. Hermeneutic

In order to unearth the foundations of Castoriadis' critical sociology, we will be engaged in a textual exegesis of Castoriadis' writings published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The hermeneutical *techné* of our exegesis involves un-concealing human discourses through the act of explicating something that was initially obscure (Freund 1978; 219). In this sense, our interpretation is not simply a methodological prescription,

like a statistical procedure, or comprehensive method of analysis (Freund 1978; 220). Even though the hermeneutic analysis is not an exact science, it nevertheless refuses to legitimize personal and arbitrary biases. As the horizons of the text are fused with that of the interpreter, the situated meaning of the object is mediated by history (Warren, 1998). Hermeneutic analyses are thus not methodologically inclined to simply reproduce the intention of the author's original production, but rather to understand the object in light of a new historical occasion. In the context of this research, it is the one-dimensional society, and the dominant ideology claiming to have reached the 'end of history', that represent the everyday boundary of our horizon of interpretation as researchers.

Our object of analysis is circumscribed to a particular timeframe, encompassing the entirety of Castoriadis' publications in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, in the post-war period. We restrict ourselves to these writings for they contain a whole new paradigm, crucial to the emerging problems confronting revolutionary activity and organization in the 1950s and 1960s. In the years following the Second World War, and beginning of the Cold War, the theory and the practice of revolution underwent significant transformations, in light of the experiences of the Russian Revolution. It marked a transitory phase, leading directly to the dissolution of revolutionary fervor and vanishing of political utopias characteristic of our contemporary society. By presenting Castoriadis as representative of this transitory epoch, much in the same way that Bahktin employs Rablelais to illuminate a past era (Bahktin, 1968) our interpretative work shall reveal Castoriadis' critical sociological method.

We will not trace in great detail the chronological unfolding of Castoriadis' ideas as they developed through his earlier political works to his later writings on the philosophy of the social imaginary. Remaining primarily within the territory of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, later texts will be used to sustain the foundational argument being made within the delimited area we have chosen for our research. The development of our corpus follows the general lines of Louis Althusser's idea of the "epistemological break". While Althusser debated a possible "break" between the "young" and the "mature" Marx, we shall emphasize a similar discontinuity between the "young" and the "mature" Castoriadis. We claim that Castoriadis' early writings mark a distinctive period of Castoriadis' intellectual trajectory: an epoch of political militancy which terminates with the cessation of the journal's publication.

Such an epistemological break is never simple and radical. It follows a process which can be long and arduous. Thus, it is inevitable that Castoriadis' turn away from militant politics, towards philosophical and psychoanalytic reflection, took many years; just as Marx's transition from ideology to science cannot be reduced to a point in time, a particular piece of writing, or a specific year.

1.4. Intentions and Objectives

Our goal is to demonstrate that for Castoriadis autonomy is not possible without revolutionary *praxis*; and that revolutionary *praxis* is not possible without the autonomous engagement of individuals in the world. This reciprocity signals that

autonomy is always haunted by its other: heteronomy. Inasmuch as the possibility of autonomy transcends historical particularities it cannot be concretely thought outside the contingencies of history. We thus argue that without the utopia of autonomy, heteronomy appears as the eternal present; the singular dimension of reality swirling infinitely into itself. It is only when both are maintained and juxtaposed that Castoriadis sees the potential inherent in the contingent: *what could be* within the specter of *what is*.

Accordingly: the question "*what is to be done*?" will guide our reading of the oeuvre. "*What is to be done?*" is not only the question of *doing*, but the more profound sociological problem of the relationship between theory and practice. It directly confronts the question of politics as a *praxis* aiming the radical transformation of society and the individual.

To the reader familiar with the history of communism, "*What is to be done?*" echoes back to Lenin's political treatise written in 1902. The title was derived from Nikolaï Tchernychevsky's novel, which had influenced many of the young Russian revolutionaries and radicals. Lenin's treatise is a strategic plan to organize all classes of the population, and not merely the workers, towards revolutionary activity. But although the historical significance of this treatise cannot be denied, we contend that *Socialisme ou Barbarie* provides new avenues for thinking "*What is to be done?*" The thematic structure of our hermeneutical analysis seeks to grasp, from the apparent (what is?), the foundations for revolutionary action and orientation in the creation of the possible (what could be?).

However, as Castoriadis came to terms with the *content* of a new social-historical context, the Marxist prescriptions for revolutionary orientation and action proved inapt. The themes forming the core of our analysis thus remain true to this primary evolution of Castoriadis' thought. Since it was by putting the method and Marxist system into practice that its problems and dead-ends became apparent, our thematic architecture reconstructs Castoriadis' trajectory. Moreover, at a theoretical level, the problems posed by the unity of method and content directly engage with the problem of praxis. It is Castoriadis' contention that, in as much as method and content are inseparable, so too are theory and activity (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 21).

1.5. Chapter division

The first chapter of our analysis (chapter 2) will provide our readers with an overview of the author's life trajectory. Given that our analysis is hermeneutical, and thus primordially based on Castoriadis' thought, to understand the author's own experiences will give us a taste of the historical period in response to which his ideas were first meaningfully elaborated. Moreover, since we have circumscribed our object of analysis to the early works of Castoriadis, we will in this chapter, introduce the collective of the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, their shared intellectual and revolutionary projects.

Once these building blocks have been positioned, chapter three will be dedicated to the general social-historical context which Castoriadis reflected upon. Castoriadis' early writings in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* transpire in the spirit of the epoch. The rise of

Stalinism in the after-war period posses an essential conundrum for Castoriadis and leftist Marxists: what was the significance of the degeneration of Soviet socialism? Before this question can be answered, however, it must be historically situated. Did not Marx's theory of capitalism, as riddled by crisis and contradictions, predict the inescapable advent of socialism? After a synopsis of historical materialism, we will aim to comprehend its legacy: that is, how it was put into practice in Russia, creating the first nominally socialist state. The two first parts of this section thus establish the historical origin of socialism in theory and in practice. This will be essential to understand the specifics traits of Lenin's views on revolutionary organization and processes, which were, for the collective, a point of departure in understanding the degenerative process of the revolutionary project.

Chapter four will begin the crux of our analysis. Intending to understand the degenerative process of the Russian revolution, Castoriadis applied a Marxist method of analysis to the modes of production in Russia. Revealing an actual bureaucratic form of capitalism concealed under the juridical veil of socialism, Castoriadis concluded that the class dynamics no longer followed the traditional Marxist scheme of property ownership. Castoriadis' critique of Trotskyism will here be specified. As the bureaucratic trend identified by Castoriadis was demystified, so too are the new modes of exploitation and alienation it created. The political organizations initially created with the intent of leading the worker's towards revolution became autonomous ruling entities. The workers, subject to new forces of power and rule, needed new strategies in their struggle against capitalism, for capitalism was itself adapting to the demands of the workers without transforming the inherent structure from which its contradictions emerged.

Chapter five will undertake to uncover, with Castoriadis, the possible tactics for future action, based on the lessons of failed revolutions and revolts. This section will analyze the content of socialism, as Castoriadis conceived it could be. The project of autonomy, as autonomous management of production, will here be elevated as the one vibrant rival to bureaucratic capitalism. Beyond the explicit content of the possible society of the future, Castoriadis' ideal society elucidates the necessity of thinking other possibilities. This necessity is contingent on the fact that there is no essential teleological determination of being or society. Castoriadis' ideal project for society, while founded in the historical conditions of possibility and the positive elucidation of the class struggle, directly led Castoriadis to a critique of history and society understood in traditional deterministic frameworks.

The separation between the world (chapter four) and ideas (chapter five), will be bridged by the question of doing. Tackling the question "*What is to be done?*", chapter six will weave together the threads from both the negative and the positive elucidation of the class struggle. How is revolutionary praxis to materialize the ideal of autonomy? How can what could/should be, be brought to actualization? From the ontological problems revealed by Castoriadis' direct engagement with the Marxist method, he was forced to re-think history and society, so that doing may be revived as a significant politic of transformative action. Castoriadis' project of a political praxis of autonomy flourished in light of his criticism of Marxism and a new social-historical context. As the reminiscent anticipation for inevitable world socialism dissolved, Castoriadis was propelled to create new meanings and orientations for society and history.

In conclusion, we will undertake to understand the aim of the project of autonomy as the "destiny of man". Destiny is here obviously not to be thought of as a pre-destination, a determinate finality to which we are inevitably bound. Re-defining destiny as immanent to the continuous confrontation of heteronomy and autonomy, man is destined to the striving after autonomy, in a world that will always present itself as heteronomous. The instituted social imaginary significations which we inherit from history have nothing of an inherent necessity. Since human creation is for Castoriadis an ontological presupposition, a praxis aiming the project of autonomy is a necessity. The destiny of man is found in this inter-play between the inherited and the creating, which finds no final resolution, but rather continuous confrontation.

Chapter 2: The Revolutionary Project: Contextualization

> What is a rebel? A man who says no, but whose refusal does not imply renunciation. He is also a man who says yes, from the moment he makes his first gesture of rebellion.
>
> -- Camus, Albert (1951). *The Rebel.* London, Penguin. Pp.13

2.1. Cornelius Castoriadis: A short biography

Born in Constantinople, Castoriadis grew up in Athens, and studied law, economics and philosophy at the University of Athens. As member of the Greek Communist organization during the dictatorship of the Metaxas, Castoriadis was strongly engaged in risky oppositional politics. After the start of the Second World War, and the German occupation of Greece, the Communist party allied to the bourgeois resistance.

The opportunism and nationalism of the Stalinist Communist party led Castoriadis to join the left-wing Trotskyist faction, directed by Spires Stinas. The Trotskyist faction was the only revolutionary opposition to Stalinism and the Soviet orthodoxy legitimating Stalinist politics (David, 2000; 20). For Castoriadis, this association meant another unsafe political alliance: the Troskyist's were not only persecuted by the Nazis during German occupation, but also by Stalin following the 'liberation' of Greece in 1944 (Van der Linden, 1997). Castoriadis continued to participate in the Trotskyist faction in Greece until he fled to France in 1945. Upon his arrival, he allied himself with the Parti

Communiste International (PCI), the French section of the Fourth International.[4] But the political and theoretical questions emerging from his experience of the situation in Greece led him to put into question fundamental Trotskyist conceptions (David, 2000; 20). It became pressing for Castoriadis to redefine socialism in light of Stalinism and the central theoretical and practical ideas of revolution (Van Der Linden, 1977).

Trotskyists claimed that Stalinism was an unstable government that should be defended against capitalism, and reformed from within (Castoriadis, 1975; 133). Trotskyists' reformism clearly perceived the bureaucratic apparatus of the Stalinist dictatorship; however it legitimized its presence in defense of the soviet state. From Castoriadis' experience of the sudden installation of dictatorship in Greece, it was clear to him that this Trotskyist "tactic" was "absurd". Once Stalin was in power, revolutionaries were executed and dissident voices silenced. Under such conditions of oppression and terror, counter-revolution or reform could not be considered a viable possibility. The traumatic experience of the massive "mopping-up" operations carried out by Stalinists against the followers of the Trotskyist faction convinced Castoriadis that reform could not be achieved from within the existing system (Grottaux, 1997).

For Castoriadis the idea that Stalinism was a "degenerated workers state", in which reform was possible, could not be sustained. Stalin's Russia needed to be

[4] The First International was formed by Karl Marx in 1847, under the name of the Communist League. The *Communist Manifesto* was written as a program for the Communist League, calling upon workers of all countries to unite in the struggle against capitalism. The Second International, created after the death of Marx, in 1889, was led by Karl Kautsky, in Germany. It was the Second International, which, on the eve of the First World War, turned against the proletarian movement in favour of the imperialist war. The third International, known as the Communist International, led by Lenin, was a direct response to the opportunism which had infiltrated the Second International (Foster, 1955). The Fourth (and final) International, was the oeuvre of Trotsky in the 1930's. It was created as a direct opposition to Stalin's theory of socialism in one country, which we will elucidate in the following chapter.

understood as a new social-historical formation: it was neither socialism nor capitalism. Only by unveiling the forces maintaining the proletariat under the grand illusion of socialism, would it be possible to effectively struggle against Stalinist bureaucracy.

With this view, Castoriadis fomented trouble in the PCI. He received support from another member, Claude Lefort. Together, they became known as the "Chaulieu-Montal" tendency (pseudonyms for Castoriadis and Lefort). In the Trotskyist led Fourth International, they wrote numerous articles in an attempt to disseminate their analysis of Stalinism, and the problems with defending the idea of a "degenerated worker's state". They condemned not only the un-democratic nature of the state, but also the bureaucracy as a social class in its own right, guarding its corporatist interests at the expense of the proletariat.

Castoriadis and Lefort remained a minority amongst the Trotskyists for four years. They eventually left the PCI, accompanied by other members who endorsed their conclusions. Their departure marked the beginning of a new and original project.

The first issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie: Organe de Critique et d'orientation Révolutionnaire* was printed in March 1949. The journal was, amongst other things, designed as a medium for the circulation of their critique of the Fourth International (Van Der Linden, 1977). Lefort and Castoriadis were its founding members. Castoriadis was considered to be the *spiritus rector* of the group (Gabler, 2001; 350).

During his involvement in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Castoriadis wrote under a variety of pseudonyms[5] not only because of his dissident political views, but also because he did not enjoy French citizenship until 1970. Since Castoriadis had a cover for clandestine political militancy (Poirier 2004; 75), there is no author signing as Cornelius Castoriadis until the publication of "*L'Inconscient*", in 1968 (Poirier, 2004; 8).

With an official position from 1948 until 1970 as Director of Statistics, National Accounts, and Growth Studies, at the OECD (Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development), Castoriadis' ideas are recognized for having influenced, amongst other things, the student rebellion of May 1968 in France. This event marked a turning point in Castoriadis' approach. From 1968 until his death in 1997, Castoriadis developed a theoretical perspective that retreated from the direct engagement in revolutionary activity, which had until then been so prominent. He became a practicing psychoanalyst in 1974, and in 1979, was elected Director of Studies at Paris's *École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales*.[6] It can thus be said that the oeuvre of Castoriadis contains two more or less distinct phases, the militant-political and the philosophical-psychoanalytic (Poirier, 2004; Gezerlis, 2000; Quiriny, 2004). In this research we will be concerned, as mentioned, primarily with the first.

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[5] Castoriadis' pseudonyms are: Paul Cardan, Pierre Chaulieu, Jean-Marc Coudray, Jean Delvaux, and Marc Noiraud (Cornelius Castoriadis Agora International Website (2007) available at: http://www.agorainternational.org/).

[6] Castoriadis became a practicing psychoanalyst after undergoing a thorough critique of Lacanian psychoanalytic circles in France. For Castoriadis, psychoanalysis was, like pedagogy and politics, a path by which autonomy could be sought. (Cornelius Castoriadis Agora International Website (2007) available at: http://www.agorainternational.org/)

2.2. The Journal

> La barbarie moderne serait la période historique d'où la possibilité de la révolution communiste serait absente.
>
> -- Socialisme ou Barbarie (1949) *Socialisme ou Barbarie: Organe de critique et d'orientation révolutionnaire*, vol.2; 26

Socialisme ou Barbarie was not only a journal. It was more importantly a political group of the radical left: directly engaged in the political *milieu*, and the creation of a new revolutionary organization.

In contrast to pure intellectualism, the aspirations of the group were both theoretical and militant. While intellectualism is content to produce abstract enunciations, the *socio-barbares*[7], directly introduced these enunciations into the political milieu through concrete activity (Grottaux, 1997). The journal was the medium by which the diffusion of ideas for the orientation of revolutionary activity became possible. This was considered by the group one of the most important activities for an organ of critique.

The journal was published from 1949 until 1965. Its title – *Socialisme ou Barbarie?* – was derived from a dilemma posed by Trotsky (following Lenin and Marx) recognizing that socialism was neither fatal, nor ineluctable, but rather possible (Castoriadis, SB1, 1973; 75). The *socio-barbares*, in 1949, could not perceive the

[7] This substantive nomen was periodically used by the group (Grottaux, 1997), and will here be used as reference to the collective.

conflict and the rising tension between communism and capitalism to be resolved under any other condition than a third world war or revolution. Either the victorious system would accelerate the march of modern society towards barbarism, or the intervention of the exploited masses would prevent this scenario through a revolution permitting the reconstruction of a society of free men, autonomously in charge of their own destiny (S ou B no.1, 1949; 22). The pressure of organizing revolutionary activity was a matter of directing society towards the most desirable future.

Stephen Hasting King names the collective "...one of the most important and influential Marxist groups to emerge since World War II." (Stephen-Hasting King, 1999; 1) However, the forty issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* long remained unnoticed by the larger public, and gained most of its attention after its cessation. Advocating revolutionary Marxism against the communist *doxa* dominating the post-war period, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was naturally marginalized. The relatively limited circulation of the journal knew its darkest period in the years 1950-51, when it sold only forty to fifty copies.

A break-through was experienced in the mid 1950's which coincided with the great proletarian uprisings against existing socialism in East Germany and Hungary, in 1953 and 1956 respectively. The journal received growing attention as the ideas proposed were being actualized in practice. It began selling between three hundred and six hundred exemplars –depending on the volumes and the themes discussed (Grottaux, 1997). Three years after the cessation of *Socialisme ou Barbarie's* publication, it remained a hot selling

item with the eruption of the student revolt of May 1968. It seemed that history had confirmed some of the most heretical ideas brought forth in the journal.

The collective asserted the possibility for revolutionary action outside the factory. Councilling action wherever a contradiction between management and labor (such as within the university, or the family) arose, the journal salvaged a new orientation for revolutionary potential in modern societies (Van der Linden 1997). Numerous articles were published in 1960 on the transformations of institutions such as the family, education, and gender. In so doing the journal contributed to the emergence of the New Left in France (Hastings-King, 1999; 2).

The journal did not occur like most intellectual journals of the time, such as *Les Temps Moderns*, and *Argument*. In these latter journals, personalized texts, divergent and sometimes even contradictory ideas, were published in the same issue. In contradistinction, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was constantly preoccupied with the collective elaboration of ideas and the unified orientation of articles. The articles published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* were thus the fruit of long processes of deliberation, stemming from the editors' oral expositions. Hence, within each publication a coherent image of the collective and their views was produced.

In retrospect, not all members of the group necessarily shared this organizational and programmatic conception of the journal. The tension between the members leaning towards a more open diffusion of ideas, such as Claude Lefort, eventually led to the split of the *socio-barbares* in 1958 (Grottaux, 1997). But while the collective could occasionally entail limits to expressions of individual sensitivity, it correspondingly

enriched individual experiences. For instance, Daniel Mothé (a militant worker encouraged to share his experiences of the factory in the pages of the journal), stated that *Socialisme ou Barbarie* became for him a university (Grottaux, 1997).

In 1964 Castoriadis claimed that "Partis du marxisme révolutionnaire [...] nous sommes arrivés au point ou il fallait choisir entre rester marxistes et rester révolutionnaires." (Cardan, no.38, 1964; 21). This rupture from Marxism scandalized the committed Marxist members of the group, such as Lyotard, Maille, Guillaume and Souyri (Grottaux, 1997; 17). Castoriadis' propositions became, at this point, more philosophical and abstract, and thus less and less collectively elaborated (Castoriadis, 1975; 142). The tension between orthodox Marxists and Castoriadis' "abandoned" Marxism was insoluble, leading to another breach in June 1963 (Castoriadis, 1975; 141). After this split, only six issues of the journal were published. The group nevertheless continued to work together until spring of 1967, when it declared its auto-dissolution (Blanchard, 2007; 13).

