THE POWER TO ASSUME FORM

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS AND REGULATIVE REGIMES OF HISTORICITY

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Abstract

This thesis proposes that the work of Cornelius Castoriadis offers a unique framework to analyse how specific regimes of historicity shape social-historical contexts. It contends that Castoriadis opens up a way to analyse contemporary trends of 'depoliticisation' in Western contexts that are indicative of dynamics that are shaping a transition of liberal-democratic societies into newly configured regimes. The novelty of Castoriadis's approach to historicity is that it foregrounds a theory of instituting power that is centred on the power of social imaginary creativity. He analyses instituting power based on a field of political contestation between cultural articulations within given social imaginary contexts. From this perspective, the regulative role of instituting power within regimes of historicity correspond to how articulations of social imaginary creativity are able to assume institutional form within their broader social-historical contexts.

This thesis addresses one of the major criticisms of Castoriadis's work: that it tended to dichotomise between two distinct types of social-historical regimes, autonomy and heteronomy. This dichotomy is shown to undermine the capacity for his theory of imaginary institution to undertake a nuanced comparative analysis between differing or transitional regimes of historicity. The opposition between these two institutional regimes is collapsed to demonstrate how these dynamics are implicated in ways that relate to the regulative modes of instituting power that constitute societies. A theory of historicity is proposed that foregrounds how social-historical contexts are shaped by implicit forms of instituting power that regulate modes of instituting activity.

Based on this theory of historicity, the thesis turns to an alternate perspective on the perceived 'crisis' of democratic culture in Western contexts. By developing the conceptual implications of Castoriadis's theory of instituting power, it is possible to contextualise the political situation of liberal-democratic societies within their broader trends of depoliticisation.

The blind spot in Castoriadis's framework of historicity is that he did not consider the implications of how established forms of political power maintain their dominance by regulating the relative openness and closure of cultural capacities to alter institutional contexts. What appeared as heteronomous to him in contemporary societies is, in fact, the imposition of a dominant regime of regulatory power, which is still autonomous in the sense that it is a regime that lucidly regulates, and ultimately depoliticises, the creative capacities of culture to alter instituted forms. Through this analysis, contemporary trends of depoliticisation become the subject of an investigation into the substantive attributes of a new regime of historicity that is shown to be laden with new political questions.

Declaration

This thesis is an original work of my research and contains no material which has been accepted for the award of any other degree or diploma at any university or equivalent institution and that, to the best of my knowledge and belief, this thesis contains no material previously published or written by another person, except where due reference is made in the text of the thesis.

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Date: …14/11/2019…….

INTRODUCTION

The most significant intervention into Castoriadis's thought offered by this thesis is to dismantle the central dichotomisation that appears in his theorisation of historicity: autonomy and heteronomy. There have been a few commentators on his work that have noted the necessity of moving past this dichotomy, and yet none have offered a serious elaboration of the implications this has on the effectiveness of Castoriadis's work or what significant contributions can therefore be made by developing his conception of historicity. This thesis deals with these implications, for the main purpose of developing the critical potential of Castoriadis's work and to understand how his theoretical perspective remains an insightful framework to analyse the significance of the deepening depoliticisation of contemporary liberal-democratic societies. With its focus on historicity, the theoretical framework established by Castoriadis raises two fundamental questions. Firstly, *what is it that holds a society together?* Or, in other words, "what is the basis of the unity, cohesion, and organised differentiation of the fantastically complex web of phenomena we observe in any existing society"? [1] Secondly, *what is it that brings about other and new forms of society?* A question that asks how we are to understand the way 'the multiplicity and diversity of societies' contributes to an "alteration of the given social order that possibly leads to a (sudden or not) end of the 'old order' and the establishment of a new one".[2]

The intention of this thesis is to respond to these questions in a way that constructs a new theoretical framework that can account fully for the political dimension of historicity, something which remained an underlying yet enduring theme in Castoriadis's work. This theoretical framework will look closely at the relationship between culture and power in order to understand how a society's mode of historicity can be considered to be the manifestation of its political dimension: ultimately, the theoretical argument of this thesis proposes that historicity is a regulative institutional regime that involves an immanent mediation between the ontological fertility of *cultural creativity* and historically instituted *forces of power*. This thesis will develop this theme, which, it will show, is present in Castoriadis's writing only in embryonic form. It will be argued that he was not able to develop this theme himself because he had locked himself into an ontological

[1] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1984, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain", in *Disorder and Order: Proceedings of the Stanford International Symposium (Sept. 14-16, 1981)*, Paisley Livingston (ed.) (California: Anma Libri), 148.

[2] Castoriadis, ibid., 149.

framework that attempted to preserve the belief in revolutionary social change that had shaped his prior engagement with Marxism. In order to argue this point this thesis follows a two-pronged approach: firstly, it seeks to identify the limits of Castoriadis's theorisation of historicity and to develop the promising insights of his thought in a way that can rectify these limitations; secondly, it aims to apply this developed Castoriadean framework to an analysis of the increasing trend of depoliticisation in liberal-democratic societies, in a way that will provide insight into the political situation of contemporary regimes of historicity.[3] To this end, in order to present the central critique of Castoriadis's work upon which the argument of this thesis is constructed, the unique influence of his Marxist heritage must first be understood.

The roots of Castoriadis's Marxism were in fact, established in Greece where, at quite an early age, he was drawn to the Greek Communist Party (KKE). Impressed by the Trotskyist thesis of the 'Revolution Betrayed' he aligned himself with the *Archeio Marxismou* (*Marxist Archive*) group, under the influence of Agis Stinas.[4] Stinas had espoused the view that the revolutionary theory of Marx formulated a vision for the establishment of a 'perennial revolution' through which societies would be able to consistently rejuvenate themselves. This vision, according to Stinas, proposed a dissolution of the nation-state model, which reflected an almost anarchistic perspective of revolution that would supersede the orthodoxy of Soviet internationalists.[5] Upon emigrating to France following the Dekemvrianá events of the Greek civil war, Castoriadis set out to promote his Stinas-inspired reading of Marx within the French Trotskyist movement.[6] He formed an intellectual tendency with Claude Lefort (the *Chaulieu-Montal tendency*) and introduced a critique of Russian

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[3] The term 'regimes of historicity' has been revived in recent scholarship by François Hartog. See: François Hartog, 2015, *Regimes of Historicity: Presentism and Experiences of Time*, trans. Saskia Brown (Columbia University Press, NY). Although much of the work around this notion in political philosophy takes Aristotle as their reference, the use of the term in this thesis is derived from work developed by a group of scholars associated with the 1970's French journals, *Textures* and *Libre*; the key figures of these journals being Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort, Marcel Gauchet, Pierre Clastres, and Miguel Abensour.

[4] Agis Stinas's real name was Spyros Priftis. He was Castoriadis's political teacher, mentor, and life-long revolutionary interlocutor.

[5] Stinas's view had ruffled feathers closer to home, in Greece, amongst the hyper-nationalist sentiment within the KKE. The position of Stinas was also, however, disputed within Trotskyist circles such as *Archeio Marxismou*. What is important to highlight is that Castoriadis had internalised Stinas's position, and in doing so he maintained in his thought the element of a 'perennial revolution' that Stinas drew from within Marx's theory See: Vrasidas Karalis (ed.), 2014, Cornelius Castoriadis and Radical Democracy (Brill, Leiden)

[6] The Dekemvrianá (the December events; 13 December 1944 – 11 January 1945) was a watershed moment for leftist militants in the Greek civil war. The KKE covertly diverted the actions of the Organisation for the Protection of the People's Struggle (OPLA) away from the anti-occupational activities of the National Liberation Front (EAM) and turned to assassinating dissident comrades and factional Marxists. This kind of targeted violence by the KKE was at once a mortal threat to Castoriadis and a nail in the coffin for any hope that the communist movement in Greece could be anything other than the installation of a totalitarian state identical to the Russian oligarchy. It was this situation that catalysed Castoriadis's decision to exile himself from Greece and to pursue a scholarship from the *Institut de France*. He left alongside a number of other dissident artists and intellectuals, embarking for Paris on the RMS Mataroa.

bureaucracy at the third congress of the French Trotskyist party, *Parti Communiste Internationaliste* (PCI), in 1946. Castoriadis and Lefort argued that even the Trotskyist revisions concerning the Russian state, considered as a degenerated workers state, fell short of recognising the reality of the social regime in Russia. Their critique was grounded in the conviction that Russian bureaucracy was in fact the privileging of an exploitative class, an institution of oligarchic power, which, ultimately, rendered obsolete the revolutionary beacon that the Trotskyists still persisted to see in Russia. The Chaulieu-Montal tendency gained a reasonable following that eventually led to the formation in 1948 of the group *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, which became a loose intellectual organisation that was concerned with issues of workers' self-management. The organisation published pamphlets presenting a progressive critique of such issues and the organisation viewed its origins as a break from all the shades of red that Trotskyism had become.

Castoriadis's experience with *Socialisme ou Barbarie* can be characterised as a period of confrontation with Marxism that led him to cut his umbilical relation to Marx and to pursue a more radical understanding of social transformation that emphasises historical contingency. This confrontation progressed through a variety of phases, which can be characterised by two distinct breaks. Firstly, it led to a disavowal of Marxism: the Trotskyist line was abandoned due to the factions' inability to recognise that the bureaucratic structure of the Russian state, with all property owned by the statist-bureaucracy, had institutionalised an exploitative managerial class. The *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group pursued a non-partisan project of worker's self-management, which for Castoriadis was the basis of an early formulation of his understanding of autonomy. Secondly, the critique undertaken by the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group led Castoriadis to completely severe his theoretical ties to Marx, which involved a re-evaluation of Marx's economics, something undertook while he was employed as an economist at the OECD (1948-1970).[7] Despite his appreciation of Marx's attempt to theorise the relation between capital and historicity, Castoriadis undertook a thorough critique of the conceptual foundations of Marx's work in order to show that Marxian economics (and its underlying theory of historicity) fundamentally did not work. His critique aimed to supplant Marx's theoretical and philosophical account of history, shifting emphasis from the productive power of labour to the creative role of the imagination, in order to revive the vision of a 'perennial' mode of 'revolution'; a vision, arguably, instilled in him through

[7] Alongside these theoretical developments there were also historical events that provided led Castoriadis to abandon Marxism, in particular the brutal repression of the Hungarian Revolution in 1956 (whose significance was reinforced by the events of the Prague Spring in 1968). In these events Castoriadis found confirmation of the totalitarian-bureaucratic character of the Soviet regime; retrospectively this also came as confirmation of his long-held intuition concerning the kind of regime that would have been installed in Greece during the Stalinist coup d'état of 1944. See: Castoriadis, 1990, *Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Interview Cerisy Colloquium*, 7 (unpublished transcript).

the close friendship with Stinas. What Castoriadis rejected was Marx's view of society as guided by pre-determined and productive historical processes. The impetus of Castoriadis's critique can also be seen to have coincided with a deeper interest in the cultural and subjective features of the political dimension of historicity.[8]

The significant theoretical developments of Castoriadis work emerged following his break from Marxism, which can be clearly discerned in the second section of his first major work *The Imaginary Institution of Society*; first published in 1975.[9] However, this thesis will propose that Castoriadis's post-Marxist theoretical framework was limited by his attempt to 'recommence' the revolutionary element of Marx's work. It will be shown in this thesis that his Marxist heritage is a noteworthy context that provided his subsequent work with its militant character. This revolutionary element was reconceptualised in terms of *autonomy,* which became the central theme of Castoriadis's work following his break with Marxism. This is evident in the way that Castoriadis theoretically formalised autonomy within his conception of historicity, and also the way he came to reframe his critique of liberal-democratic societies in terms of a broader crisis of Western societies. He applied his theory of historicity to an analysis of 'crisis' by proposing that since the mid-twentieth century Western societies have sat at a crossroads between the development of a radical democratic project inspired by a particular 'autonomous' mode of politics (a vision rooted in his Marxist heritage) or a regression into an 'heteronomous' mode of institutional servitude. He proposed that heteronomous societies do not pursue autonomy and that the laws that constitute society are vested with a transcendental reference, from which Dominque Bouchet has surmised, "follows all of the representations and significations about the world and the human condition"; in other words, Castoriadis regarded the prevalent mode of political institution in the history of human societies to be essentially religious.[10] In Castoriadis's analysis, as Bouchet suggests, "a radical distinction is introduced historically with the emergence of democratic societies".[11] Castoriadis argues that heteronomous institution has been the overwhelming norm shaping the historicity of human societies, which is a position that rests on his assertion that autonomous modes of institution are rare exceptions in human history. In fact, Castoriadis identifies only two moments where he

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[8] Evidence of the increased interest in cultural and subjective concerns can be seen in his later *Socialisme ou Barbarie* essays; for instance, in these essays one can find his early engagement with psychoanalytic ideas, as with his claim that the psychosexual dimension of the individual must be taken into account in whatever is 'done or thought' in the political domain. See: Cornelius Castoriadis, 1997, "From the Monad to Autonomy", in *World in Fragments*, trans. David Ames Curtis (ed.) (Stanford University Press, California), 173.

[9] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Polity Press, UK).

[10] Dominique Bouchet, 2007, "The Ambiguity of the Modern Conception of Autonomy and the Paradox of Culture", *Thesis Eleven* No. 88; 34.

[11] Bouchet, ibid., 34.

considers this to have occurred, "first in ancient Greece, as far as we know, and was redeveloped later, with some completely new features, in Western Europe starting at the end of the Middle Ages".[12] Further to this, he attests that "the break that occurred in Greece and began again in Western Europe resides in the fact that inherited representations, and ultimately the very notions of truth and reality, were questioned", whereas for heteronomous societies it is considered that "what is true is what conforms to the established modes of representation".[13] This framing of historicity in terms of two distinct modes, between autonomy and heteronomy, set up a strong dichotomous motif throughout Castoriadis's entire theoretical framework; and throughout this thesis it will be shown that Castoriadis takes his assertion to excessive limits, arguing that these two instances of human autonomy (in ancient Greece and Modern Europe) are "the first time we see any being whatsoever explicitly call into question, and change through explicit action, the law presiding over its existence".[14]

A major objective of this thesis is to present a critical assessment of the way Castoriadis constructed such a dichotomy. It will be argued that he insisted on maintaining this distinction throughout the entirety of his work and that this limited his analysis of the political situation faced by contemporary liberal-democratic societies. Bouchet has identified that Castoriadis's dichotomisation of historicity stems from the fact that "he [could not] conceive a discourse about autonomy that [was] not at the same time an affirmation of the democratic project".[15] Even though his theoretical framework rests on the notion that the institution of all human societies is fundamentally autonomous, in that they are all essentially 'self-instituting', Castoriadis argued that it is only in democratic societies that people claim to make their own laws and consider 'society' to be a product of their own *self-institution*. The idea that autonomy directly and exclusively equates with democracy, which is central to Castoriadis's work is regarded in this thesis to be a deeply unsatisfactory response to the regimes of historicity that have emerged in the modern period. The underlying premise of my argument is that Castoriadis's view of autonomy is deeply (helleno-)euro-centric, in that he constructs a spurious European exceptionalism that frames autonomy in relation to the specific development of autonomy in these social contexts, leading him to define autonomy in terms of societies where: "the laws are changed deliberately; [and] questions are posed overtly; [i.e.] Are our laws just? Are our gods true? Is our representation of the world right? In other

[12] Cornelius Castoriadis, 2010, "Imaginary Significations", in *A Society Adrift*, trans. Helen Arnold (Fordham University Press, NY), 57.

[13] Castoriadis, ibid., 58.

[14] Castoriadis, ibid., 57.

[15] Bouchet, 2007, "The Ambiguity of the Modern Conception of Autonomy and the Paradox of Culture", 34.

words, radical political questions as well as radical philosophical questioning are raised".[16] By privileging a certain type of radical questioning over other questions concerning the interpretation and implementation of institutional power—which are just a prevalent in 'heteronomous' societies—it is proposed that Castoriadis remained indifferent, not only to various modes of autonomous institution, but also the particular mode of autonomy upon which liberal-democratic societies are based.[17] Even though he was deeply critical of the oligarchical structures that have increasingly shaped liberal-democratic societies, he did not develop a thorough comprehension of how *these structures reflect an authoritarian mode of autonomy*, which has only intensified with the advancement of neoliberal contexts. It will be argued in this thesis that contemporary political regimes in liberal-democratic societies are structured upon depoliticising modes of instituting power and that this is a direct manifestation of their autonomous mode of self-institution. This assessment is contrary to Castoriadis's assessment of the 'crisis of Western societies', which he viewed as a regressive retreat from autonomy. This thesis therefore argues that the autonomous dimension of liberal-democratic societies remained a blind spot in Castoriadis's theoretical framework, as it was limited by his insistence on a 'revolutionary' (post-Marxist) definition of autonomy as a mode of radical democratic institution.

While I will show that Castoriadis's insistence on this dichotomy is a reflection of his 'revolutionary' militancy, I will also show that he developed an underlying theoretical framework that offers a more promising line of thought that contributes significant critical insights into the political dimension of historicity. This promising line of thought frames historicity as a "*perpetual flux of self-alteration*", through which the political community articulates its laws in accordance with what is meaningful in the world. It reveals that a political community "can only exist by providing itself with 'stable' figures by which it makes itself visible, visible to and for itself as well, in its impersonal reflexivity, which is also a dimension of its mode of being; the primordial 'stable' figure here is the institution".[18] This understanding of what constitutes a 'mode of historicity' is what 'holds a society together', and in this respect 'what brings about other and new societies' is a question of specific political regimes through which a community frames its capacity to alter itself. This thesis proposes that by relativising the strict dichotomisation between autonomy and heteronomy and, instead, seeing each as an institutional tendency relating to the formative

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[16] Castoriadis, 2010, "Imaginary Significations", *A Society Adrift*, 58.

[17] This thesis will address the mode of autonomous institution that is specific to liberal-democratic societies. There is a growing amount of scholarship that addresses the various modes of institution whose autonomous characteristics are contextualised within their specific social contexts, for instance, see: Shmuel N. Eisentadt (ed.), 2002, *Multiple Modernities*, Transaction Publishers NY

[18] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 204

capacities of political power, this more promising line of thought can be developed as a critical theoretical framework to analyse social-historical contexts.

This thesis will develop this promising avenue, which requires a culturological approach to historicity. A culturological approach is indeed implied in Castoriadis's conception of how the *social imaginary* offers an explanation of how societies exist as a mode of social-historical alteration. The social imaginary is a novel concept that Castoriadis developed in order to account for the 'radical instituting' power that emerges from the cultural dimension of societies; it is "a faculty of making be, of bringing out of itself modes of being, determinations, and laws that will henceforth be that self's laws, determinations, modes of being".[19] As a theoretical notion, the social imaginary was constructed by Castoriadis in order to situate his conception of culture as the driving force of the *creative imagination* that makes it possible to institute societies. Loosely speaking, Castoriadis proposed that the social imaginary is "not a substance, not a quality, not an action or a passion," but is "the invisible segment holding together this endless collection of real, rational, and symbolic odds and ends that constitute every society, and [it is] the principle that selects and shapes the bits and pieces that will be accepted there".[20] The concept of the social imaginary implies that there is an homogenising tendency within a community that gives coherence to the institutions that form a society. Castoriadis argues that this is necessary because;

> … it is not that society has long sought imaginary compensations for its unsatisfying 'real existence'… It is that this 'real existence' is impossible and inconceivable, as existence of a *society*, without the positing of *ends* for individual and social life, of *norms* and *values* regulating and orienting this life, of the *identity* of the society considered, of the *why* and *wherefore* of its existence, of its *place* in the world, of the *nature* of this world.[21]

His conception of the social imaginary therefore tends to emphasise the ontological features of the symbolic field that raises the question of how the social imaginary shapes the formal institutional conditions that define the 'why and wherefore' of institutions. The symbolic field is an essential feature of the social imaginary's capacity to shape institutions, and this is because the social imaginary does not float above the realm of pre-existing symbolic meaning, but rather, it works through it, framing how institutions are maintained or altered. What is important to note about Castoriadis's understanding of institutions, in the context of the social imaginary, is that he considers them to be polysemous and, as he argues, "this polysemy causes a malaise" because in his

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[19] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1997, "Done and to be Done", in *The Castoriadis Reader*, trans. David Ames Curtis (ed.) (Blackwell Press, Oxford), 404.

[20] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 143.

[21] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", *Thesis Eleven* No. 35, 11-12.

formulation ‘everything is institution’, from the way that the way that the world is known to the ways that we understand ourselves in it.[22] Institutions are polysemous because societies consist of heterogenous cultural expressions that inform a range of social imaginary perspectives through which institutions are shaped but also contested. Historicity in therefore seen, in Castoriadis’s view, as an open-ended ‘determining’ (i.e. not indeterminate!) mode of institution, which foregrounds the capacity for cultural forms of creativity to alter existing institutional conditions. Culture is understood, generally, as the perpetual “creation of a world of meanings” that exists within a temporal relation between what is established ontologically in the symbolic field and how this field is received and altered in practice.[23] Cultural creativity is therefore considered to be ‘history in the making’ because it accounts for, both, the social imaginary basis that holds society together and for the creative capacity to perpetually institute itself anew.

In *chapter one* it will be shown that one of Castoriadis’s major insights is that the social imaginary is understood in terms of a creative capacity to bring into being something ‘other’ than what is given by historically determined processes, and as such it is a conception that Castoriadis developed to overcome the inadequacy of Marx’s conception of historicity.
In this chapter it will be shown that the cultural articulation of institutions is theorised by Castoriadis as a creative feature of the social imaginary and also, importantly, that the capacity for culture to shape institutional contexts creatively is inextricably bound by the forms of power established by institutions. This chapter will outline how Castoriadis developed his theoretical reformulation of historicity in an attempt to move beyond Marxist frameworks. Castoriadis’s schematic approach to the ontological foundation of societies delivers a response to the questions concerning *what holds societies together* and *what brings about other and new forms of society*, which articulates how cultural creativity can alter these foundations. This chapter will establish the premise of my argument that Castoriadis’s view of historicity tended to overemphasise the power of institutional form, which also over-ontologised the culturally creative capacities of individuals who are seen to be formed on the basis of the social norms, identities, laws, etc., that have been established through the institutions of society. This will establish my main criticism of Castoriadis’s work and the main theoretical argument presented in this thesis: *that cultural creativity is not bound by ontological principles, so much as it is regulated by institutional power*.

[22] Cornelius Castoriadis, 2007, “Primal Institution of Society and Second-Order Institutions”, *Figures of the Thinkable*, trans. Helen Arnold (Stanford University Press, California), 95.

[23] Castoriadis, 2007, “The Social-Historical: Mode of Being, Problems of Knowledge”, *Figures of the Thinkable*, 230.

Chapter two will elaborate this central criticism of Castoriadis's work, in order to show that his emphasis on the ontological characteristics of institutional form is underpinned by an inherently political conception of the instituting power of the social imaginary. It will be shown in this chapter that Castoriadis's emphasis on the ontological foundation of institutional form overshadows the extent to which cultural heterogeneity can be regarded as the source of creative openness to the world. This chapter therefore interrogates Castoriadis's theoretical framework of historicity in order to show how he theorises the relation between the ontological context of institutions and the heterogenous cultural articulations of the social-historical world. This interrogation will serve to outline the ontological framework that Castoriadis develops in order to account for how societies maintain a cohesive self-image, despite the fact that they institute themselves through a temporally creative and heterogenous mode of historicity. The chapter will show how this framework leads to the construction of his dichotomous view of historicity, whereby only the autonomous mode of institution advances a mode of reflexivity that is capable of incorporating radically new forms of cultural creativity. It will be proposed that it served Castoriadis's intent, to maintain a strict dichotomy between these two modes of historicity, because this allowed him to preserve his revolutionary conception of autonomy: as I will demonstrate, the only way to maintain this distinction was to emphasise the distinction between these two modes of historicity as either institutional contexts of ontological closure or openness.

Also, in *Chapter two,* one of the most significant criticisms of Castoriadis's work, shared by Johann Arnason and Suzi Adams, is taken up and incorporated into the thesis's argument concerning the relativisation of the dichotomous conception of historicity. This critique proposes that Castoriadis reduces the 'world' "to a particular creation of each social-historical formation, and thus seems to privilege the constructivist 'world-making' capacity of the social-historical".[24] Arnason and Adams have proposed a pathway to bypass Castoriadis's emphasis on *ontological closure* as a distinct feature of heteronomy. They highlight the problematic of the world in Castoriadis's work in a way that allows them to foreground the significance of a creative mode of historical contingency that is a general feature of historicity. Conversely, Adams notes that Castoriadis's ontological bias seems to draw a picture of autonomous cultural creation that emerges from a 'worldless vacuum'.[25] In

[24] Suzi Adams, 2013, "Castoriadis, Arnason and the Phenomenological Problematic of the World", in Ingerid Straume and Giorgio Baruchello (eds.), *Creation, Rationality and Autonomy,* NSU Press, Copenhagen, 78.

[25] Adams, Ibid., 78. It is worth noting that the image of a 'worldless vacuum' corresponds to the premise that the social-historical world is autonomous because it emerges from 'undifferentiated chaos'. Indeed, Castoriadis considers this onto-cosmology to be at the basis of ancient Greek creation of the *polis*. See also: Mouzakitis, 2013, "Chaos and Creation in Castoriadis's Interpretation of Greek Thought", in Straume and Baruchello (eds.), *Creation, Rationality and Autonomy,* 33.

Adams's view, Castoriadis "could not fully reconcile the ontological creativity of the social-historical with the phenomenological insight that we are always already *in-the-world*".[26] Arnason, on the other hand, points to the limitations inherent in Castoriadis's portrayal of historicity, which are themselves constructed due to Castoriadis's "overriding interests in the emphatic conception of autonomy [which] led him to neglect the more general problem of reflexivity and the varying directions it could take in difference historical settings".[27] The reflexivity to which Arnason alludes will be explored in this thesis in relation to metacontextual modes of historicity, which actually constitutes a line of inquiry that exists in Castoriadis's work in embryonic form. The theme will be developed further in order to emphasise the tendency of *ontological openness* in processes of social-historical alteration; this tendency constituted the promising line of thought in Castoriadis's work, which asserts that "*it is historical creation that makes autonomy exist as openness rather than as closure*".[28] This line of analysis emphasises how the ontological dimension of institutions, represented through the symbolic dimension of social life, is a primary source for cultural creativity. I argue that this ontological framework takes on a privileged position in Castoriadis's thinking. The inherent constructivism that pervades Castoriadis's dichotomous modes of historicity is upheld by emphasising the ontological characteristics of institutional power, rather than a culturally creative mode of institution that constitutes historicity in terms of a perpetual political contestation concerning the formation of social institutions.

In *chapter three* I will argue *with Castoriadis* against some of his own ideas, in order to show that, contrary to his dichotomous vision of historicity, there is a latent method of institutional analysis within his thought that centres the role of the political dimension within cultural creativity. It will be argued that the more promising line of thought in Castoriadis's work, associated with his conception of the social imaginary, in fact, provides deep insight into the *political* dimension of historicity that accounts for the instituting power of cultural creativity. This chapter will develop this line of thought to define this promising theoretical framework and to show how Castoriadis's work can contribute to an analysis of the political dimension of historicity by interpreting it as the site of social-historical *self-alteration*. In this chapter I will examine the dichotomous motif that runs throughout Castoriadis's entire theoretical framework in order to show that he considered the political to be a dimension of power contingent upon a central tension between instituted forms of power and the radical instituting power of social imaginary creativity. This chapter shows that

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[26] Adams, 2013, "Castoriadis, Arnason and the Phenomenological Problematic of the World", 95.

[27] Johann P. Arnason, 2007, Imaginary Significations and Historical Civilisations, in Christine Magerski, Robert Savage, and Christiane Weller (eds.), *Moderne begreifen*, (DUV, Frankfurt), 99.

[28] Castoriadis, 2010, "Imaginary Significations", *A Society Adrift*, 57.

Castoriadis's dichotomous construction of historicity privileges a vision of autonomy as a capacity to bring into being new social-historical institutions. However, it is argued that this creative capacity also needs to be considered in its conservative dimension, a function that preserves the historical patterns of social reproduction. This argument is made in order to develop an analysis of an aspect of instituting power that was never extensively explored in his work. My analysis will turn toward the political dimension of the *social imaginary* as the locus of *implicit power*, a power derived from the cultural level of established institutional contexts. An argument will be made that implicit power must be distinguished from the structures of *explicit* power, in order to show how established institutional contexts are reinforced at the cultural level in ways that implicitly open up *or* close down capacities to participate in power. Castoriadis overlooked this aspect of instituting power because it complicates the strict distinction he made between autonomy and heteronomy that served his revolutionary understanding of social change. This argument will constitute my attempt to rectify the limitations of Castoriadis's work that views regulative power as an ontologically derived mode of institution that upholds the strict dichotomy between heteronomous and autonomous modes of institution underpinning his understanding of history. In doing so, it will be shown that he is unable to account for the complex interrelation of these two tendencies and, in particular, how they can both be considered to constitute reflexive modes of historicity.

Chapter three will therefore establish a new framework that develops the insights into the culturological basis of the political dimension of societies, which Castoriadis himself did not formulate due to his emphasis on the ontological level of institutional power. If the dichotomy is dismantled it becomes possible to elucidate the social imaginary features of reflexive historicity, particularly the role of implicit power within institutional processes of self-alteration. Toward this end, this chapter conceptualises implicit power in a way that incorporates both heteronomous and autonomous dynamics. This, in turn, strengthens the theoretical point in Castoriadis's work that emphasises the political dimension as central to the institutional modality of historicity. In brief, this chapter proposes a way to relativise the dichotomous conception of historicity, while simultaneously developing the more promising aspects of his thought that emphasises instead the basis of instituting power in the social imaginary that shapes a society's mode of historicity. The relativisation of a dichotomous conception of historicity also opens up a way to understand how the regulative role of the political dimension contributes to the social reproduction of institutional conditions and, importantly, how capacities to alter institutional conditions are hierarchically instituted. The objective of the remainder of this thesis will then be to draw out the conception of power latent in Castoriadis's work and apply it to the political situation of contemporary liberal-democratic societies. In my view, this latent dimension of implicit instituting power does not

require a meta-institutional analysis of the tendencies of heteronomous closure or autonomous openings. Rather, more attention needs to be given to the cultural dimension as an implicit field of power; this aligns with the hermeneutic critiques of Arnason and Adams, which, I propose, can help to introduce a culturological perspective that relativises Castoriadis's dichotomous position.

In the final two chapters of the thesis I will develop the culturological line of thought foreshadowed in Castoriadis's conception of the *social imaginary,* which hinges on the implicit dimension of instituting power. In *Chapter four* the Castoriadean framework will be used to interpret how historicity is shaped by regulative regimes instituting power. Two major questions arise from this in the application of this framework: firstly, there is the question of how differing social imaginary perspectives can acquire a capacity to alter institutional conditions in accordance with their interests—this is, ultimately, a question of the limits of autonomy—and, secondly, the question of how dominant social imaginary perspectives are able to maintain the institutional conditions that render their reproduction (which, ultimately, concerns the regulation of cultural creativity). In this chapter it will be argued that what Castoriadis did not explore in any depth is how the autonomous capacity to 'open up' participation in the shaping of institutions is always implicitly regulated by established modes of instituting power, or 'regimes of historicity', that structure processes of institutional legitimation. This will establish the basis for an examination (in *chapter five*) of the State form as an autonomous regulative mechanism of institutional legitimisation. In fact, it will be argued in *chapter four* that Castoriadis did not go far enough towards developing the implications of how instituting power is structured within modes of historicity that always possess a degree of cultural autonomy. He had to develop his dichotomous framework in order to account for the hierarchical structuring of democratic societies and looking at the cultural basis of instituting would have led him to compromise his radical vision of autonomy.

In the final chapter my development of Castoriadis's theorisation of historicity will be applied to an analysis of the increasing trend of depoliticisation in liberal-democratic societies. *Chapter five* argues that depoliticisation in liberal-democratic societies must be analysed as characteristic of their established mode of historicity that is a fundamentally autonomous. This stands as contrary to Castoriadis's argument that depoliticisation constitutes a retreat from autonomy (which he diagnosed, instead, as a regression into heteronomous mode of institution). In fact, it will be argued in this chapter that the State form that reflects hierarchical ordering of autonomous instituting power—as a mechanism derived historically from *postmonarchical* power—provides liberal-democratic societies with the institutional conditions that have led to the establishment of oligarchical regimes of historicity. Further to this, it is argued that that the political regimes of these

societies are maintained through implicit modes of instituting power that privilege dominant social imaginary perspectives (i.e. liberal values) in a way that creatively reproduces and reinforces oligarchical conditions. Ultimately, this chapter, however, proposes that the 'relative' openness of liberal-democratic regimes means that the dominant social imaginary perspectives are contestable but, in fact, also reinforced through the regulation of cultural capacities to participate in the institutional processes that shape social-historical contexts. Ultimately, the liberal State form organised on the principle of representative proceduralism is seen to be the basis for an implicit reinforcement of dominant social hierarchies, which stands in contradistinction to the illusions of democratic autonomy presented by the liberal-democratic ideology.

This thesis argues that the institution of a social-historical world is not based on the tendency to enclose society within its own ontological closure, but that this tendency rather reflects a decisive feature of the political dimension of societies that Castoriadis left unexplored: the regulative regime of power that shapes the historicity of societies. The blind spot in Castoriadis's framework of historicity is that he did not consider the implications of how established forms of political power maintain their dominance by regulating the relative openness and closure of cultural capacities to alter an institutional context. What appeared as heteronomous to him in contemporary societies is, in fact, the imposition of a dominant regime of regulatory power, which is still autonomous in the sense that it is a regime that lucidly regulates, and ultimately depoliticises, the creative capacities of culture to alter instituted forms. My argument conclusively shows that depoliticisation is in fact a structural component of liberal-democratic regimes. In particular, it is the 'liberal' characteristics of these regimes that will be seen to provide an implicit context that sustains the regulative mode of instituting power in these societies. Further it is argued that the 'democratic' State, organised on the basis of representative-procedural mechanisms, paradoxically provide the institutional conditions for an oligarchical structuring of instituting power. It will therefore be shown that the basis of these regimes in the form of the State structures oligarchical conditions in a way that simultaneously stabilises 'democratic' modes of self-alteration, institutes hierarchical processes of political legitimation, and reproduces dominant forms of instituting power that depoliticise 'open' political contestation. My concluding point with regard to depoliticisation in liberal-democratic regimes will be that the shift toward neoliberalism has facilitated the conditions upon which new authoritarian visions have emerged, and that this situation paradoxically reflects the autonomous character of these societies; this development, ultimately, signals a shift toward newly configured regimes of historicity. The strongest social imaginary visions emerging out of liberal-democratic societies in the contemporary period largely reflect desires to control historicity and to implement authoritarian modes of self-institution.

CHAPTER 1

THE IMAGINARY INSTITUTION OF ANTHROPOS: FROM MARXISM TO AN ONTOLOGICAL THEORY OF PRAXIS

Marx set an agenda of politically militant thought in the modern world by challenging preconceived understandings of human praxis in order to foreground the dynamics of historicity within a society. This stance was succinctly summarised in his eleventh thesis on Feuerbach, in which he states that "philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point is to *change* it".[1] The primacy that Marx attributes to political praxis reflects his attempt to discern a theory of social transformation from within a broader philosophical account of the human condition.[2] Castoriadis internalised Marx's emphasis on praxis and equally sought to comprehend the potential for a social transformation that would lead to a political emancipation of human societies. Like many mid-20th Century European Marxists, Castoriadis held a tendency to be suspicious of inherited modes of thought, identifying the mainstream philosophical tradition of Western thought as facilitating a suppression of the openly creative potential of their corresponding societies.[3] He found that Marx offered an exemplary step toward the demystification of inherited thought, however he also came to consider Marx's basic conception of historical materialism as a mistaken attempt to understand political praxis and its anthropological repercussions. Having said this, Castoriadis maintains a life-long appreciation of Marx and, as will be argued in this chapter, the enduring influence of Marx's work on Castoriadis is visible in his militant confrontation with historical reality, which he argues is "explicitly inscribed in Marx's work and bound up with its most profound meaning".[4]

Ultimately, what Castoriadis takes from Marx's work is that social transformation is a question of history and any intervention is therefore necessarily political. According to Dick Howard, there is a continuity of Marx's themes within Castoriadis's work that is reflected in his commitment to

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[1] Karl Marx, 1975, *Early Writings*, trans. Rodney Livingstone and Gregor Benton (Penguin Books, Middlesex), 423.

[2] This sense of Marx's political impetus is easily identifiable in the *Economic and Philosophical Manuscripts of 1844*, written only a year before his theses on Feuerbach.

[3] This suspicion is very clearly articulated in the position of György Lukács for whom the inherited tradition of Western philosophy is simply interpretive and sets historical reality at a distance, therefore achieving little more than a contemplative stance. See: György Lukács, 1971, *History and Class Consciousness*, trans. Rodney Livingstone (MIT Press, Cambridge), 83-222.

[4] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 10.

confronting historical reality, which is evident in his emphasis to adopt "an immanent critical-historical engagement whose results cannot be separated from its theoretical premise".[5] Central to both of their theoretical projects is an attempt to understand how the historicity of societies is shaped by the political dimension of societies and to extrapolate from this how it is possible to intervene in the world. Yet, Castoriadis went beyond Marx and undertook a critique that would lead to him to formally distance himself from Marx's theory and philosophy of history. Castoriadis developed his critique based on a recognition of underlying teleological historical tendencies that underpin Marx's philosophy of history. What's more, at the anthropological level, Marx's conception of the social character of human 'species-being' (*Gattungswessen*) is discarded by Castoriadis in order to show that anthropic being is not pre-determined by historical processes but is rather self-reflexive and open to "the question of the human being in its innumerable singularities and universalities".[6]

By tracing the theoretical shift away from Marxism toward an ontology based on self-creation, this chapter will aim to show how Castoriadis reoriented the question of political praxis in terms of a more general anthropological theory that situates the political dimension of society as a constitutive attribute of human subjectivity. This chapter will argue the necessity of this break from Marx's philosophy became apparent to Castoriadis on the basis of a critique of Marx's theorisation of the historical dimension of human being. On the surface the necessity of this break reflects the historical fate of Marxism as a counterpoint for political organisation; Marxism became highly fragmented in the mid-twentieth century as factions were increasingly splintering on account of competing interpretations of Marx, which only served to stultify the political potential of his philosophy.[7] The first section will outline Castoriadis's specific critique of Marx. At a deeper level, however, Castoriadis's critique reveals that Marx's philosophy of history was based on a conceptual impasse that positioned history as a productive dimension that shapes society in a teleological sense, therefore closing off the revolutionary potential he attempted to emancipate via calls to political action. Castoriadis's major criticism of Marx was that he fails to take into account the radical self-creating capacity of society. Due to this impasse, Marx is unable to reach an understanding of the radically political process of self-definition that corresponds to the creative

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[5] Dick Howard, 2002, *The Specter of Democracy*, (Columbia University Press, NY), 87. Axel Honneth identifies the continuity of a Marxist praxis in Castoriadis's work in a more critical sense, see: Axel Honneth, 1986, "Rescuing the revolution with an Ontology: On Castoriadis' Theory of Society", *Thesis Eleven* No. 14, pp. 62-78

[6] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today", *Thesis Eleven* No. 24, Issue 5 (Sage, Thousand Oaks); 5.

[7] See: Cornelius Castoriadis, 2010, "Why I am No Longer a Marxist", in *A Society Adrift: Interviews and Debates 1974-1997*, trans. Helen Arnold (Fordham University Press, NY).

capacity of history in shaping society. The second section will outline the conceptual approach developed by Castoriadis to rehabilitate Marx's central philosophical concern to theorise revolutionary element of social transformation; this approach will be shown to revolve around Castoriadis's novel theorisation of the social-historical, institutions and the imagination. This new theoretical framework saw the introduction of an ontological turn in Castoriadis's thought, where historicity came to be theorised *as* imaginary creation, as opposed to a Marxian style ontology that rests on a materialist teleology of history. The third section of this chapter will outline this ontological turn, which involved a radical rethinking of society, history and the role of the imagination within the political transformation of societies.

BEYOND MARX

The impetus for Castoriadis to critique Marx was not due to an outright dismissal of the fundamental questions addressed in Marx's work, but rather the way that Marx addressed them. The critique that Castoriadis undertook, at its core, involved a rigorous interrogation of the conceptual faults within Marx's theory and philosophy of history, which in turn, inspired an original reflection on historicity. The critique was first presented in his thesis on 'Marxism and Revolutionary Theory', originally published in the final issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, before its dissolution. It was subsequently published as the first section of Castoriadis's defining theoretical work 'The Imaginary Institution of Society'; a preliminary critique of Marx's economic theory also appeared in a slightly earlier essay, titled 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution'[8]. The critique follows a reading of Marx's proposal for a materialist conception of history that foregrounds technical production as the primary force driving the economic dimension of historical processes. Castoriadis argued that this materialist conception of history was developed by Marx in a way that outlined a crude historical determinism, and the implications of this he argued can be dissected on three distinctive levels[9]. Firstly, Marx introduces the development of technology as the motor of history and attributes to it a cumulative autonomous evolution; this idea builds a mechanistic conception of history that entertains a false teleology of finality. Secondly, Marx attempts to submit all of history to categories that have a sense only within capitalist society (and further still, only in developed occidental countries), whilst the application of these categories to previous forms of social life raises more

[8] See: Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*; Cornelius Castoriadis, 1988, 'Modern Capitalism and Revolution', in *Political and Social Writings Volume 2, 1955-1960: From the Workers' struggle Against Bureaucracy to Revolution in the Age of Modern Capitalism*, trans. David Ames Curtis (ed.) (University of Minnesota, Minnesota).

[9] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 29.

problems than it solves. This point characterises Marx's materialist conception of history as a perspective that is shaped by a specific historical context but that is presented as if the historical situation of capitalist society is the de facto situation of human history as a whole. Lastly, the materialist determinism implicit in Marx's theory of history is based on the hidden postulate of a human nature that is considered as essentially unalterable, whose predominant motivation would be economic.[10] This point reflects the fact that Marx's theory of history is based on a rationalist philosophy and in this sense, as Castoriadis observes, "it provides itself beforehand with the solution to all the problems it poses".[11] It gives rational content to a preconceived human substance that can be mastered through historical progress. The solution in Marx's thought comes in the form of a revolutionary project; a messianic political conception that addresses the situation of the modern world, defined by an economic rationalist account of the 'contradictions of capitalism' which are resolved through forging a revolutionary path of historical progression.

Johann Arnason observes that Castoriadis was acutely aware of the role that the 'contradictions of capitalism' played in Marx's theoretical impetus, in as much as he wanted to "reconstruct a systemic self-destructive logic which would lead to a social revolution"[12]. The crude determinism inherent in Marx's theory of history was put to work in order to reconstruct a rational historical projection, that which was to become communism. Arnason also notes that this messianic agenda was taken up through the Marxist lineage in order to characterise the contradiction of capitalism as a clear separation between a progressive pole and a regressive pole: "the progressive dynamics of the forces of production that become more and more social, and the regressive blockage due to the persistence of private property".[13] Castoriadis claimed that the implied dialectic was, however, based on a fundamental flaw in Marx's theory that subsumed value-forms of labour power into a category of exchange-value[14]. Through his reconstruction of classical economic theory, despite his claims to be transcending it, Marx *still* positioned human labour as a commodity; by reading labour as the substance of society, the production of history, the essence of human being itself, the

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[10] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 54. Castoriadis locates the material determinism of Marx (and Marxism) in the import of the Hegelian dialectic, which is essentially the import of an historical rationalism that is given a strong economic content.

[11] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 41.

[12] Johann P. Arnason, 2015, "The Imaginary Dimensions of Modernity: Beyond Marx and Weber", *Social Imaginaries* Vol. 1 Issue 1 (Zeta, Bucharest), 136. Arnason is of the impression that Marx experimented with various ways to understand and apply a vision of this self-destructive logic, the most refined of which he sees in the *Grundrisse.* It is interesting to note Arnason's suggestion that Castoriadis read the *Grundrisse* after the formulation of the main lines of his critique of Marx.

[13] Arnason, 2015, "The Imaginary Dimensions of Modernity: Beyond Marx and Weber", 137.

[14] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1978, "From Marx to Aristotle, from Aristotle to Us", trans. Andrew Arato, *Social Research*, 45:4 (The New School for Social Research, NY), 671-672.

economic dimension came to be given absolute primacy within human development and was regarded as the motor of history[15]. Further to this, labour power is seen as the fuel of this motor, one that is reduced to being a solvent of historical (and technological) equivalence, which, given the right engine, will awaken the human faculties that 'originally lie sleeping in productive man'. Marx therefore insists that a *substantial* "transformation of man into 'producer' completely awakens the dormant faculties and actualises the *telos* of man", which is the *essence* of its species-being (*Gattungswessen*)[16]. The fundamental flaw recognised by Castoriadis is that there is no unified value-form of human labour from which to judge exchange-value in a way that presupposes historical tendencies. In fact, as he says of Marx's theory, "value and its substance (as well as the rest of its grandeur), far from being determined, are rather nebulous enigmas and […] this situation is profoundly anchored in the antinomic character of the thought of Marx".[17] The prevalent antinomy in Marx's thought is identified by Castoriadis as a theory of labour that "modifies everything and modifies its very self constantly", while it is at the same time "thought under the category of Substance/Essence"[18]. According to Marx, even though human labour is thought under the category of substance and essence it is also seen as a category of potential—an idea he links to a reading of Aristotle's usage of *dunamei*—that offers the potential for anthropological transformation through historical production; labour is therefore reified by Marx in order to endow it with an historically productive power that harbours the capacity to overcome the social conditions of capitalism. This opened up a central paradox in Marx's thought, which can be traced back to the tension between the influence of Hegelian rationalism and his concomitant desire to draw a reading of Aristotle, on equivalence, toward a theory of economic determinism.

Castoriadis shows that Marx in fact makes his theoretical and philosophical claims about history *from within* the capitalist image of the world. This means that the substantial content Marx gave to his interrogation of historicity was judged on the basis of a capitalist logic, as such he comes to judge history through the lens of what Castoriadis came to define as 'capitalist significations'. Castoriadis recognised that the impossibility of transforming labour power into a commodity was a 'contradiction of capitalism' much more fundamental and enigmatic than the confrontation between technological progress and institutionalised class domination. As Arnason points out, the false

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[15] Marx critiques the major thinkers of classic economics (i.e. Ricardo, Smith) on the basis of their naïve equivalencies of labour value. As a progressive correction to classical economic theory Marx recognised that the abstract nature of value-forms are based on social exchange values.

[16] Castoriadis, 1978, "From Marx to Aristotle, from Aristotle to Us", 683.

[17] Castoriadis, Ibid., 674.

[18] Castoriadis, Ibid., 684.

dialectic of Marx's historical materialist thinking that is rooted in the antinomic character of Marx's thought was exposed by Castoriadis in recognition that "the capitalist project aiming to transform labour power was contradictory in itself".[19] Marx was unconsciously caught in this more fundamental contradiction within his thinking on capitalism, which saw him constantly modifying everything according to the primacy of economic production. It is precisely in this economic determinism that Marx's thought committed to an anthropological claim, which proposed that the development of human society unfolds through the primal essence of human labour; according to Marx's anthropological vision "capitalism is historically and philosophically privileged".[20] Castoriadis recognised that the rationalising tendency of capitalism to exemplify the primacy of the economic set the course for the rationalist myopia of Marx's system and set up a deterministic and teleological conception of historical emancipation. Dick Howard proposes that the implication of Castoriadis's critique exposes a limit to the revolutionary element of Marx's thought,: "for a theory to be revolutionary, both its relation to history and the nature of the historical world must become explicit".[21] As such the antinomic and capitalistic implications of Marx's work leave no room for historical indeterminacy and must therefore be abandoned.

Castoriadis viewed the faults of Marx's theory as contributing to the degeneration of the revolutionary element of his thought within the proceeding generations of Marxism. This view was increasingly validated as Marxist orthodoxy became regimented and the historical reality of capitalism became harder to reconcile with its Marxist interpretations; this was a key insight that was put forth by the *Socialisme ou Barberie* group. Castoriadis's response was to reformulate the revolutionary project as an overall *socio-historical project*, dissolving Marx's belief in the working class as the revolutionary subject of history and in the messianic class of the communist utopia. In Castoriadis's reformulation the revolutionary project was not delivered through an eschatological history, it became inherent to *history* itself. Castoriadis dismantled the Hegelian inspired teleology of Marx's theory of history and in turn formed a theory that regards historical transformation as a creative process that is necessarily enmeshed with the political dimension. His theoretical reformulation of history foregrounds the political dimension as *the* indeterminate condition of society. By stepping beyond Marx's work Castoriadis was confronted with problems that concern how the historical dimension is implicated in the constitution of the modern world.

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[19] Arnason, 2015, "The Imaginary Dimensions of Modernity: Beyond Marx and Weber", 137.
[20] Castoriadis, 1978, "From Marx to Aristotle, from Aristotle to Us", 684.
[21] Howard, 2002, *The Specter of Democracy*, 88.

Arnason proposes that Castoriadis approached the historical problematic through a synthesis of his critique of Marx's accounts of the contradictions of capitalism with the Weberian theme of bureaucracy[22]. Castoriadis had in fact discovered Weber in his early years and his reading of him had been heavily influenced by pre-war Greek Neo-Kantians; particularly Konstantinos Despotopoulos, who had placed particular emphasis on the conceptual role of 'ideal types' in Weber's thought[23]. Yet, his was a reading of Weber that was achieved through Marxist veils, particularly directed to counter his fraught relation with the Trotskyist strain of Marxism[24]. Arnason claims that Castoriadis saw the subsumption of labour power under capital, "as a particular case of a more general logic which manifests in the organisation and division of bureaucratic labour"[25]. As far as this corresponds to the historical reality of the time Castoriadis was acutely aware of an increasingly defining pattern within the revolutionary workers' movements, a pattern that he characterised as a 'degeneration' into bureaucratic movements. This pattern of bureaucratic degeneration can be characterised through the following developments; the voluntary delegation of power to the leaders of the movements based on the grounds of political expertise, and the tendency to confer decision-making power amongst levels of the bureaucratic apparatus on the grounds of specialisation—both of these developments serving to foster apathy and marginalise critical attitudes[26]. In Castoriadis's view, the reality of the situation was that the capitalist rationalisation replicated in Marx's work had planted the seeds for the revolutionary element of Marxism to become hierarchised. Further to this, Marxism was at a loss to explain the historical tendencies that had informed the hierarchic bureaucratisation shaping the reality of socialism (in both its Soviet and Western forms). His engagement with the theme of Weberian bureaucracy was taken up in order to provide an alternative to Marx's theory of value-form, and this provided an opening to a more *culturological* understanding of the historical problematic. His transition to the Weberian theme of bureaucratisation entailed a critical examination of the role that rationalisation plays, not merely as an organisational dynamic of society but as a culturological dynamic that is shaped by power. It was through Weber's argument about the existence of an intimate kinship between rationalisation and

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22 Arnason, 2015, "The Imaginary Dimensions of Modernity: Beyond Marx and Weber", 137.

23 Konstantinos Despotopoulos was related to a circle of Greek Neo-Kantians that revolved around Constantine Tsatsos and involved liberal sociologist Panayiotis Kanellopoulos and Platonist philosopher Ioannis Theodorakopoulos. This group formed an influential publication entitled *Archeion Philosophias kai Theorias ton Epistimon* (*Archive of Philosophy and Theory of Sciences*). See: Karalis, 2014, *Cornelius Castoriadis and Radical Democracy*, 10-11.

24 Karalis, 2014, *Cornelius Castoriadis and Radical Democracy*, xv.

25 Arnason, 2015, "The Imaginary Dimensions of Modernity: Beyond Marx and Weber", 137.

26 These arguments form crucial points in essays that reflect his transitional period, they are "Recommencing the Revolution" (1964, published by *Socialisme ou Barbarie*) and "Self-Management and Hierarchy" (1974, written in collaboration with Daniel Mothé); both essays appear in, Cornelius Castoriadis, 1993, *Political and Social Writings Volume 3, 1961-1979: Recommencing the Revolution: From Socialism to the Autonomous Society*, trans. David Ames Curtis (ed.) (University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis).

bureaucracy that Castoriadis discovered a notion of rationalisation that provided practical support for his revision of Marx's 'contradictions of capitalism'. Castoriadis understood Weber's theory of rationalisation in the sense that society was a conglomerate body of 'rationalising' subjects, and therefore the 'logic' that capitalism supposedly imposes on society is open to a condition of in-finite rationalisation. It is in this reading of Weber that Castoriadis discovered the practical conditions from which capitalism would "escape its internal contradictions"[27].

The culturological approach that Castoriadis then adopted became crucial to stepping beyond Marx and directed his reflection toward ontological questions that begin to privilege the historically contingent character of social institution that has its basis within the cultural dimension of human subjectivity. Castoriadis developed his social theory of the imaginary institution of society as a consideration of the contingent condition of these historical tendencies, re-conceptualising Marx's notion of value-form in order to foreground the indeterminate character of politics and to preserve a perennial, non-hierarchical, praxis of social transformation within the constitution of the modern world. This was to be a theory of society that stresses how human societies constitute their own world through their culturally indeterminate capacity for self-institution; a theory of history as creation. It will be shown that his most novel and radical idea is that the imagination brings the social-historical sphere into existence as a perpetual project of self-definition. Castoriadis's conceptualisation of the deep complicity between the imagination and history completely abandons Marx's insistence on a substance/essence driven historicity, and in its stead, he develops a thoroughly political conception of cultural creation that attempts to present simultaneously a theory historicity and a practical explanation of the potential for social transformation.

NEW CONCEPTS FOR A MILITANT PHILOSOPHY: SOCIAL-HISTORICAL, INSTITUTION AND THE CREATIVE IMAGINATION

It is important to stress that Castoriadis insisted on the necessity of breaking with Marxism in order to salvage a political theory of praxis that would be able to account for social transformation. Axel Honneth identifies this seemingly paradoxical move within a more general lineage of critical theorists in the twentieth century who shared the same impulse "to preserve the practical-political intentions of Marx's work by means of a determined abandonment of its central basic assumptions".[28] In Castoriadis's case this resulted in an attempt to "rescue for the present its

[27] Castoriadis, 1988, "Modern Capitalism and Revolution", *Political and Social Writings Volume 2*, 273 and 312 (fn. 54).

[28] Honneth, 1986, "Rescuing the revolution with an Ontology: On Castoriadis' Theory of Society", 62.

practical core, the idea of a revolutionary transformation of capitalism".[29] As Johann Arnason argues, Castoriadis's "thought remains to some extent 'Marxomorph', that is to say it carries traces of a prolonged encounter with Marx, and of the need to engage this adversary on his own ground".[30] Castoriadis's work can perhaps best be viewed as 'Marxisant', in that it was driven by an incentive to theorise the *potential* for a revolutionary transformation of capitalism, as was the case with Marx. In fact, Castoriadis's adherence to the central problematic of Marx's work will be traced throughout this thesis and will be shown to have contributed to the way that he developed his theory of historicity. To be clear, this prolonged encounter did not remain Marxist in character. Rather, Castoriadis constructed a novel anthropological theory that emphasises political praxis as a predominant feature of human subjectivity. This new theoretical approach to the questions outlined by Marx was systematically outlined in 'The Imaginary Institution of Society' (1974), in which Castoriadis sets himself an almost programmatic theoretical framework that would become the basis for the subsequent development of his work for the rest of his life. What Castoriadis theorised as the 'imaginary institution of society' is highly original and for the sake of guidance this section will provide some qualifying discussion; firstly, I will briefly outline the introduction of a novel conception termed the 'social-historical' that rethinks the relation between society and history, which will be followed by a brief sketch of his theory of 'institution', which—thirdly—will be shown to have been given new meaning in the context of Castoriadis's philosophical conceptualisation of the role of 'imagination' within societies.

Before outlining Castoriadis's unique theoretical framework, however, it is worth situating his abandonment of Marx in the historical and social context of his time. Hans Joas and Honneth have spoken of a particular trend in the early seventies where critical engagement with the questions raised by Marx involved a broadened theoretical approach, more in line with the tradition of philosophical anthropology. In their view, "those who were not ready to accept the existing form of Marxism as the full realisation of its inherent potential saw grounds enough for believing that an anthropological approach might be necessary for elaborating an interpretation of Marxism that was adequate to the present historical period".[31] Castoriadis was very much situated within this context, and more specifically his shift away from Marx can be viewed as somewhat *à la mode* alongside many of his Parisian contemporaries, who have since been loosely regarded under the category of

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[29] Honneth, 1986, Ibid., 62.

[30] Arnason, 2015, "The Imaginary Dimensions of Modernity: Beyond Marx and Weber", 143.

[31] See: Axel Honneth and Hans Joas, 1988, *Social Action and Human Nature,* trans. Raymond Meyer (Cambridge University Press, NY), 3.

French post-Marxists.[32] It is significant to note that the post-Marxist development of Castoriadis thought did not draw influence from the structuralist trend in France that had been a common path of addressing anthropological questions but, rather he addressed these questions through a novel synthesis of disciplinary approaches; namely, drawing from psychoanalysis, political philosophy and phenomenology (particularly Maurice Merleau-Ponty, whose importance in the development Castoriadis's theorisation of historicity will be outlined in the following chapter).

Castoriadis's post-Marxist turn was a direct attempt to move beyond what he saw as an impasse in the way that Marx conceived the relation between society and history. This new direction in his work involved a reconsideration of Marx's view of a praxis that guides pre-determined and productive historical processes. A new conception of praxis was put forward that is situated in relation to the ontological dimension of society, this is a vision of praxis which emphasises the creative capacity of societies and positions history itself as the domain of political action. The notion of the social-historical was developed in order to overcome the distinction between society and history; Castoriadis develops this notion in correspondence with the following interrogative questions: *what is it that holds a society together?* And, *what is it that brings about other and new forms of society?* In his view, society and history are inseparable and can only be thought together:

> History is the self-deployment of society in time; but this time is, in its essential characteristics, a creation of society, both as *historical* time and in each particular case as *the* time of this particular society with its particular tempo, significant articulations, anchorages, prospects, and promises[33]

According to Castoriadis, temporality has wrongly been thought of as a separable historical dimension 'within' or 'through' society. By contrast, his conception of the social-historical proposes that history is society *itself*, and vice versa, that society *is* history.[34] Society and history are seen as two sides of anthropic being more generally and, in a more specific sense, the social-historical is *the* ontological mode of anthropic being. The mode of being of the social-historical should, therefore, be understood as specifically anthropic and viewed as the '*ad*vent' of a collective human world that "comes from *nothing* and out of *nowhere*".[35] The social-historical is considered as *the* privileged domain of *anthropos*; it is the orientation of anthropic being in the form of society, which is also to

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[32] See: Warren Breckman, 2013, *Adventures of the Symbolic: Post-Marxism and Radical Democracy*, Columbia University Press, New York.

[33] Castoriadis, Cornelius, 1991, "The Social-Historical: Mode of Being, Problems of Knowledge", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*, trans. David Ames Curtis (ed.) (Oxford University Press, Oxford), 34. See also: Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 170; Castoriadis, 1997, *World in Fragments*, 5-6.

[34] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 170-176.

[35] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 195.

say that it is the form through which "society *is* self-deployment in time and space".[36] Angelos Mouzakitis has pointed out that Castoriadis's discussion is "guided by the need to attain a conception of time that could do justice to the fundamental connection between society and history, the latter being thought of in terms of *creation*".[37] The social-historical, for Castoriadis, is inseparable from time precisely because *time is creation*, and more specifically, it is *creation* "in and through social-historical doing" .[38] This formulation equates creation with praxis in the sense that social action involves the capacity to create new forms of social-historical existence, which corresponds to what Castoriadis refers to as the capacity for "otherness-alteration". [39] The question concerning the relation of historicity to 'other and new forms of society' is addressed within this formulation of a society's creative temporality.

The question concerning 'what holds a society together' became an even more pressing concern for Castoriadis in light of this understanding of social-historical creation. In response to this question Castoriadis emphasised the necessity for society to be considered as the self-deployment of its institutions in their 'totality', which means that societies necessarily entail the "creation of a simultaneously ordered 'natural' and 'social' multidimensionality proper to each and every society".[40] The 'order' (i.e. 'totality') that takes shape through the self-deployment of society is key to addressing 'what holds society together', and in response to this question Castoriadis developed a unique theory of social-historical *institution*. The institution of society is defined by Castoriadis in its broadest and most radical sense: it is the institution of "norms, values, language, tools, procedures, and methods of dealing with things and doing things, and, of course, the individual itself both in general and in the particular type and form given to it by the society considered"[41]. Mouzakitis proposes that the radical claim put forward by Castoriadis's conception of institutions is that they do not determine historical processes, but rather the 'total' "mode of being of the social-historical allows it to put itself into question, to put into question the very 'laws of its existence'".[42] This reference to the 'laws of existence' is expressed by Castoriadis in a general anthropological

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[36] Castoriadis, 1991, "The Social-Historical: Mode of Being, Problems of Knowledge", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 34.

[37] Angelos Mouzakitis, 2014, "Social-Historical", in *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts,* Suzi Adams (ed.) (Bloomsbury, London), 94.

[38] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 197.

[39] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 195.

[40] Castoriadis, 1991, "The Social-Historical: Mode of Being, Problems of Knowledge", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 34.

[41] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain", *World in Fragments*, 6.

[42] Mouzakitis, 2014, "Social-Historical", *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, 94.

sense corresponding to the 'institution' of anthropic being in the form of a society. On the basis of this claim, Castoriadis is proposing that the *self-reflexivity* of the social-historical mode of being can therefore be understood as a capacity for the *self-institution* of its own laws. However, Castoriadis also argues that society imposes on individuals ways of thinking and acting, 'social-historical patterns are imposed on the psyche', which Arnason maintains is a crucial aspect of 'what holds society together'[43]. Arnason further proposes that the role of the social-historical in the formation of individuals is a core element of Castoriadis's theory of institution:

> Institution produces, in conformity with its norms, individuals that by construction are not only able but bound to reproduce the institution. The 'law' produces the 'elements' in such a way that their very functioning embodies, reproduces, and perpetuates the 'law'[44]

Defined in this way, it is possible to discern one of the features of social-historical being in its homogenous appearance as what Castoriadis called 'instituted society', which is succinctly summarised in his expression that "we are all, in the first place, walking and complementary fragments of the institution of our society"; however, and importantly so, we are not determined by 'instituted society'[45]. In Castoriadis's theory of social-historical institution a tension therefore exists between society as *instituted* and the *instituting* capacity of society.

These two terms, imagination and institution, are central to Castoriadis's thought and became especially so after his critique of Marx, as they served to re-orient the entirety of his philosophical and political projects away from Marx's historicism. In what would have been his second major philosophical treatise, *l'Elément imaginaire* (a work that remained unfinished until his death), he worked to fully develop a claim that had been present since 'The Imaginary Institution of Society', that the entire inherited tradition of Western thought has continuously suppressed recognition of the role of imagination.[46] Castoriadis's critical exposition of the imagination deviates from the traditional modes in which it was explored throughout the history of Western philosophical thought. Even though he credits the discovery of the imagination to Aristotle, Castoriadis claims that it never took right of place as a central element in Aristotle's philosophy of the subject, nor would it

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[43] Johann P. Arnason, 2014, "Institution", in *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, Suzi Adams (ed.), 102.

[44] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain", *World in Fragments*, 7.

[45] Castoriadis, Ibid., 7.

[46] Castoriadis's thesis regarding the discovery (and subsequent suppression) of the imagination, in its fundamental role for human being and its subsequent consequences as an ontological condition of the social world, involves a lineage of thinkers: Aristotle, Kant, Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Castoriadis claims to liberate the social and historical implications of the human imagination and in doing so also formulates a critique of the 'inherited tradition' of Western thought as one that repeatedly suppresses the radical ontological character of the imagination in favour of an obsession with thinking being as 'being-determined'. A more detailed discussion of Castoriadis's conceptualisation of the imagination will be seen further in this chapter.

subsequently be attributed a central role in what would later take shape within Western metaphysics.[47] His claim is premised on the notion that the imagination is a source of alterity, that it is a source of 'otherness-alteration' that has the potential to rupture established social order; or, as he phrased it, the source of a "positive rupture of already given determinations, of creation not simply as undetermined but as *determining*, or as the positing of new determinations".[48] Castoriadis sees that giving the imagination such a definition unsettles a firmly ingrained tradition in Western thought, the one that gives ontological privilege to the notion of being as a determined quality, which is synonymous with a tendency to subordinate the creative aspects of the imagination to a particular characteristic of being that idealises what it is '*to be' as such*. In this respect, Castoriadis considers the history of mainstream philosophy as "the elaboration of Reason, homologous to the positing of being as being-determined, or determinacy (*peras, Bestimmtheit*)".[49] Castoriadis claims that human being is not simply the domain of determinable modes of existence but that being human necessarily involves a radical imaginary capacity to create *new* social-historical modes of existence. His claim is that it is the imaginary that alters the historicity of societies. This claim rests on the proposition that this capacity of the imaginary was never given its proper definition through the notion of a *creative imagination* and that the inherited tradition of philosophical thought is marked by the suppression of an historical contingency that is opened up through the potential of *imaginary* creation.

Ágnes Heller attributes significance to the fact that Castoriadis turned to Aristotle in order to reorient his philosophical approach toward the imaginary dimension of social transformation. Heller considers Castoriadis to be a neo-Aristotelian. In her view, neo-Aristotelians do not share any common theoretical positions, but rather they share a unique temperament in that they are fiercely independent thinkers that hold a predisposition to Aristotle's work rooted in their political or philosophical radicalism; in Castoriadis's case this involves his Marxist heritage.[50] Heller considers

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[47] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1994, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", in *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, Gillian Robinson and John Rundell (eds.) (Routledge, London), 136. It is significant to note John Rundell's work on the influence of Fichte as an influence on Castoriadis's conception of the imagination as a primary aspect of anthropological self-constitution. See: John Rundell, 2013, "Re-reading Fichte's Science of Knowledge after Castoriadis: The anthropological imagination and the radical imaginary", *Thesis Eleven* Issue 119 (Sage, Thousand Oaks).

[48] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1993, "Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition", *Thesis Eleven* No. 36 Issue 1 (Sage, Thousand Oaks), 1.

[49] Castoriadis, 1993, "Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition", 1.

[50] Agnes Heller, 1989, "With Castoriadis to Aristotle; From Aristotle to Kant; From Kant to Us", in Giovanni Busino (ed.), "Pour une philosophie militante de la démocratie : Autonomie at autotransformation de la société", *Revue européenne des sciences sociales* Tome XXVII No.86, Librairie Droz, Geneva, 161. Heller identifies a number of 20th Century philosophers that she considers to be neo-Aristotelian, these include: Hannah Arendt, Alisdair MacIntyre and

the way that Castoriadis theorises *praxis* as a capacity of the imaginary dimension of human societies to be 'authentically Aristotelian', particularly in that "praxis is understood as autonomous activity proper, [and] at the same time as [a] creative activity".[51] Curiously, however, Vrasidas Karalis has identified a another distinct influence in the way that Castoriadis formulated his ideas about praxis, namely his early engagement Despotopoulos (a neo-Kantian), whose "idea about the 'cultural creativity' of the human mind and his belief in human *autoteleia*" is distinctly similar to Castoriadis's understanding of autonomy.[52] Castoriadis describes the cultural capacity for imaginary creation as the *poietic* dimension of societies, to which he contrasts the *practical* (i.e. functional) dimension of pre-established social-historical institutions. This reflects a fundamental distinction in Castoriadis's work between cultural creativity and the formation of institutions, which is evident when Castoriadis describes the social-historical domain as "a socially sanctioned symbolic network in which a functional component and an imaginary component are combined in variable proportions and relations".[53] From Arnason's perspective, Castoriadis views culture as the synthesis of a 'complex of relations' whose creative capacity is "irreducible to [the] shared norms or intersubjective understandings" of established institutions. [54] This distinction introduces a dichotomous element to Castoriadis's theory of the imaginary institution of societies that is reminiscent of the Aristotelean distinction between *praxis* and *poiesis*. Honneth also picks up on the strong Aristotelean influence that undergirds Castoriadis's shift away from Marxism, particularly in the way that Aristotle's distinction (where "*poiesis* aims at producing a product external to itself, [and] *praxis* is realised in its own performance") is radicalised "beyond its character as performance, *praxis* is characterised both by a particular form of action-orienting knowledge, as well as by an immanent reference to the autonomy of the individual".[55] In other words, Castoriadis introduces the creative (*poietic*) capacity of the imaginary as a potential revolutionary source for *praxis*.

This new sense that Castoriadis gives to the distinction between *praxis* and *poeisis* is crystallised in his definition of culture:

> We shall call *culture* all that, in the public domain of a society, goes beyond that which is simply functional and instrumental in the operation of that society. In other words, culture

Michel Foucault.