Ironically, it was at this point that *Socialisme ou Barbarie* garnered its largest audience. This audience was, however, largely passive; the collective organ for revolutionary activity was merely being consumed intellectually. It became clear to Castoriadis that the journal had lost its meaning, and needed to be suspended (Castoriadis 1975; 142).

2.3. An intellectual and revolutionary project

Essential to the *socio-barbares* was the comprehension of the modern conditions of praxis. The fundamental conundrum was to understand why social movements had fallen prey to massive bureaucratization (Van der Linden, 1997). Continuing the Marxist project, without preaching the Marxist ideology, the group was driven by the Leninist maxim that "[...] sans développement de la théorie révolutionnaire; pas de développement de l'action révolutionnaire [...]" (S ou B, vol.1, 1949; 3). From the initial conception of the journal, it was clear to the *socio-barbares*, that revolutionary theory was only valuable if it continually enriched itself from the experiences of past revolutionary movements. It must also employ the achievements of scientific thought. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* thus aimed at rejuvenating, and further developing the theory of revolutionary praxis to answer the conditions of a new social-historical context.

Barbarism, for the *socio-barbares*, signified a state of totalitarianism, in which the possibility of an alternative could no longer spring from the inherent contradictions of the system, whether socialism, as it was deployed in the USSR, or capitalism. It was amongst the most radical ideas of the *socio-barbares* that these two systems, in fact, had profound similarities: they were different forms of the same trend towards bureaucratization that plagued worker's organizations (Castoriadis, MRCM, 1979; 193). However, the *socio-barbares* promoted that the emergence of an alternative was still possible. Socialism, as

re-defined by returning to Marxist fundamentals, was necessary to comprehend the unexpected twists and turns of history.[8]

In order to achieve this potential alternative, *Socialisme ou Barbarie,* (subtitled *Organe de critique et d'orientation révolutionnaire*) initially took the position of orienting the workers towards revolutionary activity (Poirier, 2004; 36). In this sense, the group's purpose, through the journal, was to educate the revolutionary masses. This did not mean feeding the masses with a ready made program of step by step procedures by which an ideal world of socialism could be constructed. The *socio-barbares* aimed to develop the *understanding* of alienation under bureaucratic capitalism, in order to direct *action* towards new and different fields of emancipation and freedom. The question of organization, direction, and orientation for this action was thus the subject of intense debate amongst the *socio-barbares*.

In the first issue of the journal, the group introduces its project of organization as representing:

> [...] la direction idéologique et politique de la classe dans les conditions du régime d'exploitation, mais une direction qui prépare sa propre suppression par sa fusion avec les organismes autonomes de la classe dès que l'entrée de la classe dans la lutte révolutionnaire fait apparaître sur la

[8] Today we know that the events anticipated by the *socio-barbares*, of war or revolution, never materialized. However, that they were in error is hardly informative. The reasons why these misleading theses were produced are of much greater importance. Castoriadis, in his introduction to "La société bureaucratic 1" (1973), which is an amalgamation of texts from *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, identifies these reasons to be twofold: 1) an over estimation of the interdependence of the directing classes in both imperial blocs; and 2) an adhesion to Marxist economic theory, claiming the inevitability of the crisis of overproduction and the impossibility of the system to attain equilibrium. (Castoriadis, SB1, 1973; 25) However, as we will see, before the cessation of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Castoriadis' understanding of the social-historical context will lead to a complete reconsideration of the foundations for what were in the beginning accepted, "inherited ideas" of the inevitability of war or revolution.

> scène historique la véritable direction de l'humanité, qui est cet ensemble de la classe prolétarienne elle-même. (Blanchard, 2007; 197)

Autonomous organization of production and action became their radical vision of socialism, in light of the experience of Stalinism; it was the only viable and universal revolutionary project. *Socialisme ou Barbarie's* negative critique of bureaucratic capitalism was followed by a positive and optimistic engagement in the present, for the future.

Chapter 3: What is socialism?

Socialisme ou Barbarie cannot be fully understood without being located in the tradition from which it emerged, and to which it reacted. The social-historical context will set the tone for a more nuanced comprehension of Castoriadis' demystification and critique of bureaucratic capitalism (chapter four), as well as his advocacy for autonomy as councils of self-management (chapter five).

Castoriadis' political and historical critique of Stalinism emerged from his growing interest in understanding the nature of the degeneration of the October Revolution of 1917 (David, 2000; 22). We will thus provide the reader with an overview of the history of the Russian socialist experiment, including highlights of the international situation occurring simultaneously. *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, born in a century swept by war and revolution, cannot be embraced without a close inspection of these events and their theoretical inspirations.

The Soviet ideology was inspired by the oeuvre of Karl Marx (1818-1895). Marxism refers to the legacy of Marx, as it was interpreted by his heirs. It is thus our contention that socialism in practice cannot be understood without first and foremost delving into its theoretical inception by Marx.

Socialism, for Marx, was to replace the current capitalist organization of the world. Through an in-depth analysis of capitalism, Marx perceived an irreconcilable

contradiction that was to lead to the downfall of capitalism and replacement by a higher order of social organization: communism. Socialism was to be the transitory state on the road to communism.

Our investigation will proceed by engaging with Marx's theory of historical materialism. We will then illuminate the inheritors of Marx, who materialized the first socialist revolution in Russia. Both of these understandings are foundations for comprehending not only Castoriadis' critical view of existing socialism and the ideologies of mystification that became Marxism, but also the positive lessons that were to contribute to the continuation of the class struggle towards revolutionary activity.

3.1. Historical materialism and the advent of socialism

Marx introduced a philosophy of praxis, in which theory and the world were dynamically inter-related, constantly informing and transforming one another (Cardan, no.35, 1964; 4). However, for Marx (as direct response to, and critic of, Hegelian idealism) human's sensuous relationship to the world is the founding principle of ideas and knowledge (Marx, 1978; 92,114,115,124)

The materialist method revealed that in order to exist collectively, biological needs must first be satisfied. Feuerbach, who preceded Marx, had already made use of the materialist method, stating that religious ideas were derived from material conditions. For Marx, however, the social dimension of Feuerbach's abstract and isolated individual could not explain how and why religious ideas originated. It was the historical dimension

of societies, and their development through the material production of reality, which explained the development of ideas and knowledge.

Marx's doctrine of historical materialism stated that: "No production possible without an instrument of production, even if this instrument is only the hand." (Marx, 1978; 224) The mode by which a society *produces* its means of subsistence thus determines the organizational basis of that society. Different modes of production have developed different social organizations across epochs. Although it is not necessary, for our purposes, to expand on the development of the modes of production in history, from slave, to feudal, to capitalist societies, we must understand the emergence of capitalism. The modes of production visible in contemporary capitalist society are indeed the basis of Marx's analysis, and here of utmost relevance to us.

Marx understood the development of society and history dialectically, as being the oeuvre of the class struggle. This dialectical process, by which the attainment of a higher state of social order could be achieved, was inherent to the fabric of societal organization. In capitalist society the dialectic was contained in the class division. There were, for Marx, only two remaining sources of historical power: the proletariat and the bourgeoisie (Marx, 1978; 473).[9]

[9] The proletariat and the bourgeoisie emerge as antagonisms in the capitalist order through primitive accumulation. "Primitive accumulation plays in the political economy about the same part as original sin in theology." (Marx, 1978; 431). Primitive accumulation refers to the nascent stage of capitalism, as it emerged from the ashes of feudalism (Marx, 1978; 432). It was achieved by transforming serfs and slaves into wage laborers.

With the advent of capitalism, private property was no longer based on the labor of its owner. The traditional peasant no longer cultivated his land for subsistence, for capitalism dissolved man's direct relation to the earth. Land, soil, raw materials, instruments, and money were divorced from the mass of individuals; introducing capital in what originally constituted a unique and organic cycle between man and earth (Marx, 1978; 268). The private ownership of the means of production changed the objective

While the bourgeoisie is the class of modern Capitalists, who own the means of social production and employ wage-laborers; the proletariat are wage-laborers, who, being deprived of control of the means of production, must sell their labor power to the bourgeoisie in order to live. These two classes, who, according to Marx, were fated to develop increasing hostility towards one another, emerged from the social transformations brought forth by the industrial revolution. The industrial revolution opened avenues for the creation of modern industry, cities, the world market, and the development of technology, such as railroads. The bourgeoisie, which had been an oppressed class under the sway of feudal nobility, played a historical role in bringing feudalism to its end. Historically, the bourgeoisie was considered by Marx to have played a revolutionary part (Marx, 1978; 473). Replacing the feudal and absolute monarchy with the modern representative state, the bourgeoisie became the representative of common affairs, and executive of the state. According to Marx the primary, unconscionable freedom proclaimed by the bourgeoisie was that of Free Trade (Marx, 1978; 475).

However, the bourgeoisie could not have developed without the simultaneous and proportional development of the proletariat: the industrial working class. The proletariat was mostly constituted by the shopkeepers, the handicraftsmen, and the trades people (the lower strata of the middle class) of the old feudal order. The reasons for this recruitment from all classes of the population to form the proletariat are twofold. For one, the lower middle classes could not compete with large scale, modern industry. In addition, specialized skills lost value to the new modes of production that were being

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conditions of labor. To actualize his/her life, the non-proprietor would have to detour through the economy, and sell labor in exchange for means of subsistence.

developed. The proletariat thus changed in number and strength according to the demands of modern industry.

Since Marx's theory of historical materialism stated that capitalist development tended towards crisis, Marx could deduce, from the logic of the concentration of capital, the point at which capitalism would reach its irresolvable contradiction, and implode. Capitalism, for Marx, represented only a transitory stage in the history of rationality (Chaulieu, no.12, 1952; 2). In *Das Kapital,* Marx deduced from the laws of capital, the inevitability of capitalism's final dissolution, and subsequent rise of a new world order.

The logic of the concentration of capital presupposes that the capitalist produces not for the sake of production (as Ricardo would claim), but in order to accumulate capital. To fulfill this task, the reduction of workers and their wages was necessary. However, reducing the wages of the workers simultaneously reduces the purchasing power of the mass of society (Marx, 1978; 285). If capitalists cannot sell their products, then the entire process of capital circulation comes to a halt. From the capitalist's greedy and insatiable desire to relentlessly accumulate, capitalist exploitation would be maximized. However, it was the pressure of limitless exploitation which would ultimately result in the revolt of the masses, and the proletarian revolution.

Thus, from the contradictions inherent to the capitalist system, a higher order of social organization was bound to emerge. Just as capital and the proletariat emerged from primitive accumulation, so communism was to emerge from the concentration of capital. Although communism was conceived as the pinnacle of human achievement, "the end of

history", it did not emerge directly from capitalism. There was a necessary intermediary stage of socialism.

For Marx, the socialist revolution could only occur once two conditions were fulfilled: the universalization of the proletariat; and the development of technology. The proletariat class extended beyond the national boundaries, for Marx, and had to be united in a common front against capitalist exploitation. "The Communists are further reproached with desiring to abolish countries and nationality. [...] The working men have no country." (Marx, 1978; 488) The socialist revolution was to be a global revolution. Indeed, the *Communist Manifesto* (1848) called to the proletariat of the world for unity in the common struggle against the bourgeoisie. "The proletarians have nothing to loose but their chains. They have a world to win." (Marx, 1978; 500) The different phases through which the proletariat would have to pass, in order to loose their chains, will be further exemplified in section 3.2.

The permanent expansion of production through techniques was a crucial step in the advent of socialism (Castoriadis, MRCM, 1979; 75). There could be no socialism, or classless society, without first acquiring the capacity of production necessary for labor to become leisure. Since accumulation aimed to reify man, and reduce him to a simple cog in a machine, the point of tension between the technical progress of society and man's freedom was inherent to the system of capitalism itself. The road towards progress was premised on the science of wealth that the political economy was to produce.

The augmentation of exploitation and alienation was for Marx directly related to technical progress. "With the *increasing value* of the world of things proceeds in direct

proportion the *devaluation* of the world of men." (Marx, 1979; 71) Labor, while producing itself as a commodity, was alienated from the commodity of its production. The producer did not have power over the product; the product of labor had an independent power, exercising power over the worker. "Everything which the political economist takes from you in life and in humanity, he replaces for you in *money* and *wealth*." (Marx, 1978; 96) This had profound consequences on structure and nature of social relations: man became alienated from nature; from the fruit of his labor; from man; and from himself. Thus, only through the abolishment of private property, and the collectivization of the means of production currently in the hands of the bourgeoisie, could the proletariat hope to overcome alienation.

3.2. The Socialist Experiment

As Marx sketched the outline of the future, his inheritors began hammering the prognosis into reality. Only a few decades after the death of Marx, the Russian intellectuals provoked a putsch and materialized the historical fate of socialism. The Russian revolution was recognized as a world shaking event (Hobsbawm, 1995; 66). It was to the twentieth century, what the French revolution of 1871 was to the nineteenth century.[10]

[10] Both the French and the Russian revolutions could not have occurred without the violent eruption of the populace. It was the "bottom up terror" which gave way to a government under the spell of passions, with a desire for justice, vengeance and redistribution. The Russian revolution however, would not give birth to popular sovereignty, but rather a warped dictatorship of the proletariat (Mascotto, 2003; 202). For more on the comparison of the two revolutions, see Arno J. Mayer, "*The Furies. Violence and Terror in the French and Russian Revolutions*", Princeton University Press, 2000.

The October Revolution, although circumscribed to a specific territorial milieu, shook the world with both hope and fear. For communists worldwide, the revolution was to be the long awaited signal of world transformation: the advent of socialism, and the consequential downfall of capitalism. But, contrary to Marx's prophecy, Vladimir Lenin (1870-1924) led the revolution to victory in a country where capitalism had not yet fully developed. This marks an emergence of new elements in the original scheme of historical development unconcealed by Marx. For Marx the development of capitalism was an essential step in the construction of socialism: just as socialism was an essential step in the construction of communism.

The October Revolution occurred in a country where capitalism was still only in embryonic formation, and thus the population largely consisted of peasants. The proletariat at the time compromised only 7 to 8 percent of the population (Trotsky, PR 1965; 62). The consequences of this situation cannot be overlooked. Too weak and too isolated the proletariat had no choice but to hand over victory to the Bolshevik party. The party took the revolution – so to speak – into its own hands. The organization of the masses towards socialism in a "backward" country became the oeuvre of Lenin.

The revolution occurred in two waves: in March 1917, the Tsarist Regime was replaced by a provisionary democratic government; in November 1917, the Bolshevik's seized power.[11] However, the seeds of the revolution that shook the Tsarist Regime had been sown long before 1917, during the Russio-Japanese war of 1905-1906. As the Tsar Nicholas II fought against Japan for a feeble piece of China a spontaneous strike

[11] The famous October Revolution actually took place on November 5th, 1917, for Russia was still functioning according to the Gregorian calendar at the time.

movement emerged. This spontaneous insurrection was not organized by the Russian Social-Democratic Labor party. It was the generalized poverty, in which the Tsar had immersed his country, which united the workers of industries, peasants, women, and students, to act collectively for basic life necessities.

Peaceful demonstrations were crushed by the Tsar in hopes to freeze the mass uprisings with terror. The "*Bloody Sunday*" massacre in St. Petersburg on January 9, 1905 was Lenin's confirmation that armed insurrection would be necessary for the revolutionary putsch. These revolutionary lines became part of the Bolshevik program, which developed during this experience of massacre, mass strikes and demonstrations (Foster, 1955; 196). The defeat was taken by the socialists as training for the inevitable, prognosticated world revolution to occur.[12] Although scattered strikes continued until 1907, the crest of the revolution had passed, and dissident voices silenced by Tsarist political strategy.

Lenin further devised his strategy from the major lesson drawn from the Commune, as elucidated by Marx. The insistence was on organization and direction of the Communists down the long and arduous road to socialism (Foster, 1955; 98). The spontaneous elements of revolt experienced in the 1870s, not only in France, but also in Russia, were to Lenin the embryonic form of proletarian consciousness (Lenin, 1902). A revolt of the masses, without foresight into the stratagems against opposing forces, was to be recuperated by the system of the bourgeoisie. Only with the organization and the

[12] It must be remembered that the socialist revolution was not a mere probability in the mind of its intellectual leaders, but a necessity, founded on the scientific laws of history. Karl Marx and Friedrich Engels claimed to have discovered the scientific basis of the socialist movement, and cleared it of all its utopianism, idealism, and eclecticism (Foster, 1955; 27). "Just as Darwin discovered the law of evolution in organic nature, so Marx discovered the law of evolution in human history." (Engels in Foster, 1955; 27)

direction of the party, could the revolutionary proletariat overcome the reformist policies of the bourgeoisie (Lenin, 1902). Lenin's conception of the party was a direct refusal of the traditional methods of opposition experienced in the Paris Commune: spontaneous insurrection, without organization, or pre-established strategies of attack.

The party, as the vanguard of revolutionary forces was to organize and gather the entirety of the population, the peasants as well as the workers and the youth, under a veritable Marxist offensive against the government. The dictatorship of the proletariat corresponded to a historical phase, where the proletariat was to use the existing state apparatus and power dictatorially, as means to transform society. The initial logic of the dictatorship of the proletariat was based on the necessity of abolishing class domination (private property) by instituting a dictatorial constitutional legality to exclude from the law those parties who supported the restoration of private property (Chaulieu, no.10, 1952; 7). Marx's idea of the dictatorship of the proletariat, which was elaborated in the Communist Manifesto, demonstrated that the socialist revolution needed to destroy the state apparatus, to create a power that was no longer the State in the traditional sense of the term.

> Le grand enseignement de la Commune, tel que Marx l'a formulé dès le lendemain de sa défaite, a été que le prolétariat lors de sa révolution ne peut pas utiliser pour ses fins la machine de l'État existante, qu'il doit la briser et la remplacer, dans la mesure ou un "État" reste nécessaire, par son propre "État", qui n'en est déjà plus un dans la mesure où il n'est rien d'autre que l'organisation des masses armées. (Chaulieu, no.21, 1957; 14)

The Bolsheviks (from *bolshoi*, meaning 'large') wanted to limit accessibility of their group to activists accepting the program of the party. Only those working under the instance of direction could be a party member. For Lenin, circumscribing the access to

the party guaranteed that it would not deviate from its original goals. On the other hand, the Mensheviks encouraged a broad, amorphous organization. They acquired large support from Kautsky and Zetkin of the German party, the most influential of the Second International (Foster, 1955; 188). The Second International, which had begun in 1889 as a Marxist organization, substituted the socialist revolution for bourgeois reformism (Foster, 1955; 236). The collapse of the Second International in 1916 came as a signal for Lenin to organize a Third International, based on a revival of the revolutionary Marxism of the First International. The Third International later became known as the Communist International (CI). It was under this banner that the Socialists marched into power in Russia.

The motor of the Socialist Revolution in Russia was the Great War, which began in 1914 and ended in 1918. Although the Tsar had welcomed the alliance with France and Britain against Germany, Austria-Hungry, Turkey and Bulgaria as a preventive measure against uprisings, the incompetent political and military leadership, weighed against the march of the Bolshevik, produced contrary expectations (Foster, 1955; 252). Lenin seized the opportunity given by this alliance to denounce the imperialist nature of the war, in defense of the international proletariat. For Lenin, following Marx, the *'workers have no fatherland'*; the impetus of the war was thus to be steered towards the destruction of capitalism and the instauration of socialism.

The revolution of October occurred rather smoothly; the terrain had been well prepared by the fall of the Tsarist Regime (March) and the rise to power of a social-democrat government. This period is characterized by heavy turmoil. The country was

plunged into chaos (Koenen, 1998; 45). The provisionary democratic government, which held power for eight months, was too loose to maintain order in Russia. Bolshevism, on the other hand, held the image of decisive leadership, capable of restraining the Russian world from a plunge into complete anarchy. Lenin merely seized the moment, and provoked the putsch in October 1917. Apart from sporadic skirmish, the October revolution occurred rather like a changing of the guards (Koenen, 1998; 58). For Lenin, taking power was a relatively easy task; holding on to it, however, constituted the real challenge (Hobsbawm, 1995; 63).

As the dictatorship of the proletariat was inaugurated, the new Bolshevik state immediately entered a state of 'War Communism'. The aim was to fight counter-revolutionaries, foreign intervention, and the civil war. The pre-revolutionary attitudes of democracy, free speech, and civil liberties became secondary: the primary objective of the Bolshevik was to maintain the fragile soviet power against representatives of private property and the state (Hobsbawm, 1995; 387). War Communism was a *carte blanche* against all suspected forms of counter-revolutionaries. A secret police, the "*WeTscheKa*", was founded in December 1917, and the "red terror" began. Marxism and the vocabulary of the political economy quickly transformed into a near theological propaganda, as the list of enemies of the people grew to boundless proportions. One of the most popular placards of the Bolshevik depicts Lenin with a broom, sweeping the crowned heads, and the clergy from the world, with a message stating "*Comrade Lenin cleansing the world from all evil spirits*" (Koenen, 1998; 63).

By 1921, all socio-economic relations in Russia had been dissolved: generalized famine imposed the need for a new political strategy. The famine, in 1921 produced almost five million deaths; notwithstanding the five and a half million orphans and children; and the level of production declined to one eighth its pre-revolutionary state (Mascotto, 2003; 178). After the uprising of Kronstadt[13], Lenin replaced war communism for the *Novaia Ekonomistitcheskaia Politika* (NEP), the new political economy (1921-1928), which was a policy aiming to repair a devastated social fabric. This began the "*époque heureuse*" in the history of the USSR. This included the promotion of commerce and relations between merchants; the introduction of money wages; the allocation of nationalized enterprises to cooperatives and particulars, the compromising with capitalist neighbors for commercial exchange (Mascotto, 2003; 184). A period of "state capitalism" thus ameliorated the standard of living in Russia (compared to the famine of 1921-22). This occurred during the Great Depression of the western world. The USSR thus portrayed to the world an image of strength, growth, and stability.

Under state capitalism, the USSR was comparable to one giant monopoly directing all domains of social and economic life:

> [...] le bolchèvisme ne met pas seulement fin au pluralisme politique, il ne s'affirme pas seulement comme un parti unique, il s'arroge l'autorité de décider des principes qui régissent tant la vie économique que la famille, les moeurs, la sexualité, l'éducation, la littérature ou l'art [...] (Lefort, 1999; 73)

[13] The Kronstadt rebellion was an unsuccessful uprising provoked by the Soviet sailors. This event in the history of Bolshevism has created wide political debate. Certainly, it was contradictory that the Red Army silenced a workers revolt for freedom. However, the Kronstadt rebellion must be understood in the national and international context. The Bolsheviks were increasingly threatened by counter-revolutionaries and the weakened proletariat. It was, for the Bolsheviks, a question of saving the workers state at all costs (Lenin & Trotsky, 1979; 20).

Monopolization suppressed the market horizontally by eliminating competition, as well as vertically, by dominating the different stages in the process of production. The state was the ultimate possessor: from primary material, to consumable, finished commodities, the entire process of reproduction was dictated by the unique law of the party (Chaulieu, no.3, 1949; 38).

As we will discuss in the next chapter, Stalin's Russia portrayed the image of the leading bureaucratic apparatus, in a state of total control. Stalin, who had been general secretary of the Communist party since 1922, became the leader of the USSR after the death of Lenin in 1924. The five year plans established by Stalin affirmed the economic power of the state and the solidity of its class. By eliminating all owners of private property as a threat to the party, Stalinist bureaucracy appeared as the only group capable of global intervention and planning (S ou B, no.7, 1950; 89). Although achieved through devastating collectivization and radical industrialization, Stalin's revolution brought about in the "democratic" constitution of 1936, aimed to achieve the classless society, within one country. [14]

> La bureaucratie s'exhausse finalement au statut de la bureaucratie "politico-céleste", elle possède enfin sa classe purement socialiste, sa classe productive immanente aux processus techniques de la production, dont les aspirations se confondent avec l'appareillage de la croissance industrielle et la gestion administrative des forces productives. (Mascotto, 2003; 174)

The apparatus of terror unleashed by Stalin constituted one of the most violent crimes of modern history (Mandel, 1995; 49). Stalin's murder machine between 1924

[14] Stalin's theory of socialism in one country certainly provoked a break from the Marxist tradition, as well as the inheritance of Lenin. This, for Ernst Mandel, spoke to the conservative inclinations of the Soviet bureaucracy. Stalin's logic was: rather than waiting for the success of an international revolution, energy should be concentrated on the building and strengthening of their society.

and 1933 was ruthless. It was met with little resistance, for its power was paralyzing, the proletariat demoralized, and the Social Democratic parties infested with opportunists.

Stalinist bureaucracy extended its power to other countries: to satellite countries of central Europe, the Balkans, Yugoslavia, and later in China and Vietnam. Under the presence of the Red Army, these countries were analogue to the Russian Regime (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 73). Internationally, the pressure from the bourgeoisie as well as from the Stalinist bureaucrats, led the 3rd International into a new degenerative process. Compared to the degeneration of the 2nd International, the 3rd international was revised by a hierarchy of functionaries directly linked to, and dependent on, Moscow.

Trotsky's Fourth International formed a direct opposition to the increasing power of Stalinist bureaucracy. It was for Trotsky the honor of Lenin's Soviet state which was at stake. We will explore more of Trotsky's views and critiques in the following chapter, for Castoriadis was directly engaged against the propositions of the Fourth International in his attempts to demystify Soviet bureaucracy. For the moment, it is important to situate this historical detour through the Russian revolution to the context, and aims of the *socio-barbares*.

3.3. The Russian Revolution for Castoriadis

The Russian Revolution was a terrain rich with insights into the problems posed by the organization of revolutionary activity. Themselves a revolutionary organization, the *socio-barbres* were inspired by the Russian revolution. Although casting a pessimistic

shadow over the group's possible outcomes and consequences, the degeneration of the revolution remained the focus of the *socio-barbare's* attention. From an understanding of this degenerative process, Castoriadis revealed the positive lessons to be taken from the revolution, in order to orient future revolutionary activity.

For Castoriadis, and the *socio-barbares*, the goals and objectives of the Russian revolution significantly differentiated it from previous revolutions. With its own flag, its own organizational forms, its own reclamations, its own means of struggle, the Russian revolution deployed its essential proletarian nature.

> Dans une révolution où les ouvriers se battent pour la "Liberté, l'Egalité, la Fraternité" - et quelle que soit la signification que subjectivement ils donnent à ces mots d'ordre - ils sont l'infantrie de la bourgeoisie. Lorqu'ils se battent pour "Tout le pouvoir aux Soviets", ils se battent pour le socialisme. (Chaulieu, no.14, 1954; 49)

For Castoriadis, the degeneration of the Russian revolution into a totalitarian society did not reverse its essential proletarian character. This, according to Castoriadis, followed his judgment of the Paris Commune, which although it had proven confused, weak, and was finally defeated, nevertheless remained understood as a proletarian revolt. However, to prevent the fate of degeneration and defeat which had been characteristic of these revolutions in the immediate past, it was for Castoriadis vital to understand the structures, processes and mechanisms of degeneration. What then did Castoriadis learn from the Russian Revolution?

The Russian Revolution clearly posed the question: 'who should be a member of the communist organization?' This question was of fundamental importance for the organization of the revolutionary party. Since the *socio-barbares* at first declared

themselves to be a party, it was central to the aims they set forth to accomplish. The *socio-barbares'* direct experience in creating a collective with a unified vision could not help but confront ideological divergences. The question of the methods to be employed for revolutionary activity constituted one of the hottest topics, often of direct confrontation, amongst the group. Mandel succinctly affirms: "The relation between self-organization of the masses and the vanguard party is one of the most complex problems of Marxism." (1995; 73)

Admittedly, the split between Castoriadis and Lefort occurred because of their irreconcilable views on this topic. Their dispute resembled in certain respects the problem faced by the Russian Social Democratic Party. For Lefort, as for the Mensheviks, there was no foundation for strictly delimiting who could be member and who could not be member of the organization. The absolute openness of this position, for Castoraidis, diverted the party from the possibility of a concrete direction (Castoriadis, USALD, 2005; 39). The treason of the Second International, which adopted the Menshevik way, was a clear demonstration that such direction was needed.

For Castoriadis, Lenin's position, although regarded through a critical lens, contained keys to understanding the essential political dimension of organization (Castoriadis, USALD, 2005; 35). The party had the responsibility of uniting the "immediate" or "spontaneous" class struggles within a global perspective of social transformation.

But, could direction be taken democratically? Was the orientation of the workers towards socialism bound to degeneration and totalitarianism? These were the questions

emerging from the consequences of Lenin's strong vanguard party, which led the proletariat in directions that were not foretold by Marx.

For Castoriadis, following Lenin, actual revolutionary practices had to be understood using a theoretical framework. The efficiency of an idea could not, however be detached from the social and political dynamic from which it emerged. From the first issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, it was stated that revolutionary theory was to be elaborated simultaneously with practical revolutionary activity. For the *socio-barabres*, theory could not be established once and for all: theory was situated and non-transcendental. Theory needed to be developed along side the conditions and experiences of doing. Without such development, there could be no growth of the revolutionary movement. While revolutionary theory could not stand above activity, ideologically, it also could not overshadow spontaneous insurrection. Theory and practice needed to condition one another in a reciprocal dynamic (S ou B, no.1, 1949; 3). In other words, for the *socio-barbares*, Leninism could not be used programmatically, without first being revised to the lessons and consequences emerging from its trials and errors.

> La théorie révolutionnaire ne peut être valable que si elle s'enrichit de toutes les conquêtes de la pensée scientifique et de la pensée humaine en générale, de l'expérience du mouvement révolutionnaire plus particulièrement, si elle subit, chaque fois qu'il est nécessaire, toutes les modifications et les révolutions intérieures que la réalité lui impose. (S ou B, no.1, 1949; 3)

The new conditions of the world could not be understood through the looking glass of the past. The *socio-barbares* were therefore confronted with a new and difficult task: creating new strategies and methods of revolutionary organization, without reproducing the mechanisms of capitalist domination and exploitation which had

infiltrated the party and the union. The essential question then became: what are the new modes of exploitation produced by the party and the unions, in both Russian socialism and western capitalism respectively?

For Castoriadis, as for many other revolutionaries and political activist of this era, it was essential that socialism attain its promise. It was the imminent reality of a reigning barbarism which drove the necessity for revolution. This urgency can hardly be felt today, for the revolutionary project of socialism no longer dwells in the western imaginary as a viable possibility. However, at the time when Castoriadis was writing, the inevitability of capitalism's implosion was still presumed. From this, two fates could arise, either: its downfall would be sparked by the positive engagement of man in the creation of a new world, or a negation of possibility in creating alternative modes of social organization would result. The historical choice between socialism and barbarism inhabited the somber circumstances of the epoch (Blanchard, 2007; 13). However, even in this darkened atmosphere where the menace of atomic war weighed over the world, the *socio-barbares* remained optimistic. They perceived the inevitability of the coming war as a possibility for the proletariat to realize his liberation. Organizing and directing the spontaneous impetus of the revolution became the task at hand for them. Castoriadis positively illuminated the iron curtain of history weighing over his present, in order to incite the class struggle towards the creation of an alternative society.

Chapter 4: The Actual: demystification of bureaucracy

There are two axes in the oeuvre of Castoriadis, which will help us to retrieve the answer to the question "*What is to be done?*": that *against* which revolutionary activity is to be directed (heteronomy) and that *towards* which the revolutionary activity is to be directed (autonomy). The revolution, for Castoriadis, is not only a struggle negating the current mode of social organization, but is a struggle directly positing *what could be*, and *what should be* the revolution.

These two poles in Castoriadis' early writings are enfolded in the language and world view of his epoch. While heteronomy in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* takes the guise of alienation and exploitation in modern capitalist society; autonomy takes the guise of socialism. When Castoriadis spoke of heteronomy and autonomy, they were conceptually subsumed to a discussion of two rival social organizations: capitalism versus socialism. However, as will become evident in this chapter, this antagonism cannot be translated as the East versus the West; as Russia versus America. For, when Castoriadis peered under the veil of soviet socialism, he discovered a totalitarian form of bureaucratic capitalism lurking there.

By uncovering and demystifying the nature of socialism in Russia, Castoriadis revealed the new engines of conflict and crisis animating society. Understanding the new conditions of alienation and exploitation was an essential step in the orientation of the workers towards meaningful revolutionary activity. Before the positive elucidation of the

revolutionary project, its goals and orientations, the degeneration of the socialist organizations needed to be fully unpacked.

For Castoriadis, the revelation that the Soviet Union was a totalitarian form of bureaucratic capitalism had crucial consequences for the effective modes of activity to be employed in the class struggle. Castoriadis arrived at different conclusions than Marx, Lenin and Trotsky, concerning the normative direction to be taken in order to fulfill the promises of socialism (which later translated into the project of autonomy). The challenge was to have a comprehensive account of the failed promises of socialism. Why had the experiment of concrete socialism created a totalitarian form of bureaucratic capitalism? What did this say about the modes by which the revolution was to be organized and directed towards its desired goals?

4.1. Trade Unionism: Reformism and Spontaneity

Although the term 'bureaucratization' at first echoes Max Weber's pioneering work on the subject, Castoriadis instead considered the concept from within a Marxist theoretical framework (Singer, 1979; 36). Before we start unearthing the bureaucratic turn of Soviet Russia, we will establish its historical origin according to Castoriadis. In his view, bureaucracy was the child of the class struggle: it was an un-intended consequence of historical *doing*. However, the phenomenon of degeneration emerging in proletarian organizations was not, for Castoriadis, a trait specific to organizations. It was

rather the expression of the reminiscence of capitalism within the proletariat (Cardan, no.27, 1959; 72).

Initially, socialists had massively engaged in workers' unions, which they believed offered the perfect instrument for the final insurrection of the masses. Trade unions mark the birth of the labor movement. The unions were the worker's defense against capitalist's overarching power. To take action against the injustices imposed by rapid industrialization, and lack of social control and protection, the collective organizations of workers had one weapon at hand: strikes. With mass organized strikes, power was balanced; the workers could reform capitalism to their demands. Trade-unions, although participating in the class struggle, were essentially reformist (Pannekoek, 1936). The idea of over-throwing capitalism had not yet dawned.

With the growth of capitalism, so grew its opposition. However, as the rules of the game were changed, the strategies of defense provided by trade unions proved inefficient, and contradictory. Marx had foretold that revolution was the only means to end the relentless exploitation of capitalists.

Lenin was aware of the trade-unions betrayal of the revolutionary ideal and the proletariat struggle. On the eve of the First World War, the alliance of the Second International with the imperialists was enough to convince Lenin that trade unionism had irrevocably compromised themselves with the bourgeois ideology. The world revolutionary momentum had been lost to nationalist demands. Trade unions had succumbed to what Lenin described as a critical trend of opportunism (Lenin, 1902; 14). Of course, it was in the interest of trade unions to maintain the tension between the

capitalist and the workers. Communism and revolution was of no interest to the trade unions, which had their very basis of existence within the capitalist enterprise (Pannekoek, 1936).

Amongst other things, trade-unionists denied the inevitability of the materialist conception of history (Lenin, 1902; 12). For Lenin, this meant:

> [They] corrupted socialist consciousness by vulgarizing Marx, by advocating the theory that social antagonisms were being toned down, by declaring the idea of the social revolution and the dictatorship of the proletariat to be absurd, by reducing the working class movement and the class struggle to narrow trade unionism and to a 'realistic' struggle for petty, gradual reforms. (Lenin, 1902; 28).

Other than reformism, there remained a perceptible problem with trade unionism: spontaneity. For Lenin, spontaneous and fragmented strikes had to be united under a common front. Lenin's treatise "*What is to be done?*" proposed that the solution to trade unions strategy of spontaneity was the party. The function of the party was twofold: it both aimed to disseminate knowledge on the condition of the proletariat, as well as create specialists of the revolution.

To develop the proletariat's consciousness, the party organization was tasked with both disseminating political knowledge, and training all orders and ranks of society for revolution. The writings of Lenin, according to Pannekoek, thus did not aim to bring the reader private philosophical reflection. Rather, they intended to teach readers that the party was right, and that the party leaders were to be trusted and supported in directing history towards its fate (Pannekoek, 1975; 101).

The party, for Lenin, was a direct response to revolutionary spontaneity. The Communist International, established by Lenin, attempted to return to the roots of the Marxist project (Mothé, no.14, 1954; 35). For, Marx had himself discovered, from the results of the Paris Commune in 1871, the inherent problems of spontaneous insurrection. If the working class movement remained spontaneous, it would inevitably become an instrument of the bourgeoisie. The established bourgeois ideology could not be shaken by riots and strikes of desperation; the struggle had to be waged on the same grounds as the bourgeoisie: the grounds of theory and science.

Although Marx stated that 'every step of real movement is more important than a dozen programs', and although he supported the Paris Commune, he more importantly insisted, in Lenin's view, that the necessity of unity could *not* be achieved at the expense of theory (Lenin, 1902; 40). 'Without revolutionary theory, there can be no revolutionary movement' thus haunted the spirit of Leninism. Indeed, Soviet ideology created a pseudo-scientific Marx, propounding a theory of dialectical materialism which was based on scientific laws of nature. Just as chemistry is the science of matter; biology the science of the development of organisms; so, dialectical materialism aimed to be the science of the development society (Wetter, 1962; 15). The objective laws inherent to social development were thus presupposed knowable and explainable by a political and economic science of production.

Furthermore, the Marxism of Leninism aimed to define the avant-garde as an organization of professional revolutionaries: a minority of specialists in charge of

overseeing science, by directing production in its manifold dimensions. Lenin's avant-garde was inspired by Karl Kautsky, who believed that:

> Socialist consciousness can arise only on the basis of profound scientific knowledge. [...] The vehicle of science is not the proletariat but the *bourgeois intelligentsia* [...] Thus, socialist consciousness is something introduced into the proletarian consciousness from without [...] and not something that arose within it spontaneously. (Lenin, 1902; 65)

The working class was to be "pushed from outside" towards political revolution. The avant-garde, possessor of knowledge, would be in charge of monitoring the creation of the new society.