[51] Heller, 1989, "With Castoriadis to Aristotle; From Aristotle to Kant; From Kant to Us", 164.

[52] Karalis, 2014, *Cornelius Castoriadis and Radical Democracy*, 13.

[53] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 132.

[54] Arnason, 2014, "Institution", *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, 102.

[55] Honneth, 1986, "Rescuing the Revolution with an Ontology: On Cornelius Castoriadis' Theory of Society", 67.

> concerns all that, in this society, pertains to the imaginary *strictu sensu* [in the strict sense], to the poietic imaginary, in as much as this imaginary dimension is embodied in works and in pattern of behaviour that go beyond the functional.[56]

Arnason shows that in Castoriadis's definition of culture there is a "strong emphasis on the interrelations that constitute the social field, and [these interrelations] are only in part identifiable with norms and rules".[57] Castoriadis views the cultural dimension as made up of heterogenous articulations of the world and various interpretations of the instituted symbolic forms that structure societies. In Castoriadis's view, the 'complex of relations' that shape the conditions for cultural creativity reflect a social-historical fact, that 'all actual and factual relations are *not* causal', instead, social institution occurs *vis formandi*, through the "power of formation".[58] Castoriadis defines his particular use of the notion *'vis formandi'* with respect to the idea that human being is creation, although it is not the creation of 'matter-energy' but instead the creation of social-historical 'forms'.[59] The unique element of Castoriadis's theory of institution is that this 'power of formation' is *the human imagination*. The *vis formandi* of imaginary institution is precisely the *instituting* capacity of the imagination to create social-historical institutions as a collective mode of being. This aspect of the social-historical institution will be explored in more depth within the next section of this chapter, which will then lead to the main contention of the chapter, that Castoriadis conceives of the political dimension of society on the basis of the *vis formandi* of social institution.

HUMAN SUBJECTIVITY AND SOCIAL-HISTORICAL BEING

But, how do human societies establish their own world and for whom? Who is the human subject with this cultural capacity to create history? What is the specificity of anthropic being that it may take the form of a human subject? These are some of the questions that arose for those who abandon the Marxist paradigm in search of a new conception of political praxis. Honneth and Joas recognise that the practico-political impetus of post-Marxism involves the construction of "a theoretical model of human praxis in such a way that the independence of social conditions was neither denied nor reified, but could be recognised rather as the product of social action".[60] Post-Marxism cannot be defined by a distinct methodological approach, however a common feature of 'post-Marxist'

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[56] Castoriadis 1997, "Culture in a Democratic Society", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 339-340.

[57] Arnason, 2014, "Institution", *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, 102.

[58] Castoriadis, 1997, "Culture in a Democratic Society", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 342.

[59] Castoriadis, 1994, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, 149.

[60] Honneth and Joas, 1988, *Social Action and Human Nature*, 3-4.

thinkers can be discerned on the basis of their attempt to incorporate various discursive considerations of political praxis into an anthropological theory of the human subject.[61] Castoriadis's shift beyond Marx shares this feature, which he directed toward a theoretical project that explores the ontological conditions of human subjectivity. This turn is reflected in his critical engagement with discourses as diverse as philosophical anthropology, the life sciences, phenomenology and psychoanalysis, the latter two being of significant importance for his culturological revision of the relation between the human subject and society.[62] Castoriadis constructs a theory of political praxis that is based on a novel conception of human subjectivity, which considers *anthropos* as a living being (*le vivant*) endowed with an imaginary capacity to create itself *as* social-historical being.[63] This theoretical approach can be seen as a forerunner to contemporary debates concerning the conceptual status of the biopolitical. Even though biopolitical considerations are typically seen as originating from a lineage passed on by Foucault, Castoriadis's contribution to a theoretical understanding of the ontological conditions of the biopolitical is less appreciated; he is in fact an explicit theorist of the biopolitical. As will be shown in this section, he outlines the particular type of *living being* that grounds human subjectivity and elucidates the radically creative ontological capacity of the human imagination as a specific feature of human nature. Castoriadis makes clear that the 'essence' of human nature is simply its 'capacity' of imaginary creation, in the sense of "*making be other forms* of social and individual existence" as new historical creations. This is a mode of praxis that evokes the political dimension of society within the very process of anthropogenesis, and not—as with Marx—at the level of technical and economic production.[64]

In order to describe the radically ontological nature of human subjectivity Castoriadis identifies the specificity of anthropic being on the basis of a central axis: a transversal ('horizontal') level that

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[61] On the philosophical level there are three factors that can be seen to contribute a considerable influence on the work of post-Marxists: an engagement with the work of Freud, Heidegger, Husserl and Nietzsche, the import of ancient Greek thought, and a revision of the Kantian legacy. However, these influences were also utilised for the purpose of theorising the human subject in relation to a variety of positivist, materialist or empirical discourses; such as linguistics, biology, semiotics, cybernetics, psychoanalysis, anthropology, sociology, phenomenology, etc.

[62] Previous to becoming a practicing psychoanalyst in 1973, Castoriadis was briefly associated with Jacques Lacan's *École Freudienne de Paris*, before he aligned himself with a splinter of that organisation that formed the *Quatrième groupe* (O.P.L.F. - *Organisation psychanalytique de la langue française*). The *Quatrième groupe* involved Piera Aulagnier, François Perrier, and Jean-Paul Valabrega; all had been original board members of *École Freudienne de Paris* yet had disputed Lacan's practical methodology and insisted on a 'third way' between the Lacanian school and the original psychoanalytic organisation, the *International Psychoanalytical Association*.

[63] While the origin of the term 'biopolitics' emerged as an organicist and racial concept of social thought, the term is now commonly debated according to the definition given to it by Michel Foucault in his Collège de France lectures. See: Michel Foucault, 2008, *The Birth of Biopolitics: Lectures at the Collège de France 1978-1979*, ed. Arnold I. Davidson, trans. Graham Burchell (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke).

[64] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1997, "Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics", *Thesis Eleven* no. 49 (Sage, Thousand Oaks), 103.

situates human being within nature and in relation to other living beings, and the 'vertical' transcendence of social-historical life as a culturological mode of being beyond merely intersubjective relations. In other words, his line of enquiry centres on the problem of theorising the precise conditions of human subjectivity in relation to the political dimension of society. It is important to remain cognisant of the fact that Castoriadis shifts to this axis in order to relocate the Marxist concern for revolutionary praxis from a primarily societal concern to a more thoroughly anthropological problematic. Honneth has recognised that this viewpoint shifts from a philosophy of praxis based on Marx's concern with "the structure of intersubjectivity", and instead praxis is articulated in ontological terms which take into account "the creative dimension of social action".[65] In what follows, I will address three key considerations that are crucial for understanding Castoriadis's theoretical construction of an ontological dimension of human being and the role of political praxis: a) the fundamental distinction between *living being* and *anthropic being*, b) the specific anthropic nature of the *imagination* and c) the central claim that human beings are, both, created *by* and create themselves *as* a social-historical mode of being.

Castoriadis develops a complex schematic to outline his theory of human subjectivity.
This schematic is based on a distinction between a) various regions of self-organisation that determine the *human subject* and b) the largely indeterminate capacity of *human subjectivity* to alter itself by creating other 'social and individual' forms of existence. The constitution of the *human subject* involves a poly-regional complex of ontological sources, in which "we are dealing with a multiplicity of regions, and even levels, of being, all of which come under the title of the *for-itself*",[66]. These regions of the *for-itself* (*pour-soi*) correspond to the following categories: the living being, the human psyche (as the subjective origin of the imagination), the social individual, and society (as the social-historical domain that is specific to anthropic being).[67] Each of these regions correspond to meta-functional levels of the *human subject*, however this schematic stratification of poly-regional self-finalities cannot account for the activity of *human subjectivity,* which is posed by Castoriadis "as a question and as a project" of human subjects within their social-historical context.[68] *Human subjectivity* is therefore 'to be made' and, in turn, 'makes itself by means of' its regional strata of the *for-itself*, "it is *historical creation* and a creation whose history can be followed".[69] The political dimension of *human subjectivity* inaugurates itself on the basis of a

[65] Honneth, 1986, "Rescuing the Revolution with an Ontology: On Cornelius Castoriadis' Theory of Society", 66.
[66] Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today", 10.
[67] Castoriadis, ibid., 11.
[68] Castoriadis, ibid., 5.
[69] Castoriadis, ibid., 11.

radical *self-reflexivity*, which allows the *human subject* to put itself into question.

Castoriadis defines the living being as an entity whose archetypal source is its own '*for-itself'* (*pour-soi)* character.[70] He qualifies the *for-itself* characteristic of living being as taking shape by way of three principle features: "the living being is *for-itself* insofar as it is self-finality, insofar as it creates its own world, and insofar as this world is a world of *representations*, *affects*, and *intentions*".[71] These three principles are absolutely central to life bringing itself into existence, and according to Castoriadis, it is on the basis of these principles that the living being is able to organise and constitute a world as *its own* world (*son monde propre*), and to define *its own* world within *its own* limits, which are visible only as an horizon onto the world *tout court.*[72] The *for-itself* therefore signifies being as the functionality of one's own ends and in accordance with one's own needs, it is its own *self-finality*, and toward this end the triadic principles of self-organisation (*representation/affect/intention*) are what shape the world of a living being.[73] Castoriadis insists that there must be some characteristic of the world *tout court* that makes it possible for a living being to be able to organise a world *for-itself* (*pour-soi*). He insists that the world *tout court* is *organisable* and that the needs of a living being must function in accordance with the indifferent reality of an impartial nature. Castoriadis terms this indifferent level of nature, the *first natural stratum.*[74] There is a necessity for the living being to 'lean-on' the first natural stratum by functioning in relation to the natural limits of its *organisability,* Castoriadis calls this a relation of 'leaning-on' nature, *Anlehnung* (or *étayage*), using a Freudian concept, which is intended to describe the parameters upon which self-finality can be organised through an indifferent world.[75] The acknowledgement of this relation is gleaned from the fact that any organisation that is able to constitute itself, *for-itself*, cannot come into existence without the basic condition that "the 'material' they 'form' did not already include in itself the 'minimal form' of being form*able*".[76]

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[70] Castoriadis, ibid., 10. See also: Cornelius Castoriadis, 1990, "Pour-soi et subjectivité", Daniel Bougnoux, Jean-Louis Le Moigne and Serge Proulx (eds.), *Arguments pour une méthode (Autour d'Edgar Morin)* (Seuil, Paris), 118-127.

[71] Castoriadis, 1997, "The State of the Subject Today", *World in Fragments*, 148—italics mine.

[72] Castoriadis, 1994, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", in *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, 140. See also: Castoriadis, 1997 "Done and to be Done", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 366.

[73] Castoriadis, 1989, "State of the Subject Today", 13.

[74] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 229-237.

[75] Castoriadis, ibid., 186. Castoriadis uses the Freudian notion of *Anlehnung* as a way to by-pass the Kantian problematic. He situated the psychoanalytic schema at the juncture of the natural and human world in order to equate the imagination as the source of anthropogenesis. It is not within the bounds of this thesis to pursue this any further than to comment, that contemporary quantum physics is testing the limits of our understanding of the *for-itself* as the constitution of reality.

[76] Castoriadis, 1994, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", in *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, 140.

According to Castoriadis, the necessity of leaning-on nature is therefore presupposed by the fact that there is an extensive quality of the world that allows it to become, both, *perceptible* and *representable* and it is on the basis of this quality that a living being can only bring itself into existence by making the world meaningful *for-itself*. Therefore, functional needs are translated into subjective processes that attribute *sensorial (perceptible)* and *representational* value as a necessary component of the physical, chemical and biological propensities of any organism. Here we are talking of the very basis for the emergence of life[77]. What is relevant for the present discussion is the fact that the living being is subject to its own reality as it organises its world as meaningful on the basis of the triadic principles of self-finality: "everywhere there is the for-itself there will be representation and image, there will be affect, there will be intention" [78]. The overarching subjective schema of the living being, which constitutes a reality *for-itself* on the basis of these triadic principles is the *corporeal imagination*. The living being conceived as a subject refers to its capacity to process what is meaningful *for-itself* in accordance with the natural stratum and the complexity of its multiple ontological regions. This definition of the subject is suitable for all types of living beings (plants and animals alike), as the central premise involves a *functional* adherence to mainly biological ontological regions; from the region of intra-species relations (i.e. sexuality) right down to its own single-cell organisms. The form through which anthropic being 'leans-on' nature and produces its own mode of self-finality is the social-historical institution. The fundamental anthropological claim made by Castoriadis is that, as living beings, the emergence of human life is an altogether new mode of being, precisely because the subjective processes that attribute *sensorial* and *representational* value have been *defunctionalised*.

One would assume that if the subjective processes of human beings (as living beings) are not functionally determinate, as Castoriadis maintains, then it would follow that human beings would be 'mad', degenerate, animals, and that they would be "radically unfit for life".[79] However, while this may be true from the perspective of the living being, this fatalistic notion does not take into account the region of the *psyche* as the genesis of the creative and *defunctionalised* human

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[77] See: Kalevi Kull, 2009, "Vegetative, Animal, and Cultural Semiosis: The Semiotic Threshold Zones", *Cognitive Semiotics*; Issue 4 (de Gruyter, Berlin). This conception of the emergence of life reflects the programmatic definition of semiosis as the condition of life that is central to the field of biosemiotics, however I am not able to pursue in this thesis the many insights that Castoriadis's work can contribute to this field.

[78] Castoriadis, 1997, "The State of the Subject Today", *World in Fragments*, 146.

[79] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 1. Castoriadis, 1997, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain", *World in Fragments*, 6. It is significant to note that this anthropological image of the 'mad, degenerate, animal' is a common feature of post-war German philosophical anthropology, and interestingly this literature was also concerned with developing a concept of 'institution'. see: Arnold Gehlen, 1988, *Man: His Nature and Place in the World*, trans. Clare McMillan and Karl Pillemer (Columba University Press, NY).

imagination.[80] The idea of a *defunctionalised* imagination is put forward in order to demonstrate a caesura of the human imagination from its biological functionality. Castoriadis locates this caesura within the psyche of human subjects, who are "biologically non-functional in order to be 'functional' from another point of view", that is, the 'functional' viewpoint of the social subject who is shaped by the institution of society.[81] The psychoanalytic aspect of this idea is present in the observation that the human psyche can be defined as the *domination of representational pleasure over organ pleasure*, which is regarded by Castoriadis as a "massive *conversion,* co-originary with humanity".[82] The source of representational pleasure for the psyche is the social-historical region of being, which corresponds to the institution of society as a specifically anthropic mode of being. Castoriadis takes up the psychoanalytic insight that regards the psyche to be the seat of differential formative capacities within the human subject, yet he gives this a phenomenological bent in that it also involves a twofold embodiment of the imagination: a *corporeal imagination* through which the body "creates its sensations" and a *radical imagination*, the emergence of 'defunctionalised' (social) meaning as an "incessant flux that is at once representational, intentional and affective".[83] The radical imagination is a novel conception that was developed by Castoriadis in order to account for the unique imaginary trait that subjects human beings to an 'incessant flux' of information that consistently surges forth in the form of new 'representations, affects and desires', as opposed to the largely transversal imaginary trait of the living being, corresponding with the corporeal (i.e. functional) imagination, which is either "reproductive or simply combinatory (and usually both)".[84]

It must be stressed that the formative capacity of the human subject still depends on the *corporeal imagination* to a certain extent, even if it only exists as a "floating debris of the animal's *functional* 'psychical' apparatus". However, the human subject is dominated by its *radical imagination,* which utilises this dependency in order to create its world according to social-historical meaning.[85] The *defunctionalised* imagination of the 'mad, degenerate,' human being therefore turns out to be have been exceedingly successful in creating its own imaginary mode of life in the form of social-historical being. The human subject's radical capacity to create itself *vis formandi* (i.e. as social-

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[80] Castoriadis ruptures the traditional philosophical approaches that emphasise subjective regions of being and instead privileges the socio-cultural (i.e. social-historical) region as the rudimentary source of self-definition for anthropic being.

[81] Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today", 18.

[82] Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today", 19.

[83] Castoriadis, 1997, "From the Monad to Autonomy", *World in Fragments,* 178.

[84] Castoriadis, 1994, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", in *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity,* 138.

[85] Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today", 20-21.

historical form) appears to be "virtually limitless and goes far beyond any characterisation in terms of 'functionality'".[86] This apparent limitlessness reflects the fact that social-historical meaning does not have an elementary or functional basis. It is precisely because the human imagination is debased and 'unbridled' that a human subject can give form to the social-historical world according to "its own process of thought" and to do so through a subjective process of *self-reflection* that does not simply 'lean-on' 'calculation' or 'reasoning' but reserves the capacity to create itself anew (*ex-nihilo*).[87] The imaginary capacity for the human subjectivity to bring a social-historical world into being *vis formandi* is characterised by Castoriadis as a capacity for 'self-creation' and not 'self-organisation'.[88] Due to this 'incessant flux' of radical imagination, human subjects have attained the capacity to create themselves on the basis of social-historical meaning, to think self-reflectively and to question what being is for itself. It is precisely this condition for self-reflection that establishes the capacity of praxis as a defining feature of human subjectivity.

However, putting aside considerations of the living being, it is necessary to show that the human subject's capacity to create itself *vis formandi* on the basis of *social-historical* meaning is not limitless. Castoriadis insists that the most formative region of the human subject is its existence as a *social individual*, which takes into account the social-historical context shaping the capacity of the human subject to bring itself into being. In fact, we exist as social individuals only so far as we have been fabricated by the historical institution of society; this is the sense in which Castoriadis proposes that "we are all, in the first place, walking and complementary fragments of the institution of our society".[89] This is an important point because it opposes the image of the individual as a tabula rasa that is endowed with a limitless autonomy to act on the basis of every representation, affect, or desire that it sees fit to act upon; in fact, this very idea of tabula rasa echoes the definition of psychosis given by Castoriadis[90]. In fact, the notion of the individual as a tabula rasa is a liberal conception that depoliticises subjectivity, which is a claim that will be addressed in this thesis. The

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[86] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain", *World in Fragments,* 9.

[87] Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today", 27.

[88] Castoriadis, 1994, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", in *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity,* 149.

[89] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain", *World in Fragments,* 7. From the subjective point of view, social individuals are characterised by their *sublimation of social-historical meaning,* which involves the psychical construction of mechanisms that undertake, both, repression of its 'psychical flux' and transgression of 'inherited meaning': "Sublimation is the process by means of which the psyche is forced to replace its 'own' or 'private objects' of cathexis (including its own image of itself) with objects that exist and have value in and through their social institution and, out of these, to create for itself 'causes', 'means' or 'supports' of pleasure" (Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today", 42-43 fn. 21). See also: Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society,* 312.

[90] See: Castoriadis, 1997, "The Construction of the World in Psychosis", *World in Fragments*.

most pertinent feature that underlies the existence of the social individual is that human beings can only constitute themselves as social subjects and can therefore only constitute themselves in relation to their cultural context; which is to say, following on from the definition of culture discussed in the previous section, that an individual acts in relation to an imaginary context that is shaped by heterogenous cultural perspectives. As such, Castoriadis defines the social individual as a 'socially functional' region of the self that takes shape through the social institutions that it embodies (i.e. family, language, education, etc)[91]. It is a stabilising region that allows the human subject to negotiate between society and its psyche;

> [the social individual is] a speaking entity that has an identity and a social state, conforms more or less to certain rules, pursues certain ends, accepts certain values, and acts according to motivations and ways of doing things which are stable for its behaviour to be, most of the time, foreseeable for other individuals.[92]

A social individual therefore must posit itself in a way that is both contextually meaningful and temporally oriented within the institutions of society, i.e. within *instituted society*. It is important to point out Castoriadis insistence on the fact that, "the social-historical institution alone *brings* identity *into being*", which means that the human subject must conform to a large extent with the institution of society[93].

However, as was stated at the beginning of this chapter, this does not mean that the human subject is absolutely determined by its social institution. Despite the fact that the human subject encounters the world in the form of *instituted society*, there remains a radical *instituting* power within human subjectivity that allows us to bring ourselves into being 'as a question and as a project' of social-historical significance. This 'radical instituting power', which goes under various names in Castoriadis's lexicon—"collective, anonymous, radical, instituting, and constituting imaginary"—can be understood in objective terms as the *social imaginary.*[94] It is opposed to *instituted society* in the sense that the *social imaginary* arises as 'otherness and the perpetual orientation of otherness", which in plain terms can be understood as an imaginary capacity to reflect 'collectively' on the instituted forms of society and to 'collectively' propose 'other' forms of social-historical existence.[95] The emergent basis of the social imaginary lies within the capacity of the human

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[91] Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today", 36.

[92] Castoriadis, ibid., 23.

[93] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 204. The following chapter will involve a discussion of social-historical identity in relation to the institution of rationality and reason.

[94] Castoriadis, 1997, "From the Monad to Autonomy", *World in* Fragments, 173.

[95] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 369. The conception of social imaginary was never elaborated further than this definition to create something 'other' than what exists. However, in the context of the field of power

subject to engage in *self-reflection* which in turn gives rise to "the possibility of *putting oneself into question*".[96] It is through the dimension of *self-reflection* that the human subject's capacity to create new forms of social-historical existence (i.e. praxis) attains its political character. As a social individual, to put oneself into question is to place the institutions of society into question; it is the capacity to rupture instituted meaning and to

> break up the closure of the hitherto prevailing instituted society and open up a space where the activities of thinking and politics lead to putting again and again into question not only the *given* forms of the social institution and of the social representation of the world but the possible *ground* for any such forms.[97]

Human subjectivity involves the social imaginary to the extent that it is oriented toward the praxis of its self-reflection, which is defined on the basis of two core features: *deliberate activity* and *will*. As will be shown in more detail in chapter three, Castoriadis interprets the capacity for self-reflection into a theory of *autonomous praxis*, which is situated as an inherent *possibility* of the imagination 'to posit as existing something that is not' and to do so on the basis of what it *wills* and in accordance with its own *deliberate activity*. The crucial feature of this interpretation of self-reflection is that it becomes the foundation for Castoriadis's political conception of praxis in the form of the *autonomous subject*.

The political dimension of *human subjectivity* inaugurates itself on the basis of radical *self-reflexivity*, whereby the subject and the social institutions that shape it become the subject and object of knowledge that can be translated into practical forms of questioning, which aim to transform social and historical conditions[98]. It is precisely this creative capacity to bring into being something 'other' than what is given by historically determined processes that was missing from Marx's understanding of social transformation. Castoriadis's theory of *human subjectivity* places this radical capacity for *self-reflection* at the centre of anthropic being, and situates political praxis as concomitant with "what we are as imagining (that is, creative) beings".[99] It is on the basis of this praxis that Castoriadis builds a political theory of social institution, which characterises *autonomous being* as its instituting mode of existence and the next chapter will focus in more detail on how this creative praxis is incorporated into a political theory of social institution. Following on from this, in

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that grounds instituted society and this instituting capacity, the political dimension of social imaginaries can be seen to have strong resonances with forms of resistance within societies; this point will be explored further within the thesis in order to define depoliticisation in the context of dominant forms of instituted power.

96 Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today", 26.

97 Castoriadis, 1997, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain", *World in Fragments,* 17.

98 Castoriadis, 1997, "Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics", 99.

99 Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today", 28.

chapter three, it will then be shown that Castoriadis translates this autonomous mode of being into a collective political project, on the basis of which "we ought to reserve a place for a *society* that would not simply be a for-itself beyond individuals but would be capable of reflecting on itself", accordingly, this would be "a society that can and should be called 'autonomous'"[100]. However, Castoriadis stresses that the autonomous capacity of human subjectivity is only a *possibility*[101]. In fact, he was rather pessimistic on account of this autonomous capacity within contemporary Western societies:

> "recent and present history offer massive horrifying examples in which the last traces of reflectiveness and of a will of one's own, which human beings can possess, are reduced to nothing by the social (political) institution.[102]

What Castoriadis is describing here is the 'reduction' of the subjective capacity of political praxis within society, it is this 'reduction' that will be examined in this thesis under the conception of *depoliticisation*. This thesis will show that Castoriadis's project for an autonomous society is not realistically attainable. My argument is not so much concerned with this claim. Rather, the ambition of the thesis is to show how the political dimension of society, which Castoriadis bases on this conception of *human subjectivity*, offers an abundant resource for a critical self-reflection on the phenomenon of contemporary *depoliticisation* (and its subsequent symptoms).

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[100] Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today, 11-12.

[101] The way that Castoriadis situates the conditional 'possibility' of autonomous self-reflection can be read as a correction to the criticism that he makes of Marx's use of Aristotle's conception of *dunamei*.

[102] Castoriadis, 1989, "The State of the Subject Today, 37.

CHAPTER 2

THE INSTITUTION OF SOCIETIES AND THE SOCIAL-HISTORICAL WORLD: HISTORICITY AND ONTOLOGICAL FORM

Society, according to Castoriadis, is a domain of ontological world-creation, "which is not predetermined and which superimposes on the chaos a cosmos, a world that is organized and ordered somehow or other".[1] The question of how the institution of society organises and orders the social-historical world 'somehow or other' will be the focus of this chapter, because it is the specific way that Castoriadis provides an explanation of social-historical institution that leads to a unique and important perspective on historicity. The image of world-creation evoked by Castoriadis is drawn from ancient Greek thinking, in particular the pre-Socratic vision that "it is out of the total void that the world emerges".[2] Castoriadis considers this vision to propose an understanding of anthropogenesis that necessarily involves the establishment of a society, and that societies are only ever a thin veil covering over (*recouvrant*) "the Chaos, the Abyss, the Groundlessness" of being.[3] Because social-historical institution is *groundless* it must therefore be considered as the "emergence of a new ontological form". [4] Castoriadis defines society as the self-creation of a community that defines itself, or, to put it in the theoretical language of Castoriadis's conception: society is a mode of onto-genesis in the form of an *eidos.* The idea of society as an *eidos* is offered by Castoriadis as a way to explain that social-historical institution necessarily involves the formation of a world through which a community defines itself in the form of a society:

> For it is one in the same thing to say that society institutes the world in each case as its world or its world as the world, and to say that it institutes a world of significations, that it

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[1] Castoriadis, 1997, "Culture in a Democratic Society", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 342.

[2] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 273.

[3] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 1. Castoriadis re-contextualises these pre-Socratic images in relation to his distinction between the psyche and social-historical forms, which were outlined in the previous chapter: "under two forms, therefore, humanity continues, prolongs, recreates the Chaos, the Abyss, the Groundlessness from which it emerges: psychical Chaos, the Groundlessness of the psyche's radical imagination; social Abyss, the Groundlessness of the social imaginary, itself creative of signification and of the institution. And, at the same time, it has to confront the Chaos, the Abyss, the Groundlessness of the world." (Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 5).

[4] Castoriadis, 1994, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, 149.

> institutes itself in instituting the world of significations that is its own, in correlation to which, alone, a world can exist for it.[5]

Eidos is therefore a concept used by Castoriadis to refer to the institution of a social-historical world, which organises a community around practices, norms and laws that structure the 'form' of society, "in the full sense of the term (union of the organisation and the organised)".[6] Social-historical *eidos* is a specifically anthropic form of being that is shaped in its own self-image and—as discussed in the previous chapter—created under the principle of its own form. Castoriadis believes that the self-creation of a society that reflects heterogenous cultural articulations of the world is most evident with the human capacity to place the constitutive principles of their own self-institution, which is to say the 'organisation' of society, into question; self-institution operates on the basis that a society presupposes its own origin, as the "the advent of a 'form' (*eidos*) that explicitly alters itself *qua form*".[7]. This chapter will examine how Castoriadis comes to theorise the self-institution of social-historical form through one of his most important theoretical developments: his novel conception of the social imaginary.

As discussed in the previous chapter, Castoriadis attempted to analyse the ontological construction of a society in order to move beyond the teleological aspects of Marx's understanding of historicity. A central concern for Castoriadis in developing a fresh understanding of historicity was to present the temporal dimension of social-historical institutions in a way that emphasises how the institution of a society involves an ongoing articulation of the social-historical world that is being instituted. This concern represents a generally phenomenological approach to the question of ontology and forms the basis of a theoretical project that attempted to outline human existence as a creative mode of self-institution. Johann Arnason provides one of the most detailed interpretations of the phenomenological perspectives developed by Castoriadis, showing how "social imaginary significations serve to articulate an ontological framework", and how the cultural expression of

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[5] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 359.

[6] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 310. It is important to be clear that Castoriadis does not tie the notion of social-historical *eidos* to an ontology of being, it is the ontological form of social-historical existence that is a creation of collective human being; as will be discussed further into the chapter, human being is understood to be a creative capacity, not an ontological form in-itself. The term, *eidos*, is drawn from Aristotle's reworking of Plato's definition, in which form reflects an *oussia* that is specific to its own telos. Castoriadis's own re-working of the term, in its social-historical usage, highlights the indeterminate character of *telos*, which reveals an interpretive dimension of *eidos* that Castoriadis relates to the contingency of ontological form (see: Cornelius Castoriadis, 1984, "Value, Equality, Justice, Politics", in *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, trans. Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle (MIT Press, Massachusetts)—society is therefore open to alteration via the self-creation of new, and other, *eide*, which reflect other ends. I will argue in this chapter that this interpretive dimension of *eidos* does not only reflect a contingent characteristic, but that it also reveals an implicit ground of institutional creativity.

[7] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1994, "The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy", *Philosophy and Social Criticism*, Vol. 20 No. 1/2 (Sage, Thousand Oaks) 149.

significations form a symbolic milieu that takes on specific institutional significance.[8] The relationship between institutional form and the heterogenous cultural articulations of the world is proposed by Castoriadis to be "the essential *historicity* of significations".[9] The social imaginary, as a mode of cultural creativity, plays a significant institutional role in Castoriadis's theorisation of historicity, particularly in the sense that it is seen to 'ground' institutions within a 'totalising' context that consists of heterogenous symbolic forms. Here again, Arnason pinpoints the relevance of Castoriadis's work to broader intellectual traditions, in remarking that "Castoriadis takes up again the question of the relationship between institutions and collective representations—clearly posed but only partly answered by Durkheim and Mauss—and links it to a broader perspective on 'the meaning of meaning'".[10] This chapter will interrogate how Castoriadis develops a theoretical schema that links the cultural formation of significations with a broader totalising context of the social-historical world. In attempting to provide a fresh understanding of historicity Castoriadis developed a complex ontological schema that emphasises the radical capacity of communities to institute societies that are based on creative interpretations of the world. It will be pointed out in this chapter that Castoriadis emphasises the creative aspects of historicity in relation to ontology, over a thoroughly cultural interpretation of this creativity; the latter perspective is developed by Arnason in his hermeneutical critique of Castoriadis's work. This ontological view of self-institution situates the particular creations of social-historical meaning within the institution of a broader totalising context, or in Castoriadis's terms: this means that "society exists in positing the requirement of signification as universal and as total, and in positing its world of significations as what can satisfy this requirement".[11] I will argue in this chapter that this leads Castoriadis to dichotomise modes of historicity that tend toward 'ontological closure' or 'ontological openness'. This dichotomous distinction will be shown to be implausible precisely because these two modes of historicity are considered by Castoriadis to be opposed on ontological grounds.

In this chapter, Castoriadis's work is situated within in a specific lineage of phenomenological thought that goes from Edmund Husserl to Maurice Merleau-Ponty. This lineage is most evident when one considers how Merleau-Ponty—referring to Husserl—talked of the phenomenological task that aims for an "ontological rehabilitation of the sensible".[12] This is precisely the impetus for

[8] Arnason, 2007, "Imaginary Significations and Historical Civilisations", *Moderne begriefen*, 96.
[9] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 368.
[10] Arnason, 2007, "Imaginary Significations and Historical Civilisations", *Moderne begriefen*, 94.
[11] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 359.
[12] Cited in: Marc Richir, 1993, "The Meaning of Phenomenology in the Visible and the Invisible", *Thesis Eleven* No.

Castoriadis to develop his conception of the ontological constitution of the social-historical world. The rehabilitation of sensibility in the context of the social-historical is significant because it led him to also develop his conception of the social imaginary as an actively world-forming ontology. The social imaginary will be shown to provide a homogenous and 'totalising context' through which the institution of a society is represented in accordance with the broader significance of the community's encounter with the world; the final section of the chapter will outline how, in a variety of ways, Merleau-Ponty's work contributed significantly to Castoriadis's major shift toward ontological considerations of the social-historical world. It will be argued that Castoriadis develops an overly ontological conception of historicity, which privileges institutional modes of closure over that of openness. This will be shown, throughout the thesis, to have limited some core insights into the political nature of historicity provided by his theoretical project. Ultimately, this chapter will argue that this dichotomous theorisation of historicity stands in contradiction with his more radical conception of historicity as a mode of creative self-alteration. I will propose that it is instructive to relativise the dichotomy constructed by Castoriadis and to instead develop the notion of the *social imaginary*, in particular, in the sense that it provides an explanation for both the constituent ground of institutions and the capacity for a community to engage in a creative mode of self-alteration. Castoriadis's notion of the social imaginary offers a unique approach to historicity—the political implications of this will be examined in the following chapter. This chapter therefore present the basis of a core argument in this thesis, which is that the institutional form that shapes a society's mode of historicity is not bound by ontological principles, but rather by institutional power.

THE SELF-ORIGIN OF THE SOCIAL-HISTORICAL WORLD

The theme of the social-historical world raises the idea that societies contain a 'totalising' dimension whose central dynamic, as portrayed by Castoriadis, is "the union *and* the tension of instituting society and of instituted society, of history made and history in the making".[13] It is the dynamic of 'history in the making', in tension with existing institutional forms, which Castoriadis most clearly sets out to describe throughout his work, and in doing so he developed what constitutes his most original contribution to social theory: the notion of the *social imaginary*.[14] The social

36 issue 1 (Sage, Thousand Oaks). See: Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1968, *The Visible and the Invisible*, Claude Lefort (ed.), trans. Alphonso Lingis (Northwestern University Press, Evanston), 99 and 242.

13 Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 108.