Although neither trade-unions nor the party had succeeded in overcoming these fundamental problems, Castoriadis denied that the phenomenon of degeneration was an *essential* trait of organization (Cardan, no.27, 1959; 53). There was for Castoriadis, no determinate finality in order. Understanding the logic of capitalism in its new bureaucratic form was to reveal the new points of tension and crisis. If alienation persisted, then he was convinced revolt would manifest itself. What was needed was a unified direction to the "immediate" and scattered revolutionary outbursts, so that their aggregate political force could uproot capitalist rationality.

Uncovering this crucial antinomy of revolutionary praxis, Castoriadis faced a conundrum. The society of exploitation was not merely a structure exterior to the individual, but rather an integral part of effective social action. The question then became how revolutionary organization could manage to dissociate itself from the very society which produced it? In this sense, to say with Marx that 'the dominant ideas of an epoch are the ideas of the dominant class' was not merely to say that they are the most diffuse or

popular ideas of a historical formation, but rather that they are accepted, in part, unconsciously, even by those that would combat them most violently (Cardan, no.27, 1959; 65).

> La situation du prolétariat est absolument contradictoire, car en même temps qu'il fait naître les éléments d'une nouvelle organisation humaine et d'une nouvelle culture, il ne peut jamais se dégager entièrement de la société capitaliste dans lequel il vit. (Cardan, no.27, 1959; 58)

It was precisely this contradiction that the proletariat needed to overcome, but how? How was the proletariat to break free from the shackles of capitalism?

4.2. Degenerated workers state or bureaucratic capitalism?

Castoriadis was not the first to discover that Stalinism was a form of bureaucratic organization; this idea was in the air of the times (especially in Trotskyist circles in France). However, only his analysis uncovered the reminiscence of capitalism at the root of Russian socialism. It is for this reason that Castoriadis' view of soviet Russia as a form of bureaucratic capitalism was provocative in France's leftist intellectual circles.

Standing by his conviction that socialism as degenerated workers state was a view which needed to be demystified; Castoriadis embarked on his inaugural rupture from Trotskyism. This gesture of emancipation, allowed Castoriadis to initiate a course of thought which detached him from "received ideas" and allowed him to create an understanding of reality which was not motivated by specific political ideologies (Blanchard, 2007; 9). This was one of the great originalities of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*:

neither to repeat whole cloth, nor choose one point of a doctrine as defining element of the group, but rather to weave from a revision of Trotskyism, Leninism, and Marxism the panoply of interlaced problems and solutions that they entailed.

For Castoriadis, Trotskyism, even though staged as a critique of Stalinist bureaucracy, merely provided a befogged version of history. According to Castoriadis the paradox in Trotsky's analysis, was to announce the degeneration of the Bolshevik party into a bureaucratic state apparatus, while simultaneously maintaining its legitimacy (Trotsky RB, 1965; 112). The poverty of a country was for Trotsky an essential measure of the place bureaucracy was to occupy in society. Russia being a poor society, with only a nascent form of capitalism, necessitated a stern form of bureaucracy: one which would support the privileged minority in its creation of socialism (Trotsky RB, 1965; 55). Such an opinion supported a Leninist claim for the dictatorship of the proletariat as the dictatorship of the party.

Since existing socialism lagged behind capitalism in technical and cultural production, it was legitimate to prolong the dictatorship of the proletariat; as long as it aimed to 'catch up' with the Western leaders of progress (Trotsky RB, 1965; 47). Indeed, the institution of the NEP in 1921, although a return to a market form of economy, was necessary according to Trotsky, if an increase in the level of available techniques and material resources was to be made possible (Trotsky, RB 1965; 115). The lack of means of subsistence, as well as the lack of productivity had created new social antagonisms rather than the desired classless society. Regardless, for Trotsky, these new social

antagonisms were still perceived as protecting the spirit of the working class. Bureaucracy became the only way to political and social 'salvation'.

Castoriadis' experience of Stalinism in Greece bespoke a reality of a different nature. In an analysis of the relations of production in Russia (1949) Castoriadis revealed a few problems with Trotsky's analysis by returning to the roots of Marxism. Indeed, it was Marx's contention that any ideology–including the contemporary juridical veil of the Soviet ideology—could be demystified by investigating the materialist organization of a society: the modes and relations of production.

Trotsky rightly contended that the availability of resources in Russia was too low for a communist re-distribution to be possible. Yet he continued to believe that the current soviet economy was socialist. His definition of socialism thus followed the criteria of the nationalization of the means of production. However, for Castoriadis, production could not be understood without looking at consumption and distribution: two integrated moments of circulation (Chaulieu, no.2, 1949; 4). That the relations of production in Russia were nationalized said little about the mode of distribution of nationalized products. Could it still be presumed socialist, if distribution had a bourgeois character? Distribution, remarked Castoriadis, had two significations: 1) the distribution of social product; and 2) the distribution of the conditions of production. This was a basic and fundamental lesson of Marxism:

> The structure [*Gliederung*] of distribution is completely determined by the structure of production. Distribution is itself a product of production, not only in its object, in that only the results of production can be distributed, but also in its form, in that the specific kind of participation in production

> determines the specific forms of distribution, ie. the pattern of participation in distribution. (Marx, 1978; 233)

Hence, before the distribution of consumable products occurred, there was a necessary distribution of the instrumental modes of production. This meant that different members of society were assigned to different strata of production. Castoriadis remarked that the analysis of production and distribution could not be separated without reflecting some fundamental elements of a classical bourgeois economy (Chaulieu, no.2, 1949; 4)."Si, donc, les rapports de répartition en Russie ne sont pas socialistes, les rapports de production ne peuvent pas l'être non plus." (Chaulieu, no.2, 1949; 8)

If, as Castoriadis contended, we could define the modes of production by examining the modes of distribution, then everything 'scientifically' justifying that the Russian economy was socialist conspired to maintain the proletariat under a grand illusion of evolutionary progress. The thesis held by Trotsky, that the bureaucratic apparatus of Soviet Russia was to be found uniquely in the domain of distribution, and not the domain of production, was erroneous (Chaulieu, no.2, 1949; 9). A political revolution, as proposed by Trotsky, would thus not reinstitute the workers state. The problem was not only political; it was also fundamentally economical. Castoriadis could not envision a political revolution in Russia, a change of the guards, without also changing the deeper economic foundations on which it was settled. The bureaucratic structure which had infiltrated Russian socialism was much more than a political problem. It was founded on an entire economic framework which needed to be re-evaluated.

Socialism could not be created by simply nationalizing the means of production. To give the means of production to the nation was to make the dominant class (the party) possessor of the entire economic framework (Chaulieu, no.2, 1949; 19). Certainly, the old dominating classes were suppressed, but this did not answer the fundamental question: who was now directing production and how? As early as the 1950s, it was apparent to Castoriadis that the private ownership of property was no longer the determining element of exploitation and that the crystallization of a bureaucratic apparatus demanded that the theory of the dictatorship of the proletariat be revised.

The Russian revolution had transformed the dictatorship of the proletariat into the dictatorship of the party. Castoriadis did not blame the Bolshevik party *itself* for having degenerated the victorious proletarian revolution into a totalitarian dictatorship. For Castoriadis, it was important to understand that the ideas and the attitude of the Bolshevik party could not have been possible without the masses themselves seeing in the party the necessary organ of their power. The proletariat did not assume the direction of the revolution, nor of the resulting society (Cardan, no.27, 1957; 55). The first blush of socialism thus took control of the means of production from the industries and put it in the hands of a new directing class. This unforeseen consequence of delegation contributed to the maintenance of exploitation.

> Lénine commettait l'erreur d'assigner une limite objective -- le trade-unionisme -- à la prise de conscience autonome de la classe ouvrière. Il commettait également l'erreur -- essentiellement dans la pratique -- de concevoir la direction de la classe comme un corps organiquement séparé de celle-ci et cristallisé sur la base d'une conscience que la classe ne pouvait que recevoir de l'extérieure. (S ou B, vol.2, 1949; 108)

This was a great contribution of Castoriadis' analysis: the clairvoyance that all forms of capitalist society are founded on a stable and generalized division between executors and directors. This division transposed to the realm of culture, characterized the separation between "understanding" and "doing" (Canjuers et Debord, 1960). Even after having demolished private property in Russia, a distinction was maintained between executors and directors of production. This divide was ideologically promoted by the social layer of bureaucracy, and ended in reproducing the fundamental relations of capitalist society in socialist Russia. The domination of production by the party was experienced as monopolizing the understanding of the activity of production. This led to increased specialization of labor, which could only be reconstituted as a unity by the specialized organ of the party.

> En ce sens très général, la bureaucratie ne fait que continuer l'accomplissement de la tâche de la bourgeoisie capitaliste, qui a été de développer et de concentrer les forces productives, et ceci précisément dans les pays ou cette bourgeoisie s'était montrée déficiente. (Castoriadis, SB1, 1973; 309)

Marx had also forecasted that the differentiation between the mental and the material labor was to sharpen as the division of labor and accumulation developed (Marx, 1978; 190). However, this antagonism could, for Marx, only exist within the framework of private property. Castoriadis' analysis of the relations of production in Russia clearly revealed that state owned property was a form of private property: it maintained the division between those executing and those directing the modes of production; thus reproducing class dynamics.

How could the class basis of society be eliminated? Castoriadis' findings on the nature of Soviet socialism demanded that the significance of the class struggle be revised. Clearly, the worker's demand for organization could not be totally fulfilled through the intermediary of the party. The revolutionary organization was bound to degenerate if the divide was maintained between the party and the workers. The answer, for Castoriadis, could only be: the workers had to take the direction of production into their own hands, excluding from their organization all those opposing the *autonomous management* of production by counsels (Chaulieu, no.10, 1952; 7). This is one of Castoriadis' singular contributions: the demand for recognition in the proletariat of his own protagonist role in history. If socialism was to be created, it could only be done with the full engagement of the workers in the construction of their new society.

Some fundamental questions remained, however: how was the proletariat to acquire the knowledge necessary for autonomous action? What was the role of the *socio-barbares*, as a party with an acute understanding of the past, and architecture for future revolutionary activity? How was the proletariat's condition of alienation and exploitation to be revealed in a non-ideological and non-dogmatic fashion?

4.3. Alienation in a bureaucratic society

Castoriadis does not find it contradictory that bureaucracy was linked to rationalization per se, but rather that it was linked only to a specific technical form of rationalization (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 98). The introduction of the machine in industry transformed man's relation to the world, as well as man's relation to man. Modernization, however strongly it may be related to the development of technology and the idea of progress, cannot be reduced to such. It was not rationality *itself* that was the problem for Castoriadis, but the specific type of reasoning associated with a technological rationality.

Castoriadis' critique of traditional Marxism will be dealt with at length in chapter six (section 6.2). However, we will here begin to unpack the way in which Castoriadis diverges from traditional Marxist readings on the condition of society. That is, through a specific understanding of technique.

For Castoriadis the significant meaning of techniques, from the Greek *techné*, was initially to fabricate, produce; to bring to existence, or cause. Additionally *techné* was frequently used by Plato, to signify rigorous and founded knowledge, or *epistemé* (Castoriadis, CL I, 1978, 223). Moreover, Aristotle also linked *techné* to the concept of creation (*poièsis*). A thorough-going unpacking of Greek creation for Castoriadis then, included : "Cause qui, quelle que soit la chose considérée, fait passer celle-ci du non-être à l'être." (Castoriadis, CL I, 1978, 293) On this account, *Techné* was thus not limited to the transformation of that which exists, through a specialized knowledge of the object. Rather, it could include creation from nothing, or *ex nihilo*. This alternative reading

of *techné* accounted for the creation of the new. This was significant for it presupposed that the world was neither rational nor irrational through and through (Castoriadis, CL I, 1978, 293). Since the world was not complete *ananké* or chaos, and there was *logos alèthès* or real reason, there was not only existing disorder but a world that could be organized, and rationalized (Castoriadis, CL I, 1978, 294).

However, according to Castoriadis, with traditional Marxist readings a separation between *ananké* and *logos alèthès* was effectuated in favor of the latter. Consequentially, *techné* was limited to a rationality of means and ends (Castoriadis, CL I, 1978, 299). For Marxists then, rationality was balanced on two scales: science (the means) and progress (*telos*). It was through science that man's labour could dominate and shape nature.

Indeed, this signalled that if history was the development of techniques, it was the simultaneous development of a knowledge belonging to the specific domain of science. For Castoriadis, this was a critical finding: the interpretation of techniques as the basis of the development of the modern world, was in fact saying that ideas were the motor of history. Since an instrument was always already infused with signification, technique and consciousness were mutually interacting and influencing one another (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 98). From this premise, Castoriadis developed an interest for the *significations* of structuration partaking in the organization of society. This discovery led Castoriadis to move further away from the materialist conception of history (Castoriadis, CL I, 1978, 300). We will return to the consequences of this distance in chapter six.

The technical rationalization of the means of production represented a rationalization of the relations between groups and individuals whose relations were increasingly mechanically mediated (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 98).

> Par son asservissement à la machine, et, à travers celle-ci, à une volonté abstraite, étrangère et hostile, l'homme est privé du véritable contenu de son activité humaine, la transformation consciente du monde naturel; la tendance profonde qui le porte à se réaliser dans l'objet est constamment inhibée. (Castoriadis CS, 1979; 97)

Collective activity was increasingly directed by an impersonal apparatus, a hierarchal organization, acting according to rational methods that privileged the economy. This apparatus decided and applied the rules and laws. It was an entity autonomously ruling the institutional structure not merely in the field of production, but also the state, and in the organization of politics and trade unions. When the logic of bureaucracy was applied to all spheres of society, it became the very logic of that society. For Castoriadis bureaucracy could not, be understood merely as social layer, whose power was increasing; or as the manager of economic affairs. Bureaucracy meant: "...une transformation des valeurs et des significations qui fondent la vie des hommes en société, un remodelage de leurs attitudes et de leurs conduites." (Cardan, no.32, 1961; 102)

For Castoriadis, the rationalization of capitalism was inseparable from bureaucratization. Alienation, was thus not merely contained in technological rationalization, but was also a modality of the institution. Instituted heteronomy became for Castoriadis the social phenomenon of alienation (IIS, 1979; 109). It appeared in the

anonymous collective.[15] Therefore, alienation was necessarily tied not only to the social, but its historicity.

Instituted alienation presented itself for Castoriadis in two ways. Firstly, the instituted was alienated from its specific content, which sanctioned class divisions, and granted power to one category over the totality. However, instituted alienation also presented itself regardless of class boundaries: a society alienated towards its own institutions, which had become autonomous and disincarnated from the present over which they ruled (Cardan, no.39, 1965; 37). The institution, in possessing its own inertia, and logic, far surpassed its own function. Its effects survived and impacted society in a permanent fashion.

It became clearer to Castoriadis that Marx's concept of alienation needed to be revised. Already in the early 1950s Marx's oeuvre was punctured by Castoriadis' disagreements. Only in the 1960s, however, were these disagreements to realize the final abandonment of Marxism's rationalist metaphysics of history (Martuccelli, 2002; 291).

Certainly, alienation was part and partial of the process of production, however it was for Castoriadis not merely contained in the infrastructure. As the Russian revolution demonstrated, the conditions of alienation also appeared in, and were heavily conditioned by, the institution. The institution, in Marxist terminology, the super-structure, could not for Castoriadis be thought merely as a reflection of the infrastructure. For, this abolished

[15] The 'anonymous collective' was for Castoriadis the social-historical being. Castoriadis' conception of the social-historical emerged after disarming Marxism, and the dogma which it had become. It is apparent that Castoriadis' critique of Marxism was emerging from its incongruence with the social-historical reality it proclaimed to elucidate. The 'anonymous collective', as we will further elaborate in chapter six, is defined as the impossibility of total knowledge of society and end to history.

the essential symbolic dimension of the institution; or, the way of being of the institution. The critique of soviet bureaucracy allowed Castoriadis to uncover this fundamental incoherence: the superstructure, although promoting a juridical apparatus of socialism, was institutionally organized to maintain the class structure. Thus, even though private property had been abolished, the superstructure maintained the class divisions in a new form. The new bureaucratic layer, an autonomously ruling entity embodied in the state, was the source of mystification, exploitation and alienation, through their play on social imaginary significations.

The superstructure for Castoriadis could only be conceived as the weaving together of social relations, neither more nor less real, than the infrastructure (Cardan, no.36, 1964; 16). It became impossible, for Castoriadis, to conceive of technology, politics, law, and religion as completely and utterly separable in terms of infrastructure and superstructure. This division itself was constitutive of historical development. In other words it was not a transcendental truth of the being of society, but an understanding of history and society conceived in a particular way; the vision of historical materialism. Thus, Castoriadis undertook the project of re-defining history and society, which are, he discovered, non-reducible to our situated and limited knowledge. Thus, it was impossible to say that the economy determined ideology or that ideology determined the economy. There was in history no separated substance acting from an exterior position, onto the other (Cardan, no.36, 1964; 20)

Although alienation was present in the fabric of instituted society, the technical rationalization which it incarnated was only one of the possible dimensions of doing.

Castoriadis believed, following the Greeks, that traditional Marxist understanding's of doing as scientific progression overlooked the possibility of the emergence of the new. Since *techné* could not merely be founded in the rationality of the real, Castoriadis drew from the underlying conditions of the rationality of the real. Only thus could he think of what could potentially come into being.

Chapter 5: The Possible: A Vision for the Future

> It is not what is, but what could be and should be, that has need for us.
>
> -- Castoriadis, Cornelius (1997) *The Castoriadis Reader*, ed. by David Ames Curtis, Blackwell publishers. Pp.417

The question "*what is to be done?*" is intricately connected to an understanding of society *not* only as instituted, as we have seen in the previous chapter, but also as the potential that is constitutive thereof: the instituting. This tension between the instituted and the instituting is central to Castoriadis' conception of heteronomy and autonomy. While heteronomy refers to the legacies of the past, as they determine the present; autonomy is the space of indeterminacy, present in every determination. We will only further enmesh these two concepts in chapter six. First we must disclose with more precision what is meant by the instituting capacity; to imagine alternative modes of social organization, values, attitudes and behaviors. In continuation with our analysis of bureaucratic capitalism as a mode of social organization which must, for Castoriadis, be overturned, we inquire: what *could* be created from the ashes of capitalism? What *could* socialism be? What *should* it be, considering the lessons of history?

After the Bolshevik revolution, it was vital to turn to the effects of such a transformation on the meaning of the class struggle, its goals, and orientations. From Castoriadis' critique of existing socialism stemmed a positive elucidation of a possible

revolutionary project. Castoriadis' anticipating propositions are founded on the lessons of the past, in particular, by the Soviet worker's counsels. The ideal of workers autonomous management of production was construed from the alternative modes of social organization that had been expressed in past revolutionary times. These alternatives contained the germinal seeds for the future orientation of revolutionary activity. Whether successful or failed, the different experiments of revolution revealed an underlying regularity; a *historical doing*, directed towards the specific goal of autonomy.

Reading *Socialisme ou Barbarie,* we thus find passages where the ideal society of the future is disclosed. These appearances of the ideal society are scattered and fragmented, for the refractory nature of Castoriadis' thought does not allow for a programmatic crystallization of the ideal society. This reveals the mutable character of Castoriadis' thought; a mutability that prohibits the reification of intuitions and the degeneration of ideals into programmatic principles, and immutable codes and laws of action. It is by Castoriadis' provisional clearing away of the determinate that he could illuminate the contours of his project for an alternative future of society.