14 John Rundell identifies differing theoretical approaches to the *social imaginary* which all attempt to develop the philosophical implications of the imagination at the historical level. Rundell points out that each attempt is marked by a different emphasis, i.e. the ontological imagination (Castoriadis), the semantic imagination (Ricoeur), or the

imaginary consists of an over-arching symbolic horizon that reflects the cultural dimension through which the social-historical world is articulated. It is through this horizon that the social imaginary opens up the capacity for a society to self-reflect on how and why it is instituted in the way that it is. This social imaginary horizon can be viewed as consisting of a complex web of significations, or, in other words, a field of instituted symbolic meaning; "since history exists only because humans communicate and cooperate in a symbolic milieu".[15] However, the social imaginary does not sufficiently explain the ontological conditions of a society, rather, this is accounted for by Castoriadis's consideration of the formation of social-historical institutions as an *eidos* of society. An *eidos* is regarded as the 'universal' and 'unifying' feature of social-historical institution: "it is the universal that governs the particulars which are relatively indifferent to it; the form is determined/determining, it is in itself something universal".[16] It reflects the 'totalising' context of institutions that have their basis in collectively instituted symbolic form. This is to say that the *eidos* of a society is not produced by intersubjective relations, but rather, it is a mode of ontogenesis that emerges from a collectively instituted representation of the world; in other words, it is the self-representation of society that is reflected in its own institutions.[17] This section will outline Castoriadis's theorisation of social-historical form, in order to show that how develops a perspective on the 'totalising' dimension of societies that will become the basis for his interpretation of a society's mode of historicity.

Castoriadis views the *eidos* of a society to be the "creation of a world correlative to social imaginary significations and dependent upon these significations".[18] An *eidos* is instituted as an over-arching and totalising symbolic context through which the social-historical world is articulated and represented. It is the ontological form of society to which its institutions correspond. Even though Castoriadis affirms, that "everything that is presented to us in the social-historical world is inextricably tied to the symbolic", he insists that it is not limited to it.[19] Instituted forms of symbolism are of course grounded in the imaginary capacity to bring symbolic meaning into existence. The capacity to institute an *eidos* is therefore made possible through the creative, and ultimately, inexhaustible articulation of 'open-ended' significations from which forms of symbolism emerge. Castoriadis defines the 'open-ended' status of significations based on the fact

interpretive imagination (Arnason); see: John Rundell, 1994, *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, 7.

15 Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 138.

16 Castoriadis, 1997, "Phusis and Autonomy", *World in Fragments*, 337.

17 Castoriadis, 1988, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 144.

18 Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 6.

19 Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 117.

that their articulation is inexhaustible and that they "*denote* nothing and *connote* just about everything" that is expressible in the social-historical world.[20] Take for example, the symbolic status of 'natural law' which can only be expressed and therefore instituted through the articulation 'second-order' significations, all of which refer to the generalised form that represents 'natural law' (i.e. quantum mechanics, general relativity, loop quantum gravity, etc.). What is significant about Castoriadis's theorisation of instituted form is that he makes a clear distinction between the heterogenous cultural articulations that constitute the symbolic dimension of a society and the 'totalising' context of a particular *eidos* that is instituted through this symbolism. This is the reason why, despite the fact that there are ontological differences between articulations of a social-historical world, significations are easily conflated with their instituted symbols, because the world is instituted with reference to many particular forms meaning. Castoriadis understands that the social-historical world represented by an *eidos* is constituted through the collective 'choice' of symbolism that is instituted as an expression of the various significations created within societies. This 'choice' demonstrates the ontological groundlessness of an *eidos*, because "we are not dealing with symbolism in general, but always with a specific symbolism, and its specific symbolism, and its specificity is due to its grounding in the imaginary".[21] It is the imaginary—or, more specifically, the *social imaginary*—element of the institution that exercises over an *eidos* the capacity to alter its 'universal' choice of symbolism. This is a capacity that is ultimately a collective 'choice' to institute a particular social-historical form that represents a broader articulation of the world. The *eidos* of a society is an instituted form of symbolism that organises the culturally heterogenous articulation of the world and institutes the laws of society in relation to the 'totalising' context that, ultimately, depends on established forms of instituting power that represent 'institutional choice'; in this regard the political dimension of societies are central to Castoriadis's ontological theory. The ontological grounding of an *eidos* therefore depends on instituting 'social imaginary' significations in symbolic form.

[20] Castoriadis, ibid., 143.

[21] Cornelius Castoriadis, 2015, "The Imaginary As Such", *Social Imaginaries* Vol. 1 Issue 1 (Zeta, Bucharest), 66. There is an aspect of the imaginary that exercises an indeterminate reflexivity in defining the specific significations that are socially instituted, Castoriadis describes this reflexivity as an anonymous degree of intensity that the collective invests in certain forms of symbolism: "nothing allows us to determine a priori just where the boundary of symbolism lies, the point at which the symbolical overlaps with the functional. We can establish once and for all neither the general degree of symbolization, which varies with the culture, nor the factors that decide the intensity with which a particular aspect of the life of a given society will be invested with symbolism" (Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 124). I will explicitly discuss this in relation to the ontological meta-contingency of the institution.

It is Castoriadis's contention that the institution of an *eidos* determines a 'set of possibilities and impossibilities' for social-historical existence.[22] A social-historical *eidos* provides the 'totalising' context through which society is instituted, yet, for Castoriadis, the 'possibilities and impossibilities' that are determined by an instituted *eidos* does not exhaust the imaginary potential for these determinations to be altered and for new determinations to arise. The social imaginary 'choice' of *eidos* is not reducible to what is already determined through its significations (i.e. the role of symbolism in structuralist anthropology) and it is not deducible or producible through the determining logic of such significations (i.e. the 'cunning of reason' in Hegelian philosophies of history). Rather, the universality of an *eidos* is said to be "defined starting from the moment the form is posited".[23] This formulation suggests the exact kind of self-finality that Castoriadis seems to be arguing against, most specifically with respect to functionalist/structuralist accounts of historicity. However, it is important to highlight that in Castoriadis's account the 'universality' of an *eidos* is only ever ephemerally instituted. The imaginary element of institution opens up a capacity for "the positing of new determinations, and of *other* determinations, ones not reducible to what was already there, not deducible and not producible starting from what was already there".[24] What is inferred by this formulation is that an *eidos* is the instituted form of a social imaginary mode of ontogenesis. The ceaseless institutional creativity of the social imaginary leads to the continual emergence of 'new determinations', of *other* 'types' of significations, or *new* '*eide*', which are not considered by Castoriadis to be an elaboration of a pre-existing *eidos*. Implied within this idea is that the institution of an *eidos* determines a society's *mode of historicity*:

> History is ontological genesis not as the production of different tokens of the essence of society but as the creation, in and through each society, of another *type* (form-figure-aspect-sense: *eidos*) of being-society which is in the same stroke the creation of new *types* of social-historical entities (objects, individuals, ideas, institutions, etc.) on all levels and on levels which are themselves posited-created by a given society.[25]

Castoriadis stresses that a social imaginary capacity to institute new *eidos* of society. The core idea presented by Castoriadis's ontological theory is that, in and through social-historical form, a community is ceaselessly engaged in the *ex-nihilo* creation of the society itself.

It must be stressed that the idea of creation *ex-nihilo* is not taken up by Castoriadis in order to signify any indeterminacy that would be inherent to the institution of a social-historical *eidos*. In

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[22] Castoriadis ,1997, "Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics", 103.
[23] Castoriadis, ibid., 103.
[24] Castoriadis, ibid., 103.
[25] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 372.

fact, the opposite is true, as this concept is viewed as a complement to ontologically deterministic vision of *eidos* in that it signals the creative capacity of the social imaginary.[26] This is a crucial point of interpretation of Castoriadis because, in my view, the way that he develops his conception of creation *ex-nihilo* as the basis of a new theory of historicity leads him to overstate the role of ontological determination. This argument will be developed throughout the remainder of the thesis, and it is central to the main argument presented in this thesis: *that instituted form is not bound by ontological principles, so much as it is established through institutional power*. Creation *ex-nihilo,* according to Castoriadis, means that creation is the positing of 'new determinations', which are posited as 'arbitrary', in the sense that they account for "the emergence of new forms, *eidoi,* therefore *ipso facto* the emergence of new *laws*—the laws appertaining to these modes of being".[27] Given that the creation of a social-historical world necessarily involves the institution of a society, Castoriadis also accounts for the plurality of social-historical worlds that are each necessarily based on their own particular *eidos*. Castoriadis proposes that the social-historical specificity of each society must exist in what he calls "its cognitive closure—or, even better, its *closure of meaning*—its own world".[28] Angelos Mouzakitis has made clear that the claim of creation as *ex-nihilo* involves a rejection of what Castoriadis viewed as the traditional philosophical and theological idea that social-historical creation is simply a repetition or reproduction of what is ontologically given.[29] This rejection is made clear by Castoriadis in his qualification that 'creation *ex nihilo*' is neither "*in-nihilo* or *cum nihilo*", reinforcing both his critique of structural anthropology and Hegelian versions of historicity (particularly that of Marx).[30] In both instances his critique revolves around the idea that if creation is subordinated to what is given in being, then any alterity arising from human creation can only be understood as an incarnation of difference that is either a subordination to, or an extension of, what is already instituted. Social-historical creation would, then, merely be an iteration that follows teleologically from what is originally given within institution—which is to say that the social-historical world would be *totally confined within an ontological closure*. It should be

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[26] Castoriadis, 1997, "Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics", 103.

[27] Castoriadis, 1997 "Done and to be Done", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 369.

[28] Castoriadis, 1991 "The Social-Historical: Mode of Being, Problems of Knowledge", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 37.

[29] Mouzakitis, 2014, "Creation Ex-Nihilo", *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, 54-56. He has elsewhere shown that Castoriadis perhaps misrepresents the radical connotations of Christian theological understandings of creation, which also contain images of human 'co-creators'. See: Angelos Mouzakitis, 2008, *Meaning, Historicity and the Social: A critical approach to the works of Heidegger, Gadamer and Castoriadis* (VDM Verlag Dr. Müller, Saarbrücken). In my view, Castoriadis intended to de-theologise the concept of *creation ex-nihilo* in order tie his understanding of autonomous subjectivity with his radical conceptualisation of democratic politics; this relation will be explored in the following two chapters. It should be noted that this conception of *creation ex-nihilo* becomes a framework for his dichotomy between autonomous and heteronomous modes of institution.

[30] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 221.

pointed out that Castoriadis not only levels his critique of ontological determinism against mainstream traditions of Western philosophical thought, but he also historicises this form of determinism as an institutional mode of ontological closure by translating it into the instituting logic of religious and traditionalist societies themselves.[31] In fact, ontological closure is the basis of what Castoriadis regards to be a strict dichotomy between two distinct modes of historicity: the *heteronomy* of religious and traditionalist societies exemplified by total ontological closure and the *autonomy* of democratic societies defined by a mode of institution that is ontologically open to alteration through the institution of 'new determinations'. My contention in this thesis is to show that this dichotomy is not strictly distinct and that, while Castoriadis overestimates the institutional modality of ontological closure, he also simultaneously offers an alternative account of historicity whereby the institutional determination of ontological form remains open to alterity. The latter will be outlined in the following section of the chapter.

The ontological closure of the social-historical world plays a central role in Castoriadis's theory of historicity and is a key theme in his political interrogation of social-historical institution. What he views as being ontologically closed is the *eidos* of the world as such, which is to say that "the signification imposed on the world (and on society, which institutes itself by positing itself as part of the world it institutes) is in its essence 'arbitrary'".[32] This arbitrary characteristic of institutions correspond to the 'set of possibilities and impossibilities' that are said to be determined by a specific *eidetic* formation. Behind the idea that ontological closure is a definitive characteristic of social-historical world creation lies the basis of Castoriadis's fundamental anthropological claim that society is the product of its own origin. The closure of social-historical ontology is seen by Castoriadis as an originary circle of self-creation that "presupposes itself" as its own origin.[33] This circularity means that the ceaseless instituting activity of a society necessarily involves an ongoing self-definition of its broader social-historical world, and vice versa. Fabio Ciaramelli provides a succinct interpretation of the ontological (and temporal) circularity that is implied by Castoriadis's vision of human creation: "the origin from which it draws its essence is originary—that is to say, not derived, in turn, from another origin—only on the condition of being origin of self, self-

[31] For an in-depth discussion on the 'principle' of ontological determination and the role it plays in the Western philosophical tradition, including the intervention that Castoriadis makes with his conception of 'creation', see: Vincent Descombes, 1991, "The Principle of Determination", *Thesis Eleven* No. 29 (Sage, Thousand Oaks).

[32] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 3.

[33] Castoriadis, 1991, "The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy", *Philosophy, Politics and Autonomy*, 94. It is worth pointing out that the self-originary basis of ontological closure should be understood in in the context of its *pour-soi* characteristics, as detailed in the previous chapter. Castoriadis regards this characteristic as a defining feature of the social-historical region of anthropic being.

creation".[34] Creation *ex-nihilo* is therefore understood to be a principle of self-determination, a self-closure of human existence within the *telos* of its own creation. This self-originating *telos* accounts for the mode of historicity in and through which a society institutes itself as its own world, and because historicity is self-originating, societies are therefore only seen to determine themselves reflexively. an idea that will be returned to in the third section of this chapter. With the notion of creation *ex-nihilo* Castoriadis theoretically redefines the arbitrary role of ontological determinism within social-historical institution, turning the notion of creation from a teleological principle into a creative capacity to determine society anew. Castoriadis's theorisation of historicity, however, must account for the creative capacities of a society that are shaped by established forms of instituted symbolism, rather than proposing that creation is merely the capacity to determine *new* instituted forms, and therefore a new *eidos* of society.

SELF-ALTERING HISTORICITY: SOCIAL-HISTORICAL CLOSURE AND METACONTEXTUAL ONTOLOGY

So far, in this chapter, I have discussed Castoriadis's claim that historicity is driven by a self-originating mode of (*ex-nihilo*) creation. This discussion has shown that the social-historical world (*eidos*) "does not have its genuine, essential origin in *something* that would be external to it, it has no end other than its own existence as society positing *these* ends" .[35] This mode of self-origination, that is consistently positing its own ends—or, 'presupposing' its own *telos*—forms the basis of Castoriadis's understanding of historicity. The crucial point that has been put forward regarding historicity is that societies are oriented toward the determination of their own ends and that, according to Castoriadis, this implies that *human creation tends toward ontological closure.* This idea that a society 'tends toward' enclosing itself within its own self-creation is justified by Castoriadis on the following grounds: "every question of the *why* and *wherefore* of signification is *already* situated in a space created by signification and can be formulated only if this space is presupposed as unquestionable".[36] What this means is that the self-originary creation of a specific

[34] Fabio Ciaramelli, 1997, "The Self-Presupposition of the Origin: Homage to Cornelius Castoriadis", *Thesis Eleven* Vol. 49 Issue 1 (Sage, Thousand Oaks), 63. Ciaramelli succinctly demonstrates the radical ontological pre-supposition of self-creation: "this faculty of giving rising *originally* from itself to original determinations that henceforth are going to be determinations of the self—without, however, congealing this self in identitary closure—this inaugural appearance of a *faculty of making itself be* in and through its own alteration constitutes the very advent of Being, its radical *orginatio*, the primordial source of Time; and it is this same faculty that human creation prolongs as the drive to g*ive meaning* to the self-alteration of Being" (Ciaramelli, ibid., 53).

[35] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 4.

[36] Castoriadis, ibid., 4.

eidos necessarily posits the limit of 'possibilities and impossibilities' of its social-historical existence. In my view, this is an overly ontological assessment of anthropological closure precisely because it confines an articulation of 'human existence in the world' within the strictures of the social-historical institution of the world. This section will outline the ontological schema of self-institution that Castoriadis establishes in order to present his understanding of historicity as *a mode of self-alteration*. Castoriadis theorises a schematic division between two ontological principles that imply opposing institutional tendencies: one directed toward closure, the other toward openness. It will be shown that Castoriadis formulates these principles in order to theorise two distinct and dichotomous modes of historicity: heteronomy and autonomy; which will be outlined in more depth in the following section. I will argue that this division between two opposing ontological principles sets up a defining tension within Castoriadis's work. Ultimately, the implications of this dichotomous schema will be shown to have limited his exploration of the political dimension of social-historical institution of the world.

In Castoriadis's view, a mode of historicity 'tends toward ontological closure' and can therefore be understood as the deployment of an institutional logic that corresponds to the collective articulation of a society. This collective articulation represents the 'totalising' context that incorporates the various cultural significations that make-up a particular social-historical context and institutes a *specific* self-definition of society. In other words, the institution of a society involves the deployment of a specific way to make sense of the world that corresponds with established forms of symbolic significance. To say, as Castoriadis does, that the institution of a society (as *eidos*) 'does not have its origin in something external to it', means that the source of significance from which a society defines itself emerges from its own social-historical creations: its significations. Because the institution of *eidos* forms a specific symbolic network that involves a complex organisation of plural significations, Castoriadis proposes the rather paradoxical notion that "institutions cannot be reduced to the symbolic but they can exist only in the symbolic", which is to say that—despite the capacity to determine new forms of significance—an institution is impossible outside of its second-order symbolism.[37] In effect, Castoriadis argues that the institutional forms of society are framed within the ontological context of significance that emerges culturally within a society. This is not to say that significance is only derived from an encounter with self-created meaning, that would be entirely solipsistic, but rather, a community encounters the world through its specifically instituted mode of understanding the world, and makes sense of itself by shaping its existence as a social-historical world.

[37] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 117.

The institutional tendency toward ontological closure is understood by Castoriadis to be constituted by two deeper ontological principles that shape the existence of the social-historical world;

> [A social-historical *eidos*] is both of an absolute necessity, when one remains within it, and of a radical contingency, when one is on the outside. This amounts to saying that social signification is both beyond and on the other side of necessity and contingence—it is *elsewhere*. It is at the same time *metanecessary* and *metacontingent.*[38]

These two features, metanecessity and metacontingency, are the two key ontological principles that correspond to the schematic division in Castoriadis's work between two institutional tendencies of *closure* and *openness*. Castoriadis interprets the two metacontextual principles—metanecessity and metacontingency—in a mutually complicit fashion in order to present a 'general' ontology of social-historical symbolism (the metanecessity of "*what* is each time particular, every relation and every assemblage of things") that is complimented by a 'special' world-creating ontology (the metacontingency of "what 'contains' and renders possible the totality of relations and assemblages").[39] This configuration of ontological duplicity is extremely intricate, involving a framework that is dense with neologisms, so I will provide a preliminary explanation, followed by a broader discussion of the need to relativise these key ontological principles in in order to develop Castoriadis's theorisation of historicity.

'General' ontology refers to the instituted symbolic dimension of an *eidos* that encompasses the rational structure and logical elaboration of the social-historical world. It can be considered as an interior dimension of social-historical institution, lived as a mode of existence from the perspective of the metanecessity. An *eidos* is structured on the basis of what Castoriadis calls *ensembliste-identitaire* (i.e. *ensidic*) logic, which is akin to a mode of thinking that coheres with instituted forms of meaning.[40] He first developed the idea of the *ensidic* dimension in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, as the necessity that, a "society must define its 'identity', its articulation, the world, its relations to the world and to the objects it contains, its needs, its desires".[41] Mats Rosengren has

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[38] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 4-5.

[39] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 6. The term 'special ontology' is not a clumsy translation, it is how Castoriadis phrases the term. It refers to the ontological status of the 'magma' of significations, in the sense that it is an ontology that 'specifies' the institutional form of social-historical *eidos*. There are a variety of terms that Castoriadis uses in order to express this idea, see: 'primal institution' (Castoriadis, 2007, "Primal Institution of Society and Second-Order Institutions", *Figures of the Thinkable*), the 'self-image' of a society (Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion"), 'radical instituting imaginary' (Castoriadis, 1994, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*).

[40] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 209-210.

[41] Castoriadis, ibid., 147.

pointed out that this notion of 'ensidic thinking' or 'ensidic logic', is premised on a kind of thinking and logic based on the idea that "all aspects of being are specific differentiations of a determined original element, an element that therefore should be considered to constitute the unity, identity or essence of these aspects of being".[42] In this sense a society's self-definition is metanecessary, because the image that a society possesses of itself and of the world within which it defines itself is arbitrary and sets logical limitations on the 'possibilities and impossibilities' of social-historical existence; I am referring here to a society's instituted 'self-image' in relation to a broader 'world-image' that is culturally articulated. This 'general' ontology is 'totalising' because it provides a context that corresponds to the appearance of society as instituted. It therefore refers to the definition of a self-identity that is brought into existence on the basis of instituted form (*eidos*). Castoriadis stresses that social-historical institution itself can exist only as a 'norm of identity' that is self-reflexive and that societies understand themselves in relation to their own self-origin, "for it [society] can exist only by being itself *what* it decrees as having to be: *the identity of the norm with itself which is posited by the norm so that there can be a norm of self-identity*".[43] In this description of the normative dimension of ontology it is possible to grasp how Castoriadis views the anthropogenic character of institutions, through which a norm becomes the 'law' that presupposes itself as a 'law', or in Castoriadis's words: that "'there are laws' is the *law* that is presupposed by every set of laws", or put in another way, "'the law must be obeyed' is the first law, without which there would be no law—and which is not a law, since it is empty if laws do not exist".[44] The normative dimension of institutions can therefore be seen to form institutions on the basis of a metaneccesity, that is, the necessity to structure institutions on the basis of self-definition. The tendency toward closure is clearly expressed within this principle of metanecessity, which, as Rosengren has pointed out, Castoriadis regards to play an essential institutional role in 'keeping chaos and disintegration at bay', because institutions "have a tendency to close themselves, establishing their specific ways of functioning as immutable laws—and thus presenting themselves as necessities and unalterable realities".[45] The tendency of societies to enclose themselves within the confines of their ontological self-definition is the basis of Castoriadis's description of heteronomous institution; I will return to the discussion of heteronomy after explaining the other metacontextual principle that comprises his ontology. The present point, however, should be

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[42] Rosengren, Mats, 2007, "Radical Imagination and Symbolic Pregnance: A Castoriadis Cassirer Connection, in *Embodiment in Cognition and Culture*, John Michael Krois, Mats Rosengren, Angela Steidele (eds.) (John Benjamins Publishing Company, Amsterdam), 269

[43] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 205-206.

[44] Castoriadis, ibid., 206.

[45] Rosengren, Mats, 2008, "The Magma of Imaginary Politics: 8 theses", in *Politics of Magma*, Art Monitor # 5 Special Issue, 46.

highlighted that Castoriadis presents the principle of metanecessary as shaping an institutional dynamic that informs a society's mode of historicity, and without this principle in place, "there can be no human world, no society, no culture—for everything would be an undifferentiated chaos".[46]

The principle of metanecessity that sets social-historical institution into place offers an explanation of the thoroughly ontological structure of societies. This is because Castoriadis emphasises how institutions are established in a way that consolidates the cultural articulation of significations that shape the world. The ontological structure of societies, however, does not explain the capacities of cultural creation that Castoriadis emphasised following his abandonment of Marxism. The cultural articulation of significations introduces a completely new institutional dynamic that leads to the most promising direction of Castoriadis's theory of historicity. Because significations are instituted into a definitive ontological form of existence, this instituted form should then in principle (i.e. metaneccesity) have a hold over everything that presents itself and could ever present itself to a society, however, Castoriadis argues that "this hold, however, is always partial and always precarious". [47] This is the crucial development of Castoriadis's theoretical project. The instituted form of society is precarious precisely because the self-origin of institution is essentially groundless and exists as an attempt to weave form from chaos. If the metanecessity of 'general' ontology responds to the necessity of negating chaos, then there must also be a principle of metacontingency, reflecting a 'special' ontology, which responds to the evolving challenges posed by the precarious groundlessness of instituted form.

The 'special' ontology of metacontingency accounts for the capacity of a society to define itself in relation to something beyond its self-institution (an 'elsewhere'). It therefore must be understood as a capacity to incorporate into its mode of self-definition, something 'other' than what it institutes itself 'to be' (both a spatially and temporally). This ontological principle proposes that the 'general' ontology is not fixed but is rather an image of 'instituted society' that reflects how institutional power structures the formation of an *eidos*. 'Special' ontology is an expression of the historicity of a society, as a "mode of relation holding together the components of a totality".[48] So, even though metanecessity 'should' set the institution in *place* as 'fully' determined (i.e. ensidic), its partiality is a consequence of a society's *temporal* encounter with the world that is self-reflexive and therefore

46 Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 147.

47 Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion"), 3.

48 Castoriadis, 1994, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, 149.

contingent upon what presents itself. Gourgouris points out that the temporal mode of institution inevitably leads to an 'interweaving' articulation of its significations that can never lead to an ontological singularity that would enclose a society within a particular self-definition, and in his view this "does indeed make human experience incalculable, unformalisable, and unreproducible—in Castoriadis's term, magmatic".[49] The notion of *magma* signifies the contingent nature of 'special' ontology, which provides an opening for contingent responses to specific questions of self-definition, such as: who are we as a collectivity? What are we for one another? Where and in what are we? What do we want? what do we desire? what are we lacking?[50] I should note that the term 'special' is best expressed as the capacity to 'specify' the institutional orientation of a society, which consists of heterogenous cultural perspectives that make-up a social-historical context. Or, in other words, what I will come to discuss throughout this thesis as the 'institutional choice' that a community makes in order to articulate how society should be shaped according to its place in the world. 'Special' ontology explains how the institution of society also configures society's relation to a broader world context that is experienced as an 'over-arching horizon'.[51] Castoriadis's conception of a 'special' ontology is therefore seen to incorporate a contingent capacity based on experience something 'elsewhere', or 'other', than what it ontologically defines for itself. Metacontingency therefore provides an ontological openness, that suggests a capacity to alter the instituted forms of metanecessity that compels instituting activity toward the closure of an *eidos* in on itself.

The contingent nature of social-historical institution implies that new determinations emerge from instituted forms (*eidos*) of society and alters their previously established mode of social-historical existence. The emergence of new ontological creation irrevocably alters social-historical *eidos* in such a way that, by nature of the radical *otherness* of these new forms, preceding *eidetic* forms cease to exist. New forms of symbolism are built on the ruins of previous symbolic edifices and

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[49] Stathis Gourgouris, 2013, *Lessons in Secular Criticism* (Fordham University Press, NY), 102.

[50] Castoriadis provides a more formal definition of 'magma', which reflects the origin of the idea as based on mathematical set theory: "A magma is that from which one 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, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 342). I do not have enough space to directly pursue the depth of this conception here, except to say that this concept was used by Castoriadis to express the idea that human creation is always ontologically indeterminate (even though the institution itself is always determinate) because it is formed through an irreducible heterogeneity, which incorporates the poly-regionality that was outlined in the previous chapter. I will note that, at the level of signification, Castoriadis distinguishes this dual ontology between 'secondary significations' that serve the function of the *ensidic* dimension, and 'primal significations' that orient the *magmatic* dimension.

[51] I have addressed the relation between this over-arching horizon and anthropogenesis in a paper that draws a parallel to Castoriadis's reinterpretation of Plato's notion of *chora*. See: Sean McMorrow, 2012, "Concealed Chora in the Thought of Cornelius Castoriadis: A Bastard Comment on Trans-Regional Creation", *Cosmos and History: Journal of Natural ad Social Philosophy* Vol. 8 No. 2 (Open Humanities Press).

specifies the significance of their materials, or as Castoriadis put it, "the old enters the new, but with the signification given it by the new"[52]. This is the fundamental dynamic upon which Castoriadis constructs his ontological theory of historicity. Not only does he propose that human history is fundamentally creative, but also that ontological destruction is an essential consequence of ontological creation, that creation *entails* destruction, which is the theoretical basis of Castoriadis's notion of historicity as a mode of *self-alteration*. This is an idea that Adams has summarised quite simply: history is, in fact, "the creation and destruction of forms that for Castoriadis will elucidate time and its 'arrow'".[53] This leads to the idea that social-historical institution is nothing but a temporally creative anthropogenesis. If social-historical institution is to be characterised as temporally *self-altering* there must be an opening to otherness that exceeds the logic of its closure. Instituted form must therefore be contingent upon its reception of *otherness*.

Because Castoriadis situates self-alteration as the central dynamic of historicity, and yet maintains that institutional form is ontologically determined tendency toward its own closure, he must therefore be seen to be posing the following question: how are new determinations incorporated within a society if historicity is already enclosed in a specific instituted form? It is in response to this question that Castoriadis highlights the institutional role of the *social imaginary* dimension of a society, and in doing so he offers a unique contribution to philosophical thought. The social imaginary is developed by Castoriadis in order to conceptualise how a community undertakes its 'special' ontological capacities, which takes into consideration the encounter between culturally heterogenous perspectives with instituted forms of society. From the perspective of a community's understanding of its instituted self-image, this encounter with instituted form is experienced either in terms of an engagement with 'other' forms of meaning than those that are self-determined (i.e. the ontological forms of 'other' societies), or, with experiences of 'otherness' that emerge from the culturally creative capacities of the community itself; both of which propose new forms of social-historical existence to be institutionally incorporated into the self-image of a society. For Castoriadis these encounters with 'otherness' are framed around experiences that exceed already determined 'norms of identity' that form the 'totalising' institution of a society. In this sense, the institutional role of the social imaginary is to translate a society's relation to the world, and to incorporate sources of otherness into 'new determinations' of instituted society. The institutional role of the social imaginary is therefore seen to inscribe modes of creativity and 'otherness' into the 'general' ontological form of *ensidic logic*. It is on the basis of this view that Castoriadis can be said

[52] Castoriadis, 2010, 'Imaginary Significations', *A Society Adrift*, 63.

[53] Suzi Adams, 2011, *Castoriadis's Ontology: Being and Creation*, (Fordham University Press, NY), 209.

to view social-historical existence from the perspective of ontological closure, particularly if a society's encounter with the world (including its own) leads to 'new determinations' *only if these determinations are instituted as self-originary creation of the society considered*. Social imaginary creation is therefore metacontingent precisely because it 'specifies' new determinations in relation to an already established social-historical context.

The key ontological principles presented in this section express a seemingly paradoxical dynamic—raised in the previous section—that suggests social-historical institution involves a radically creative mode of historicity that is enclosed within its own self-originary creation. The paradox here resides in the fact that the creation of new determinations can only be instituted through 'metacontextual' processes that intersect with already established ways of understanding the world (and of society within it); which is to say that 'new' determinations are always historically bound by what is already instituted. The idea that historicity is confined within its own metacontextual processes is summed up by Castoriadis in the sense that "every symbolism is built on the ruins of earlier symbolic edifices and uses their materials", in which case new determinations are incorporated within previously established forms of meaning that, in turn, alter the edifice of society as a whole.[54] The *elsewhere* of signification, mentioned above, highlights an opposing institutional tendency, that of social-historical openness, which allows a society to ingest 'sources of otherness' and to alter itself by instituting radically new determinations; this is the basis of Castoriadis's idea that historicity is a mode of self-alteration. The dichotomous division between the tendency toward closure and the creative mode of self-alteration needs to be relativised within the aforementioned metacontextual processes of historicity. The fact that Castoriadis maintains the distinction between instituted form and the radical creation of new form, ultimately, limits Castoriadis's theorisation of historicity. In this respect, he is unable to see exactly to what extent institutional power is not driven by tendencies toward closure, but that the tendency toward closure is a similarly creative mode of institution (this will be argued in the following chapter). I will now turn to a description of these principles in order to show that Castoriadis emphasises the ontological features of this paradox, so that he was able to construct a dichotomous perspective on historicity that hinges on the tendency toward closure. I will then go on, in the final section, to relativise this dichotomy by emphasising, instead, the social imaginary, and therefore political, context of this institutional tendency toward closure.

[54] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 121.

DICHOTOMOUS MODES OF HISTORICITY: THE RELATION OF A SOCIETY TO THE WORLD

So far, I have established that Castoriadis regards the institution of a society to be a self-creation of a singular social-historical *eidos*, which is bound by a 'specifying' social imaginary that offers cohesion and solidarity with its 'component parts' and delivers an over-arching world-orientation for a specifically defined self-image of society. Yet, when this theory of social imaginary institution is construed as a mode of historicity, Castoriadis emphasises an ontological distinction that leads to a dichotomous opposition which can be characterised on the basis of a dual ontology. Castoriadis insists on an the capacity to institute new forms of social-historical existence (*eidos*), which is a creative capacity that is placed in tension with the institution of an arbitrary self-definition of society that tends toward an ontologically closed articulation of the world.[55] The implications of this tension are characterised by Castoriadis in the emergence of opposing institutional dynamics that constitute oppositional and dichotomous modes of historicity; between an openly self-altering mode of autonomous institution and an ontologically closed mode of heteronomous historicity. This section will outline how the 'metacontextual' principles outlined in the previous section are developed by Castoriadis into dichotomous modes of historicity, which subsequently emerges as a central theme of his work that this thesis will proceed to relativise.

The aforementioned paradox proposed by Castoriadis's metacontextual ontology proposes that the world is 'generally' instituted within the context of a society's 'self-image', while simultaneously, society is 'specified' within the context of broader cultural articulations of the world. This places Castoriadis in the position of privileging either one side of the paradox over the other when explaining the institutional dynamics of historicity. I argue that Castoriadis overwhelmingly privileges the determination of ontological form that is represented by the former dynamic, rather than the latter (which is reserved for creation *ex nihilo*, and therefore preserving in his theory the potential for a revolutionary praxis that characterises his work as post-Marxist). This can be seen in the way that Castoriadis insists that it is only through the self-defined institution of social-historical *eidos* that a world-image can be constituted. The implication of this position is that institutions are seen to presuppose the context in which a society's 'self-image' is 'contained'.[56] In other words, *the ontological paradox resides in the self-origin of the institution*. This paradoxical ontological

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[55] Castoriadis, 1988, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 147; Castoriadis, 1984, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, xxv-xxvi.

[56] I have explored this aspect of Castoriadis's ontology in relation to the notion of a self-altering *chora*. See: McMorrow, 2012 'Concealed Chora in the Thought of Cornelius Castoriadis: A Bastard Comment on Trans-Regional Creation', *Cosmos & History: The Journal of Natural and Social Philosophy*, vol. 8, no. 2

duplicity is therefore intimately reciprocal, or, as Castoriadis prefers, 'tied together' through a mutual relation (*lier ensemble*): "this *tying together* of the origin of the world and of the origin of society always has to recognise the specificity of society without interrupting the homogeneity of the world".[57] The importance of the 'world-image', as a catalyst of 'special' ontology, is that it is a source for the creation of 'other' significations that open up interstices within the closure of ontological identity. This *tying together* is therefore an essentially creative relation that opens up a capacity to alter the instituted *eidos*. It is a dimension of signification that incorporates otherness into the fold of ontological self-determination, as a source of self-originary meaning that does not come from an instituted identitary logic, but from 'elsewhere', from the broader horizon of the world.