5.1. The development of the class struggle

History is full of examples of movements capable of impacting the bourgeoisie. In this sense, our selection for discussion will not do justice to the totality of the proletarian struggles against capitalism, as for instance: in China between 1925 and 1927; and Spain in 1936. Although these are discussed in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, for they were

moments when inherent contradictions of capitalism materialized, Castoriadis gave them only scant attention; other historical events seemed more insightful to him. In his article "*Prolétariat et Organisation*" (1959) Castoriadis noted:

> La Commune de 1871, les Soviets de 1905 et de 1917, les Comités de fabrique en Russie en 1917-18, les Conseils d'usine en Allemagne en 1919-20, les Conseils ouvriers en Hongrie en 1956 ont été à la fois les organismes de lutte contre la classe dominante et son État, et de nouvelles formes d'organisation des hommes à partir de principes radicalement opposés à ceux de la société bourgeoisie. (Cardan, no.27, 1959; 60)

While it was from these key revolutionary moments that Castoriadis conceived the ideal society, the burgeoning strike movements in the later half of the 1950s in Western Europe also acquired a central importance in his interpretation of revolutionary activity. Even though these moments of revolutionary activity were ephemeral, aborted, and recuperated by repressive modes of government, their repercussions revealed lessons at another level: lessons rich with positive insight for thinking the society of the future.

> L'expérience du capitalisme bureaucratique permet de voir ce que le socialisme n'est pas et ne peut pas être. L'analyse des révolutions prolétariennes, mais aussi des luttes quotidiennes du prolétariat permet de dire ce que le socialisme peut et doit être. (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 104)

In 1950, it was clear to the *socio-barbares* that the two weapons initially at the disposal of those engaged in the class struggle, trade unions and the party, had been transformed into the instruments of exploitation in the interest of the dominating bureaucratic classes (S ou B, no.7, 1950; 82). What was then, to be understood by socialism?

The paralyzing dilemma, for revolutionary praxis in the post-war period, as framed by Castoriadis, was to find the golden mean between organization and

spontaneity: how could revolutionary activity be organized without succumbing to the reification and the abstraction of giant, rationalized, and disincarnated bureaucracies (Cardan, no.27, 1959; 53)? How could revolutionary activity emerge spontaneously, and nevertheless have a coherent direction and orientation for the society of the future?

From the year *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was founded until 1952, the class struggle appeared to be non-existent not only in the USSR (where Stalinist bureaucracy had a total hold over society), but also in France and other Western European countries. The attitude of the workers did not differ fundamentally under one regime or the other. Workers from both camps supported trade-unions, thus whether in the West or in the East, results were similar: inactivity and apathy.

In Western countries, the bureaucratic apparatus appeared as an instrument of management of the forces of production. Although the economy was not nationalized, there was an evident fusion of the state and private capital. While monopoly capitalism had begun the process of concentration towards the centralized organ of the state, bureaucracy had completed the process by extending its control from the economic to the social sphere.

In "*L'expérience Prolétarienne*" (no.11, 1952), *Socialisme ou Barbarie* inquired: "En quoi pourrait donc consister une analyse concrète du prolétariat?" (S ou B, no.11, 1952; 8). This question derived its relevance from the necessity of re-defining the proletariat as a political entity. Although the organization of workers had degenerated, the proletariat remained to the *socio-barbares* the greatest productive power of society (S ou B, no.11, 1952; 2). The proletariat was the heart of the revolution. It was therefore

important to follow the development of the class struggle, through its trials and errors. From its direct experience of the new bureaucratic form of capitalism, the proletariat would develop new tools in its struggle.

With the series of spontaneous strikes that struck England, France, and Germany from august 1953 to 1956, the situation of apathy and inactivity characteristic of the founding years of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was somewhat altered. As the *socio-barbares* had foretold, these recurrent spontaneous strike movements eventually learned to act against the trade union organizations. Faced with the sudden explosion of mass strikes in Europe, Castoriadis remarked:

> Or l'expérience contemporaine, celle de 1955 en premier lieu, montre que les masses entrent en action à partir d'une expérience de la bureaucratie préalable à cette action elle-même donc indépendamment de la bureaucratie - sinon même contre celle-ci. (Chaulieu, no.18, 1956; 84)

This confirmed that the proletariat acted from its concrete experiences in the world (Chaulieu, no.18, 1956; 75). Although the strike movements were not without contradiction, they demonstrated an important renewal of the class struggle: adapting its mode of activity to the new historical conditions of a bureaucratic capitalism. This did not suffice, however. The series of strikes which had occurred in Western Europe remained a long way from the ideal project of a socialist society.

In "*Comment Lutter*" (n.23; 1958) Castoriadis aimed to explain why these multiple, spontaneous and organized strikes were failing, and bound to fail in the realization of socialism. The problem, for Castoriadis, was twofold: on the one hand, the strikes were fragmented; on the other, the system of delegation persisted.

For instance, the strikes against the automation of industry in England did not achieve the status of a real class struggle. They were only particular and fragmented manifestations of discontent with the management of industry. In essence, the process of automation revealed the most profound contradiction of capitalism: the replacement of people with machines. The mass reduction of manual laborers in the industrial domain could not help but stimulate discontent. However, the benefits of the strikes were lost with the increasing prices of necessary goods. Workers could not afford to strike; just as they could not afford to be laid off with little social security.

Moreover, once the strikes were underway, the workers delegated to trade union organizations the effective direction of the strikes. Agitation was immediately appeased by bureaucratic mediations. The unions, whose initial role was to engage all industry in a unified and common struggle against the government, acted as a buffer between the management and the workers, conceding to the demands of management. Acting independently of the base, trade unions aligned with bosses and the government, searching for ways to govern the economy in the interest of capital. Together they participated in an effort to increase productivity; in other words, exploitation. Linked to political parties, the job of the unions was to limit the trouble arising from the workers' discontent and preserve the smooth functioning of the economy (Chaulieu, n.23; 1954; 7). Succinctly, trade unions worked to preserve the capitalist status quo.

The unions also divided the working class into a series of corporatist groups fighting for prominence and recognition from the central powers. Common interests were no longer represented by the unions. Different portions and augmentations in salary were

being demanded in different sectors of industry. There was no unity; no common vision of a solution to the mass discontent.

Discouragement amongst the workers came as no surprise. Receiving little support from the very organizations created for their defense, the proletariat was in a state of disarray. Castoriadis was convinced that the proletariat needed to organize itself outside the union organizations, which hampered rather than advanced the development of the class struggle. The only remaining possibility for successful strikes was that they be directly organized by the strikers themselves.

"Toute l'histoire des luttes ouvrières montre que les actions les plus importantes et les plus efficaces ont été menée en dehors des organisations existantes." (Chaulieu, n.23, 1954; 12) Struggles waged within the framework of the trade-union bureaucracies were bound to failure. From 1923 until 1953 class struggles in diverse countries (ie. China, 1925; Spain, 1936; Germany 1953; and France 1953) were all repeating a cyclical pattern: the direction of production, economy and state was left in the hands of a special category of individuals. The standing conflict between executors and directors of production was reproduced.

Only the lessons derived from the experience of the fragmented strikes were put into practice in the Hungarian insurrection. In 1956, the vicious cycle had found its point of rupture. A new conception of socialism was ready to emerge within the proletariat: socialism as the autonomous management of production.

The Hungarian Revolt

In the Hungarian Revolution of 1956, the vague and negative objectives of a dictatorship of the proletariat deployed during the Russian revolution (abolishing individual and private property) were refined. According to Castroriadis, the maturity of this revolutionary movement lay in the worker's demand for an autonomous organization of production. The workers, from their experience of Soviet bureaucratic exploitation, understood that the division of the industry between those who direct and those who execute perpetuated the fundamental problem of capitalism. In 1959, Castoriadis wrote:

> Le socialisme n'est et ne peut être rien d'autre que la gestion de la production, de l'économie et de la société par les travailleurs. À cette idée, qui a constitué dès le départ le centre des conceptions de *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, la révolution hongroise a fourni depuis une confirmation éclatante. (Cardan, no.27, 1959; 56)

The Hungarian Revolution seemed to confirm to the world what *Socialisme ou Barbarie,* and a minority of scattered voices, had been claiming since 1949: the workers' concrete experience of bureaucratic capitalism (in its totalitarian form) revealed the necessity for workers' management of production. The originality of this revolution lay in a common accumulated experience *not* of the 'treacherous' role of bureaucratic organizations, but of their daily duty as guardians of capitalism (Chaulieu, no.18, 1956; 85). The Hungarian revolution thus expressed an intentional battle against contemporary bureaucracy.

After the Second World War the Russian army ruled with an iron fist in Hungary, having occupied the country in the midst of ruins and archaic social structures. The Communist Party had been elected with only 15 % of the votes in 1946. However, they

had one great advantage: the support of the USSR. Nationalization of land, banks and industry began; the old dominating classes of the Horthy regime became the executives of the new ideology. Working conditions in the image of the USSR were installed. Salaries were low; workers sacrificed to and for the creation of the new society. Strikes were declared crimes against the state.

This scenario, however, was not perceived as such in the West. Many leftists misperceived the Hungarian revolt of 1956. When leftist media spoke of the Hungarian revolutionaries, they thus denounced it as: *fascist bands*; *counter-revolutionaries*; and *gangsters*. Newspapers such as l'*Humanité* attacked the movement on the grounds that it was disloyal to the PC, and thus supportive of the bourgeoisie (S ou B, no.20, 1957; 4). It must be remembered, that the Trotskyist ideology dominating the French communist scene at this time, defended the USSR against capitalism at all cost.

For the *socio-barbare*s, the objective of liberty was the only one to be supported, beyond any partisanship for socialism or capitalism. There was no doubt, according to Castoriadis that the Hungarian revolution emerged from a direct refusal of oppression and control . It was the peaceful demonstrations of the workers on October 23, 1956, which drew a violent response from the soviet army (S ou B, no.20, 1957; 43). The military reaction and repression of the proletarian, in the name of socialism, shed light on the total defeat of the Russian bureaucracy. Even if it was to gain a military victory, the USSR could no longer claim for itself the name of socialism. For Castoriadis, it was a long awaited moment; the 1956 event was at last confirming his heretical ideas.

The 12 day Hungarian revolt put into practice an organization of counsels that set demands for a radical transformation of Soviet domination. The counsels were democratically elected by the workers, and their power could be revoked at any moment by the electors.[16] The movement aimed to define the plan; to set its goals and limitations. The workers did not want the plan to be elaborated by a centralized bureaucratic state in Russia, which did not recognize the situated needs of the workers. Moreover, the worker's program requested that production norms be suppressed in all industrial domains. In the end, the workers appeared to be the most qualified to decide on the norms of production. Thus, it was the democratization of industry that was being reclaimed.

Counselism aimed to prevent the standing division between a minority of directors and a majority of executors (Feixa, 2006). This was the cornerstone of the old communist ideal:

> Les Conseils ouvriers sont constitués sur le principe de la révocabilité des délégués, comme l'étaient la Commune et les Soviets; les délégués d'atelier (shop stewards) des usines anglaises sont constamment révocables par les travailleurs qui les ont élus auxquels ils rendent régulièrement compte de leur activitié. (Cardan, no.27, 1959; 60)

The Hungarian revolution constituted, for Castoriadis, primary material for re-thinking, and revising the problem of organization and direction that stigmatized the Russian revolution (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 103). The development of the proletarian

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[16] These counsels were following the model of the shop stewards, which appeared after World War I. They are a form of organization independent from the syndicates, elected in every department of the industry. The most characteristic aspect of shop stewards is that they tend to surpass the level of the shop, to organizations of a much larger importance at the level of industry and region (Chaulieu, no.19, 1956; 103).

consciousness, defined as the activity, creation, and capacity of production, could obviously not be implemented from the exterior, as Lenin and the Bolshevik's propagated. Consciousness was *not* the learning and reproducing of eternal truths proclaimed by an avant-garde of scientific intellectuals, basing themselves on the study of sacrosanct, quasi-biblical Marxist scriptures. While for Lenin the intellectual was the only one who could inject a socialist consciousness into the proletariat, the *socio-barbares* were against the maintenance of such definite boundaries between intellectuals and the manual laborers; or directors and executors.

As we have explicated in the last chapter, according to Castoriadis, the essence of the proletarian revolution was to be found precisely in the abolishment of the standing opposition between classes. Therefore, all conceptions (especially under the false banner of socialism) aiming to separate the manual laborers from the intellectuals were resolutely discounted by the group as archaic and retro-grade. The avant-garde characteristic of the *socio-barbares* was to universalize tasks, and achieve a political direction that agglomerated the spontaneity of the masses, to the organization of the party (S ou B, vol.2, 1949; 102). However, the golden mean between spontaneity and organization was to be the oeuvre of the proletariat itself, in the conscious construction of socialism. In this sense, the role of the avant-garde was subsumed in the universal task of auto-emancipation.

Developing the consciousness of the proletariat was thus not for the *socio-barbares* a question of abstract study, but rather a question of contributing to the development of the proletariat's creative faculty by unleashing its revolutionary potential.

> La conception de la théorie révolutionnaire qui a prévalu pendant longtemps - science de la société et de la révolution, élaborée par des spécialistes et introduite dans le prolétariat par le parti - et en contradiction directe avec l'idée même d'une révolution socialiste comme activité autonome des masses. (Cardan, no.27, 1959-60; 79)

The insurrections in Hungary put into practice the idea of the auto-emancipation of the proletariat, which was the heart of *Socialisme ou Barbarie's* orthodox Marxism. Everything came down to Marx's formulation: "L'émancipation des travailleurs sera l'oeuvre des travailleurs eux-mêmes." (Marx in Cardan, no.27, 1959; 64) It was Marx's intuition of autonomy that was, for Castoriadis, the most profound and the most positive aspect of his oeuvre. It exposed an innovative answer to the question "*What is to be done?*", radically counter-posing the Leninist idea of the party.

Through observing the worker's counsels and the direct democracy practiced in the 12 day Hungarian revolution, Castoriadis had the intuition that alternative social organizations were a concrete *possibility* (Cardan, no.27, 1959; 72). These possible avenues for the creation of socialism were not to be taken as a programmatic prescription of the way the future was inevitably destined to unravel. Castoriadis always accounted for detours in history, provoked by the unpredictable activity of man. History, in the making, could not be thought as a linear and progressive causal chain; the detours through the totalitarian regimes of the twentieth century were certainly a lesson against this naïve conception of history. For him the ideal society was not founded on determinations, or necessities, but rather on possibilities extracted from historical experience.

5.2. Society as it could be

After the failure of the Hungarian revolution, Castoriadis was yet again confronted by the question posed by the degeneration of proletarian organizations. The *socio-barbares* were divided on the interpretation of this perpetual relapse and on the remedies needed to foster the socialist revolution.

In a very important article, published in 1957, "*Sur le contenu du socialisme*", Castoriadis deliberately demarcated his voice from the rest of the collective, and stated that the ideas brought forth in his essay were by no means shared by the entire group. The debate over organization between Castoriadis and Lefort, which ended in a scism a year later, was the source of Castoriadis retreat from the collective voice. Lefort expressed his diverging views in an article entitled "*Organisation et parti*" (1958), radically distancing himself from Castoriadis' proposed project.

Lefort feared bureaucratization (Blanchard, 2007; 203). For him, Leninist perspectives, or any variations on the role and the situation of the avant-garde, were to be condemned. The party, appearing to the proletariat as a necessary instrument in its struggle against the bourgeoisie, achieved a status of truth and direction that was distinct from the workers. For Lefort, this division between the party as director, and the proletariat as follower was highly problematic (Blanchard, 2007; 211).

The direction of the revolution by the party, for Lefort, could not be achieved democratically. It was not "bad" organization *per se* that perverted democracy, but rather the existence proper of the party (Blanchard, 2007; 214). The claim to autonomous management (of a soviet type) proposed by the group was, for Lefort, contradictory to the

idea of an organism *representing* the revolutionary masses. The critique of Leninism proclaimed by the *socio-barbares* was for him only a lure. The party could not assure a rigorous coordination of the struggle and a centralization of decision-making, without reproducing the bureaucratic structures that had plagued the socialist revolution in Russia. Lefort declared that:

> Le mouvement ouvrier ne se fraiera une voie révolutionnaire qu'en rompant avec la mythologie du parti, pour chercher ses formes d'action dans des noyaux multiples de militants organisant librement leur activité et assurant par leurs contacts, leurs informations et leurs liaisons non seulement leur confrontation mais aussi l'unité des expériences ouvrières. (Blanchard, 2007; 217)

Lefort left *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, to found another group, which published a journal named *Informations et liaisons ouvrière*. In this journal, "...la seul tâche réelle que devait se poser le groupe était de recueillir et de rediffuser des informations." (Castoriadis, USALD, 2005; 38).

Such an attitude appeared unsatisfactory to Castoriadis: autonomy was conceived by Lefort as necessarily opposed to any exterior or foreign influence. How was a passage from the "immediate" struggles of the proletariat and its universal social character to be made explicit, without the help of an organ developing the theory that unified and legitimized there activity? Certainly, argued Castoriadis, the reigning bourgeois ideology would not 'teach' the masses the social, political and historical significance of their struggles (Castoriadis, USALD, 2005; 36). To leave the masses to autonomous action, without understanding the full responsibility and implications of autonomy, would lead nowhere.

To retreat from the explicit organization of the revolution was for Castoriadis to withdraw completely from the project of creating an autonomous society. Autonomy was not an absolute that could be taken for granted. Autonomy had to be taught.

> C'est une chose de condamner la conception du parti comme 'direction'; c'en est une autre que de refuser ses propres responsabilités et de dire: 'Notre seul point de vue consiste à mettre notre journal à la disposition de celui qui veut parler.' (Castoriadis, USALD, 2005; 38)

Giving voice to the workers, without first teaching the workers how to voice their demands would only silence the revolutionary project. If the "immediate" struggles of the working class did not make the question of societal organization explicit (which was the more profound question of power), then the struggles would never go beyond spontaneous and fragmented uprisings, with naïve and short-sighted solutions.

For Castoriadis, worker's autonomous management remained the heart of socialism. Following the historical development of the proletariat, worker's autonomous management had been constitutive of the workers reclamations in Russia in 1917-18, in Spain in 1936 and also in Hungry in 1956 (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 112). From this historical trajectory, however, the meaning of worker's autonomous management had undergone some fundamental transformations. Having begun as the expression of spontaneous and externally motivated struggles with a programmatic agenda, autonomous management needed to be re-thought as a conscious, self-possessed dynamic process, situated in the social-historical.

> [...] la gestion ouvrière n'est ni la 'supervision' d'un appareil bureaucratique de direction de l'entreprise par des représentants des ouvriers, ni le remplacement de cet appareil par un analogue formé par des individus d'origine ouvrière. C'est la *supression* de l'appareil de direction

> séparé, la restitution de ses fonctions à la communauté des travailleurs. (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 126)

In order to prevent the bureaucratization that had characterized the workers counsels of the Soviets, it was necessary to confront the problem of centralization. In a socialist society, a government of counsels would not be an elected delegation of specialists on revolutionary activity, as Leninists had undertaken (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 122). Rather, the valence of power relations would be fundamentally reversed, and transformed. There would be a constant dialogue between the base and the summit, leaving the decisions to be made at the base (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 123). How were decisions to be undertaken by the base? What were the necessary conditions for decision making?

If the servitude and class domination that had prevailed in the last century was to be surpassed, then envisioning the form of the adequate institution capable of guiding social activity was a necessary step in the creation of the project. What architect can build without a plan; without laying a solid foundation? It was in this spirit that that the project of the future society needed to be elaborated. Only this plan was one that remained open to the vicissitudes of the moment, as the actual construction was underway.

Castoriadis' praise of worker's autonomous management was conditional upon: a) active participation in the counsels; b) de-centralization through direct democracy; c) transformation of the meaning of work; and d) transformation of the meaning of technology. The realization of these ideals, however, was conditional upon a radical transformation of the individual and society.

Active participation in the counsels

Castoriadis did not consider counsels to be miraculous institutions. They constituted an adequate form of organization *if and only if* the workers wanted to express themselves in these channels. If the worker's were passive and silent, the organizations were bound to reproduce the mechanisms of domination they originally sought to transgress. For counsels to work, obviously, the workers would have to transform their attitude towards organization. Commitment to the organization, and responsibility towards its functioning were prerequisites. Counsels were founded on the principle of autonomy.

Castoriadis could not foresee the transformation of society without the constitution of workers counsels at the level of industry. The first task of the counsels would be to organize production. The autonomous worker's management of production could only function according to a plan. Worker's management here signified that the worker's were responsible for realizing the objectives of the plan. The plan of production, whether for the industry or the totality of the economy functioned on two premises: the initial conditions of production, and the objectives to be attained from these initial conditions (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 157).

> Dans ces conditions *l'autonomie*, par rapport à la production signifie la détermination des modalités de réalisation de certains objectifs donnés à l'aide de moyens généralement définis. (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 147)

Determining the objectives to be realized by the industry was the first domain in which the workers would exercise their freedom. However important; this task was not a panacea. For, on the one hand, although the workers would participate in the decision-

making process, it could not be overlooked that all industries in the modern economy were inter-related. Thus, there had to be a unity to industrial production, as well as a certain global coherence to the set objectives. On the other hand, the workers could not decide the totality of the preferred means to be employed, for these would be conditioned in part by other industries.

Although the counsels were instituted as delegates of the workers, the counsels could deviate from their initial function. The Russian Soviets served as a historical lesson of the undesirable direction of counselism (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 115). But the "reflux of revolutionary activity" experienced in past revolutions had nothing of an inherent necessity. Even though the experiences of past revolutions demonstrated that "reflux" was a possibility, it was for Castoriadis not utopian to believe that this "reflux" could be eliminated through a network of institutions and method of functioning favorable to the organization of the masses (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 113).

Fetishism of councils needed to be condemned. This fetishism included as much the 'statuary' fetishism as the 'spontaneous' fetishism. Autonomous activity in the counsels, for Castoriadis, could not remain informal; it needed organization, institutions, and methods available for efficient functioning (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 113). This did not mean, however, that the autonomous worker's management would be a new apparatus for direction. Rather, its task was to be an instance of co-ordination; a "permanent" center for the regulation of industry with the greater demands of society (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 126).

In a planned economy, there would be two tasks for co-ordination: firstly, to make choices which function with the fluctuations of the economy; and, secondly, to assure the co-ordination of the diverse sectors of enterprise and in particular the diverse fractions of the bureaucratic apparatus (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 145). This would be solved through direct democracy.

De-centralization through direct democracy

For the counsels to function as system of collective management, direct democracy would be necessary. The General Assembly would serve as the supreme instance of decision for all the problems concerning industry. It would have to ratify all the decisions of the counsels. In other words, the General Assembly was akin to a government, except that the decisions were taken from the base and brought to the summit, rather than the other way around.

Democracy signified, for Castoriadis, domination by the masses. Real domination, Castoriadis insisted, could not be confounded with the idea of the vote, prevalent in our western representative democracies. "La domination réelle, c'est le pouvoir de décider soi-même des questions essentielles et de décider *en connaissance de cause*." (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 117) In these last words (*en connaissance de cause*) Castoriadis captures a central flaw in contemporary democracy. Representative democracy was a hoax. To call people to vote once every four years, without sufficient knowledge of the issues at hand, was useless. Most probably inspired by the Greek model, Castoriadis imagined that citizens had to form an organic community, in which political subjects would be part of daily activity, before voting with *connaissance de*

cause would be possible. Through direct democracy, which eschews representation, it would be possible to create a unity of the people in which the political participation of the individual would become total (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 119).

Direct democracy would imply the institution of the principle of revocability and delegation at all levels of society, assuring a maximum decentralization (David, 2000; 101). Revocability was the only means of instituting a true control over the logical tendency of power towards 'automaticity'.

Although direct democracy would allow for decentralization, the various cells created by this decentralization would have to be integrated into a totality. For Castoriadis, it was not centralization itself that corrupted organizations of modern societies, and resulted in political alienation. The obscure task of bureaucracy was to centralize power in an organ that acted and functioned independently of the workers. In a socialist society, by contrast, there was to be no separate organ in charge of unifying the various tasks. This proposition returned to most fundamental basis of the socialist society: the break-down of the standing division between those who *do* and those who *know*.

At the most profound level, autonomy signified reflexivity and activity. Concretely, this was to be translated into institutions favouring the lucidity of the individuals and the collective, as well as a maximal individual participation in public affairs (David, 2000; 107). Thus, the socialist society organized through Counsels and direct democracy were overlapping terms in Castoriadis' vocabulary.

Transformation of the meaning of work

For worker's counsels to be effective modes of societal organization, a profound transformation of the meaning of work would be necessary. A socialist society was characterized by:

> [...] la *transformation* consciente de la technologie héritée de façon à subordonner pour la première fois dans l'histoire de l'homme non pas seulement en tant que consommateur mais en tant que producteur. (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 127)

Retrieved from being a cog in the machine for the accumulation of alienated capital, the worker would acquire an active and creative role in the process of production. Production did not refer merely to the production of material goods, but also and most importantly to the meanings, and the values with which we imbue the world. The evolution of modern society, divided and socialized labor, reducing it to a partial execution of menial tasks, Castoriadis argued this could be overturned by offering to the workers a sense of direction and participation in the construction of social reality.

Contrary to Marx, for whom the reign of liberty began when work became a free activity (in the superior passage to communism), for Castoriadis, in a socialist society, production itself had to be the incarnation of this free activity. Castoriadis recognized the importance of allowing people the opportunity to accomplish a diversity of activities. However, the goal of a socialist society could not be oriented towards the reduction of working hours, for that implied that man could only be free in leisure. On the contrary: if labour was the basis of society, and the organization of man's practices, labour could not be overcome, without overcoming man. The task of socialism was thus to transform this

labor into autonomous and creative production of the world. Freedom would be placed at the center of the socialist society.

> Le problème est de faire de tout le temps un temps de liberté, et de permettre à la liberté concrète de s'incarner dans l'activité créatrice. Le problème est de mettre de la poésie dans le travail. (Poésie signifie très exactement création.) (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 135)

The realm of freedom began with work as free activity: that is, the autonomous organization of the motivations, and the content of labour activity. For Castoriadis, freedom would be a mystification unless it was contained in the most fundamental activity of man: the productive activity. This freedom, however, would have to be the conscious accomplishment of man himself.

This would necessitate two fundamental revisions of the current instituted society: the gradual dissolution of the division of labour; and a reorientation of the technical structures and their application. We have devoted a section to both of these latter tasks (below) for they constitute, according to Castoriadis, two sides of a same coin: the relationship of man to technology.

Transformation of the meaning of technology

The transformation in the nature and the content of work signified a conscious transformation of inherited technology, so as to subordinate technology, for the first time in history, to the demands of man not only as consumer, but as producer (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 127). This was possible for Castoriadis, for two reasons. He did not believe that domination and exploitation were inherent to the nature of techniques. Neither did he

accept the view according to which modern technical progress was following an autonomous unalterable development.

The development of technology within the capitalist enterprise was not value free, or neutral. Castoriadis identified a specific form of "capitalist technology", which was, from within the spectrum of *possible* technologies available for a given epoch, the technology developed in the interest of capitalists. The fundamental role of capitalist technology was not to develop production for the sake of production, but to subordinate producers. The ultimate goal being the elimination of the role of the human in production, in order to reduce costs of production, and increase profits (Castoriadis CS, 1979; 129); only a given percentage of technological processes were effectively in use (Castoriadis CS, 1979; 130).

> A partir du moment, en effet, où le développement de la science et de la technique permet un choix entre plusieurs procédés possibles, une société choisira infalilliblement les procédés qui ont pour elle un sens, qui sont "rationnels" dans le cadre de sa logique de classe. (Castoriadis CS, 1979; 130)

Under a different system of values, such as socialism, the development of technology *could* take a different course. Technology was not in essence exploitative and alienating. In a classless society the means and ends of science and technology would not be oriented towards the maintenance of class divisions. It could effectively be directed towards other productive and creative uses.

Castoriadis understood the rationale behind the division of labor: competence and specialization of technical knowledge reserved to a minority group. However, it did not follow from this proposition that the best way to use competence and specialization was

to hand over to these specialists the entire process of production. As we saw in chapter four, the separation of technicians from the process of production constituted one of the main sources of alienation and oppression in the capitalist system. The only way to abolish the standing division was to institute a cooperative management of technical and productive tasks in industry (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 141).

> Autrement dit, ce que nous contestons fondamentalement, c'est qu'il puisse y avoir une technique capable d'organiser les hommes extérieure aux hommes eux-mêmes (c'est finalement aussi absurde que l'idée d'une psychanalyse à laquelle le psychanalysé resterait extérieur, et qui ne serait qu'une 'technique' de l'analyste). (Castoriadis, CS, 1979; 142)

5.3. Coming to terms with Autonomy

The project of autonomy is the central aim of Castoriadis' revolutionary praxis. Castoriadis' view of autonomous workers management, was influenced by Anton Pannekoek's (1947) Communist Councils. Pannekoek sought the golden mean between organization and spontaneity and also emphasized the particularity of autonomous organization. He stated that:

> True organization, as the workers need it in the revolution, implies that everyone takes part in it, body and soul and brains; that everyone takes part in leadership as well as in action, and has to think out, to decide and to perform to the full of his capacities. Such an organization is a body of self-determining people. There is no place for professional leaders. Certainly there is obeying; everybody has to follow the decisions which he himself has taken part in making. But the full power always rests with the workers themselves. (Pannekoek, 1936)

Both Castoriadis and Pannekoek viewed socialism as something the working class does, rather than something that is forced upon it by some objective circumstance.

However, as autonomy was used ever more precisely by Castoriadis, his revolutionary project became more radical and singular. In later writings, the project of worker's autonomous production matured and extended to all realms of society, as the autonomous institution of society. This followed the general diffusion of the crisis of modern societies to all spheres of social activity: beyond the proletariat, to the family, race, gender, and beyond; the project of autonomy needed to broaden its horizon in correspondence with a transforming reality.

By the end of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the project of autonomy was still only at an embryonic form. Yet, from this intuition of autonomy, present throughout Castoriadis' engagement with the collective, the kernel of his understanding of the possibility of creating alternative social organizations was cultivated, and flourished.

The history of the idea of autonomy became of utmost importance for Castoriadis. He traced the origins of autonomy to the birth of Greek democracy and philosophy. Autonomy, from the Greek *auto* –self and *nomos* –law, designated the situation of self-government; of giving oneself one's own laws. The Greeks, in submitting their self-created institutions to inquiry, materialized the first project of an autonomous society. Politics acquired a new signification: it was the act of questioning power and its legitimacy. As the institution of society was actively taken in charge by the Athenian people, philosophy was created as a discourse incarnating unlimited interrogation, modifiable with the course of history (Castoriadis, 1997; 20).

Beyond the individual dimension, autonomy was essentially social, for it was reflected in the democratic (*demos* –people, and *kratos* –*power*) organization of

society. *Demos* designated the citizens, the people with whom the open deliberation of the institutional order took place, in the name of social and individual autonomy (Castoriadis, USAD, 2005; 185). The *demos* recognized no transcendental power. It posed the citizens as the autonomous creators of their laws.

> La participation directe au pouvoir, l'auto-gouvernement, l'absence d'Etat, le refus du fondement extra-social de l'institution sont quelques-uns des traits de l'imaginaire politique grec. (Gregorio, 2006; 57)

A society that gives itself its own laws is diametrically opposed to a heteronomous society, where power has been automated, and become, as we saw in chapter four, an autonomous ruling entity above the workers and outside the ken of the citizens. The project of autonomy equated, for Castoriadis, to the possibility of freedom from the significations of the past, materialized in societies institutions.

> Socialism is about *freedom*. We don't mean freedom in a merely juridical sense, nor moral or metaphysical freedom, but freedom in the most concrete, down-to-earth sense: freedom of people in their everyday lives and activities, freedom to decide collectively how much to produce, how much to consume, how much to work and how much to rest. Freedom to decide, *collectively* and individually, *what* to consume, *how* to produce and *how* to work. Freedom to participate in determining the orientation of society, and freedom to direct one's own life within this social framework. (Cardan,1961)

Thus, for Castoriadis, alternative modes of social organization could be imagined; from the potential inherent to the contingent, there was a space for creating anew. As we will see in the following chapter, however, as the conditions of possibility for total revolution dissipated, Castoriadis was confronted with a new problem. It was the revolutionary project itself which was losing its desirability, and being condemned as subjective fantasy. In response to this, Castoriadis was to unravel new paths for thinking

revolutionary activity. With human creation as the ontological root of the project of autonomy, the aim of autonomy was a human destiny.

Chapter 6: What is to be done? Actualizing the Possible

The ideal society disclosed by Castoriadis has significance beyond the mere content of the proposed alternative mode of social organization. It reveals that *what is, is* a social-historical construction that *could/should be* otherwise. We will be weaving, in this chapter, the close ties between a revolutionary praxis of autonomy together with the social-historical, which Castoriadis explicitly theorizes in the final breaths of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Hence, Castoriadis continues to move further away from traditional Marxist orthodoxy.

It was the trend towards privatization, observed by Castoriadis at the turn of the 1960s, which permitted the market economy to flourish. The method of Marxism was unable to explain this trend, and even less, provide answers to its possible political and social orientation. Castoriadis' last articles published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, "*Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne*" (1964) as well as "*Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire*" (1964) demounted the armature protecting Marxism; laying bare the knotted centre of its ideological mystifications. Castoriadis' concluded that Marxism had to be abandoned, if the revolutionary project was to be maintained.

This was a turning point for the *socio-barbares*: the point of no return. This would be a prelude to the final dissolution of the group. The oeuvre initially inspiring the coalition to take arms against the Fourth International contained lethal ingredients for the legitimacy of their revolutionary project.

Importantly, what needed to be addressed for Castoriadis, was the question of the "*how*?", which continued to haunt the revolutionary project. Castoriadis, never abandoning the revolutionary project, increasingly specified the contours for the possibility of transformative political action. Through a politics conceived as *praxis*, Castoriadis' provided a definition of the project of autonomy that remained open to the arrival of the new. Understanding the creation of the new as an ontological necessity of being social-historical beings, Castoriadis uncovered the imaginary: the motive force obscured by a historical materialism all too obsessed with the real and the rational.

What is to be done to effect a radical transformation of the individual and society? How is action to be directed towards non-yet-apparent but *possible* goals and orientations for society? Although Castoriadis cannot give us the prescriptions for the orientation of future activity, he took a normative position on a conceivable future that was preferable to traditional Marxism. In other words, Castoriadis provided us with an alternative: an orientation for the future of society, which increasingly appeared without political trajectory.

6.1. The crisis of modern societies

In the aforementioned articles written by Castoriadis, it was the contemplation of the general disinterest in political affairs that perturbed him. Capitalist modernization had decreased the frequency of crises in the contemporary world. Higher standards of living and higher salaries had created apathetic masses, and attenuated discontent (Castoriadis,

MRCM, 1979; 51). This apparent tendency of conciliation between the workers and the capitalists had not been foreseen by Marx.

The consequences of this situation were critical: if the capitalist economy was no longer driven by crisis, then how was the socialist revolution to emerge? Traditional Marxists[17] disregarded these striking tendencies towards pacification. Opening this Pandora's Box directly challenged the messianism of the proletariat. Indeed, if the objective contradictions of the capitalist economy had been resolved, mass discontent satisfied, workers demands granted; then what was the *raison d'être* of the revolutionary project? The revolutionary project would immediately become undesirable, and the subjective fantasy of a disgruntled intellectual minority. The trend of de-politicization marked a deep incision in the class struggle.

> La privatisation des individus est le trait le plus frappant des sociétés capitalistes modernes. [...] elle réussit jusqu'ici à détruire la socialisation politique [...] ou l'idée qu'une action collective puisse déterminer le cours à l'échelle de la société a perdu son sens sauf pour d'infimes minorités [...] (Castoriadis, MRCM, 1979; 69)

This trend of privatization was for Castoriadis, a consequence of bureaucratic organization. Through the division and fragmentation of responsibilities, political life had become the affair of a minority of specialists (Cardan, no.32, 1961; 104). The rest of the population participated in the political only on the occasion of an election, usually once every four years.

The value of collectives in general was dissolved by rampant atomism. Indeed, under Castoriadis' notion of privatization one finds that which we simply call

[17] Traditional Marxism, for Castoriadis, does not refer to the systematic doctrine of Karl Marx, but the theory and ideology of the Marxist movement (Castoriadis, MRCM, 1979; ftn 13 p.194).

individualism today (Castoriadis, USALD, 2005; 183). The value of active participation in trade unions and political organizations appeared to be increasingly insignificant. The meanings of institutions such as work, the university, or the family, were ever more distorted through the rationalization of bureaucratization. Since the institutions no longer represented the *demos*, these institutions were reduced to instrumental functions: serving the primary interests of the market.

Not surprisingly, the process of privatization was supported by enormous commercial activity, directed towards the creation of needs, and their satisfaction through a psychological manipulation of consumers (Castoriadis, MRCM, 1979; 66). Revenue had meaning only insofar as it increased the individual's powers of consumption; the only remaining meaning of labor was income.

Alienation and exploitation persisted despite people's apathy (Castoriadis, no.35, 1964; 32). Therefore, Castoriadis continued to believe that even though the theory of crisis, based on wages, had not materialized, there remained fundamental contradictions in the enterprise of bureaucratic capitalism. Modernization had not "solved" the glitches of the capitalist system by pacifying individuals (Castoriadis, MRCM, 1979; 70). To view this situation as a solution was simply an indication that traditional Marxists were blind to the new loci of contradiction.

The focus of analysis needed to be shifted and adapted to the realities of a transforming social-historical context. Where was the locus of alienation to be found in the contemporary social world? Castoriadis would continue to pursue the search for elements of crisis present in the new modes of exploitation as he had from the original

inception of the journal. Through his analysis of bureaucratic capitalism it was obvious to Castoriadis that the internal contradictions had intensified rather than been resolved. Moreover, this intensification had consequences far beyond the class struggle. It extended to all spheres of society and across class lines: it was political, economic, and cultural at once.

Thus, Castoriadis began to expand his consideration of crisis to struggles waged in other social orders; such as those undertaken by the youth in South Korea and Turkey (and later in France); the illiterate Blacks in South Africa; the peasants in Cuba; and the women's liberation movement.