Ultimately, *the world-image is ontologically open* and, as such, it is the source of interpretation that opens historicity to its mode of self-alteration. The metacontextual principles of institution direct the emergence of any creative articulations of the world, which means that any mode of self-alteration must, in turn, alter the self-image of society (i.e. *eidos*). The heterogenous cultural articulations of the world are therefore seen to alter the historically instituted symbolic forms of a society. In this respect, the institutional transformation enacted through self-alteration must accord with "the homogeneity of the world and of society".[58] This is to say that there is a necessity for a specific form of society to be instituted in accordance with broader cultural articulations of the world. This necessity can be equally understood in terms of the need to establish "the homogeneity of being from the point of view of signification".[59] The representation of this homogeny within the self-image of a society becomes the decisive point where Castoriadis privileges the ontological modality of instituted society and establishes a dichotomous construction of two distinct modes of historicity. In providing a critique of Castoriadis's homogenising tendencies, Arnason has picked up on the paradoxical character that lies at the heart of this self-altering dynamic of historicity. He argues that Castoriadis's emphasis on the distinction between these dichotomous modes of historicity ignores the hermeneutical dimension of social-historical institution, particularly in its more subtle modes of self-altering contingency. Arnason, instead, views historicity from the

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[57] Castoriadis, 1993 ISR; 7. The fact that the image of the world and society are inextricably bound together is conveyed by the French expression *lier ensemble.* To place this concept into the context of my argument; this tying together (*lier ensemble)* constitutes an *eidos* as a social sphere that is created by the *social imaginary*, it is the point from which anthropic self-definition becomes an instituting mode of society: this explains how society is created (non-consciously) as the self-originary form of anthropogenesis. I will use the term *lier ensemble* as a noun throughout the thesis, because it succinctly represents this complex interrelation between the 'world image' and the 'self-image' of society.

[58] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 7.

[59] Castoriadis, ibid., 7.

perspective of civilisations that places greater emphasis on the metacontextual processes of self-alteration; as opposed to Castoriadis's focus on the singular and homogenising *eidos* of different societies. Taking cues from Merleau-Ponty, Arnason proposes that "civilizations can be understood as historically situated and historically developing configurations of the human condition". [60] This approach very clearly deemphasises the privilege given by Castoriadis to the ontological dimension of institutional determination. This thesis is not focused on the civilisational dimension outlined by Arnason, but rather his interpretation of Castoriadis's work is helpful for bringing into focus the political dimension of historicity. The importance of Arnason's critique of Castoriadis that I want to foreground is that a mode of institution "involves multiple and diversifiable relations to the world" that are not reducible to configurations of successive ontologically enclosed self-images.[61] Arnason's hermeneutic critique of Castoriadis's theory of historicity stresses that the social imaginary is a field of cultural articulation that is ontologically open, whose instituted dimension is the primary source for creativity, and whose tendency toward closure is a concern of the political dimension of instituted power; which is to say, that he proposes a mode of historicity that is not defined on the basis of the principle of ontological closure.[62] Further to Arnason's reading of the interpretive field of social imaginary creation, however, I will propose that this hermeneutic dimension should also take into consideration the implications of political power that shape the social imaginary capacity to alter societies; I will advance this argument in the following chapter.

By emphasising an ontologically derived dichotomy derived from two distinct modes of institution, which are seen to be guided by two distinct ontological tendencies, a bifurcation emerges in Castoriadis's work between two distinct modes of historicity. The first formulation proposes that the ontological capacity to initiate a mode of self-alteration is only possible in the form of radically new social imaginary creations, which means that historicity can only be a process that successively ruptures ontological closure. The other, more promising, formulation proposes that social-historical institution is engaged in a consistent mode of self-alteration that reflects an ongoing self-definition of society in relation to a heterogenous and culturally defined articulations of the world. In the former interpretation, the power of the social imaginary to creatively shape the social-historical world through (open) metacontextual processes is neglected; particularly absent in this approach is the capacity of both tendencies toward openness *and closure* to contribute to creative modes of

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60 Johann P. Arnason, 2013, "Merleau-Ponty and the Meaning of Civilizations", in *Corporeity and Affectivity: Dedicated to Maurice Merleau-Ponty*, Karel Novotny, Pierre Rodrigo, Jenny Slatman and Silvia Stoller (eds.) (Brill, Leiden), 294

61 Arnason, ibid., 294.

62 See: Johann P. Arnason, 1989, "Culture and Imaginary Significations", *Thesis Eleven* No. 22 (Sage, Thousand Oaks).

historicity. The latter formulation, however, offers some promising steps in this direction. Instead, Castoriadis made the dichotomy between two distinct modes of historicity—heteronomy and autonomy—the central theme of his theoretical work and political project.

Castoriadis's distinction between heteronomy and autonomy was initially premised on an exercise of historical-comparative sociology that set out to define democracy as an exception to the norm when it comes to the variety of political modes of institution that have been implemented by societies throughout human history.[63] His investigation into the specificity of modern modes of institution (particularly the specificity of 'Western' societies, and the way that they have been informed by an ancient Greek democratic heritage) led him to propose that the mode of institution common to all other previous societies is one of heteronomy. A heteronomous society is defined by Castoriadis as mode of institution that is enclosed and dominated by its instituted forms of symbolism. It is a mode of institution that vests instituted symbolism with an authorial power that accounts for the origin and grounding of institutions, in which case "the source and foundation for the law, as well as for every norm, value, and signification, are posited as being transcendent to society itself".[64] The origin of heteronomous societies are taken to be "transcendent in the absolute, as in monotheistic societies, and transcendent, in any case, relative to the effective reality of living society (as in the case of archaic societies)".[65] Castoriadis develops this conception of heteronomy alongside the ontological theory of social-historical institution that I have previously outlined, however it is important to step through just how he does this in order to explicitly outline how he 'over-ontologises' heteronomous modes of historicity.

Castoriadis argues that a society is instituted on the basis of heteronomous modes of historicity when the 'source and foundation' (i.e. self-origin) of its institution is posited as 'transcendent to society'. Heteronomy is seen to conflate the origin of society within an image of the world presupposes a homogenous and unitary ontology. It is a mode of institution whereby the self-image of society is not only tied to the world-image but is subsumed by the latter. According to Castoriadis, the conflation of this the ontological origins of society with a transcendent ontology of the world denies the self-creative capacities of social-historical institution: heteronomous institution entails "the positing of an extra-social source for the institution (and for signification), therefore the

[63] This distinction should be seen as a contribution to the historiographical debate that attempted a comparative analysis between ancient Greek and modern (Western) forms of politics; important interlocutors in this instance are Moses I. Finley and Pierre Vidal-Naquet.

[64] Castoriadis, 1997, "Culture in a Democratic Society", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 340.

[65] Castoriadis, ibid., 341.

occultation of the self-institution of society, the covering over by humanity of its own being as self-creation".[66] Given that I have outlined—in the previous chapter—the fundamental anthropological claim that human existence is presupposed by the self-institution of the social-historical world, it makes sense Castoriadis insists that this transcendent 'extra-social' signification is itself a 'self-instituted' creation. In his view, heteronomous institution involves a fundamental denial of self-originary creation, whereby "everything occurs as if the ground where the creativity of society is manifested… had to be covered over by an imaginary creation arranged in such a way as to allow society to conceal what it is to itself".[67] For Castoriadis, then, heteronomy is a negative mode of institution where everything occurs as if society must negate itself as self-instituting society.

So why does Castoriadis claim that heteronomous modes of historicity are overwhelmingly dominant throughout human history? The discussion undertaken so far in this chapter provides a way to answer this question: the institution of heteronomous signification acquires its mode of ontological dominance precisely because such signification is *instituted on the basis of absolute necessity*. The instituted symbolism that established the foundation of a heteronomous society becomes the basis of generalised norms that enclose the specific self-image of a society within a predetermined definition. In this conception of heteronomy, Castoriadis displays his bias toward the ontological parameters of social-historical institution, by emphasising the form of institutional origin as being *completely* derived from the representation of 'extra-social' significations;

> And this representation aimed, and still aims, at quashing the process of calling the existing institution into question; it locks in, as a matter of fact, its *closure*. In this sense, these societies are heteronomous. For, they are enslaved to their own creation, their law, which they posit as intangible, as it proceeds from a qualitatively other origin than living men and women.[68]

Castoriadis's insistence on the heteronomous enslavement of existence to instituted forms of signification emphasises the ontological dominance of institutions, and as such, he views life in these societies as enclosed within the interior logic, the metanecessity, of the significations that form such determinations. Castoriadis proposes that "such an assignment of its source and its foundation goes hand in hand with a *closure of signification*", and that "the word of God, or the arrangements bestowed by the ancestors, are taken to lie beyond discussion and to be established once and for all".[69] It will be argued in the following chapter that the 'closure of signification' that

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[66] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 7.

[67] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 213.

[68] Castoriadis, 1994, "The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 149.

[69] Castoriadis, 1997, "Culture in a Democratic Society", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 341.

Castoriadis refers to within heteronomous modes of institution are not ontologically predetermined, this is overstated in his work, but rather that institutional forms of dominance are politically enforced and regulated. Before making this point, however, it is necessary to show in the remainder of this chapter that is necessary to relativise this dichotomous conception of historicity.

Firstly, it is important to point out that the heteronomous representation of a society's origin is said to be tied to 'extra-social' symbolism in such a way that a society's 'self-image' is *completely* derived from a specifically defined 'world-image'. The self-origin of society is delegated to a representation that grounds this origin in a fundamental characteristic of the world within which societies exist (i.e. religious laws, ancestral laws, historical laws, natural laws, etc.). Gourgouris has provided an explanation of this dynamic, by showing how the negation of self-originary institution involves the specification of an external source for a society's own self-definition: in his view this involves "the internalisation of various certainties and givens—or rather, more accurately, of certain values, ideas, or practices that are internalised as given, indisputable, and unquestionable by virtue of being internalised and thus naturalised".[70] So, Castoriadis's description of heteronomous closure is therefore presented as a mode of symbolic closure that operates on strictly metanecessary grounds. The principle of metacontingency does not appear factor into his description of heteronomous modes of historicity. This leads Castoriadis to ontologise the dichotomous distinction between heteronomy and autonomy. This is evident where he proposes that the denial of self-institution is "equivalent to the denial of the 'contingency' of signification". [71] Instituted forms of symbolism remains arbitrary and are designated an authorial function, and it functions as such because authority is derived from an arbitrary "*elsewhere* of signification relative to the necessity and contingency" of signification.[72] This function of authority is framed by Castoriadis as a denial of contingency, which is his way to argue that heteronomous modes of institution are fundamentally non-creative; as will be discussed in chapter four, this argument forms the basis of Castoriadis's understanding of depoliticisation.

As I have argued so far, the dichotomy proposed by Castoriadis over-emphasises the role of ontological closure in such a way that he presents the mode of heteronomous institution as a denial of contingent aspects of social-historical institution. Autonomous modes of institution, on the other hand, reverse the situation and instead historicity is arguably based on a denial of necessity. I will

[70] Gourgouris, 2013, *Lessons in Secular Criticism*, 92.
[71] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 7.
[72] Castoriadis, ibid., 7.

provide a rather long passage where Castoriadis outlines the ontological level of autonomous historicity, because in chapter four I will focus on the essentially political basis of autonomy;

> Autonomy is not closure but, rather, opening: ontological opening, the possibility of going beyond the informational, cognitive, and organizational closure characteristic of self-instituting, but *heteronomous beings*. It is ontological opening, since to go beyond this closure signifies altering the already existing cognitive and organizational 'system', *therefore* constituting one's world and one's self according to *other* laws, *therefore* creating a new ontological *eidos*, another self in the world.[73]

What is plainly obvious is that historicity is dichotomised as a strict predilection toward openness or closure. His devotion to this oppositional conception of these two modes of historicity meant that, despite his increased interest in social-historical contingency as a creative power of human creation, he would uphold until the end that there is a distinct and essential dichotomy between heteronomous and autonomous modes of historicity. This over-emphasis restricts his analysis of historicity to a socio-centric (rather than an anthropo-genetic) social-historical analysis, which in the end only serves to uphold the primacy of the Greco-European creation of political autonomy (echoes of Marx can also be found here); I will return to this criticism in chapter four. This, in turn, serves to stifle the valuable insights that are implied by the metacontingent principle of institution that is implied within his notion of *self-alteration*. This notion of heteronomous institution, instead, emphasises a non-creative mode of historicity. The emphasis on *meta-necessity* portrays a view of historicity that is self-referential in a way that institutional self-alteration is indirect and coincidental, as it is a mode of institution that is seen to tend toward its own internal ends. In accordance with this perspective, contingency is viewed as the incorporation of 'otherness' that folds into a *meta-necessary* logic. The self-alteration of *eidos*—considered as *creation ex-nihilo*—therefore cannot be understood in any other way than as the perpetual rupturing of an *ontological* constitution of the world.

Castoriadis therefore constructs a dichotomy between two modes of historicity based on a conception of *ontological closure*, whereby "everything happens as if society were unable to recognize itself as making itself, as instituting itself, as self-instituting", and *ontological openness*, whereby a society institutes itself based upon contingent relation to its own creativity.[74] In heteronomous societies the metacontingent relation to this authorial 'elsewhere', which opens the institution up to the incorporation of 'otherness', is seen by Castoriadis to be covered over and

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[73] Castoriadis, 1994, "The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 145.
[74] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 213.

imbued with the authority of a sovereign 'world-image'. The sovereign 'world-image' is signified as the only source of origin for the institution, and it is therefore instituted as the 'unalterable' organisation of a society. In Castoriadis's view, the 'unalterable' order of an heteronomous society is an instituted fact that conceals "its being as [self-instituting] society by negating the temporality that is first and foremost its own temporality, the time of otherness-alteration that it brings into existence and that, in turn, makes it exist as society".[75] The self-alteration of a society's institution, which is nothing other than a society's particular mode of historicity, is therefore seen to be enclosed within its central world-ordering significations. Castoriadis argues that self-alteration within heteronomous modes of historicity can therefore only take place within the confines of a fundamental ontological closure. The creative emergence of new determinations and their subsequent contingent alterations are seen to be *completely* translated into the symbolism of a social organisation whose meaning can only be attributed within the metanecessary logic of instituted form. This denial of contingency is therefore taken by Castoriadis to be an ontological denial (which is to say that it is, to a large extent, a form of denial that is *structural*), which is to say that it is a predetermined closure of the capacity for communities to question the 'self-image' of their societies and to propose new forms of self-organisation. In the final section of this chapter I will argue that Castoriadis overemphasises the ontological dimension of his distinction between these two modes of historicity, and that this unnecessarily dichotomises what are in fact two differing institutional dynamics that are at play within all modes of historicity. Further to this, it will be argued that Castoriadis's conception of the social imaginary, in fact, offers a way to develop such a relativised conception of the creative and self-altering modes of historicity.

OPENING UP THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY: MERLEAU-PONTY AND THE WORLD HORIZON

The work of Arnason offers a pathway beyond the impasse of ontological closure that limits Castoriadis's insight into creative modes of historicity and the capacity for communities to alter their social-historical contexts. Arnason proposes that when engaging with Castoriadis's work there is a need to develop the hermeneutical dimension of social creativity, which shifts the focus on institutions from a strictly 'ontological' theory towards a more 'culturological' conception of the world-forming 'imaginary significations' that orient the self-institution of societies. The culturological approach develops the notion of the social imaginary, which is a notion that

[75] Castoriadis, ibid., 213.

Castoriadis developed—as will be argued in this section—alongside his engagement with Merleau-Ponty, and the latter's description of culture as a mode of existence that shapes a world horizon. Arnason views the culturological approach as an 'articulation of the world' that incorporates "cultural spheres ('world orders' in Weber's terminology) as well as overall cultural patterns and traditions".[76] By taking this approach Arnason is de-emphasising the importance that Castoriadis places on the role of imaginary significations as an ontologically determining 'articulation of the world'. Rather, the culturological approach emphasises how significations contribute to the ontological openness of institutional conditions, which situate the creative capacities of a community within a field of power that regulates the potential for self-alteration. What is significant about this approach is that the instituted forms of symbolism are viewed as the source of creative potential for self-alteration, rather than an ontological trap. Arnason approach is therefore suggesting a shift of emphasis toward a phenomenological-hermeneutics of creation that foregrounds the culturological articulation of the world that shape imaginary significations.[77]. It is argued in this section that the phenomenological-hermeneutic approach is not necessarily contrary to the critical insights offered by Castoriadis's novel conception of the social imaginary, and that by developing this notion in relation to self-altering modes of institution it is possible to—in the following chapter—provide a unique political understanding of historicity.

Arnason critique, in fact, picks up a thread within Castoriadis's thought that can be seen as a continuation of the phenomenological concept of 'the world'. He observes that the concept of the 'world' within phenomenological thinking has been shown to highlight two interrelated points of orientation: whereby "the reference to a totalising context or horizon is as important as the ultimate

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[76] Arnason, 1989, "Culture and Imaginary Significations", 27.

[77] Castoriadis seemed to portray a distaste for the hermeneutical tradition, going so far as to say that it threatens to become a substitute for original thinking, which could explain one of the motivations that would lead him to privilege the radical capacities of the imagination to create new social forms. Arnason makes it clear that Castoriadis's philosophy of social institution is, in fact, amenable to being developed along hermeneutic-phenomenological lines. This can be achieved by reconceptualising the theoretical implications of 'meaning creation', starting from the two basic proto-institutions that have been developed by Castoriadis: legein (i.e. *language*) and teukhein (*social-doing*). See: Castoriadis 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, chapter 5. Arnason bases conception of an 'open' world horizon on Castoriadis's re-articulation of Merleau-Ponty's work on *language* (see: Castoriadis, 1984, "he Sayable and the Unsayable", *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*), which was clearly expressed by Castoriadis's in the final chapter of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*: the proto-institution of language opens up "the continuous emergence of linguistic signifieds *other* than those already recorded" (Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 345. See: Arnason, 1989, "Culture and Imaginary Significations", 39). The proto-institution of *social-doing*, instead, refers to the dimension of *praxis*. This aspect looks at how various techniques of social doing bring form to the world and emphasises the temporal dimension institutions through the social practices that give them shape. This idea was only briefly explored by Castoriadis in the early 1970s (see: Suzi Adams, 2013, "Castoriadis, Arnason and the Phenomenological Question of the World", *Creation, Rationality and Autonomy*). However, Castoriadis did not develop the epistemological aspects of *social-doing* and instead sidelined these concerns throughout the trajectory of his work by emphasising creation *ex-nihilo* as the capacity to rupture ontological form.

open-endedness of the context and the possibility of conflicting interpretations".[78] However, Arnason argues against Castoriadis's idea that the horizon of the world-image "has no referent" outside self-originary ontology.[79] Arnason's intervention proposes that the organising principles of the world-image are not ontologically derived from within a 'worldless vacuum', rather, it is derived from the cultural dimension of instituted symbolism, and therefore the "referent is the world with which society is confronted and of which it nevertheless forms a part".[80] The 'world' is therefore shaped by a 'shared' and 'interpretive' horizon of articulated meaning whose contingency is derived from a collective existence within the 'world' in an over-arching sense. The culturological basis of social-historical institution decentres Castoriadis's insistence on ontological *creation ex nihilo* and positions the ontological dimension within an *anthropological horizon* of the world. It would be easy at this point to simply say that this shifts Castoriadis's socio-centric conception of world constitution to a broader anthropo-centric version.[81] However, this would not be entirely correct. What is being argued here is that social-historical institution is a mode of anthropogenesis (which is not confined to the socio-centric limits that Castoriadis placed on the forms of closure derived from social-historical ontology). This move away from a strictly ontological approach also means that social creativity can begin to be understood in terms of a *decentred anthropology.*[82] This perspective reintroduces one of Castoriadis's pertinent phenomenological insights, that a 'shared' and 'interpretive' world horizon opens up an "inexhaustible supply of otherness", which offers something more than an abyss of undifferentiated chaos, because it is an opening to a 'shared' anthropological horizon that incorporates 'other' forms of differentiated meaning.[83] If the *interpretive* horizon can be defined as being open to the capacities of a limitless *interpretation* of otherness, then the hermeneutic is not enclosed within ontological bounds (as Castoriadis, in fact, views the hermeneutical approach). By introducing a culturological approach to the interpretation of the world it is possible to develop Castoriadis's insights into the reflexive mode of self-alteration that drives historicity, and to show that the

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78 Arnason, 1989, "Culture and Imaginary Significations", 27.

79 Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 364.

80 Arnason, 1989, "Culture and Imaginary Significations", 40.

81 Adams highlights the implications of Arnason's intellectual shift to decentre Castoriadis's socio-centric ontology: "the *re-centring* of 'the world' at the level of culture, that is to say, the trans-subjective field—i.e. the social level of reality beyond the intersubjective domain—brings in the world as *transcencus*, to draw on Jan Patočka, that goes beyond the radical immanence of Castoriadis" (Adams, 2013, "Castoriadis, Arnason and the Phenomenological Question of the World", *Creation, Rationality and Autonomy*, 80).

82 This aligns with the notion of *decentred anthropology*, which Adams proposes is a central aspect of Arnason's civilisational theory: "Arnason elaborates the 'world' as part of a decentred anthropology where *anthropos* is not only a 'self-interpreting' animal, as *per* Charles Taylor, but also 'world interpreting'" (Adams, 2013, "Castoriadis, Arnason and the Phenomenological Question of the World", *Creation, Rationality and Autonomy*, 79).

83 Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 371.

institution of society is contingent upon the broader cultural articulation of the world horizon; it will be argued in the following chapters that this ontological openness requires a stabilising mode of regulation, which places historicity in the context of instituting power.[84] In order to come to the political implications of Castoriadis's thought, it must be recognised that his theoretical work essentially grappled with the a fundamental tension between the ontological dimension of social-historical institution and the self-altering creativity of the cultural dimension. As Arnason has pointed out, Castoriadis's articulation of this tension was framed around his interpretation of Merleau-Ponty's attempt to clarify the phenomenological 'world problematic'.

Merleau-Ponty's phenomenology exercised a strong influence on Castoriadis's theorisation of social-historical ontology.[85] Merleau-Ponty's work offers a 'relational' ontology that considers the co-dependency of the self, the 'other', and the world. Castoriadis drew from the significant inroads that Merleau-Ponty had made toward understanding how it was that perception, as a faculty of corporeal imagination, becomes instrumental in the formation of a subjective world that is based on a relational encounter with social meaning.[86] In fact, Castoriadis's attempt to theorise the ontological status of the social-historical world should be traced back to his engagement with the work of Merleau-Ponty, particularly in the way that Castoriadis reformulates Merleau-Ponty's recognition of the fact that "because we are in the world we are condemned to meaning".[87] This 'condemnation to meaning' was taken by Castoriadis as an indication that we are condemned to the ontological *eidos* of social institution, which is to say, that we are condemned to 'society' at large.

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[84] I began developing this approach to Castoriadis's work on self-altering creation by pairing it with a seemingly implicit notion of *chora*, which is radically re-interpreted within Castoriadis's conception of the social imaginary, but is barely, and only ever briefly, discussed by Castoriadis (See: McMorrow, 2012, "Concealed Chora in the Thought of Cornelius Castoriadis: A Bastard Comment on Trans-Regional Creation").

[85] See: Arnason, 2014, "Institution", *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, 101.

[86] The influence of Merleau-Ponty on Castoriadis is evident in two seminal essays in the development of his philosophical considerations on ontology. The first essay, *Sayable and the Unsayable*, is marked by a linguistic turn in Castoriadis's thinking, however the second essay, *Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition*, reflects a more guarded hermeneutical turn that I will explore in the remainder of this chapter. See also: Suzi Adams, 2013, "After Merleau-Ponty: Castoriadis, Living Being, World", in *Corporeity and Affectivity*.

[87] Suzi Adams, 2012, "Castoriadis and the Non-Subjective Field: Social Doing, Instituting Society and Political Imaginaries", *Critical Horizons* vol. 13 issue 1 (Taylor & Francis, UK), 36. Ref: Merleau-Ponty, 2008 *Phenomenology of Perception*. Although Adams has rightly pointed to Heideggerian legacy of the world problematic in Merleau-Ponty's work, I am more inclined to read his theoretical trajectory in line with Husserl. In the last finished essay before his death (Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1964, "The Philosopher and His Shadow", *Signs*, trans. Richard C. McCleary, Northwestern University Press, Evanston), Merleau-Ponty reflected on his indebtedness to Edmund Husserl as a benchmark for approaching the phenomenological question of being in the world. This phenomenological legacy has been made explicit by Dan Zahavi (Dan Zahavi, 2002, *Merleau-Ponty on Husserl: A Reappraisal*, in *Merleau-Ponty's Reading of Husserl*, Ted Toadvine and Lester Embree (eds.), Kluwer Academic Publishers, Dordrecht), who views the central ideas within Merleau-Ponty's work as a continuity and development of key ideas within Husserl's later work. This legacy is particularly discernible on two accounts: the idea of 'otherness' considered through the reciprocal conditions of reversibility, as well as the notion of 'incarnated subjectivity' within the context of transcendental intersubjectivity.

In fact, as Adams has duly noted, Castoriadis was one of the first to develop the implications of Merleau-Ponty's notion that the trans-subjective dimension of society gives rise to the basis of perception.[88] In his lectures at the *Collège de France* between 1954-1955, Merleau-Ponty began to envisage the ontological character of institutions. Merleau-Ponty considered the notion of institution as a field of social meaning, or cultural context, from which the subject is able to create its own *Sinngebung* ('donation of sense', or, 'bestowal of meaning').[89] These considerations led Merleau-Ponty to turn from a 'history of perception' to the 'perception of history', which includes the perception of "ideologies, of myths, of intellectual tools, of practical wholes".[90] Merleau-Ponty attempted to read the institution as a field that arises in a 'bi-directional' confluence between "the given to us, and also of us to the given".[91] A theme, it can be argued, that is reinterpreted by Castoriadis in his distinction between 'instituted society' and 'instituting society'. For Merleau-Ponty, the institutional field arises as a dialectic synthesis that considers 'objective' history to be lived subjectively 'only in our life', it is through our *Sinngebung* that we conceive the advent of history as a sector of lived experience.[92] There remains a sense of 'objective' history that can be perceived as the 'gaze of other times on mine', however Merleau-Ponty begins to dissolve the concrete 'objectivity' of the past in proclaiming that, "we never have closed significations; we, like the humans of the past, have only open significations and situations whose sense is in genesis".[93] History is therefore an instituted passivity, two terms that would become the basis of his 1954-1955 *Collège de France* lectures. History is therefore something received and projected temporally through lived experience, it is "something that arises from an *Urstiftung*" (i.e. self-origin of the institution), whose instituting capacity arises from an intersubjective level of *Sinngebung.*[94] Merleau-Ponty situates historicity as an issue of the reception and projection of meaning that forms

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88 Adams, 2012, "Castoriadis and the Non-Subjective Field: Social Doing, Instituting Society and Political Imaginaries" 36. Adams has further pointed out that Castoriadis is aligned with post-Husserlian phenomenological thought, because following Merleau-Ponty, he is also engaged in a critique of "the idea of the transcendental subject of knowledge" (Suzi Adams, 2008, "Castoriadis' Long Journey Through Nomos: Institution, Creation, Interpretation", *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* No. 70 (Brill, Leiden), 280). Despite this obvious phenomenological lineage, Arnason has commented that Castoriadis was "consistently dismissive about Husserl, whose transcendental phenomenology he saw as a prime example of the 'egological' illusion" (Johann P. Arnason, 2007, "The Idea of Negative Platonism: Jan Patočka's Critique and Recovery of Metaphysics", *Thesis Eleven* vol. 90 (Sage, Thousand Oaks), 23)

89 See: Merleau-Ponty, Maurice, 2010, *Institution and Passivity: Course Notes from the College de France (1954-1955)*, trans. Leonard Lawlor and Heath Massey (Northwestern University Press, Illinois). According to Merleau-Ponty, the natural world, or "the 'natural thing' appears to us only in a culture" (Merleau-Ponty, 2010, *Institution and Passivity*, 133). This is important to point for Castoriadis's understanding of the 'first natural stratum' and its social-historical representation.

90 Merleau-Ponty, ibid., 133.

91 Merleau-Ponty, ibid., 133.

92 Merleau-Ponty, ibid., 133.

93 Merleau-Ponty, ibid., 134.

94 Merleau-Ponty, ibid., 134.

a society's temporal presence. These themes are remarkably visible in Castoriadis's discussion of the self-origin of social-historical institution.

Merleau-Ponty saw that the phenomenological problem of 'being-in-the-world' had to address the institutional dynamic of its historical dimension; which Castoriadis admits can be perceived as "a mixture of activity and passivity".[95] By emphasising the perceptual schema of subjectivity, Merleau-Ponty suggests that the *Sinngebung* capacity of the subject directly translates experience into 'the prose of the world' (a position that is seemingly reflected in Castoriadis's conception of self-reflexivity). However, meaning that is formed through perceptual experience is not drawn from a mute, concrete, or passive world, rather, in Castoriadis's view, the prose of the world is already ontologically transcribed in the *eidos* social-historical world, which exists outside of subjective experience, and forms the basis of what Castoriadis come to call the *social imaginary*:

> It is above all the imaginary *schema* underlying the thought, the unnameable primordial figure that gives shape, that organizes, includes in and excludes from that which is taken into consideration, allots in the field values, volumes, lights, and shadows, animates what will be coined into privileged types of logical operations and into 'ultimate' ontological decisions'.[96]

What Castoriadis describes here is the pre-existing symbolic matrix of the social-historical field, or what he calls 'instituted society', and it is important to highlight that this the social imaginary represents the 'privileged' types of ontological form that shape what is 'always already there' in the world. Castoriadis describes the social imaginary on the basis of the institutional role it plays in shaping social-historical form and orienting the temporal dimension of historicity. It is a useful conceptual tool that provides insight into the *institutional tension* between what's 'always already there' (ontologically speaking) and new forms of collective expression. It can be said that Merleau-Ponty envisaged the originary 'instituting/instituted' dynamic at the heart of the subject (ontological creation at the level of perceptual-subjectivity, its *Sinngebung*), whereas Castoriadis expanded this ontological dynamic to elucidate the radical self-creation of anthropic being at the social-historical level.[97] Castoriadis's approach stresses the self-originary capacity of the 'instituting/instituted' dynamic as a temporal mode of social-historical self-alteration. This dynamic equates the historicity of society with its creative temporality—an idea that will be discussed further in the following chapter.

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[95] Castoriadis, 1993, *Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition*, 35.
[96] Castoriadis, 1993, *Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition*, 35.
[97] Merleau-Ponty, 2010, *Institution and Passivity*, 6.

As I have previously outlined in this chapter, Castoriadis takes these Merleau-Pontian themes to be a central problematic in his attempt to think historicity in ontological terms. However, Castoriadis considers this later phase of Merleau-Ponty's work to have remained trapped within a "*schema* of perception", from which "he would never completely succeed in freeing himself" because, he argues, that Merleau-Ponty viewed subjective perception (*Sinngebung*) as an experience of "ontological *reception*".[98] Castoriadis points out that by emphasising perception as the primary ground of ontological creation, Merleau-Ponty was destined to search for the institution of society at the level of *intersubjectivity.*[99] There is a level of irony in Castoriadis's critique of Merleau-Ponty's entrapment within the 'ontological tradition', because Castoriadis himself leans on a similar ontological emphasis, albeit at a trans-subjective level, when he comes to analyse the political dimension of socio-historical institution; this point will be argued in the following chapter. As I have shown in this chapter, it is Castoriadis's emphasis on the ontological dimension of society that upholds the distinction between autonomous and heteronomous modes of institution. However persistent Castoriadis's ontological emphasised remains, one can nevertheless argue that his interpretation of Merleau-Ponty still provided him with the basis from which he was able to develop his conception of the social imaginary in ways that go beyond its ontological strictures.[100]

If there is one archetypal idea that Castoriadis gleans from Merleau-Ponty it is that nothing is "a pure act of the subject", that a self-image cannot be created without an image of the world within which such self-definition is made possible.[101] In Merleau-Ponty's view this image of the world is tied together 'almost by chance' through the vision of an historical imagination, which is not produced according to a model, "it is, in fact, the advent of meaning".[102] Even though Castoriadis does not explicitly address the imaginary feature of the 'advent of meaning'. I would suggest that it

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98 Castoriadis, 1993, *Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition*, 4.

99 Castoriadis, 1993, *Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition*, 35.

100 It may be said that Castoriadis himself remained trapped in the psychologically subjective dimension, by privileging a conception of autonomy that emphasises a psychoanalytic basis of freedom. In my view, Castoriadis saw psychoanalytic work as revolutionary because he could not accept the instituting influence of neoliberal capitalism, especially the fact that from the 1970s onwards it became increasingly constitutive of cultural subjectivities that began to erode established political institutions. His psychoanalytic work became a personal activism amidst what he viewed as the lack of a collective 'revolutionary' agenda, however this led him to read contemporary subjectivity on the basis of historico-ontological cultural forms; psychoanalysis would became the passage toward an autonomous subjectivity that ruptures the heteronomous grip of capitalist ends. This meant that he was not himself open to recognising new cultural articulations and creative subjectivities that were formed through various expressions of political autonomy.

101 Merleau-Ponty, 2010, *Institution and Passivity*, 136.

102 Maurice Merleau-Ponty, 1973, *Adventures of the Dialectic* (Northwestern University Press, Evanston), 17.

is perhaps one of the most significant ideas that he draws from Merleau-Ponty. It is significant to point out that in Merleau-Ponty's later work the imagination came to play a central role:

> Everything comes to pass as though my own power to reach the world and my power to retrench myself in phantasms only came one with the other; even more: as though the access to the world were but the other face of a withdrawal, and this retreat to the margin of the world a servitude and another expression of my natural power to enter into it.[103]

Arnason views the constitutive role of the 'phantasmal' imagination within this passage as the sign of a direct affinity with Castoriadis's later project. This is undeniable, however, Castoriadis goes beyond Merleau-Ponty's idea of 'retreating' from the *passivity* of the world to show that the social-historical world, in the form of its institution, is a *creative* formation of the world by the *social imaginary*. Castoriadis perceives an ontological excess in the constitutive role of the imagination, he recognised that the collective dimension of the imagination is "a creative process, and the most fundamental precondition of freedom", or more precisely, the freedom to collectively institute the form of the world as a self-originary *eidos.*[104] The collective dimension is not a 'passive' articulation of the world horizon but rather, the collective basis of an imaginary means to 'create' the horizon itself. It is this characterization of 'passivity' that Castoriadis theorised into a model of heteronomous historicity that over-emphasises ontological closure, in the sense that social creativity remains trapped within its pre-given significations. The dichotomy is erected in strict contrast with what is presented as the autonomous mode of historicity, wherein culture is seen to be liberated and opened-up to modes of self-alteration that are apparently the only true opening for politics; it is on this last point that his Marxist heritage is most pronounced.

Castoriadis's dichotomous construction became framed as a fundamental tension between *instituted* modes of historicity and the capacity of *instituting* new human creations. This dichotomous construction will be detailed in the next chapter by following the line of thought within Castoriadis's work that recognises the 'inexhaustible supply of otherness' that poses an "irreducible challenge to every established signification". [105] The sources of self-altering creativity that are seen to be manifest through the social imaginary will be discussed in the context of power, which will provide a more nuanced account of the metacontextual tendency toward closure that was outlined in this chapter. It will also be argued that self-alteration is a metacontextual mode of historicity that should be thought on the basis of a political, and not an ontological, mode of

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[103] Merleau-Ponty, 1968, *The Visible and the Invisible*, 8.

[104] Arnason, 1989, "Culture and Imaginary Significations", 27.

[105] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 371.

historicity. The concept of the social imaginary is significant, because introducing an imaginary dimension at the social-historical level enabled Castoriadis to envisage the deep connection between subjective, cultural and historical creation. This deep connection is considered by Castoriadis to be the main driving force behind the temporality of society *as* an ongoing self-creation, where the "present exists as originating, as immanent transcendence, as source, as the surging firth of ontological genesis".[106] Anthropic being is therefore the self-creation of a social-historical mode of being in the world, which is always bringing itself into being based on a temporality that is *to-be* (*à-être*). This notion highlights a central theoretical tension within Castoriadis's philosophical project, between; the world as a 'network of significations' driven by ontological inertia, and, the more promising line of thought, that the world is "an inexhaustible supply of otherness".[107] Arnason offers an alternative approach to Castoriadis's dichotomous perspective by shifting the emphasis on ontological form to a more nuanced world-interpretive *culturological horizon*. This approach understands that cultural creativity involves a perpetual opening-up to the experience of 'otherness' and takes instituted symbolism into account as a primary source for self-altering creativity. Arnason's critique is an important corrective to Castoriadis's social-historical creation, because it forges a culturological approach that recognises the possibility of an anthropic world horizon that permeates the cultural diversity of ontological forms and differing societies. This approach, in turn, invites a more nuanced interpretive dimension to social-historical existence which relativises the dichotomous distinction of historicity, and offers a new proposition that any 'denial of contingency' actually springs from the political dimension of a society as a mode of social-historical regulation. This is the argument will be pursued in the remaining chapters of this thesis.

[106] Castoriadis, ibid., 201.
[107] Castoriadis, ibid., 371

CHAPTER 3

THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY, POWER AND HISTORICITY: THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF SOCIETIES

Castoriadis's notion of the *social imaginary* was introduced in the previous chapter as the *self-instituting* force of societies that arises in tension with the social world as it is collectively *instituted.* In this chapter I will address how Castoriadis conceptualises the social imaginary in such a way that the aforementioned institutional tension is incorporated into a reflexive mode of historicity. From the perspective of Castoriadis's social theory, this is understood to operate as a temporal dynamic in all societies. At its most basic level the social imaginary is viewed as the collective 'self-deployment' of societies across time, which is a novel conceptualisation of historicity that leads to an innovative understanding of power and the political dimension of social-historical institution.[1] Castoriadis's conception of the social imaginary has remained a largely ambiguous notion, even though it supports the crux of his reflection on the institution of social-historical worlds. Johann Arnason has suggested that this ambiguity originates in the fact that Castoriadis did not extensively develop the socio-cultural implications of the social imaginary, that he tended instead to maintain an excessive reliance on psychoanalytic considerations of the creative imagination.[2] This suggestion from Arnason points to an argument raised in the previous two chapters: that Castoriadis placed more emphasis on the radical creativity of the imaginary than on the political implications of historical self-alteration, the latter of which, I propose, offering his greatest insights. In what follows I will develop this latter perspective to argue that the ambiguity surrounding Castoriadis's conceptualisation of the social imaginary ultimately arises due to an inconsistent theorisation of the concept. It will be shown that throughout his work Castoriadis offers differing accounts of the radical creativity of the social imaginary. This chapter will propose that this remains an unresolved issue in Castoriadis's work on social-historical ontology that leads him to theorise historicity as an institutional tension between society as *instituting* and society as *instituted*. I will argue that this issue can be resolved by articulating the regulative role that political power plays in the historicity of societies.

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[1] Castoriadis, 1991, "The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 147.

[2] Johann P. Arnason, 1994, "Reason, Imagination, Interpretation", *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, 167.

Castoriadis conceives the social imaginary as a manifestation of the tension between the appearance of *instituted society* within the underlying presence of *instituting society*. This institutional tension will be shown to be a fundamental feature of the historicity, which, according to Castoriadis, defines human societies. One of the most significant implications of this tension is the emergence of the political dimension as a field of power. In fact, Castoriadis views this field of power as a constitutive feature of the social imaginary, arguing that "we must therefore recognise that there is, in human collectivities, a power of creation, a *vis formandi*, which I call the instituting social imaginary".[3] The theme of institutional tension first appeared in Castoriadis's work in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, and it will be argued in the first half of this chapter that throughout his later work he struggled to develop this theme alongside his schema of the social imaginary. It will be shown that he had a tendency to downplay the role of the symbolic field when taking into account the creative aspects of historicity. I will counter this tendency by placing emphasis on how the social imaginary maintains an open-ended world horizon, which, I proposed in the previous chapter, is important to view historicity as an orientation toward ontological openness; this point is important with respect to discussing Castoriadis's theorisation of autonomy in the following chapter. As I have also shown in the previous chapter, Castoriadis tended to ontologise historicity, unwittingly echoing the errors of Marxist historicity that he so deliberately and painstakingly attempted to overcome. Ultimately, it will be shown that his tendency to ontologise was a result of an insistence to uphold a distinct dichotomy between autonomous and heteronomous modes of historicity.

This chapter also put forward an important critical argument of the thesis: that by collapsing this dichotomy in Castoriadis's social theory it is possible to understand historicity in a much more creative sense, and one that does not merely emphasise the radical potential of the imagination, but also understands the creative power of institutions as a power that regulates the instituting capacities of the social imaginary. This provides a deeper analytical conception of power, which not only accounts for the fact that differing social imaginary perspectives attempt to alter established institutional form, but also for the way the establishment of institutions is maintained through instituting power. This chapter will establish the fundamental argument of the thesis: that the regulation of power through the social imaginary is at the basis of the political dimension of societies. The second half of this chapter will tie together two essential distinctions that frame Castoriadis's understanding of the political dimension of society; (I) the transmission between *infra- power* (i.e. *ground power*) and *explicit power* as an underlying process that constitutes the

[3] Castoriadis, 2007, "Imaginary and Imagination at the Crossroads", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 72.

political dimension, and (II) the conceptual distinction between the *political* dimension (*le politique*) and the activity of *politics* (*la politique*), which leads to a specific conceptualisation of autonomy. I will examine how political power takes shape through the social imaginary by proposing that the socio-cultural implications that remain under-theorised in Castoriadis's work can be taken into account through developing the role that *implicit power* in fact plays in his theoretical schema of historicity, even if Castoriadis himself did not explore it fully. It will be shown that this is what frames specific social-historical modes of institution (i.e. regimes of historicity) and how historicity is regulated through the political dimension of societies. The fundamental link between the open-ended world horizon, the institutional tension of historicity and the political dimension of society exposed by Castoriadis's work offers insights that open new avenues to rethink the political dimension of societies, as an immanent mediation between the ontological fertility of social creativity and the historically instituted forces of power.

THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY: HISTORICITY AND ITS INSTITUTIONAL TENSION

Together, *instituted society* and *instituting society* constitute a tension that is arguably the most fundamental motif in Castoriadis's work.[4] What has remained largely unexplored so far in the scholarship on his work is how this tension has been conceptualised as the basis for a number of key distinctions in his analysis of the political dimension of historicity. An exception to this can be found in the work of Angelos Mouzakitis, who justifiably points out that this tension "seems to have introduced an irreconcilable dualism at the very heart of sociohistorical processes", on which Castoriadis bases his schematic model for theorising historicity.[5] This tension is not to be thought on the basis of divisible 'forces' of society (i.e. base vs superstructure; in Marx's terms), neither is this tension a mediation between 'society' and 'individuals' (i.e. legitimate authority vs social actors; in Weber's perspective). Rather, this tension of social-historical institution is contained within the social imaginary, which is a trans-subjective mode of being that encompasses the individuals who, collectively, constitute themselves the flesh of the social institution.[6] The social

[4] This institutional tension remains a central problematic for Castoriadis throughout the entirety of his work. John Rundell rightly situates it within broader philosophical debates, not least in "the interplay between the *natura naturans* of the creative, instituting imaginary, and the *natura naturata* of the instituted social imaginary" (Rundell, 1994, *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, 10). Adams has convincingly shown that Castoriadis's approach to this problematic has its deepest inspiration from Aristotle and various other pre-Socratic sources, in which he came to interpret this dichotomy on the basis of a fundamental tension between *physis* and *nomos* (Adams, 2013, "After Merleau-Ponty: Castoriadis, Living Being, World", in *Corporeity and Affectivity*, 335).

[5] Mouzakitis, 2014, "Social-Historical", *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, 92.

[6] There is a polarity in Castoriadis's thought between the social imaginary and the singular psyche (which is prior to the

imaginary "brings itself into being *as* a mode of being", a mode of historicity that is a manifestation of this institutional tension, which brings society into being through its own instituted temporal mode of *self-alteration.*[7] The idea of the social imaginary remains highly ambiguous in Castoriadis's writing due to the fact that he expresses this institutional tension in different ways over the span of his entire work. Not only does the social imaginary account for the emergence of social-historical novelty, but it also accounts for self-alteration as a mode of institutional cohesion that also reinforces the imperative of institutional closure. The institutional tension is therefore contextualised within a *social imaginary* that harbours, both radical social conflict and complicit relationships between various social imaginary perspectives. Ultimately, this tension reflects processes of historical continuity and discontinuity, and therefore what is at issue is really the political context of historicity. From this perspective, we can begin to envisage how Castoriadis increasingly came to understand social imaginaries as a source of power that shapes institutions according to particular social imaginary perspectives; the meaning through which institutions are shaped is therefore contestable and leads to differing capacities for other social imaginary perspectives to participate in social-historical alteration.

The social imaginary is a key concept in Castoriadis's work, both, as a central aspect of social-historical institution and as a prerequisite of power. Here it is important to elaborate on Mouzakitis's observation concerning the 'irreconcilable dualisms' to emphasise how the tension between *instituting* and *instituted* society is central to his theoretical work. Castoriadis emphasises a number of key dualisms—determinacy/indeterminacy, primordial power/explicit power, political/politics, heteronomy/autonomy—in order to establish his theory of historicity as a series of dichotomies that elucidate the social imaginary as the foundation of a society's mode of historicity.[8] In this section it will be shown that the social imaginary is an umbrella concept that Castoriadis used to schematise these dichotomies in such a way that he could construct his understanding of the political as the basis for a theoretical account of historicity.

In general terms, as highlighted in the first chapter, the social imaginary can be understood as the social-historical equivalent of the *radical imagination.*[9] The social imaginary is an "open stream of

social individual), however this polarity sits outside of the social institution. It serves, instead, to demarcate anthropic being and natural being. See: Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 145-146.

[7] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 372.

[8] These distinctions are discernible for Castoriadis, in the broadest sense, as an invocation of the ancient Greek distinction of nomos/physis, which describes the broader cosmological nature of anthropic institution: nomos/physis. See: Suzi Adams, 2011, *Castoriadis's Ontology: Being and Creation*.

[9] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 369-373. Adams has pointed out that the social-historical

the anonymous collective"; it is the collective articulation of social-historical *eidos* that is shaped through the expression of collective representations, affects and intentions that form the social institution.[10] In other words, the social imaginary ties together *significations* which, in turn, institute societies. It involves an ongoing collective articulation of the symbolic, affective and temporal experiences of social-historical existence. In an early formulation of the social imaginary, Castoriadis placed central importance on its symbolic dimension: "the imaginary has to use the symbolic not only to 'express' itself (this is self-evident), but to 'exist', to pass from the virtual to anything more than this".[11] However, as outlined in the previous chapter, the symbolic dimension of the social imaginary is open toward an otherness that exceeds established determinations; so it can therefore be said that the social imaginary is only ever constrained by instituted forms of meaning.

The symbolic dimension is, both, 'constitutive of' and a 'resource for' the creative circularity of the social imaginary: the creative capacities of the social imaginary constitute an *anthropological horizon* of the 'world', which is in itself situated in the institutional formation of established meaning (i.e. 'society'). This horizon is open-ended and consistently articulates the world in such a way as to bring into being radically new formations of social-historical meaning. (This circularity reflects the previous chapter's discussion on self-originary ontology and the importance of hermeneutic-interpretation). In this sense, the social imaginary is indistinguishable from the symbolic dimension of a specific social-historical context, and yet it should be made distinct from the institution of society, as Castoriadis maintains: "institutions cannot be reduced to the symbolic but they can exist only in the symbolic; they are impossible outside of a second-order symbolism", the latter of which requiring a level of specificity that serve to articulate the open-ended context of significations.[12] In relation to the social institution, the social imaginary is therefore responsible for the "emergence of *other* types, *other* relations, *other* norms" that bring new *significations* into the fold of society.[13] Castoriadis sets the *anthropological horizon* at a distance from the institution of society. What is significant about the social imaginary is that, despite Castoriadis's claim to the contrary, it in fact serves a functional role, that of tying together the social institution with its broader world horizon.

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mode of being of the social imaginary has deep affinities with Kant's understanding of aesthetic creation in the third *Critique*, However, Castoriadis develops this notion of creative imagination in relation to the role Kant gives to the imagination in the first *Critique*, which considers the imagination as the root of reason. See: Adams, 2008, "Castoriadis' Long Journey Through Nomos: Institution, Creation, Interpretation", *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie*; 275.

[10] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 369.

[11] Castoriadis, ibid., 127.

[12] Castoriadis, ibid., 117.

[13] Castoriadis, 1993, "Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition", 24.

The innovative feature of Castoriadis's conception of the social imaginary, however, is that its role is not to embody the symbolism of institutions, but to account for the collective 'choice' of the symbolism that shapes a given society: "it is only relative to these significations that we can understand the 'choice' of symbolism made by every society, and in particular the choice of its institutional symbolism".[14] In Castoriadis's social theory, this collective 'choice' accounts for a *primal* level of institution, whereby the social imaginary creates society "afresh in each instance", by drawing on its symbolic foundations.[15] The social imaginary configures the 'choice' of significations that constitute the social institution on the basis of its second-order symbolism; this corresponds directly with what has been discussed in the previous chapter as the formation of a self-image of society.[16] The self-image of society, crystallised in instituted form, is defined by the social imaginary through a complex relation of significations that must always be articulated alongside a perpetually open world-image; the social imaginary therefore serves to tie together (*lier ensemble)* their relation. The social imaginary opens up a reflexive space to negotiate how societies are specifically instituted without interrupting the homogeneity of the world, this space situates 'society' as that which is instituted and brought into existence in accordance with a more general *anthropic self-definition* that must take its world-image into account; in the following section of the chapter it will be shown that this relation is established *politically*, through the institution of laws and norms that regulate the self-instituting power of the collective.

The existence of the social imaginary was first posited by Castoriadis in his later period of political militancy within the group *Socialisme Ou Barbarie*. At the time its formulation was tied up with his desire to revise Marx's historicism, while maintaining a vision of political praxis that left the door open for the possibility to actively engage with processes of social transformation. The notion of a radically self-altering social imaginary came to be developed as an attempt to theorise an inherent freedom in human creation that—as outlined in the previous chapter—would overcome the impasse of Marx's 'historical laws'. Initially, this led Castoriadis to envisage the radical *instituting* capacity

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[14] Castoriadis 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 146.

[15] Castoriadis, 2007, "Primal Institution of Society and Second-Order Institutions", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 100. In my view, the notion of *primal institution* of society means that the notion of society in-itself is meaningless, it reflects a social space whose specificity is articulated through social imaginary significations, it is in this respect that the social imaginary can be viewed as a parallel to the cultural dimension of social life. Society can therefore be seen as nothing more than the temporal dimension of the social imaginary, it is a social space that is inhabited by present significance and oriented as something to-be (*à-être*).

[16] I have omitted discussion of *transhistorical* institutions that correspond to the level of social imaginary significations that must lean on a 'world referent'; in other words, the level of institution that is not culturally specific and must conform to the necessities of the physical or biological substratum (i.e. family, cuisine, etc.)

of human societies as a force lurking in the shadows waiting to be harnessed by the social imaginary, which would then rupture and engulf *instituted* society, replacing it with yet another form of social institution (*eidos*). It is not difficult to perceive the persistence of a Marxian conceptual framework within these shadows, as there is without doubt a notion of revolutionary change in Castoriadis's understanding of the *instituting society* 'that bursts onto the stage and pulls up its sleeve to get to work'.[17] An idea that distinguishes between everyday life, as a reproduction of the same, from the extraordinary modes of social activity typified by revolutionary periods. This early formulation encompasses a highly dichotomised interplay between *instituting* and *instituted* moments of society: "once this institution is set in place, the social as instituting slips away, puts itself at a distance, is already somewhere else".[18] At this stage, the social imaginary itself is also conceived in distinctly dichotomous terms, which mirror these institutional moments. On one side, there is an *actual imaginary* that corresponds to society in its *instituted* and rationalised form, and then on the other side, there is the *radical imaginary*, which is understood as an *instituting* force of indeterminacy within which the *instituted* 'dwells'.[19]

The Imaginary Institution of Society marked Castoriadis's turn toward defining the social imaginary as a perpetual flux of ontogenesis that propels the historicity of a society. Castoriadis reconfigured the dichotomous relation from his initial formulation as an ebb and flow between two institutional imaginary moments—i.e. *actual imaginary* and *radical imaginary*—toward a more synthesised version of the social imaginary that incorporates the institutional tension. The dichotomy, far from being dissolved, is in fact intensified and presented as what defines, outright, the mode of social-historical being. The institutional tension therefore translates directly into the historicity of a society. However, the major problem with this conception—and one that I will attempt to overcome in this thesis—is the fact that Castoriadis downplays the inner logic of the symbolic field that characterises the *instituted* aspect of this tension, even though it is crucial to analysing the implicit role of the political dimension of society. In doing so, Castoriadis fundamentally neglects the role of *instituted* meaning as a source of historical novelty, which was seen in the last chapter to be a repercussion of his insistence on radical social creation. Instead, the role of *instituted* society is marginalised to designate one particular institutional dynamic: a mode of historicity defined in

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[17] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 112.

[18] Castoriadis, ibid., 112.

[19] Castoriadis, ibid., 146. The notion of an *actual imaginary* was subsequently dropped by Castoriadis; however, it is significant to mark its inception at the heart of the instituted/instituting dichotomy. This passage illuminates it: "The social world is, in every instance, constituted and articulated as a function of such a system of significations, and these significations *exist*, once they have been constituted, in the mode of what we have called the *actual imaginary* (or the *imagined*)" (Castoriadis, ibid., 146).

terms of its reproduction of the past, i.e. as essentially heteronomous. Heteronomy is, ultimately, understood as an institutional dynamic whose temporality revolves around a self-referential mode of historicity: heteronomy is embodied and materialised in the "concrete institution of society, incorporated in its conflictual division, carried and mediated by its entire organisation", which is interminably reproduced in and through the social imaginary.[20] Rather than focus on the role of social reproduction as an institutional resource for the innovative capacity of social-historical creation, Castoriadis was more concerned with the radical *instituting* aspects of the institutional dynamic and with a potential capacity to establish politics of autonomous self-institution.

In general terms, society therefore came to be seen by Castoriadis as Janus-faced: *instituting society* entails an ongoing relation with itself as *instituted society*. This is why the social imaginary remains an ambiguous concept. Even though the underlying dichotomy remained a consistent feature of Castoriadis's theorisation of historicity, his conception of the social imaginary nevertheless established a significant theoretical breakthrough. It allowed him to pursue a philosophical reflection on the underlying tension that constitutes reflexive modes of historicity. Historicity, as a mode of social imaginary institution, must be understood as a radically creative temporality that rests upon historical heritage, yet, is not defined by it. Castoriadis crystallises this breakthrough in one concise sentence: "as instituting as well as instituted, society is intrinsically history—namely, self-alteration".[21] The breakthrough can be envisaged in the sense that the dichotomy can be relativised within a temporal logic of *self-alteration*, it is not necessary to uphold a distinction between *instituted* and *instituting* moments, rather, societies are perpetually *instituting* in their very temporality: "even as instituted, society can exist only as perpetual self-alteration".[22] This perspective can be seen as an underlying aspect of the main argument in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, which proposes historicity to be a *conscious* relationship to *instituted* society that opens up the capacity of its *instituting* dimension as a political project of society. Castoriadis developed the idea of a self-altering historicity in order to draw out the political dimension of human autonomy and this precisely constitutes the basis of his project for an autonomous society. A proper exploration of how he conceptualises autonomous societies will be the subject of the following chapter. For the moment it is worth noting that Castoriadis proposes a deeply fundamental understanding of autonomy that rests on the following premise: historicity is an *autonomous* temporal creativity that is fundamental to all human societies. It is his view that such a fundamental

[20] Castoriadis, ibid., 373.
[21] Castoriadis, ibid., 371.
[22] Castoriadis, ibid., 372.

autonomy has been denied by forms of societies based on tradition and religion, indeed going so far to say that this denial has been constitutive of a heteronomous mode of institution that 'almost always' and 'almost everywhere' has been the dominant mode.[23] Here, again, the dichotomy between autonomy and heteronomy is erected, and this time not on institutional grounds but in the constitution of the social imaginary itself.

In my view, the notion of social imaginary was conceived by Castoriadis in order to account for the problem that all human societies face: how to regulate their constant self-altering historicity; I will return to this point at the end of the chapter. A significant insight provided by Castoriadis is that the capacity to regulate historicity is only possible if a society is engaged in a mode of reflexive self-institution. It is the idea of a reflexive mode of historicity that constitutes the most promising line of thought within Castoriadis's work. This idea is, however, at odds with his more direct social analysis where he consistently foregrounds the tension between dichotomous modes of historicity: heteronomy always threatening to annihilate the historical creativity of autonomous institution. It can be readily presumed that recourse to this dichotomous tension allowed Castoriadis to push the radical democratic vision of his autonomous project, which as I have proposed in the first chapter is derived from his sustained attachment to the Marxian idea of revolution. It becomes clear that, as Castoriadis proceeded to develop this line of thought, his insights into social-historical *self-alteration* became increasingly limited by his repeated insistence on the dichotomous modes of historicity that stand at the basis of his social criticism. If one breaks out of this strict dichotomy, it is, however, possible to advance Castoriadis's notion of *self-alteration* as a significant vision of human autonomy; this idea will be pursued in the following chapter. The implication of relativising this dichotomy is that the contingency underlying institutional modes can begin to be understood on the basis of a symbolic reflexivity (i.e. hermeneutic-interpretive creativity) that defines historicity as a mode of self-altering regulation, which means that it is *political* by virtue of being *poietic*, rather than being derived from an established ontological dynamic, as Castoriadis himself argued. Following this more promising line in Castoriadis's thought, the social imaginary can be conceived as a manifestation of institutional tension, as the general collective activity that shapes social-historical *eidos*, and this, in turn, brings into being a world in which society "inscribes itself and gives itself a place".[24] I must point out that the social imaginary is not merely topographical—i.e. reduced to an inscription of place—it surges forth as *temporal* ontogenesis. It is from this perspective that the 'always already established' *eidos* must be viewed as the symbolic ground of a

[23] Castoriadis, 2010, "Neither a Historical Necessity nor Simply an 'Ethical' Exigency: A Political and Human Exigency", *A Society Adrift*, 151.

[24] Castoriadis, 1997 "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary", *World in Fragments*, 84.

reflexive dynamic that has the social institution poised as 'having-to-be' (*à-être*) *what it understands itself to be,* a dynamic that propels the perpetually *instituting* mode of historicity.

What is most significant in the ontological turn made by Castoriadis in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* is the fact that the *instituting* capacity of the social imaginary is understood to surge forth "in a relation of reception/alteration with what had already been instituted".[25] In my view, this is one of the most concise descriptions of historicity that exists in Castoriadis's work. The radical ontogenesis that is theorised at the heart of his anthropology comes to be considered as a reflexive capacity to shape or create particular social-historical determinations. Society itself is seen as a universalised reflection of *instituted* ontological determinations, a *self-image* that is instituted in the form of a totalising *eidos*. Castoriadis's notion of the social imaginary is significant because, given the temporal flux of historicity, its self-image can only be projected via an *instituting* imaginary, which means that even though the social imaginary constitutes an open *anthropological horizon* it also serves the function of presenting the institution of society as an homogenous, albeit anonymous, 'whole'.[26] Society is therefore only grasped as a projection of its own self-image, the manifestation of which is precisely the social imaginary sphere itself. The homogenising self-image that is manifest through the social imaginary emerges as a world that is proper to the individuals that are encompassed by it; "the creation of instituting society, as instituted society, is each time a common world—*kosmos koinos*".[27]

Kosmos Koinos, the 'common social world', stands as the experience of existing within the established form of social-historical institutions; it is an identification of the *eidetic* edifice that constitutes society as a self-originary 'network of meaning' through which a person relates to the world and understands themselves as *anthropos*. Castoriadis must therefore outline a distinction between *kosmos koinos* as an autonomous anthropic region and the broader natural world, from which it emerges. Anthropos, according to Castoriadis, is a radical self-originary creation that is set within the broader enigma of the natural world. This is to say that while *anthropos* is an extension of natural regions (i.e. physical and biological) its institution is not derived from these regions, precisely because it constitutes itself on the basis of a social-historical meaning that is self-originary. However, as argued in the previous chapter, this view presents differing societies as

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[25] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 369.

[26] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain", *World in Fragments*, 6.

[27] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 370. Castoriadis's reference to a *kosmos koinos* alludes to a fragment from Heraclitus and implicitly expresses the polarity between the social-historical world (*kosmos koinos*) and the psychical world (*kosmos idios*). The Heraclitus fragment can be paraphrased as follows: 'the waking have one common world, but the sleeping turn aside into each a world of his own'.

specific social-historical worlds that are closed within their own determinations. Castoriadis has a tougher time distinguishing between the common social world specific to societies and the broader anthropological world within which they are made distinct; it will be shown in the following section that this is precisely what opens up the properly political dimension of historicity that his ontological framework ends up neglecting. By following the alternate line of Castoriadis's thought relating to the self-altering capacity of the social imaginary it is possible to theorise the open relations between these specific social-historical worlds. This perspective views the crosscurrents of specific social imaginaries as always taking place in the scheme of a broader anthropological world horizon. Such a suggestion invites a relational dimension to the articulation of signification that is not explicitly present in Castoriadis' work, and which rests on an enigmatic engagement with otherness. The relation between the social imaginary of specific societies and what is other to it is experienced as an enigma because such otherness is always in excess of the social-historical meaning that defines a specific self-image. What the broader anthropological world horizon presupposes is that history is nothing other than an 'inexhaustible supply of otherness' experienced by a reflexive alteration of the common social world. But, most importantly, what this enigmatic quality tells us about the formation of a society's self-image is that it is constituted politically and is therefore framed within a field of instituting power.

After all, in Castoriadis's own terms, because it is situated in the world, the self-image of society "is always also something else and more than *what* it is (posited as being [*étant*])".[28] This is the basis of the self-reflexive mode of historicity. Self-reflexivity is a feature of the collective level of society that sets its own social-historical mode of being at a distance from itself by virtue of its social imaginary creativity, which becomes the basis of instituting power.[29] It is this social imaginary openness—and the incessant need for social-historical experience 'to be' meaningful—that propels the temporal mode of historicity in new directions. What is most enigmatic about creativity as an 'inexhaustible supply of otherness' is that this 'otherness' is a relation to a mode of instituting power that regulates what is incorporated into the self-image that shapes institutions. This, for Castoriadis, is presupposed in his principle of *meta-contingency,* which characterises historicity as a social-historical mode of institution that engenders its own mode of 'perpetual self-alteration'.[30] The temporal implications of a mode of historicity that is simultaneously the source of its own self-

[28] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 6.

[29] This theoretical distinction seems to reflect Claude Lefort's notion of the 'double movement' of self-institution that forms the basis for his conception of '*le social*'. This point can be made in order to draw a parallel with the influence of Merleau-Ponty, whose notion of reversibility can be seen as a predecessor.

[30] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 371.

origin and the movement of its own self-alteration is that the social imaginary exists as "having-to-be" (*à-être*) *always already instituted.*[31] Historicity is therefore understood by Castoriadis as the *instituting* temporality of the social imaginary, whose mode of perpetual self-definition is contingent upon its own self-image. This conception of the 'social imaginary' is unique to Castoriadis's philosophical system and, as I want to argue, it should be considered as an attempt to reveal the political dimension of historicity.

Castoriadis's theoretical approach to the institutional tension shifted further throughout his later years, as he began to contextualise *instituted* society more thoroughly as a specific manifestation of the *instituting* mode of the *social imaginary*. The institutional tension came to be viewed on the basis of "the work of the radical imaginary as instituting, which brings itself into being as instituted society and as a given, and each time specified, social imaginary".[32] In a 1996 paper, title *Imaginary and Imagination at the Crossroads*, Castoriadis also maintains the distinction between *instituting* and *instituted*, and seemingly re-introduces his initial formulation of a dichotomous polarity between the *instituting social imaginary* and an *instituted social imaginary*:

> once created, both imaginary social significations and institutions crystallize, or solidify, and that is what I call the *instituted social imaginary*. It provides continuity within society, the reproduction and repetition of the same forms, which henceforth regulate people's lives and persist as long as no gradual historical change or massive new creation occurs, modifying them or radically replacing them by others.[33]

In this formulation, after expressing the ultimately creative nature of the imagination and imaginary institution, Castoriadis highlights the existence of a dichotomy at the social-historical level, which seems to value only novelty that is historically effective and affirms his theoretical position on the ontological closure of an *eidos*. He takes the view that social-historical creation is marked by the 'pulsating processes' of historical transformation and concedes that the *instituting* imaginary is only rarely a rapidly effective force; although an extremely important 'phenomenon'. He therefore views social-historical creativity as "phases of dense, intense creation [that] alternate with lulls, sluggishness, or regression".[34] Castoriadis's later theoretical developments increasingly came to

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[31] Castoriadis, ibid., 371.

[32] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 145.

[33] Castoriadis, 2007 "Imaginary and Imagination at the Crossroads, *Figure of the Thinkable*, 73-74. The notion of institutional 'regulation' is an implicit theme that underlies his theoretical approach to the political dimension of society. Although the notion is not explicitly developed by Castoriadis, I will situate it alongside his theory of power in the following section of the chapter.

[34] Castoriadis, ibid., 76.

view the 'radical instituting' capacity of the social imaginary as only rarely creating new *eidetic* forms. The *instituting* mode of self-alteration otherwise, indeed, serves to reproduce forms of *instituted* social meaning, the social imaginary being trapped within its ontological closure, which produces history through differing articulations of the same significations. This revision of the tension between the institution and the creative capacity of the social imaginary revived his original version of dichotomous historicity, which saw him set up two opposed institutional modes that I have discussed above: autonomy and heteronomy. It is unfortunate that an analysis of the dimension of power, which regulates what becomes historically effective in the social domain, remained as a result markedly absent in this portrayal. While Castoriadis's theory opens up potential avenues to understand the political dimension of historicity, the political issue does not lie with the inability to create new significations, but rather with the openness of significations to be freely articulated. A theoretical analysis of historicity therefore requires coming face to face with the implicit power of the social imaginary, a question that will be examined in the following section. It is worth noting that within this later period Castoriadis offered conclusions that contrast with his earlier enthusiasm for the revolutionary potential of the social imaginary. In fact, the further he explored the historicity of contemporary societies, the further he came to consider its instituting capacity in a more sober light. This would suggest that Castoriadis, instead, increasingly came to view the instituting capacity of the social imaginary as the primary force of social reproduction.

POWER & THE POLITICAL DIMENSION OF SOCIETY

At this point, some key clarifications must be made regarding how Castoriadis theorises the political dimension of society. As stated in the introduction of this chapter, the political dimension has remained implicit and under-theorised in Castoriadis's work; yet it can be revealed through the definition he gives of instituting power. This definition of power insists on the centrality of historicity, of an institutional tension between the established social-historical institution and articulations of the broader anthropological world horizon.[35] An initial point of clarification concerns the key distinction between politics (*la politique*) and the political (*le politique*); yet another manifestation of theoretical dualism. As Stathis Gourgouris has pointed out, Castoriadis offers a definition of the political/politics distinction that is contrary to conventional definitions and

[35] Castoriadis developed his conception of power and contextualised it within his definition of the political in an essay that was written between 1978-1988 titled, 'Power, Politics and Autonomy' (Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*). This essay is his most detailed statement on the political dimension of society, whose implications were only vaguely (i.e. Castoriadis, 2007, "The Rationality of Capitalism", *Figures of the Thinkable*) and implicitly (i.e. Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion") pursued in his later work.

brings a completely new meaning to these terms.[36] Given that I have so far in thesis put forward the suggestion that Castoriadis's conception of the social imaginary drew significant influence from Merleau-Ponty's idea of 'the advent of meaning' (particularly in its later formulation within the schema of 'the visible and the invisible'), I would add that this influence is nowhere more prominent than in Castoriadis's distinction between 'politics' and 'the political'. As I will outline in this section, at the basis of this distinction is an understanding of social-historical power that ultimately reflects Merleau-Ponty's notion of 'the advent of meaning'.[37] Further still, if, as argued in the previous section, the social imaginary is the locus of historicity, then one must distinguish between its instituted form ('the invisible') and its radical capacity to bring power into focus as an instituting imaginary ('the visible'). In the most simplest terms, Castoriadis's distinction between 'the political' and 'politics' intends to highlight the institutional tension, whereby 'the political' relates to instituted form (social-historical *eidos*) and 'politics' defines the instituting capacity of the social imaginary: politics makes the political dimension visible and opens up the capacity to institute new forms of social life and other articulations of the world explicitly and self-consciously.