> A Cuba, un partisanat paysan a mis par terre une dictature établie de longue date et appuyée par les Etats-Unis. En Afrique du Sud, des Noirs illettrés, soumis depuis des générations à la domination totalitaire de trois millions de négriers blancs, constituent collectivement, inventent des formes de lutte inédites et sont sur le point d'obliger le gouvernement Verwoerd à entreprendre ce que le Financial Times a appelé "une longue et douloureuse retraite". En Corée du Sud la dictature de Syndman Rhee, ouvertement soutenu par les Etats-Unis depuis quinze ans, s'est effondrée sous les coups portés par les manifestations populaires où les étudiants ont joué un rôle prépondérant. Ce sont encore les étudiants qui, en Turquie, se dressèrent les premiers contre le gouvernement Mendérès et ses mesures dictatoriales et ouvrirent la crise qui aboutit à la chute du régime. (Castoriadis, MRCM, 1979; 54-55)

The crisis being more deeply engrained in the institutional conditions of modern society, Castoriadis no longer prioritized the class struggle. It was thus time, for Castoriadis, to reconsider Marxism in light of this emerging social-historical reality. If the method of Marxism could not come to terms with the content of the world, then Marxism would have to be abandoned. We will now turn to Castoriadis' critique of

Marxism, which was based on the observations of crisis extending far beyond the industrial working class.

6.2. Critique of traditional Marxism

Through a critique of Marx's theory of crisis, it became clear for Castoriadis that the concrete locus of revolutionary activity needed to be displaced. However, this critique of Marxism had consequences far beyond the abandoning of a few ideas. As we will see, it meant renewing the traditional schemes through which both society and history were to be thought, so that human creativity could be restored to the center of political activity.

Castoriadis' critique of traditional Marxism was twofold. Effective revolutionary activity could not be based in an understanding of being as being-determined. Man's action could not be reduced to a formula guaranteeing specific results, applicable regardless of the situation. There could be no singular transcendental determination of the future, to which human activity corresponded. The future was for man to create, from the ashes of the present.

On the other hand, if action directed towards the radical transformation of society was to acquire political significance, it could not be entangled in an unchangeable teleological system of historical prescriptions and predictions. The "end of history", in other words, was only a projection of a specific order imposed on *chaos* by our finite, imperfect modes of thinking. Our investment of meaning in the world did not necessarily entail a correspondence to the reality of what is. In fact, the world could be indifferent or

even violently contrary to the significations we project upon it. Finally, this meant that communism was not the inescapable fate of our civilizations; it was a systematic construction that veiled the unpredictable nature of history.

As we have noted in chapter three, Marx's theory of wages implied that capitalists would always attempt to reduce the wages of the worker. This reduction would enable them to accumulate more surplus capital. Simultaneously though, this dynamic would amplify alienation until a socialist consciousness emerged within the proletariat.

However, there was a conundrum hidden in this formula. The theory of wages, founded on the theoretical necessity of ever-increasing exploitation, postulated that the proletariat was effectively reduced by capital to mere object. As an object of pure economic science however, whose intentions and actions had no determining impact on the evolutionary course of history, the proletariat lost any agency necessary for change.

Paradoxically then, Marx the thinker of praxis, while engaged in the theory of transformative action, reduced man to an object subject to the "objective" laws of scientific economics. This caused the sole apparent course towards the future to be known, predictable and programmable. The proletariat had only to wait for the train to arrive on the railway to socialism! He was no more than an object, a lump of coal or ingot of iron, whose actions could not consciously influence the value for which they would be sold (Castoriadis, MRCM, 1979; 85).

> Il faut dire tout de suite que cette conception équivaut à traiter dans la théorie les ouvriers comme le capitalisme voudrait mais ne peut pas les traiter dans la pratique de la production -- à savoir comme des objets purs et simples. Elle équivaut à dire que la force de travail est intégralement

> marchandise, au même titre qu'un animal, un combustible ou un minerai. Elle possède une valeur d'échange qui correspond à un coût objectif déterminé par les forces du marché; elle possède une valeur d'usage, dont l'extraction ne dépend que du bon vouloir du capitaliste et de ses méthodes de production. Le charbon ne peut pas influer sur le prix auquel il est vendu; ni empêcher le capitaliste d'augmenter son rendement énergétique par des méthodes d'utilisation perfectionnées. L'ouvrier non plus. (Castoriadis, CMR, 1979; 85)

For Castoriadis, Marx's analysis revealed profound ontological contradictions within what, for the *socio-barbares,* was the spirit of his oeuvre: Marx's conception of revolution and the possibility of social transformation. The seeds of revolutionary potential co-existed beside systematized, objectivist and determinist theoretical elements (Castoriadis, MRCM, 1979; 88). Castoriadis indicated:

> On aboutit ainsi à cet énorme paradoxe: Marx, qui a découvert la lutte des classes, écrit un ouvrage monumental analysant le développement du capitalisme, ouvrage d'où la lutte des classes est totalement absente. (Castoriadis, CMR, 1979; 102)

Adopting traditional Marxism, it became absurd to legitimize the project of the ideal society, as a creative alternative social organization: people were not the agents of history, but their passive receptacle. What was, then, the possibility for a radical transformation of society? Why struggle, if human history was fully determined; and bound to arrive at its final destination come hell or high water?

If the revolutionary project was to be maintained, and fortified, it was for Castoriadis essential that history and society be re-thought with man's creative potential at the forefront. Could people be transformed into something other than a mere receptacle for the world's conditions and constraints? Although this protean quality had always been implicit to Castoriadis' understanding of revolutionary activity, it became necessary for

him to explicitly formulate a theory of creation as ontologically prior to the determinations of history. The revolutionary project itself was here in jeopardy.

The downfall of Marxism was not simply the ruin of a certain number of precise economic ideas. It was also, and most significantly, the collapse of a specific relationship between ideas and the world, thought and action. This was the pinnacle of Castoriadis' insights concerning traditional Marxism: the impossibility of continuing to propound a closed system of thought. Of course, it was not only that the proletariat was an immoveable figure in the rational-economic scheme of historical development; but also importantly that this scheme had an end that was far removed from the situated course of life.

Time, for Castoriadis, could not be thought along this teleological scheme; human action was unpredictable. Castoriadis' conception of history was predicated on the observation that socialism did not come naturally, as would the change of seasons. Castoriadis could thus safely declare that history was not a linear succession of events, inevitably leading to the reasonable, desirable, projected end. It was evident to Castoriadis that the struggle of the workers against exploitation was an extra-economic factor; one that could not be successfully determined by laws, rules, or norms of objective calculation (Castoriadis, MRCM, 1979; 84). The awaited socialist revolution had not materialized as envisioned: actions and reactions that had taken place in the world could not be foretold; especially not in strictly economic terms.

Since it was not possible to base human activity on a scientific system claiming to encompass the whole truth of historical development (Castoriadis, no.35, 1964; 9), more

than ever the question of human destiny needed to be confronted. The realization that the future was unknown and unpredictable necessitated a complete re-evaluation of the grounds for the revolutionary project. It was not only the possibility for revolutionary activity and creation that was at stake, but the very foundations of legitimacy for the intentional direction and orientation of a society within history.

Castoriadis referred to the break from Marxist thought as the end of the "theological phase", which he defined as:

> [...] la phase de la foi, soit en un Être Suprême, soit à un homme ou un groupe d'hommes 'exceptionnels', soit à une vérité impersonnelle établie une fois pour toutes et consignée dans une doctrine. C'est la phase pendant laquelle l'homme s'aliène à ses propres créations, imaginaires ou réelles, théoriques ou pratiques. (Cardan, no.35, 1964; 10)

Marxism had become a mechanism of alienation, a theory dissociated from the reality it aimed to transform, and from which it claimed its justification.

For Castoriadis, the end of the "theological phase" was not a corresponding plunge into skepticism. There remained truths and falsehoods for every moment of experience, and the necessity of creating a unified understanding of these experiences. However, this understanding could be only provisionary, open and mobile. At every stage of our development, we have the ability to affirm certainties, but only on grounds recognizing the frontiers of our reflection, and all the uncertainties on which our reflection was founded and stemmed.

Unearthing the question "*What is to be done*?" for a radical transformation of society and the individual, significantly altered traditional conceptions of praxis. There

was no fixed program to follow, no unwavering prescriptions for revolutionary activity, or even a universal justification for actions aiming to transform the world. Although the deck was stacked against him, Castoriadis did not abandon the hope for revolution. History had not yet come to its end, and if history was still in the making, then Castoriadis remained confident that new avenues could be paved for a politics of autonomy. Moreover, these new roads would have the lessons of the past as building blocks. It was thus on the ruin of the theological phase that the foundations for thinking praxis would arise anew. Our ontological understanding of history and society, however, had to be transfigured so that the revolutionary project could be kept alive.

6.3. Re-thinking history and society

It was not possible for Castoriadis to deny the fundamental problems which lay at the heart of traditional Marxism. However, neither was it possible for Castoriadis to abandon the revolutionary project. Faced with this difficulty, Castoriadis embarked on an original path, re-thinking history and society in light of the dead-end of historical materialism.

Castoriadis' major lesson was certainly that the two primary frameworks for thinking history and society were inadequate. Historical materialism, whether of the *physicalist* type, such as functionalism, or the *logicist* type, *à la* structuralism, failed to grasp the problem of the identity of history and society. Nor did it grasp the significance of its alterations. These lacunae were contained in the problematic conceptions of creation and the emergence of the new or radical alterity, which Castoriadis persisted to

specify as point of departure. From this stance Castoriadis provided a critique of the ontological structures of determination through which history and society were traditionally thought. This led Castoriadis to new insights concerning a transformative praxis of autonomy, which we will further elucidate in the section 6.4.

The functionalist view stated that within society, all social practice, whether institutional, material or cultural, served a vital function for the greater whole. The image of a living being, where every organ participates in the production of the totality, is analogous with this understanding of functionalism. On the social plane, however, this reduced the role of the institution to an economic perspective: regarding every part as fulfilling a role in the total economy of society. The institution was conceived as satisfying the real-rational needs of society.

As we have seen in chapter four, Castoriadis dismantled the idea of an institutional superstructure as the singular adequate mode of representing the infrastructure, or the "real" needs of society. This functionalist approach, inherent to Marx's historical materialism, emphasized a logic by which the means and ends, or causes and effects, between the superstructure and the infrastructure were in natural correspondence. No such correspondence actually appeared for Castoriadis.

Of course, he did not deny that institutions served a function in society. However, their role was not exhausted in this instrumentality. If the only function of the institution was to satisfy needs, then we would merely have to inquire: what are the 'real' needs of human society? (Cardan, no.39, 1965; 42) It was obvious, that the needs of human beings far surpassed the biological.

> On recouvre ainsi le fait essentiel: les besoins humains, en tant que sociaux et non simplement biologiques, sont inséparables de leurs objets, et les uns comme les autres sont chaque fois institués par la société considérée. (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 256)

In other words, human needs were not merely being served by the organizational mode of society; whether feudalist, capitalist or socialist. The organization of society also instituted needs; needs that were not at all based on a biological human nature (we need only think of organized religions, or their diverse rituals). Needs were not fixed once and for all by nature; society invented needs, as well as new ways of fulfilling them. This insight overturned what functionalism tried to achieve, which was the determination of needs according to a perceivable end (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 268).

The second type of historical materialism, the *logicist* type, was an operational logic repeated a certain number of times, in order to render successively the whole of history and society. This logical operation posited as a foundation a finite ensemble of elements in history that were identifiable, separable, and subject to categorization (such as in structuralism). According to Castoriadis, this logic abridged history into finite and discrete sequences, knowable in their entirety. Indeed, the only way to think of the distinct and the definite on this account was by employing a schema of unity. Thus, historical materialism could grasp the unfolding of history and society, because it assumed it to be finite. It would progress in a dialectical mode until the achievement of its true aim: to fulfill the 'real' needs of human society.

For Castoriadis, even though patterns and sequences in history could be identified, these observations resulted from within a rationalizing consciousness. In later writings, Castoriadis was to refer to this as the logic of identity and ensembles

(Castoriadis, 1975; 257).[18] This logic was, for Castoriadis, tautological. It stated that that which existed could be identified as ensemble. However, the logic of identity and ensembles constituted the only available means for human beings to 'know' the world (Castoriadis, 1987; 232). Society could only represent itself, through language and doing, by instituting the ways of saying and doing of the social (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 263). In other words, everything that was identified existed, because of our capacity to identify the existing. This circularity, for Castoriadis, sculpted being out of *Bestimmtheit* – determination. There was, in this logic, "...no thought of being that is not also a logos of being." (Castoriadis, 1997; 211) Snared in an unavoidable circularity, demonstrated by the conditioning world, the *logicist* analysis must abandon its premise to elude contradiction.

The problem remained, for Castoriadis, that the question of the origin of the object was not addressed by *either* analysis. From the postulate that social organization could be reduced to a finite knowable sequence, the ontological and logical foundations of history and society remain within the realm of the thinkable. But, the thinkable itself is anchored in the institution of the social-historical. The rational ontology at work in these modes of thinking focused on the possibility of real repetition, and hence on the a-temporal; making it impossible to think of creation and the emergence of the new.[19]

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[18] Castoriadis qualifies the logic as *ensemblist-identitaire* for it constitutes an essential dimension of language, as well as practical social life (Poirier, 2004; 112).The *ensemblist-identitaire* logic constitutes both *legein* and *teukhein*. *Legein,* from which *logos* was derived, refers to the dimension of the social represented in language. *Teukhein*, from which *techné* was derived, refers to the dimension of the social represented in doing (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 262).

[19] The inability for inherited thought to account for creation was, for Castoriadis, contained in its inability to think being and time. Determination could only posit a-temporality and the forever-now. It was thus the ontological root of being, which needed to be re-thought (Adams, 2003; 106)

Castoriadis' social-historical being was intended to address precisely this problematic. Although composed of inter-subjective relations, it was neither the sum of these inter-subjective parts, nor their calculable product. Society was not merely a thing, nor a subject, nor an idea. Castoriadis referred to the social-historical as the "anonymous collective". How, then, was the social-historical to be thought?

> The social-historical is the anonymous collective whole, the impersonal-human element that fills every social formation but which also engulfs it, settling each society in the midst of others, inscribing them all within a continuity in which those who are no longer, those who are elsewhere, and even those yet to be born, are in a certain sense present. (Castoriadis, 1987; 108)

The difficulty of expressing or defining the social-historical was entangled in the limits of language. For, wrote Castoriadis, the social-historical was neither a substantive, nor an adjective, nor a substantive adjective. The mode of being of that which appeared *before* the imposition of the logic of identity or ensembles Castoriadis named *magma*. Although ontologically prior to our capacity for definition, and identification, Castoriadis used this enunciation to describe what he intended with magma:

> A magma is that form which can extract (or in which one can construct) an indefinite number of ensemblist organizations but which can never be reconstituted (ideally) by a (finite or infinite) ensemblist composition of these organizations. (Castoriadis, 1997; 297)

Magma, therefore, was the precondition for the possibility of the logic of identity and ensembles. It was a plurality, a multiplicity, whose content could not be calculated. It was magma which held together the distinctive-indistinct diversity of the social-historical. The magma was held in the interstices of being, allowing the logical operations of ensembles and identity to transform or actualize in distinct and definite terms the

indistinct and the indefinite. It is not possible here to expand fully on Castoriadis' notion of magma; it suffices to understand that the social-historical, for Castoriadis, was enfolded and engulfed in magma.

The social-historical appeared in two principle forms: as individual psyche, as well as collective, social imaginary significations. We will elucidate these two manifestations of the social-historical, for they contain the key to Castoriadis' re-thinking of history and society as inherently instituting new possibilities and posing alternatives to a reality presenting itself as always already instituted.

At the collective level, the realm of the symbolic functions as the most familiar constituent of social imaginary significations. For each subject the symbolic instantiated both an interiority and an exteriority. However, the symbolic could not be reduced to the particular language of a society. It was incarnated in the general ways of doing, thinking and feeling within a society. The symbolic thus acquired, for Castoriadis, a material presence through the institution. Instituted in structures, there was always an exchange between the instituted and the instituting; there was a constant dialogue between that which was and that which could/should be. This was the paradox of the social-historical being: it was both the forming and the formed; installing and altering its own mode of being (Adams, 2003; 105)

It was thus impossible to wholly dominate or abolish the social-historical from the being of the subject, for it was a constitutive element thereof. Castoriadis had already foreseen this in his analysis of capitalism. Capitalism, to reiterate, was not merely an

externally conditioned force, in the material conditions of production, but rather co-constitutive of the proletariat's values and behavior. It was because capitalism partook in the construction of the proletariat's interiority, that it became so difficult to transform radically. It was not just a question of changing the modes of production of a society, as Russian socialism had attempted, but re-evaluating the entire scheme by which the individual had learned 'to be' in the world.

However, while constituting the subject, the social-historical could not be understood as being in a strict relation of dependence nor necessity with the subject. The institutional symbolism, through which the social-historical was manifested, did not exhaustively determine the content of social life. Neither, however, could it be regarded as a realm of total liberty.

> Un symbolisme est maîtrisable sauf pour autant qu'il renvoie, en dernier lieu, à quelque chose *qui n'est* pas symbolique. [...] Ce qui permet au symbolisme institutionnel de s'autonomiser [...]; ce qui enfin, lui fournit son supplément essentiel de détermination et de spécification, ne relève pas du symbolique. (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 176-177)

The symbolic was *not* a space of concrete determination; and thus institutions were not inherently alienating. Although the institution could alienate itself from the symbolism it incarnated, this was not a necessity of the instituting process. It was therefore more accurate, for Castoriadis to define this relation as one of immanence: as the terrain from which both autonomy and heteronomy had the potential of emerging.

As we began to demonstrate in chapter four, alienation as a modality of the institution signaled its social-historical constitution. Alienation was not limited to the material realm of techniques, embodied in the *material* modes and forces of production.

If *techné* was could not be dissociated from the symbolic, and the production of knowledge, then alienation was also able to be contained in the symbolic dimension of technological rationalization. However, there was to every symbol, and symbolism, an imaginary component. Castoriadis, in his search for the possibility of creating new modes of social organization, began to uncover the imaginary as the foreground to all symbolism.

The imaginary was for Castoriadis not a concept referring to our common sense understanding of something unreal, fictitious, and thus existing only in the mind. Neither was the imaginary for Castoriadis the effective imaginary, which, although it does not represent the world as it appears before us, plays with and combines images of the world that already have a meaningful referent to us.

> Ce que j'appelle imaginaire [...] n'a rien à voir avec ce qui est présenté comme "imaginaire" par certains courants psychanalytiques: le "spéculaire", qui n'est évidemment qu'image de et image reflétée." [...] "L'imaginaire n'est pas à partir de l'image dans le miroir ou dans le regard de l'autre. Plutôt, le "miroir" lui-même et sa possibilité, et l'autre comme miroir, sont des oeuvres de l'imaginaire, qui est création ex nihilo. (Florence, 2006; 115) or (Castoriadis, CL, 1987; 7)

The "spéculaire" (or reflection) is always an image of something pre-existing, pre-determined, and determinate, in the symbolic field (Castoriadis, CL, 1984; 59). The imaginary for Castoriadis was not dependent on the symbolic in this fashion. Although the imaginary needed the symbolic in order to find a means of expression, and mode of existence, to pass from the virtual to the real; it was the imaginary, which was at the wellspring of creation, not the symbolic (Cardan, no.39, 1965; 55). To separate himself from these psychoanalytic currents using the flat notion of 'reflection', Castoriadis named

the source of the unceasing and essentially indeterminate creation of new figures, forms and images the *radical imaginary*. The radical imaginary was ontologically primary to the symbolic, for it allowed creation to be thought and enacted *ex nihilo*.