The first thing to be mentioned with regard to Castoriadis's analysis of power is the fact that it is defined purely in reference to 'social' power, which is to say that it is not a characteristic of 'physical' or 'biological' dimensions.[38] While this point seems incredibly obvious, it is important to emphasise that social-historical power acquires its force from its historical characteristics. Social-historical power emerges from the pre-existing symbolic field of the 'always already' instituted, which contextualises the domain of power within the realm of historical-ontological forms. It is important to point this out because Castoriadis defines power as a *constitutive* force. Power is not only the radical (i.e. *ex nihilo*) capacity of social-historical creation. Simultaneously it is also defined as formative capacity, and one that is oriented toward a mode of institutional cohesion that contributes to social reproduction. As has been argued in the previous chapter, Castoriadis's ontological analysis most often neglects the hermeneutical dimension of creation that provides an account of social reproduction, and this neglect is also consistent in his analysis of political power. I intend to emphasise, instead, the role of an *implicit* mode of power that accounts for Castoriadis's oversight and allows power to be understood more thoroughly as a constitutive feature of social cohesion and, more importantly still, as a regulative dimension of historicity.

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[36] Gourgouris, 2013, *Lessons in Secular Criticism*, 123, fn. 3.

[37] Merleau-Ponty, 1973, *Adventures of the Dialectic*, 17.

This constitutive role cannot be understood in a straight-forward manner unless we examine the very precise definition of power given by Castoriadis in his 1988 essay, 'Power, Politics, Autonomy'.[39] It is worth quoting the definition in full, because it is on the basis of this definition that it is possible to critically analyse the political dimension as a manifestation of institutional tension; it is a manifestation in the sense that the instituting power of the *social imaginary* has its basis in the historically instituted *eidos*. Castoriadis defines power accordingly:

> [Power is] the capacity for a personal or impersonal instance (*Instanz*) to bring someone to do (or to abstain from doing) that which, left to themselves, they would not necessarily have done (or would possibly have done), it is immediately obvious that the greatest conceivable power lies in the power of preforming someone in such a way that *of their own accord*, they do what one wants them to do, without any need for *domination (Herrschaft)* or of *explicit power (Macht/Gewalt)* to bring them to… (do or abstain from doing something).[40]

The most immediate point to be made is that Castoriadis describes 'preforming power' as the greatest conceivable force of social-historical power.[41] This 'preforming power' is precisely the power of socialisation that is wielded by the social institution. The 'preforming power' of the institution is viewed as the invisible background of the social-historical world, which reflects *instituted* society as a mode of social reproduction of historical-ontological forms. Ultimately, Castoriadis views power as "the social-historical field itself", which is grounded by the *instituting power* of the social imaginary.[42] Power is therefore seen as the *vis formandi* capacity of the social institution to give form to social-historical existence and also, simultaneously, to a creative temporality that constitutes an historical mode of institution that is alterable. The 'preforming power' of institutions can therefore be seen as an *infra-power* that society 'wields over the individuals' that it produces. [43] It is a power that Castoriadis comes to name the *radical ground power* of the social institution.

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[39] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1988, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", in *Cultural-Political Interventions in the Unfinished Project of Enlightenment*, Axel Honneth, Thomas McCarthy, Claus Offe and Albrecht Wellmer (eds.) (MIT Press, Massachusetts).

[40] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 149.

[41] It is worth noting that the notion of a 'preforming power', which forms an essential component of Castoriadis's conception of social institution, addresses a problematic that was first put forward by Étienne de la Boétie (in his pamphlet titled, 'Le discours de la servitude volontaire'). Interestingly, Castoriadis's colleagues were involved in a project relating to La Boétie's pamphlet at the same time that Castoriadis began to formulate his theory of social-historical power (1976-1978). The project that was undertaken by Marcel Gauchet and Miguel Abensour, which also included work by Claude Lefort and Pierre Clastres.

[42] Castoriadis, ibid., 150.

[43] Castoriadis, ibid., 150. As suggested in the previous chapter, Castoriadis provides an alternative account of biopower from that which is presented by Foucault. The social imaginary basis of institutional infra-power offers us another way to understand biopower from the perspective of a political anthropology that views the institution of power as a consistently rejuvenated imaginary force.

The *ground power* of social institution reflects the *instituted* historical-ontological form of society. It presents a 'regularity and stability to phenomena', so there is a degree of certainty that the ground will not open up under foot.[44] This certainty rests on the fact that the institution of society is always historical—and, by extension, therefore also ontological—or 'always already there'; and it is in this sense that the *ground power* of the institution represents *instituted* society. However, Castoriadis maintains that "instituted society never succeeds in wielding its ground-power in an absolute fashion"; there is also always a *radical instituting* temporality that drives social-historical institution[45]. The *radical ground power* of society is, ultimately, a manifestation of the institutional tension at the heart of the social imaginary. Castoriadis identifies the manifestation of this tension as the central issue of social-historical power: this *ground power* "is carried out by the instituted society, but in the background stands the instituting society".[46]

It is on the basis of *radical ground power* that Castoriadis offers his most developed, yet still highly ambiguous, treatment of institutional tension. It is worth noting that in 'Power, Politics, Autonomy', Castoriadis seemingly harks back to his earlier dichotomous definition of the institutional tension of historicity, which reintroduces the notion of a radical instituting creativity that ruptures the ground power of ontological form, therefore positioning ground power as a de-radicalised mode of instituting power: "once this institution is set in place, the social [imaginary] as instituting slips away, puts itself at a distance, is already somewhere else".[47] However, Castoriadis also simultaneously theorises *ground power* as *instituting power*, which serves to introduce a paradoxical correlation to the idea that *ground power* provides society with its *instituted* form.[48] This paradox is systematically avoided by Castoriadis, because if he were to delve into the implications of this paradox it would become clear that his insistence on the dichotomous modes of historicity (heteronomy and autonomy) would be considerably undermined. In my view, it is imperative to consider the implications of this paradoxical correlation—which I consider to be characteristically *implicit*—in order to extend the profound theoretical elucidations opened up by Castoriadis's thought.

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[44] Castoriadis, 1997, "Done and to be Done", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 362.

[45] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 151.

[46] Castoriadis, ibid., 150

[47] Castoriadis, ibid., 150. This statement originally appears in "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory" (Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 112).

[48] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 168.

These implications that Castoriadis himself seemingly avoided bring his thought face-to-face with the question of the 'advent of meaning', which can be further pursued on the basis of this idea: it is the historical force of society as *instituted* that is, in fact, its most powerful *instituting* force. This involves a temporal argument that highlights historicity as a mode of social reproduction, which Castoriadis outlines in a more promising line of thought:

> The present, to be sure, always transforms the past into a *present past*, that is, a past relevant for the now, if only by continually 'reinterpreting' it by means of that which is being created, thought, posited *now*; but it is always *that given past*, not a past in general, that the present shapes according to its own imaginary[49]

The ceaseless tension within the *social imaginary* therefore persists in the temporal modality of social-historical creation, as a mode of social reproduction that incessantly propels the historicity of societies. It is on the basis of this historicity that we can identify the paradoxical situation underlying Castoriadis's definition of institutional *ground power* as a mode of *instituting power*: with social institution, there is "always, and to an unmeasurable degree, also recovery of the given", and therefore the *radical imaginary* is always 'burdened' with historical inheritance.[50] It is on the basis of how this historical inheritance is cast into a mode of institution that Castoriadis dichotomises the two differing modes of historicity. Autonomous modes of historicity are marked by the ability of societies to "call into question their institution, which is to say the law presiding over their existence", while, heteronomous modes of historicity tend to sacralise their instituted inheritance.[51] In both cases, the 'fundamental' ground power of societies is defined as the *instituting power* of the *social imaginary*, in the sense that the social-historical field is subject to a collectively anonymous self-alteration of instituted historical limits and constraints. The apparently slippery and ungraspable feature of the *ground power* of the *social imaginary* reflects the fact that this collective anonymous power "is neither locatable nor formalisable" in a static *instituted*

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[49] Castoriadis, ibid., 170.

[50] Castoriadis, ibid., 150. Castoriadis neglected to interrogate the political circumstances of this 'burden of inheritance', which would have deepened his theory of power within a more immediate, and rich, extrapolation of the institutional tensions at play in the social imaginary; this would bring his theory of explicit power into the realm of social imaginary creation, in all its latency, virtuality and potential.

[51] Castoriadis, 2010, "Imaginary Significations", *A Society Adrift*, 57. Castoriadis reads the history of human societies on the basis of their mode of institutional historicity, such that autonomy is seen to be a rare form of social institution, an historical creation that was made "first in ancient Greece, as far as we know, and was redeveloped later, with some completely new features, in western Europe starting at the end of the Middle Ages. It is historical creation that makes autonomy exist as openness rather than as closure" (Castoriadis, ibid., 57). In my view, this historicism is based on, both, a misreading of the self-reflective creativity of heteronomous institution and an overly romantic 'revolutionary' view of autonomous institution. This historicised dichotomy leads Castoriadis to a rather Greco-Eurocentric bias when it comes to developing his political anthropology. This thesis will attempt a reading of historicity that offers a theoretical correction to Castoriadis's notion of social institution; however, it will not attempt to draw out an in-depth critique of Castoriadis's historicism.

form.[52] This can be explained by the fact that the *instituting power* of the social imaginary is only partially ontologically formed; in this sense, the social imaginary capacity of self-alteration can be seen to reflect the intervention of a *radical instituting imaginary* that either reforms historical inheritance or institutes new forms that partially alters this inheritance. To reiterate a point made in the previous chapter: the creative capacity to alter historical inheritance is made possible due to the fact that institutional temporality is always 'to-be' (*à-être*), at both subjective and collective levels (a point that was raised in relation to the influence of Merleau-Ponty).

The major parallel to be made between Merleau-Ponty's idea of historicity as an imaginary 'advent of meaning' and Castoriadis's formulation of the 'the political' is that they describe how it is a necessary dimension of a community for it to come into being as its own social-historical world. These are both articulations of the central dimension of historicity, where a collective 'self-image' of the social world operates as a mode of existence that is open to *self-alteration*. What is significant about Castoriadis's development of the social imaginary as a mode of instituting power is that historical inheritance (the 'advent of meaning') is simply the basis of a fundamentally creative mode of historicity. This definition of *instituting power* as a creative capacity of the social imaginary, however, does not alone account for the political dimension of society. What constitutes the political dimension is the immersion of instituting power within the broader cultural life of a society, Castoriadis makes this abundantly clear, remarking that "there cannot be a 'political' institution that is not, from top to bottom, from its most superficial to its deepest level, linked to the mores, the *Sitten*, the whole anthropological, socio-psychical structure of the people living in that society".[53] In order to clearly identify the political dimension within the broader cultural horizon of a society, Castoriadis therefore makes an important distinction between *radical ground power* and its *explicit* forms. The creative temporality of social-historical institution means that no society can achieve total control of its institution (its *instituted* form). Even though this may be an obvious and banal point, the reason for this is because human subjectivity is lived in the sphere of 'everyday life', and social-historical existence is experienced culturally. However, it is worth pointing out that the cultural dimension of power is not the only creative relation that people have with their

[52] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 168. Castoriadis uses the example of language, which is not restrained by any intentional forms of power, and whose alterations are potentially open to all who speak. He points to other 'activities that are beyond the scope of legislation'; i.e. family, mores, 'art', 'ideas'. See also, "The Sayable and the Unsayable", *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. His first essay on the thought of Merleau-Ponty.

[53] Castoriadis, 2007, "Heritage and Revolution", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 111. The distinction between the political and anthropological dimensions of society is a problem made explicit by Plato (especially in *The Laws*, without at all commenting on Plato's political approach). Castoriadis remarks that this is a political problem that is being forgotten by most contemporary political thinkers.

institutional contexts. It is also necessary to highlight that the *radical imagination* underlying socialised individuals surges forth in excess of *instituted* form, which means that praxis is essentially informed by institutional *ground power.*

Castoriadis's emphasis on the ground power of institutions situates a society's mode of historicity firmly within the context of their political dimension. Historicity is based on the necessity of instituting laws that ground institutions and represent the forms of instituting power that shape a societal self-image. The political dimension must therefore be seen to govern the capacity of cultural self-definition to shape institutional form. It is on the basis of this necessity that Castoriadis relates the 'proper sense' of *politics* to a society's mode of historicity: "it is only in the social-historical domain that we encounter an *eidos* that puts into question its own law of existence". [54] The important point to maintain is that *politics* is not considered as a latent potential of social institution, rather Castoriadis emphasises the conditions of radically reflexive historicity upon which *politics* is considered to embrace *ex-nihilo* creation and opens up a capacity for various cultural articulations to participate in the shaping of institutional form. This argument is central to Castoriadis's political theory; it is also the core of his conception of political autonomy and its subsequent institutional context: democracy. This conception of autonomy and democracy will be the respective themes of the following two chapters. For the moment, it must be understood how Castoriadis's theoretical view of political dimension led him to theorise how instituting power constitutes a political regime that defines a society's mode of historicity.

IMPLICIT POWER & THE REFLEXIVE FOUNDATION OF POLITICS

So far it has been established that Castoriadis understands the political dimension (*le politique*) of society to be an extension of a more fundamental social-historical power that underlies the institution of society. This fundamental level of power is conceptualised in terms of the *radical ground power* of social-historical institution. This underlying level of power is regarded to be the institution's 'power of formation' (the *vis formandi* of the institution), which is the power to shape individuals in accordance with the collectively defined institution of society. However, according to Castoriadis's formulation, this *radical ground power* is not rendered political (*le politique*) until it is

54 Castoriadis, 2007, "The Social-Historical: Modes of Being, Problems of Knowledge", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 226. Based on this definition of politics (*la politique*), Castoriadis gives a consonant definition of philosophy as the specific social-historical capacity to "put into question the transmitted representations it has for itself of a world and of itself", which I should note situates the task of philosophy as developing a mode of reflexive thought that elaborates the meta-contingency of social-historical institution (see: Castoriadis, ibid., 226).

explicitly instituted. The characteristic of *explicit power* is a decisive aspect of the political dimension. It is the distinction between *radical ground power* and *explicit power* that will therefore be the focus of this section, because I argue that Castoriadis neglects to develop the implications of the existence of an *implicit power*, of a ground power that is politicised and, yet, never assumes an explicit form.[55] In order to make this claim it is necessary to draw on Castoriadis's notion of 'politics' as the questioning of the ontological validity of significations. I will argue that this theme takes too central a place in Castoriadis's considerations of the political dimension and put forward the view that the political dimension consists of competing cultural perspectives that give rise to an instituting power that shapes a society's mode of historicity. Furthermore, it will be proposed that *implicit* instituting power can only be further theorised if the dichotomous schema of autonomy and heteronomy is relativised.

The reason why Castoriadis argues that the political dimension of society emerges because its *ground power* must be rendered *explicit* is because "it will always be necessary to settle conflicts, or decide that a particular act has transgressed the law of society", and due to this necessity there will always be a need "to make decisions that affect every member of a society, as to what may or may not be done".[56] In other words, the political dimension emerges due to the necessity to create law, which is instituted on the basis of three necessary functions that serve to establish social-historical power as law: to judge, to legislate and to govern.[57] It should be noted that even though these functions of *explicit power* are considered to be universal across societies, the way that these functions form an overarching *eidos* (which is to say, the totalising edifice of society, its *nomos*, or politico-cosmological totality) which accounts for legislative and executive forms of power, are not necessarily explicit in every society. In Castoriadis's view, legislative and executive forms of power can be masked by social imaginary significations that are imbued with these powers (i.e. Gods, Kingdoms, ancestors). This is what Castoriadis refers to as a heteronomous mode of institution, whereby a society gives form to the appearance of its instituted nomos in a way that posits significations that represent extra-social forms of legislative and executive power. This analysis of heteronomous institution is regarded by Castoriadis as typical of how religion structures the instituting power of a society, as opposed to an autonomous mode of institutional questioning where it is claimed that representations of power are not masked by extra-social significations, but are

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55 Castoriadis, 2007, Imaginary and Imagination at the Crossroads, *Figures of the Thinkable*, 90.

56 Castoriadis, ibid., 90.

57 Cornelius Castoriadis, 2013, *Democracy and Relativism: Discussion with the 'MAUSS' Group*, NotBored!, http://www.notbored.org/DR.pdf, 34.

rather viewed as a self-instituting power of the political community.[58] Politics (*la politique*) is viewed by Castoriadis as an activity that takes hold of these three functions of *explicit power* (to judge, to legislate and to govern) in order to establish a mode of interrogation that encompasses the entire institution of society (its *eidos*) as its subject.

It is worth highlighting that Arnason interprets Castoriadis's assessment of the objective of politics [*la politique*] as aimed toward establishing "a reflexive connection between the two levels of social-historical power": the *ground power* of the institution and the forms of power through which it is rendered *explicit.*[59] It is important to grasp how Castoriadis theorises the political dimension as a reflexive connection between these forms of power, because this reflexivity forms the historicity of a society and provides an explanation as to how the social imaginary of a community is able to gain the capacity to alter the established institutions. Arnason accepts Castoriadis's notion that *explicit* forms of power must necessarily take the form of laws, in that there is "always a need for specific institutions of explicit power with some authority to enforce rules and inflict sanctions" and further to this, these forms of *explicit power* will always become "an object of negotiation, manoeuvre and rivalry".[60] Aside from the coercive characteristics of *explicit power*, Castoriadis also identifies a deeper social imaginary foundation to *explicit power*, one that is based on the 'effective validity' (*Geltung*) of the significations that underlie such a power, and which relates to a "positive validity (in the sense of 'positive law') of the immense instituted edifice of society".[61] This is to say that the foundation of explicit power is derived from an affirmation of the broader self-image of society within which institutions are embedded. It is in this sense that *explicit power* utilises the established from (*eidos*) of social-historical institution "to compel recognition and acceptance on the part of the psyche". [62] What Castoriadis fails to recognise in this assertion is that if an institution derives its validity from the totalising context of social-historical institution (*eidos*), then this affirmation must appeal to the matrices of ground power from which the political is explicitly drawn. This is what I call the *implicit instituting power* of the social imaginary, and it is a significant feature of how instituting power is wielded to, both, reproduce institutions based on historical inheritance and to

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[58] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 155-156.

[59] Arnason, 2014, "The Religio-Political Nexus: Historical and Comparative Reflections", in *Religion and Politics: European and Global Perspectives*, Johann P. Arnason and Ireneusz Paweł Karolewski (eds.), (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh), 20.

[60] Arnason, ibid., 19.

[61] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 148.

[62] Castoriadis, ibid., 148. This is an ontological claim, that regards the institution of society as positing itself as a 'universal' (in the sense that its self-originary principle means that it presents an absolute knowledge based on self-institution); this idea is central to Castoriadis's emphasis on the primacy of self-originary ontology.

open up the capacity to alter the processes of social reproduction. Castoriadis basically says as much in stating that for *explicit power* to be effectively wielded, its power must be firmly rooted within an institutional ground power that is legitimated by "la communauté des fidèles".[63] However, if he were to develop this further into his theoretical conception of historicity he would have to collapse the strict dichotomy he makes between heteronomous and autonomous modes of institution; because, within any mode of institution, *implicit instituting power* opens up the capacity for the questioning of institutional legitimacy within the processes of self-alteration.

It is important to note that Castoriadis's discussion of *explicit power* rests on the fact that establishing the 'effective validity' of social institutions involves a social-historical process of *legitimation*. This is not a State sanctioned form of legitimacy, but one which reflects the anonymous characteristic of the social imaginary that informs the collective validity of institutions. The validity of social institution is articulated at the level of the social imaginary. It is from this perspective that the 'effective validity' of social-historical power lays the foundation upon which we can make the case that the political dimension (*le politique*) is then coextensive with the sphere of *explicit power*. And, here, the dichotomy of instituted and instituting rears its head again, as Castoriadis distinguishes between respective forms of institutional validity: *de facto validity* (instituted) and *de jure validity* (instituting). *De facto validity* ultimately reflects the collective acceptance of historical-ontological forms, significations, institutions, etc., which are *instituted* as an inherent quality of the social-historical world; institutions are therefore rendered valid through the *ground power* of social institution. *De jure validity*, on the other hand, refers to an *explicit power* that can be collectively wielded through institutions; these forms of validation appear 'universally' in every society as its judicial and governmental powers.[64] The political dimension enables the *de facto validity* of social institution to be collectively altered on the basis of explicit forms of *de jure validity*. What Castoriadis succeeds in doing by presenting these processes of social imaginary legitimation is that he sets a clear definition of the political dimension (*le politique*) as the valid exercise of *explicit power* through "instances capable of formulating explicitly sanctionable injunctions", which serve to regulate the social-historical field and maintain the stability of *instituted* forms of society.[65]

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[63] Cornelius Castoriadis, 2002, *Sujet et vérité dans le monde social-historique: Séminaires 1986-1987 (la création humaine I)* (Seuil, Paris), 388. This term can be translated as 'the community of believers', playing on the religious overtones of the phrase, this is Castoriadis's tongue in cheek way to denote how institutions must be cathected by an individual, which in turn produce the social-historical world; refer back to my discussion of subject formation in chapter one.

[64] Castoriadis, 1991 "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 155.

[65] Castoriadis, ibid., 156.

The political dimension therefore emerges from the reflexive connection between the two levels of social-historical power; the *ground power* of institutions that are given legitimacy through processes of validation that lead to their emergence in *explicit* form. On the one hand, political antagonism arises at the point when the validity of instituted *radical ground power* is questioned by differing social imaginary perspectives. On the other hand, political confrontation can also arise in the way that *ground power* is rendered *explicit*. Here, again, the Merleau-Pontian schema of the visible/invisible can be seen as influential to the conception of *explicit power*. *Explicit power* is rendered visible through the political dimension, because it is drawn into light as *instituted* form and, what's more, this form of power is reinforced implicitly by its validation within the broader symbolic field (*eidos*). It is in this sense that *explicit power* can be viewed as an extension of the *ground power* of the institution. This is a particularly important theorisation of the political dimension because it opens up *a culturological approach* to power, in the sense that the validation of institutions consists of the relation between differing cultural articulations of institutions and the capacity for these differing social imaginary perspectives to participate in the explicit shaping of such institutions. This is the point previously raised by Arnason, who rightly suggests that instituting power concerns how "the centres and mechanisms of explicit power are to be used to determine or change the instituted patterns of ground power".[66] Arnason highlights the point that remains undeveloped in Castoriadis's work, one that proposes the social imaginary to be an *instituting* force that alters the reproduction of social conditions. What remains to be elucidated in Castoriadis's work, is the 'invisible' side of the explicit power because Castoriadis himself does not provide an understanding of how the social imaginary, as an 'advent of power', politicises the symbolic field that is the basis of instituting power. The point to be highlighted from this assessment of the social imaginary is that attempts to politicise the symbolic basis of institutions is what renders power *explicit* and that attempts to question the explicit power of established institutional forms are implicitly regulated by the dominant mode of instituting power. An exploration of the social imaginary as an 'advent of power' would open up avenues to explore the regulative role of an *implicit power*, which deploys the latent potential of self-alteration from which *explicit power* can be drawn. This notion of *implicit power* is, in my view, one of the most significant features of the political (*le politique*) dimension. Implicit power should be understood to operate through the capacity of cultural reflexivity through which social imaginary perspectives are shaped. Importantly, this capacity must not be seen to determine a society's mode of historicity

66 Arnason, 2014, "The Religio-Political Nexus: Historical and Comparative Reflections", *Religion and Politics: European and Global Perspectives*, 20.

ontologically, because this is the trap in which Castoriadis's theorisation remained caught. However, this formulation of implicit power means that Castoriadis's political distinction is still upheld, in the sense that politics (*la politique*) is still seen to emerge when instituted forms of *explicit power* are collectively questioned and potentially invalidated. Politics is therefore based on a collective choice that concerns what 'ought' to remain instituted, or, what 'other' forms should be instituted in its place. In my view, politics must therefore first become gestated within the social imaginary, *implicitly*, in the form of perspectives that question the validity of institutions; this issue will be addressed further in the following chapter in the context of autonomy.

RELATIVISING HISTORICITY: NEW VISIONS OF INSTITUTING POWER

Within this chapter I have shown how the political dimension of societies fundamentally shape the modes of historicity that give societies their form. Historicity, in this context, is seen to be based on a reflexive institutional tension between the reinforcement of established institutional form and the incorporation of new institutional configurations that emerge from the culturally heterogenous creativity of a community. It has been argued that the emphasis Castoriadis placed on *self-alteration* can be developed to show how modes of historicity are
structured around institutional processes of political regulation, which, in turn, brings to light the reflexive dynamic of the *social imaginary*. Historicity is, therefore, seen as a mode of instituting power that regulates social imaginary creativity. This means that institutional reflexivity does not reflect ontologically defined modes of historicity, but rather, historicity is defined through a tension between the open articulation of *social imaginary* creation and a mode of instituting power that attempts to maintain established institutions. This reorients Castoriadis's analysis of dichotomous institutional modalities toward the culturological dynamism of *social imaginary* institution. Arnason has been shown to offer a path that foregrounds the constitutive significance of this culturological dimension, which was a present, yet underexplored, aspect of Castoriadis's work.

So far the argument of this thesis has been positioned in order to address the following contention: in order to dismantle the dichotomous modes of historicity set up by Castoriadis, the question of how social patterns are altered must be taken a step further, to show that even in the most profound social transformations there remains a significant amount of social reproduction based on implicit forms of power. The reflexive capacity to question institutions must therefore be seen to emerge from alternate interpretations of what 'ought to be' instituted, which in turn questions the legitimacy of how power is wielded in ways that maintain established institutions. Adversely, however, social imaginary perspectives that differ from those that are largely represented by established mode of

instituting power are faced with the need to confront the implicit forms of power that attempt to regulate the capacity for these perspectives to influence and shape institutional contexts. This power is maintained implicitly due to the fact that the symbolic logic of established institutions works to suppress the capacity for such positions to alter the symbolic dimension upon which the validity of established institutions are based. It is because implicit power attempts to deny these alternate perspectives the capacity to reformulate symbolic meaning in the collective context; such positions are therefore denied the capacity to render their identity explicit in the political domain.

My argument here is that social reproduction is therefore regulated both by explicit *and* implicit forms of power. Further to this, the use of implicit power to maintain the legitimacy of established institutions must also be seen to be contingent upon what is required to maintain dominant forms of instituting power, and this is why the 'tendency toward closure' that Castoriadis regards to be at the basis of heteronomous modes of institution must also be considered to be creative, something which Castoriadis himself could not bring himself to accept due to his emphasis on the revolutionary potential of social imaginary creativity. Heteronomy is therefore not an ontologically determined mode of institution, but rather a reactionary dynamic that responds to the capacities of social imaginary creativity. Throughout the remainder of the thesis, I will elaborate on the role of *implicit power* as a cultural—not ontological—domain of activity, in order to reveal that historicity must necessarily involve an heteronomous dynamic and that this dynamic can always be contingently undermined by the politicisation of autonomous reflexivity; this idea will be explored in the following chapter. This argument serves to relativise Castoriadis's dichotomous conception of heteronomous institution, because we see that in such contexts there are deep political innovations and dynamic forms of social-historical creativity that are revealed through analysing such a mode of historicity at the level of implicit power. And the same should be said vice versa, the autonomous capacity to place institutions into question and to alter the laws of a community, must necessarily be seen to take root from what is 'always already instituted'; in other words, the social imaginary draws its self-altering power from the symbolic field itself. The politicisation of social imaginary perspectives can, therefore, be seen as an attempt to alter established institutions by articulating the implicit relation between these institutions and the formulation of a common 'world image'.

This assessment infers that the alteration of social institutions involves the emergence of differing social imaginary perspectives that, to a large extent, attempt to 'partially' reformulate symbolic forms along the lines of maintaining other forms of historical continuity. This is precisely because social-historical alteration occurs in the context of a collective articulation of the world horizon. This collective articulation of the world horizon is set into the institutional form of a societal self-

image, a self-image that is held together on the basis of a mode of instituting power, which is validated at the social imaginary level. This is to say that, for alternate social imaginary perspectives to solicit alterations to social institutions, these perspectives must lay down the continuity of their position in relation to the common conceptions of the world. What I will show in the final two chapters of the thesis is that this culturological approach to instituting power provides a promising framework to analyse how a society's mode of historicity is regulated by dominant forms of instituting power. Further to this, this framework will be put to task in order to provide an assessment of the mode of historicity specific to liberal-democratic societies.

CHAPTER 4

AUTONOMY AND SOCIAL-HISTORICAL REGULATION

The central thread weaving through the philosophical and political trajectory of Castoriadis's work can be said to be his ongoing emphasis on the role autonomy plays within institutional processes. Autonomy, in his view, is a feature of social-historical institution that engenders collective political projects. In the most general sense, Castoriadis theorises autonomy as the capacity for people, and societies, to reflect on the incessant flux of experiences, interpretations and expressions that are specific to social imaginary contexts. Autonomous modes of institution would allow for new and alternate perspectives to find appropriate channels to become instituted within the broader collective horizons of social-historical institution, in turn, altering pre-existing social-historical forms. Castoriadis therefore proposed a uniquely political conception of autonomy that takes into account the confrontation of heterogeneous perspectives within given social-historical contexts. Further still, he views autonomy as characteristic of the fact that the foundation of social-historical institution is self-originary, an idea discussed at length in chapter two. In accordance with this view, autonomy is regarded as a potentiality inherent to all societies because it is a feature of the self-instituting activity that shapes social-historical institution. In this way, autonomy is put forward as an anthropological concept, whose etymology, derived from the ancient Greek, marks its fundamental status: a society is *autos-nomos* in so far as it is engaged in an activity "(to give to) oneself one's laws".[1] However, even though Castoriadis ties autonomy to the self-instituting capacity of all societies, he regards autonomous modes of institution as exceedingly rare in human history. It is this assessment that that leads him to think that a cardinal distinction is to be made when looking at the way societies define instituting power, between heteronomous societies (which present the foundation of their institution in law as coming from elsewhere) and societies in which the project of autonomy begins to emerge (where the foundation of society is seen to be self-created and politically legislated by the community).[2] This view is accompanied by a highly speculative claim that only two societies in human history have engaged in autonomous modes of institution: these include the creation of the ancient Athenian polis and the emergence of Western European modernity (from around the 11th and 12th Century to the present day). A claim that holds an obvious

[1] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 164.

[2] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary", *World in Fragments*, 85-88.

Eurocentric (Greco-Western) bias that underlies his dichotomous conceptualisation of a politically exceptional mode of autonomy over seemingly regressive modes of heteronomy.[3] Heteronomous modes of institution are described as those whereby "the *nomos*, the law, the institution, is given by another—*heteros*, in Greek", adding that, "in fact, as we know, the law is never really given by *someone else*, it is always the creation of the society".[4] This rather patronising perspective regarding the social-historical creativity of non-European societies is based on a strict dichotomisation between two distinct modes of historicity. In this chapter I will look beyond the distinction, and instead, interpret the way that instituting power shapes the historicity of societies, to show that further elaboration of this theoretical schema can help us to approach issues associated with contemporary depoliticisation.

Throughout this thesis I am situating Castoriadis's work with respect to two central questions: 'what holds societies together?' and 'what brings about other and new forms of society?'. The first two chapters have discussed Castoriadis's response to these questions through a theory of institution that emphasises the political dimension as a central structuring force that holds societies together. This chapter will examine further the way that Castoriadis addresses these questions, extending on the previous chapter's discussion of the instituting capacity of the social imaginary. It will be shown that Castoriadis develops a conception of autonomy that accounts for the capacity to bring about new and other forms of society, by attempting to understand the radical capacities of the social imaginary. My intervention into this question develops the role of instituting power that shape these capacities. In order to do this I will interrogate how Castoriadis produces a theory of historicity that emphasises the fact that human societies, in their diversity, are characterized by their mode of self-institution concerned with the creation of a world of meanings that brings into existence a world that is *proper* to each society. This is a mode of self-definition that organises the world of a society in relation to the natural world, and also brings forth a world of social meaning that is novel in relation to nature, a social-historical world within which "society inscribes itself and gives itself a place."[5] In doing so, a society constitutes a system of norms, or, institutions in the broadest sense of the term, which include "values, orientations, and goals of collective as well as of individual life."[6]

[3] By relativising the role of autonomous and heteronomous modes of institution in this thesis I am bypassing Castoriadis's Eurocentric perspective of autonomy. On this issue, it is necessary to incorporate post-colonial critiques of Eurocentricity in order to relativise Castoriadis's dichotomisation of historicity and to re-configure his approach to autonomy. Because of space constraints, I cannot explore these critiques and provide a more detailed account of how they can be reconciled with some of Castoriadis's major themes.

[4] Castoriadis, ibid., 85-88.

[5] Castoriadis, ibid., 84.

[6] Castoriadis, ibid., 84.

In Castoriadis's view, such a system is articulated through specific significations, which humans use to orient themselves and validate (or invalidate) the institution of society. This general account of social institution encapsulates both the self-definition of societies and their understanding of their respective world, both of which can be said to be contained within what Castoriadis calls the 'social imaginary' of a given society.

Among the significations that animate the institutions of a society, one is singled out by Castoriadis to be of particular importance: "the one that concerns the origin and the foundation of the institution, or the nature of the instituting power, and what would be called, in an anachronistically modern, Eurocentric language, the 'legitimation' or 'legitimacy'" of law, in the broadest sense.[7] This chapter will look beyond the obvious distinction between heteronomous and autonomous modes of institution, and instead, interpret the way that instituting power shapes the historicity of societies, to show that further elaboration of this theoretical schema can help us to approach an analysis of depoliticisation in contemporary social-historical contexts. The purpose of this chapter is to define autonomy as a cultural capacity to create new forms that alter the broader context of social-historical institution. This chapter will emphasise that in the context of instituting power autonomy involves the capacity to regulate emergent forms of cultural creativity within a given institutional context. With the approach that I want to take, the central issue for me is not to argue that heteronomy is a mode of institution that necessarily reflects a collective inability to create new significations of social-historical existence (as is the case with Castoriadis's proposed need to break the ontological closure of heteronomous societies in order to attain a true politics). Rather, my analysis instead focuses on the capacity for significations to be openly and freely interpreted and articulated. Such a capacity requires coming face to face with an aspect of instituting power that was not extensively explored by Castoriadis himself: the explicit *and* implicit ways that the instituting power of the social imaginary denies various forms of cultural creativity from participating in the shaping of societies. A guiding question that is of concern to this aspect of instituting power asks: what expressions of social existence are privileged or denied in historical processes? I view this as a particularly pertinent question with regard to addressing tendencies of depoliticisation, because we can begin to analyse these tendencies in relation to specific modes of regulation over the myriad cultural milieus that constitute social-historical contexts.