The radical imaginary was that from which what was not, and had never been, had the possibility of becoming. Castoriadis retrieved inspiration from Hegel: (Cardan, no.39, 1965; 55)

> C'est la nuit qu'on aperçoit lorsqu'on regarde un homme dans les yeux: une nuit qui devient terrible; c'est la nuit du monde qui nous fait alors face. (Hegel, *Jenense Realphilosophie*)

It was from the night and the nothingness of being that something had the potential of coming into existence. Castoriadis' exploration and eventual rejection of orthodox Marxism, which began from the rationality of real, led him back to the forest primeval from which its path had emerged. The forest primeval was *chaos* or disorder; the path was *cosmos* or order. Following on Hesiod, Castoriadis conceived the world as destruction and creation; the perpetual flux and reflux of forms (Poirier, 2004; 118).

As we stated previously, creation *ex nihilo* demanded the abandonment of the category of absolute determinacy. The indeterminacy of the radical imaginary was the source from which both the symbolic and the effective imaginary flowed and found anchorage in the real. For Castoriadis, both rationality and reality were the oeuvre of the radical imaginary, for it was the indeterminate ground of being, from which something radically unforeseen could emerge (Castoriadis, 1987; 3). Although it was conditioned by social imaginary significations, and could not be thought outside of the symbolic, the radical imaginary was not completely signified or knowable. There remained an abyss, a

chaos, an in-determinate specter within the radical imaginary. It was from this specter that what was-not could come into being; it was because of the radical imaginary that spaces for creation of the actually-new were possible.

However, the idea of creation *ex nihilo* was also foreign to complete indeterminacy or pure chaos: the radical imaginary had the potential of being formed and ordered. It was in the inter-relationship between the radical imaginary and the symbolic that the new and the emergence of radical alterity could be conceived. The radical imaginary was the emergence of just such alterity:

> [...] qui figure et en se figurant, création d'"images" qui sont ce qu'elles sont et telles qu'elles sont comme figurations ou présentifications de significations ou de sens." (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 532)

The radical imaginary was the condition of possibility of the existence of the historical; however, it was not a transcendental object, as in traditional philosophy.[20] The emergence of the radical imaginary was situated and subjective, in as much as the subject was always already constituted by the social imaginary significations of the social-historical.

It would be incorrect to believe that the totality of what-is can be thought. Moreover, it is precisely because this totality cannot be thought, that there is always space for the emergence of the new. For Castoriadis, it was not a shortfall of thought, to

[20] Castoriadis' thought inscribes itself in a phenomenological tradition, notably, that of Maurcie Merleau-Ponty. The main target of critique for Castoriadis was a conception of subject and object as radically dissociated, as in Kantian philosophy (Poirier, 2004; 81). The possibility of a transformation of the world by the subject was conducive to the primary relation the subject entertained with the world. The inter-relation between the subject and the object finds expression in a world which, although presenting itself as organized, is also organizable (Adams, 2003, 106). Although further discussion of the philosophical implications of Castoriadis' ontology is beyond the scope of this thesis, Suzi Adams' recent doctoral thesis addresses precisely these issues. See "Castoriadis and the Circle of *physis* and *nomos*: A Critical Interpretation of his Philosophical Trajectory" (2006) La Trobe University, Australia

be unable to predict the future, nor to know in advance the outcomes of action. It was rather a necessary condition for the possibility of creating alternative modes of social organization. If we could know the future, then being would be confined to determination. The revolutionary project thus found legitimacy outside traditional modes of thinking which held being as determined and history as teleological (Martuccelli, 2002).

6.4. Autonomy: a revolutionary praxis

> La praxis ne peut pas éliminer le besoin d'élucider l'avenir qu'elle veut. Pas plus que la psychanalyse ne peut évacuer le problème de la *fin* de l'analyse, la politique révolutionnaire ne peut esquiver la question de son aboutissement et du sens de cet aboutissement.
>
> -- Cardan, Paul (1965). *Socialisme ou Barbarie: Organe de critique et d'orientation révolutionnaire*. no.39; 36.

We have scrutinized in detail why the social-historical was neither determinate, nor exhaustively knowable for Castoriadis. "What is", in other words, cannot be reduced to what is known. Yet, the real, and our knowledge of the real, entertain an intimate and complex relationship. It is precisely because what is known is not determined, that what we imagine could be, has possibility of being actualized. Knowledge of the world transforms both the initial conditions of the subject and their world. This flux belongs within the domain of praxis.

It was necessary for Castoriadis to re-think the relation between theory and practice, since ideas did not have an exclusive priority over the world. Castoriadis was returning to Marx's original endeavor, to think praxis as a doing which was primary to theory. However, while Marx had sought refuge in the existence of a definite theory of man and history, reducing human activity to a cog in the mechanical progress of history, Castoriadis maintained action as the foreground of his conception of praxis (Poirier, 2004; 77). Theory itself was, for Castoriadis, a doing; the moment of elucidation was always contained in action. However, this did not imply that doing and thinking were equivalent or symmetrical. Theory was rather a occasion of doing, emerging when the moment of elucidation became expressly project (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 110).[21]

It was not because the movement towards socialism could not be predicted by a total science of society, that certain directions and movements towards autonomy could not be expounded from history. In other words, that the *telos* of history and the determination of being could not be prescribed by theory did not deter Castoriadis. It instead inspired his belief in the possibility of creating alternative modes of social organization. It was because there remained within society and history an indeterminate space that autonomy represented a *project* for society; a historical *possibility* imminent to our being in the world, consistently re-emerging where there was social living.

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[21] Castoriadis insisted on the distinction between a project and a program: the former being a historical goal, the latter being an ensemble of concrete measures to be assiduously applied by the people (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 152). In as much as total knowledge of society and history were impossible, to demand of the revolutionary project of autonomy that it predict the outcome of its actions was to revert back to a conception of history that was determinate and exhaustively knowable.

The doing of praxis could not be reduced to a mere technical knowledge of the "means" by which a desired "end" was to be achieved.

> Nous appelons praxis ce faire dans lequel l'autre ou les autres sont visés comme être autonomes et considérés comme l'agent essentiel du développement de leur propre autonomie. La vraie politique, la vrai pédagogie, la vrai médicine, pour autant qu'elles ont jamais existé, appartiennent à la praxis. (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 112)

The ground of praxis being found within the social-historical, praxis could not be conceived of as a fixed set of maneuvers to be carried out in the world. Praxis had to be attentive to the ever-changing rhythms of the social-historical. The primordial point of access for Castoriadis' praxis of autonomy was contained in understanding the conditions by which heteronomy operated. This understanding was not fixed and stable. The traditional Marxist project failed precisely in its attempts to capture once and for all the mode of alienation and its final resolution in a higher state of social organization: communism.

Nevertheless, praxis could not, as our epigraph states, eliminate thought of the future, or the "end" completely. Doing was not only a thing. It was an idea posed as an element of relation to finality. Proposing a "path" towards a "goal", does not entail finality, but rather a new ground for beginning. Since instituted reality is that which permits doing *–teukhein–* by saying *–legein–* it permits both the possible and the impossible. It permits the instituting of new "paths" departing from a projected "goal", and in so doing transforms the inherited dialectic of the possible and the impossible (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 386).

Although there was for Castoriadis no necessary teleological development towards a single predictable and determinate end in history, there was progress in the "understanding" of the revolutionary project of socialism. Praxis underwent transformations from the bourgeois revolution of 1789, through the spontaneous revolt of the masses in 1871, and the revolution of the Soviet Party in 1917, until finally the ideal type of proletarian revolution was enacted in Hungary, in 1956. In this latter stage, the workers' management of production eliminated the fundamental contradictions of capitalist production; it was finally human beings who dominated labor. Through the workers' management of production the workers had succeeded, however ephemerally: they had come to the realization that they were in possession of a creative and autonomous power to produce society's institutions, as much as its products for consumption.

It was thus possible to trace the avenues within the present towards the future. History, for Castoriadis, was marked by inspired moments of rebellion, and revolt towards the aim of greater human autonomy. This was evident and banal for Castoriadis. For if the social-historical presented itself as heteronomous, and humans were in essence creating, then instituted society would always be confronted by new waves of instituting potential. The revolutions of the last century were only a token representation of a project which began with Greek philosophical thought, and the instantiation of the political project of democracy. Revolutionary theory and activity was for Castoriadis a vein of humanity, running back towards the heart of autonomy.

Therefore, the project of autonomy was not only a project emerging in history. It was also a project beyond history: a supra-historical aim. Castoriadis attributed value to the project of autonomy regardless of the social-historical conditions of a given epoch. In the words of Martuccelli, autonomy was to the political what the institution was to society: its mode of expression (Martucelli, 2002; 300). Autonomy was thus not a goal to be pursued in view of an end. Rather, it was the condition of existence proper to the political, which inquired: "*what is to be done?*"

It is in this sense that we can argue, following Castoriadis, that the aim of autonomy is the destiny of humankind.

> Les raisons pour lesquelles nous visons l'autonomie sont et ne sont pas de l'époque. Elles ne le sont pas, car nous affirmerions la valeur de l'autonomie quelles que soit les circonstances, et plus profondément, car nous pensons que la visée de l'autonomie tend inéluctablement à émerger là où il y a homme et histoire, que, au même titre que la conscience, la visée d'autonomie c'est le destin de l'homme, que, présente, dès l'origine, elle constitue l'histoire plutôt qu'elle n'est constituée par elle. (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 149)

Destiny and autonomy appear at first glace to be radically opposed, and contradictory. While destiny resonates with fatalist determinism, autonomy echoes the possibility of the creation of the new. How then can the aim of autonomy be the destiny of man? Is destiny not necessarily part of an eschatological conception of history, which is counter to the project of creating social and individual autonomy? After a thorough critique of the conceptualizations of history and society in traditional Marxism, how can the language of destiny infiltrate the project of autonomy? On the surface, Castoriadis' proposal that autonomy is the destiny of humankind seems to revert back to a teleological conception of history. Does destiny not imply that there is a *telos*, a term to history? Is

this not participating in the grand utopian illusions of the twentieth century that have led to totalitarianism?

The problem posed by this statement, which re-appeared in Castoriaids' *magnum opus l'Institution imaginaire de la société* is not to be overlooked, or dismissed as the seeping through of inherited thought, which was suggested in Philippe Caumière's book *Castoriadis*: *Le projet d'autonomie* (2007). In our opinion, it would be not only naïve, but misleading to disregard Castoriadis' use of the term destiny. Rather than a blind spot in Castoriadis' thought, we propose that Castoriadis was in fact revealing that there is an acute interrelation between autonomy and destiny; freedom and necessity.

Castoriadis never explicitly explained what he meant by the notion of destiny. However, in his later writings, he does return to the significance of the *aim*, as essential to grasp praxis as a *doing* that is in essence creative. It is the *aim* of autonomy that is the destiny of humankind. Autonomy as praxis institutes forms –*eidos*- representing what could, possibly, be. Its creative role taps into the radical imaginary. The doing of autonomy allows one to posit forms that can be radically other than what is accepted or valued by instituted society. The power of the radical imaginary was to bring forth the new within an instituted social field, taking into consideration the "paths" that it provided. A praxis of autonomy was thus not pure reverie, utopia or fantasy. It engaged with the conditions of possibility already in place in the social-historical, while positing new forms of the possible and the impossible.

For Castoriadis, it is precisely because the *teleos* has been abandoned, and the grounds of being uprooted, that we must confront the question of the destiny of our

societies all the more voraciously. To eliminate thought of the future all together, is to let ourselves and our societies drift upon the currents of a world we abandon. Like an oracle, we must, retain the wisdom of the past, while respecting the present, and tentatively trace the future we strive to attain. The project of autonomy is an aim to transfigure what is, in light of the possible inherent in the contingent. It is an enigma to be re-interpreted in light of new social-historical contexts. The project of autonomy is thus an open destiny, which remains for us to create. It is an active situation that finds no resolution.

> Nous sommes déjà, et quoi que nous fassions, engagés dans une transformation de cette existence quant à laquelle le seul choix que nous ayons est entre subir et faire, entre confusion et lucidité. (Castoriadis, IIS, 1975; 248)

The social-historical is our collective oeuvre. Since we are destined, as human beings to create, we must value, and foster the development of creation towards greater human freedom. This is then, what is to be done: to open reflection, to foster the development of critical inquiry towards the institutions that present themselves as determinate and static. The first task of the revolutionary project is to render visible the fields of the possible.

Concluding Remarks: For a Sociology of the Possible and Utopian Thought

Our journey through the early works of Castoriadis has provided us with some fundamental tools to think of transformative political action for contemporary society. Although not spoon-feeding us a programmatic answer to the question "*what is to be done?*", Castoriadis' project of autonomy uncovers grooves and lines of flight that crack open deterministic discourses of history and society. Confronted with discourses claiming the "end of history", Castoriadis has paved avenues for thinking of *possible* orientations for a history that remains *to be done*.

In Castoriadis' view, there is always a space for creative engagement in social and individual transformation. Although the forces of revolution can no longer be found in the political militancy of the past, this does not mean that a revolutionary praxis of autonomy has lost all grounds of possibility. For Castoriadis, there remains, even if only in the imaginary, a space for thinking of otherwise possible worlds: imagining the new, and projecting these images into the future, is the first step in tracing possible avenues for their formation. The imaginary institution of society speaks of another project for society that is only *possible*, that is, imagined; but must pass through this stage, if it is a type of society that is to be created (Rioux, 1978; 165). The power of the imaginary is not to be denied in the process of creating social institutions: the imaginary is this power of formation.

Utopia and Destiny

Today, are the social forces oriented towards autonomy, and the radical transformation of individuals, and the type of society that the project of autonomy implies?

Castoriadis stated in an interview with Jocelyn Woff and Benjamin Quénelle in 1992 (published in *Une société à la derive*, 2005) that the project of autonomy was *not* utopian. To Castoriadis, giving the project of autonomy such label was to cause great confusion. Why would we strive for autonomy if it were a categorical impossibility?

Yet, if utopia is defined as something which is already immanently present, and waiting to blossom (rather than as a concrete plan for a finality in the future, that is to eventually arrive), Castoriadis may rightly be said a utopian thinker. "...l'utopie ne s'écrit jamais au futur, elle est ce qui est toujours déjà là" (Baudrillard, 1973; 141). Utopia exists here, in the immediacy of the present.

In this sense, the project of autonomy is not at all naïve optimism. It points toward the human potential of creating what is not, inherent to every 'now'. Creation, for Castoriadis, is not an action that we willingly choose to do or not to do. This would reduce creative faculties to artist or artisans. It is our very presence in the world which, with every moment, creates (signification, value, direction, and attitude). This constitutive ontological presupposition is at the root of the revolutionary project of autonomy as destiny.

By uncovering the social imaginary signification to which we are beheld, the project of autonomy unearths creative potential. Excavating the sedimentations of the past that weigh down the present, in history and consciousness, brings into appearance lines that can be drawn for the future. How is action and reflection of and towards the future to take place, if the belief in the idea of progress can no longer be sustained or if the Marxist version of history has lost all credibility?

Although both heteronomy and autonomy are social imaginary significations, emerging in history, autonomy for Castoriadis acquires a more universal status of supra-historical. This signifies that the aim of the project of autonomy is an architecture not only emerging at a specific point, for a specific time. Autonomy is present where the political is present, for it is the mode of expression of the political: a praxis questioning power and its legitimacy.

The utopia of autonomy is thus not merely a counter-weight, a negation, or an oppositional force to a reigning neo-liberal ideology. It is also a commitment to a reflexive participation in the creation of the imaginary significations with which, and through which, we view and engage in the world; creating the not-yet-cleared-spaces where these new meanings can flourish.

Critical sociology of the possible

Would Castoriadis say that barbarism reigns today; that there is no alternative to the market fundamentalism orienting our societies towards global insignificance or social disaster?

Such a question is not only of a political nature. Sociology must also raise such issues, for sociology developed out of a belief that societies could be studied globally and oriented towards the fulfillment of modernity's ideals (Freitag, 2005). If we cannot know the totality, or the consequences of our intentional activity in the world, it is not only the possibility of fulfilling the ideal of modernity that is at stake, one may argue, but sociology as a discipline.

The danger of denying sociology the possibility of reflecting its object generally, is that it becomes a regulating concept of pure methodological character (Freitag, 2005; 140). Indeed, if sociology cannot grasp the entirety that is its object, then the legitimacy of normative judgments becomes questionable. How can sociology legitimize reflection and criticism of its object, the social-historical, and propose new orientations and directions, if it is bound to specialized and fragmented knowledge?

Critique, from the verb *krinô*, signifies to separate, distinguish and judge between the good and the bad. Judgment, is not an abstract faculty, it is, for Castoriadis, a capacity to pass judgment on what is, concretely, given. "[...] dans son exercice concret et correct elle présuppose précisément de l'exercice, elle se développe en fonction d'une formation, d'une éducation, d'une *paideia*." (Castoriadis, FSLC, 2007; 123) Education, in terms of

paideia, speaks of the totality of the formative experiences to which the social individual is exposed. It is the most radical institution, mediating the social and the individual, towards autonomous reflexivity.

The normative stance of Castoriadis' critical theory is thus paradoxical. It is an activity that aims to influence the individual to do away with influences. This paradox however, is constitutive of social reality (David, 2000; 83). In creating itself, society creates the individuals through which society can effectively be. Since the normative is constitutive of our very social practice, whether or not we resist the forms of instituted heteronomy, we are participating in the orientation and direction of our society.

To promote critical reflection in a discipline such as sociology is to encourage the creative reflexivity of individuals to think of other possibilities. The project of autonomy is, in this sense, critical sociological thought (Delacroix, 2006; 229). Autonomy, as we have demonstrated, needs to be thought as a revolutionary praxis, aiming the transformation of the individual and society towards reflexivity capable of judging and choosing in the direction which fosters the development of autonomous reflection.

A sociological praxis of autonomy, therefore, is a quest for the creation of new social imaginary significations. Through words, writing, or attitude, those who are inhabited by the gravity of the contemporary situation must act towards its improvement. Autonomy is the kernel of social imaginary significations encompassing the radical questioning of all that is inherited, in order to think of other alternatives to the current cultural and social crisis.

However, the creation of the new cannot be limited to a conceptualization of revolution as break through, or paradigm shift, for this is to reduce revolution to cataclysmic ruptures, resulting from willful human action. Revolutionary action is not necessarily the toppling down of one government, and its replacement with a new form of societal organization. It is the striving to create, through every action, the utopia inherent within the present. Every act is a movement towards; the aspiration of individual and social autonomy gives significance to political action, beyond the significance inherited from detached and disincarnated ruling entities.

Another world is always possible; this is the presupposition with which Castoriadis wants us to conclude. The creation of this other world begins with the responsibility of each act fostering the development of autonomy. It is thus for us to take charge of our collective destiny, and think the future as we imagine it could be. Only thus can we resist the infinite swirling through definite and determinate terrains of heteronomous institutions.

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