It is the autonomous capacity for societies to engage in their own social-historical transformation that will be explored in this chapter, precisely because I want to show how Castoriadis's conception

[7] Castoriadis, ibid., 85-86.

of autonomy opens up a unique understanding of instituting power that will then serve as a basis to interrogate contemporary institutional contexts in the remaining chapters of the thesis. Social-historical transformation is framed in the context of *self-alteration*, which ultimately, emphasises historicity as a poietic (i.e. creative) mode of historicity that involves the collective alteration of established institutional forms. This mode of self-alteration is at the forefront of Stathis Gourgouris's interpretation of Castoriadis's conception of autonomy: "strictly speaking, self-alteration signifies a process by which alterity is internally produced, dissolving the very thing that enables it, the very thing whose existence derives meaning from being altered, *from othering itself*".[8] In fact, Gourgouris provides an important interpretation of Castoriadis's theorisation of autonomy, because he develops an understanding of the poietic features of autonomous subjectivity that lead to the creation the conditions that can overcome established institutional form.[9] This is significant because autonomy is therefore understood to be the capacity of self-alteration, and one that is deeply rooted in the cultural dimension of the political community.

Gourgouris emphasises the social imaginary context from which social-historical institution is drawn. In doing so he affirms that poietic self-realisation only takes place in relation to a broader temporal dynamic: "self-alteration… *takes place* in the only way anything can take place in the world—*in* history, *as* history"—and, further to this, autonomous activity "configures its groundwork in the world of human action, not in the universe of concepts and propositions".[10] This also means, however, that the institutional context that lays the ground for self-alteration is regulated implicitly by an established mode of instituting power, whose creative force finds its source in the dominant structures of the social imaginary. Or, as Gourgouris proposes: "precisely because there is no historical vacuum, the [individual] subject is always instituted as a social form insofar as it assumes the imaginary significations particular to the social-historical moment that pertains to it".[11] Autonomous self-realisation therefore aims to alter the structure of established institutions, and ultimately to re-configure instituting power in a way that makes possible the incorporation of alternate forms and expressions that emerge in given social-historical contexts. It is therefore within this tension, between a power that is wielded in favour of established forms and the capacity for alternate expressions to attain 'actually effective' instituting power, that historicity becomes the regulative dimension of collective self-altering activity. Based on this perspective, I

[8] Stathis Gourgouris, 2013, "Autonomy and Self-Alteration", *Creation, Rationality and Autonomy*, 244-245.
[9] Gourgouris, 2013, *Lessons in Secular Criticism*, 115-117.
[10] Gourgouris, 2013, "Autonomy and Self-Alteration", *Creation, Rationality and Autonomy*, 244.
[11] Gourgouris, ibid., 259.

contend that autonomy is the fundamentally political capacity of human societies to participate in shaping the historicity of a given social-historical context.

Following on from the discussion of the previous chapter, what is of concern here is the extent to which alternate expressions and interpretations of social-historical existence are able to become incorporated into the instituting power that shape institutions, which is to say, a power that assumes the capacity to alter the institutional landscape of a social imaginary context. In order to show this, I will concentrate on three distinct aspects of Castoriadis's conception of autonomy. Firstly, I will define heteronomous and autonomous aspects of social-historical institution, in order to distinguish them as specific, coexisting tendencies of instituting power rather than opposite ones. In the second section I outline the dynamics of institutional self-alteration and situate the role that implicit forms of instituting power play in the regulation of historicity. Ultimately, within this section, historical heritage is recognised as a source of instituting power—an idea that was introduced in the previous chapter. Then, in the third section, I will show how the regulation of historicity is undertaken via the instituting power of dominant social imaginary perspectives. This involves a society's autonomous capacity to regulate processes of institutional legitimation and this will highlight instituting power as the structuring element involved in self-altering capacity of autonomous cultural creativity.

Rather than following through with Castoriadis's intent to show how radically autonomous modes of institution can be elevated to ideal political modes of historicity, I want to show that the question of autonomy needs to be turned toward an interrogation of how instituting power enables the institutional consolidation of dominant social imaginary perspectives. I aim to show how his theorisation of autonomy, in fact, can lead to another perspective that exposes how autonomous modes of *historicity* are, paradoxically, acting as the catalyst of contemporary processes of *depoliticisation*. Castoriadis intuited the increasing trend of depoliticisation within liberal-democratic societies, however he framed this trend as a 'rising tide of insignificancy' that threatens to regress into heteronomous modes of institution. So far in this thesis I have argued that Castoriadis's perspective is limited by his framework of dichotomous modes of historicity. Rather, I define depoliticisation in relation to a mode of autonomous instituting power where dominant social-historical perspectives are maintained by regulating emergent political capacities that threaten to alter a given institutional context. Contrary to Castoriadis's claim that depoliticisation represents a broader crisis of autonomous institution—an apparent regression 'back' into heteronomous modes of institution—I argue that, in fact, *contemporary depoliticisation is a distinctly autonomous political phenomenon*.

This argument can be made due to the fact that the conception of autonomy offered by Castoriadis implies a creative mode of social-historical regulation, which is legitimised—as shown in the previous chapter—through the social imaginary level. This chapter develops the discussion of the previous chapter to show that one has to take seriously the implicit power of established institutional form, which utilises established symbolic structures in a way that autonomously regulates institutional contexts. Castoriadis's account of autonomy does not deal with this aspect of instituting power, largely because he falsely dismisses implicit forms of power as definitively heteronomous. Ultimately, I will argue that, the contemporary liberal-democratic societies constitute themselves through the creative emergence of social imaginary perspectives that maintain dominance implicitly through establishing a regulative mode of autonomous institution.

THE PRINCIPLE OF CLOSURE: DISTINGUISHING HETERONOMY AND AUTONOMY AS INSTITUTIONAL TENDENCIES

Castoriadis's understanding of autonomy can be most firmly grasped by looking into his engagement with the emergent field of 'New Biology,' whose members were focused on developing the social and political implications of the term in relation to the natural sciences.[12] This immediately shifts the socio-political framing of autonomy away from commonly held Kantian interpretations. According to proponents of this 'New Biology', the term is associated with a self-organising characteristic, and so it follows that something (i.e. a form of life) is autonomous when it functions in accordance with its own laws, and in doing so it creates its own form by cohering to a unity that is defined by these laws, its own life system. Castoriadis debated this conception with Francisco Varela, a biologist who—alongside Humberto Maturana—popularised the notion of *autopoiesis* (i.e. self-creation) in the natural sciences, and who shared with Castoriadis an interest in the question: 'how is it that [in the formation of a living system] a unity can arise'?[13] (The corresponding social question being the one raised throughout this thesis: 'what holds societies together?'). For Varela and Maturana, any conception of autonomy must aim "to understand the

[12] The 'New Biology' refers to the emergence of an intellectual network consisting that focused on addressing questions that largely bring together the fields of biology and information theory. This network attracted people that were interested in addressing interdisciplinary questions, while this approach owes much to the epistemological work of Gregory Bateson, at its core was an engagement between (what has been labelled) the Santiago school of cognitive Biology—represented by the work of Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela—and the Parisian school of self-organising systems—formed around the work of Henri Atlan. See: William Irwin Thompson (ed.), 1987, *Gaia A Way of Knowing: Political Implications of the New Biology*, Lindisfarne Press, Great Barrington.

[13] Cornelius Castoriadis, 2011, "Life and Creation: Cornelius Castoriadis in dialogue with Francisco Varela", *Postscript on Insignificance: Dialogues with Cornelius Castoriadis*, trans. Gabriel Rockhill and John V. Garner (Continuum, London), 59.

organisation of living systems in relation to their unitary character".[14] Accordingly, this means that what makes a living being autonomous is the fact that it operates as a system holding its-self together on the basis of its own identity, and in doing so it tends toward its own self-realisation; living systems are autonomous because "they subordinate all changes to the maintenance of their own organisation, independently of how profoundly they may otherwise be transformed in the process".[15] In Castoriadis's view, the importance of Varela's conception of autonomy is that a living being "has its own laws, and nothing can appear in its world that is not in conformity with those laws in one way or another, cognitively speaking".[16] A living being therefore exhibits its autonomy through a mode of "organisational, informational, and cognitive closure" and it interprets what is meaningful for its world.[17] Following Varela's discussion of autonomy, Castoriadis proposes that this closure is a common principle that runs across both the biological and social realms of being, and it is on the basis of this principle of closure that in the human domain, "each society, like each living being or species, establishes, creates, its own world, within which, of course, it includes 'itself'".[18]

Castoriadis was extremely sympathetic to the way that the 'new biologists' had framed autonomy on the basis of how life forms create their own living systems. However, Castoriadis's contribution to discussions in this field was to point out that it would be mistaken to apply this definition of autonomy to the way that autonomy operates in the social-historical domain. Castoriadis believes that the principle of closure that defines autonomy in living systems, as described by Varela, finds its parallel in the social-historical world, instead, as the perfect example of *heteronomous* modes of self-institution. This is because the closure that is characteristic of autonomy, for instance in the biological domain, is structured by pre-determined conditions;

> Closure therefore implies that the functioning of that life form, of that subject, of that oneself, its correspondence with what may exist 'outside', is governed by rules, principles, laws that are given once and for all… Some changes do occur, but they occur in a way we can only view as random [as far as these changes are meaningful to its world].[19]

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[14] Humberto Maturana and Francisco Varela, 1980, *Autopoiesis and Cognition: The realization of the Living*, D. Reidel Publishing Company, Dordrecht, Holland, 75.

[15] Maturana and Varela, 1980, *Autopoiesis and Cognition,* 80.

[16] Castoriadis, 2010, "Imaginary Significations", *A Society Adrift,* 56.

[17] Castoriadis, 1984, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain", *Disorder and Order,* 151-152.

[18] Castoriadis, ibid., 151-152.

[19] Castoriadis, 2010, "Imaginary Significations", *A Society Adrift,* 56.

These ‘rules, principles and laws’ become the ‘natural’ constraints and limitations within which the autonomy of a living being is enclosed, and this means that it can alter itself only within the parameters of arbitrary and pre-given conditions. It is on this point that Castoriadis insists that “the radical difference between the biological and the social-historical world is the emergence, in the latter, of autonomy—or of a new meaning of autonomy”.[20] The principle of closure is not considered to be a defining characteristic of autonomy in the social-historical domain because the laws that govern the mode of being of societies are self-originary and therefore are not arbitrary, which means that they are open to self-alteration. This new meaning of autonomy in the social-historical domain operates “not as *closure*, but as *openness*”.[21] This corresponds to what was discussed in chapter two, where it was shown that the institution of the social-historical world “creates a new type of order (unity, coherence and organised differentiation)”.[22]

Because the laws of a social-historical world are not ‘natural’, but self-originary, the constraints and limitations imposed by these laws are governed by conditions of self-determination—i.e. historical conditions—that are alterable by societies themselves. This is to say that societies subject themselves to an ongoing self-alteration of their established historical conditions, which, as addressed in the previous chapter, defines their fundamental mode of historicity. Social-historical worlds are therefore autonomous in the sense that they are self-instituted (i.e. constitute their own principles of closure) *and* self-altering (i.e. create new principles for this closure). They are engaged in a self-instituting modality that is de-functionalised from their ‘natural’ moorings, as opposed to living beings, societies merely ‘lean on’ natural laws. The principle of closure governing social-historical worlds are therefore specific to the laws instituted within a given context, and these laws “are always under the sway of social imaginary significations”, which are the self-originary source of a society’s autonomous closure.[23]

Further to this specific definition that Castoriadis adds to the conception of autonomy is the distinction between human autonomy as a general anthropological fact (i.e. the self-originary institution of the social-historical world) and the particular mode of institution that he would regard as being *autonomous*. On this point, societies are said to become autonomous when they recognise that “socially and historically created significations are neither contingent nor necessary”, but are

[20] Castoriadis, 1984, “The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain”, *Disorder and Order*, 159.
[21] Castoriadis, ibid., 160.
[22] Castoriadis, ibid., 155.
[23] Castoriadis, ibid., 153.

instead, as explained in chapter two: metanecessary and metacontingent.[24] This is to say that the significations of a social-historical context are contingent only upon their own self-origin, and therefore the self-institution of these significations is necessarily arbitrary. An autonomous mode of institution, according to Castoriadis, emerges in a context where it is understood "that these significations have no "absolute" source, that their source is our own meaning-creating activity".[25] The characterisation of social-historical autonomy put forward by Castoriadis could therefore be understood as follows: societies become autonomous because when they realise that their significations are indefinite, that their meanings are infinitely interpretable and contestable, and that this offers societies the capacity to institute themselves politically, in a way that opens up the potential for new significations to emerge and take their place within the broader institution of the world.

Heteronomous modes of institution, on the other hand, operate via a different relationship to closure. Castoriadis proposes that it is characterised by a version of autonomy closer to the one portrayed by Varela, with the crucial distinction being that it operates on the self-instituting basis of what I described as general anthropological autonomy. This means that heteronomy is conceived as an instituting mode whereby the institution of a society's laws remain arbitrary and unalterable, where a society has not been able to recognise itself as its own origin and foundation, "to see itself as creation, source of its institution, [or the] ever-present possibility of alteration of this institution; to recognise itself as always more and always also something other than what it is".[26] In fact, Castoriadis proposes that throughout human history this has been the normal mode of social-historical institution:

> In the overwhelming majority of cases, however, the creation of this institution is imputed to an extrasocial instance or authority, or in any case, it eludes the power and the activity of living human beings. It becomes immediately clear that, so long as this situation holds, it constitutes the best means of assuring perenniality, the intangibility, of the institution.[27]

It is important to understand that the heteronomous representation of a society's origin as 'extra-social' is designated in such a way that a society's 'self-image' is arbitrarily derived from the laws that constitute a broader 'world-image'. Heteronomous institution delegates the self-originary processes of society to an extra-social *representation* of the world, which grounds the origin of society in laws that are natural to the world within which societies are instituted—these laws are

[24] Castoriadis, "A Society Adrift", *A Society Adrift*, 214.
[25] Castoriadis, ibid., 214.
[26] Castoriadis, 1997, "Institution of Society and Religion", *World in Fragments*, 327.
[27] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary", *World in Fragments*, 85-86.

seen as extra-social because they are represented as such. This is what makes autonomous and heteronomous institution distinct in Castoriadis's eyes, because in the former, "as we know, the law is never really given by *someone else*, it is always the creation of the society".[28]

This means that heteronomous societies are grounded in representations of laws that are externalised from the communities within which they emerge (i.e. religious laws, ancestral laws, naturalised historical laws, etc.) and, in Castoriadis's view, these laws cannot be questioned from within the community because they are posited as a fundamental characteristic of the world. The point to emphasise here is that, even though Castoriadis remains faithful to his essential anthropological perspective that views social-historical institution as the self-originary creation of societies, his point is that this does not prevent societies from instituting themselves heteronomously. He goes so far as to argue that heteronomous modes of institution impose a form of authority whereby "principles, rules, laws, and significations are posited as given once and for all, as inviolable, unquestioned and unquestionable".[29] Further still, Castoriadis contends that this 'extra-social' authority has a non-questionable character, "guaranteed by instituted representations which in turn are part of the institution of society: all those representations ensuring that the source of the institution—its origin, foundation and guarantor—is non-social".[30]

The notion of an extra-social representation is expressed in Castoriadis's work under the guise of differing terms (i.e. extra-social, supra-social, pre-given). However, the underlying idea remains the same, which is to explain how the origin and foundation of the Law are instituted in a way that stipulates the source of its legitimacy as being beyond the instituting power of the collective. Heteronomous modes of historicity are seen to be caught in a dynamic of representational closure that delegates a self-instituting capacity to the authority of pre-determined institutions that maintain the legitimacy of extra-social representations as the true, originary foundation of a society's institution. Subsequently, the legitimacy of extra-social laws are placed beyond question, and it matters little whether such law is received from ancestors, gods, nature, or the Laws of History, etc.

However, as discussed in chapter two, Castoriadis overemphasised the ontological basis of this institutional closure; to the degree that he believed that questioning the legitimacy of the institution is literally 'unthinkable' in heteronomous contexts. The legitimacy of extra-social Law, as

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[28] Castoriadis, ibid., 85-86.
[29] Castoriadis, 2010, "Imaginary Significations", *A Society Adrift*, 57.
[30] Castoriadis, ibid., 57.

Castoriadis argues, is embedded in the psychosocial structures of individuals, "for whom the idea of challenging the Law is inconceivable".[31] Further still, heteronomy is seen to be as a quintessentially stable mode of historicity. Because such societies are caught in their own ontological closure, their institutions are merely interpreted and contested within the confines of their legitimacy. Processes of self-institution are depoliticised because they are seen to be grounded in a source that is unquestionably legitimate; such is the validity of heteronomous authority. Castoriadis want to make the point that, in turn, this means that 'new' and 'other' significations do not come into the fold of heteronomous societies in a way that questions the ultimate foundation of authority; this, it is argued, obviously gives heteronomous modes of institution a "fantastic potency in the service of the preservation, the conservation, of the institution"—I will come back to this discussion in the following section because it primarily concerns the role that instituting power plays within instituting processes.[32]

What makes societies autonomous, in Castoriadis's view, is therefore simply the capacity to bring into question the laws that are specific to the 'existing order' of societies. Societies become autonomous because they open up the possibility for individuals, who are the living embodiment of the significations that constitute a given society, to participate in the processes that shape institutions. The logic follows that questioning significations that are central to the foundation of the laws that constitute societies leads directly into the questioning of whether the institutions embodying these significations are legitimate;

> These societies call into question their own institution, their representation of the world, their social imaginary significations. This is, of course, what is entailed by the creation of democracy and philosophy, both of which break up the closure of the instituted society prevailing until then and open up a space where the activities of thinking and politics lead to putting again and again into question not only the given forms of the social institution and of the social representation of the world, but the possible ground for any such forms.[33]

Autonomy is therefore based on establishing the validity of an instituting power that lies at the foundation of institutions. Autonomy is the capacity to alter the validity of established authority, and to establish institutional conditions that 'open' processes of legitimation to political contestation. What Castoriadis did not explore in any depth is how this autonomous 'opening' is

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[31] Castoriadis, ibid., 57.

[32] Castoriadis, ibid., 57.

[33] Castoriadis, 1984, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Social-Historical Domain", *Disorder and Order*, 160.

always implicitly structured by established modes of instituting power, or 'regimes of historicity', that regulate processes of legitimation.

Historicity, as the general mode of social imaginary institution, should be understood as a creative temporality that rests upon an historical heritage; the question concerning instituting power therefore concerns the extent to which societies are defined (or determined) by such a heritage. As discussed so far, Castoriadis believed that when looking at the way societies define their instituting power a cardinal distinction had to be made between heteronomous societies and societies where—what he called—the 'project of autonomy' began to emerge. It is necessary, however, to look beyond the obvious distinction between heteronomous and autonomous modes of institution, and instead, interpret the specific ways that instituting power shapes the historicity of societies. The major theoretical flaw in Castoriadis's work is that he characterises heteronomy as an instituted social imaginary trapped within its ontological closure, reproducing its own history through differing articulations of the same set of significations.

As was argued in the previous two chapters, this closure is not purely ontologically determined but, rather, it is structured by a mode of instituting power that privileges dominant social imaginary perspectives. And it is on the basis of the question regarding historical heritage that Castoriadis regards the instituting and the instituted as distinct modalities, from which he construes his dichotomisation of autonomy and heteronomy as two unequivocally distinctive modes of historicity. It then becomes clear that as Castoriadis proceeded to develop his picture of historicity his insights into the processes of social-historical self-alteration became increasingly limited by his dichotomising these two differing modes of historicity. Such a dichotomisation proves insufficient to analyse the institutional dynamics of historicity, because they are not distinct modes of historicity, they should in fact be seen as tendencies that are complicit and operate more generally within alternative modes of historicity, constituted through contextual, and self-altering, regimes of instituting power. If one breaks out of this strict dichotomy, as I first suggested in the previous chapter, it is possible to advance Castoriadis's notion of *self-alteration* as a significant vision of autonomy. This also allows us to consider the emergence of autonomous creations while taking into account some of the more heteronomous dynamics that are involved within the institutional processes of historicity. In the following section I will therefore argue that these dynamics become apparent when one looks at the regulative role of power within institutional processes.

SELF-ALTERATION: A REGULATIVE MODE OF HISTORICITY

So far this thesis has attempted an exposition of Castoriadis's work, detailing its value and limits, and from here a new cluster of questions emerge that this thesis poses and with which it will attempt to grapple: how do we judge to what extent societies are defined (or determined) by historical heritage? What role does instituting power play in processes of self-alteration? And, further to this, how can answers to these questions be theorised in a way that relativises Castoriadis's dichotomisation of autonomous and heteronomous instituting tendencies, all the while extending the key insights that his theory of social-historical institution brings?
In my view, this is best accomplished by placing *self-alteration* at the focal point of analysing historicity, and to do so in a way that maintains Castoriadis's emphasis on the formative power (*vis formandi)* of the social imaginary. To make this perspective clear, it must be understood that it is the instituting power of the social imaginary that is the permeating structuring element of the social-historical world. And in order to establish this perspective, it must be made clear that the structuring forces of instituting power not only regulate the capacity to alter established institutions by (explicitly) bringing 'new' and 'other' forms of human existence into the fold of institution. Crucially, the capacity for instituting power to establish institutions (implicitly) also regulates and alters the emergence of 'new' and 'other' forms of creation. This perspective highlights the underlying theoretical argument of this thesis: historicity is a regulative instituting regime that involves an immanent mediation between the ontological fertility of *cultural creativity* and historically instituted *forces of power*. Self-alteration takes place within the myriad ways that these two elements overlap and intertwine.

In order to elaborate the notion of self-alteration it is necessary to incorporate the theme of historical heritage into the conception of instituting power, in a more detailed way than Castoriadis attempted. As was brought to light in the previous chapter, Castoriadis came to view cultural creativity as a relatively rare event, marked by 'pulsating processes', and autonomous institution is therefore only seen in "phases of dense, intense creation [that] alternate with lulls, sluggishness, or regression".[34] To my view, this occludes the persistence and variation of cultural creativity at play *in any given social-historical context*. Cultural creativity—as explained in the previous chapter—involves the activity of heterogenous social imaginary perspectives that shape the social imaginary. Historical heritage frames the temporal context of these heterogenous cultural sources. In a more abstract sense, this heritage can be seen as an established symbolic field that provides the instituting

[34] Castoriadis, 2007, "Imaginary and Imagination at the Crossroads", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 76.

temporality of societies with references to its (self-)origin. Indeed, as was touched upon in the previous section, the social imaginary institutes its instituting temporality through its own social imaginary significations, which is to say that it understands itself as instituting (or at least recognises the foundation of its institution) in the representations of itself in relation to its world. The instituting temporality of societies is therefore understood in relation to their historical heritage, and in this process they "always tends to cover over, to conceal and to deny temporality as otherness-alteration", or in other words, to deny that their self-alteration is 'other' than emerging from the context of their histories.[35] It is not particularly useful to take the position of Castoriadis linking this denial of 'otherness-alteration' to a denial of cultural creativity in general. It is one thing to invest in a political project that would be oriented around a radical autonomous instituting temporality, but this in itself denies a crucial political dimension to the institutional processes of self-alteration characteristic of all societies, even those Castoriadis deemed to be heteronomous. This political dimension involves an implicit and ongoing regulation of cultural creativity. I argue that the problem is not merely that cultural creativity is bound by the reception of an historical heritage but also, more importantly, that it is bound by an instituting power that possesses a regulative dimension, a regulative dimension that is most effective at the social imaginary level.

To return to the discussion begun in the previous chapter, Castoriadis introduced the notion that an '*infra-power*' is involved within instituting processes and this idea can be developed further in order to explain how this regulative dimension operates. The most immediate point to be made is that Castoriadis describes the notion of infra-power as the strongest force of instituting power because of its role in 'preforming' individuals in relation to established institutions. Castoriadis insists that the source of this preforming power comes from the established historical dimension, it is an *infra-power* that produces individuals in the image of established social institutions and therefore to also shape the cultural milieus in which they are a part.

In order to show how historical heritage is received and experienced as an instituting temporality it is worth highlighting how the infra-power of institutions fabricates individuals that will conform to social-historical norms. Castoriadis established the link between historical heritage and instituting temporality by proposing a psychoanalytic theory of socialisation that explains the role of social-historical meaning in processes of subject formation. This theory foregrounds the role that social imaginary significations play in shaping individuals in ways that are not explicitly coercive, but rather, in ways that form individuals in accordance with historical norms;

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[35] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 212.

> This explicit power, the one we speak of in general when we speak of power, which concerns the political sphere, in its essence rests not on coercion—there obviously always is coercion to some extent or other and, as we know, it can reach monstrous heights—but rather on the internalisation, by socially fabricated individuals, of the significations instituted by the society under consideration. It cannot rest on mere coercion… There must be a minimum adherence, be it by only a portion of the population, to the institutions already in place, or coercion loses its grip.[36]

To a large extent, socialisation is the process whereby individuals are produced and educated to conform to pre-existing institutions by their internalising the significations that give meaning to a social-historical world—a process that will be explored in the following chapter. And what's more, we are socialised into a world of instituted significations. Andreas Kalyvas paints a picture of this in broad strokes, when he writes that "individuals are produced through the radical ground-power [infra-power] of the instituting society, the identity of an individual is embedded in prior relations, engulfed in cultural, symbolic, and linguistic structures".[37]

In psychoanalytic terms, in becoming socialised, we let go of the psychic omnipotence of our ego and sublimate instituted social meaning in ways that allow us to function within social-historical contexts as they are specifically structured. As Stathis Gourgouris puts it particularly aptly, it is in this way that "the psyche receives the instituted significations that signify it as a subject in a given social-historical domain".[38] Individuals cathect the significations of society, but, it must also be added, that they do so in such a way as "never to be reducible to the overall instituted signification".[39] As Gourgouris puts it further, "subject-formation is never exhausted in a single instance but is inevitably an open-ended (re) iteration, a historical enactment". [40] As discussed in the first chapter, it is the radical imagination of the psyche that opens up the capacity for creative individuation in relation to the ground power of the institution, this is why the latter can never be wholly omnipotent over the subject.

An individual's relation to this ground power therefore involves a *creative relation* to the historical heritage that informs them and provides them with a temporal orientation. This creative relation to

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[36] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary", *World in Fragments*, 85.

[37] Andreas Kalyvas, 1998, "Norm and Critique in Castoriadis's Theory of Autonomy", *Constellations* Volume 5, No 2 (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford), 169.

[38] Stathis Gourgouris, 2010, "On Alteration", *Parrhesia* Issue 10 (Open Humanities Press), 9.

[39] Gourgouris, ibid., 9.

[40] Gourgouris, ibid., 9.

historical heritage opens up the capacity for autonomy and, as Castoriadis maintains, "makes it possible for the individual to escape the enslavement of repetition, to look back upon itself, to reflect on the reason for its thoughts and the motives of its acts, guided by the elucidation of its desire and aiming at the truth".[41] This is the case, not only with respect to the personal dimension, but, importantly, also the cultural one (an aspect I will turn to momentarily): subjectivity is therefore seen as a creative correspondence with an established social-historical world. Gourgouris interprets this in psychoanalytic terms, saying that;

> subject-formation is the limitless process by which the radical imagination of the psyche retains its capacity to make and unmake (to alter) the horizon of possibility of social imaginary institution by accepting (and acceding to) social-imaginary signification, by accepting (and acceding to) the specific social-historical content it then comes to recognize as its worldly existence.[42]

This, of course, is not limited to the situation of an individual subject, this creative relation is also experienced by the political community. The political community is formed on the basis of the heterogenous cultural sources that exist within a given social-historical context. The creative relation between the political community and its historical heritage shapes the temporal orientation of a society and informs their mode of historicity. This relation is the basis upon which heterogenous cultural articulations that exist within a given social-historical context face established forms of instituting power. The opposite can be said, when considering established forms of instituting power within a society, there is a creative relation between instituting power and the heterogenous sources of creativity. The latter aspect of this relation informs a mode of instituting power that regulates the creative capacity of cultural articulations to shape institutional conditions, and therefore the political community is hierarchised. Societies are always structured around the regulation of their cultural dimension, which explicitly and implicitly imposes a 'regime of historicity' that actively limits the capacities of a political community. In my view, however, this creative relation is always a source of autonomous subjectivity—even in those contexts that Castoriadis himself deemed to be institutionally closed (i.e. heteronomous).

It is through the cultural dimension of this creative relation to historical heritage that the political dimension of historicity becomes the focal point of self-alteration caught in the tension between cultural creativity and historically instituted forces of power. And, further to the point, this is the juncture at which the instituting temporality of the social imaginary should be seen in terms of

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41 Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 164. See also: Castoriadis, 1997, "The State of the Subject Today", *World in Fragments*.

42 Gourgouris, 2013, "Autonomy and Self-Alteration", *Creation, Rationality, Autonomy*, 262.

instituting power. Socialisation is a process through which instituting power at its most basic level regulates the psychic phantasm, At the level of the social imaginary the regulation enacted through instituting power is directed instead to the cultural dimension of subjective creativity.

Regulation is directed toward the capacities of cultural creativity to institute 'new' and 'other' forms of existence within a given social-historical context. It is significant that regulation, as Castoriadis began to intuit, is largely carried out *implicitly,* through the established infra-power of the social imaginary; with the explicit forms of coercion being only an extensive version of this regulative instituting power. This regulative power is directed toward shaping the ongoing processes of subject-formation, it therefore inherently involves implicit political techniques aimed at forming subjects in relation to established institutional conditions, as Gourgouris points out, this is made possible because subject formation "signifies the inaugural negotiation with power—indeed, with the power of the other, or with power as other, but also, inevitably, with power as altering (*othering*) force".[43] It is with reference to the subject's creative relation to instituting power that the temporal mode of regulation cannot be seen as pre-determining subjective responses to power, but rather this regulation must be regarded as an *autonomous determining power* that is established within two essential contexts of subject formation. On the one hand, regulation must reinforce dominant forms of instituting power by reproducing the symbolic structures of established institutions (i.e. regulative instituting power is based on established institutional conditions). On the other hand, regulation must also reinforce dominant forms of instituting power in relation to the generally 'anonymous' characteristic of indeterminate social imaginary creativity (i.e. regulation relies on establishing a normative dimension). Autonomy, ultimately, is the collective capacity to alter the institutional conditions of society, and it is from this perspective that autonomous modes of self-altering historicity must be grounded in pre-existing significations that constitute the material from which the social imaginary draws its creative capacities. The regulative dimension of instituting power anchors autonomous self-alteration within a specific regime of historicity. And, yet, the formation of an autonomous regime, as described by Castoriadis, "operates implicitly, is intended as such by no one, is realized through the pursuit of an undetermined number of particular ends".[44] Autonomy involves the capacity to participate in collective modes of instituting power that is brought about on the basis of pre-established historical creation, and it is generally 'anonymous' because this power is not something that can be made historically effective by a singular individual or cultural milieu.

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[43] Gourgouris, ibid., 256.

[44] Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 363.

In this respect, I want to emphasise a crucial aspect of self-alteration whose implications were not thoroughly explored by Castoriadis: *it is the historical force of society* ***as already instituted*** *that is, in fact, its most powerful instituting force*. This involves a temporal argument that highlights historicity as a mode of social reproduction. Castoriadis points toward this idea in his conception of the social imaginary as a creative instituting mode of historicity. However, by emphasising the creative instituting modality of radical social transformation, he neglected to explore the creative instituting modality of *implicit* historical transformation—the obvious reason for this emphasis being that Castoriadis was focused on countering the determinism of traditional Western philosophical thought, while attempting to salvage the revolutionary project that he had inherited from his engagement with Marxism. This project places emphasis on an insurrectionary politics based on what was considered to be the radical emancipatory potential of social production. For Castoriadis, the creative dimension of the social imaginary is the source of insurrectionary politics, however, I want to stress that it is also the most significant aspect of social reproduction. This aspect of the instituting imaginary can be easily extrapolated from Castoriadis's work on the instituting mode of historicity, take this passage, for example;

> The present, to be sure, always transforms the past into a *present past*, that is, a past relevant for the now, if only by continually 'reinterpreting' it by means of that which is being created, thought, posited *now*; but it is always *that given past*, not a past in general, that the present shapes according to its own imaginary.[45]

The complex situation Castoriadis faced in defining institutional *ground power* as a social imaginary instituting power comes with recognising that with social-historical institution, there is "always, and to an unmeasurable degree, also recovery of the given", and therefore his problematic remained focused on an insurgence of the *radical* capacities of autonomy in the context of a social imaginary that he saw as always 'burdened' with historical inheritance.[46] In fact, if anything, further theoretical development of how established institutional contexts are implicitly maintained and creatively reproduced is perhaps more useful in serving the capacities of an insurgent imaginary (particularly for the development of any kind of insurrectionary politics). The point to be emphasised, in this regard, is that the instituting force of historical heritage is more often than not experienced as anything but a burden on societies and it is, in fact, the most important creative source for political activity (regardless of the intention behind the politics).

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[45] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 170.
[46] Castoriadis, ibid., 150.

In fact, Castoriadis is rather ambiguous on the issue of historical inheritance (i.e. continuity) because he simultaneously recognises the principle of closure as a necessary instituting tendency that ensures the self-preservation of societies. It is this principle that can be seen to be the underlying tendency of a reproductive instituting power that is oriented toward regulative modes of historicity. Why is such an instituting power necessary? And why does Castoriadis propose that it belongs "among the ultrarare instances of social-historical universals"? There are four points why he thinks so, and they all relate to the idea that every society must maintain itself, preserve itself and defend itself:

> A society is constantly being challenged, first of all, by the world in its very unfolding, the infra-world as it exists before being constructed by society. It is menaced by itself, by its own imaginary, which can rise up and challenge the institution as it already exists. It is also threatened by individual transgressions, a result of the fact that at the core of each human being is to be found a singular psyche, irreducible and indomitable. Also and above all, each society is immersed in a temporal dimension which itself cannot be mastered, a time-to-come that is to-be-made and to-be-done, in relation to which there are not only enormous uncertainties but also decisions to be taken.[47]

What I want to stress about instituting power, is as follows: in all of these instances, instituting power is established in relation to *internalised* threats to institutional coherence, or you could even say, threats to historical continuity, which emerge from cultural creativity within a given social-historical context; coercion, therefore, must be seen to constitute a mode of social-historical regulation that explicitly engages with forms of cultural creativity that *implicitly constitute such threats* to the cohesion of established institutions, or put another way, self-alteration involves implicit instituting processes that confront *established forms of explicit power that are oriented toward the regulation of historicity*. In contemporary societies, contrary to Castoriadis's notion of heteronomy, the regulation of implicit forms of instituting power should be seen as one of the significant features that constitute autonomous regimes of historicity. In fact, it is because instituting power regulates the creative alteration of societies for the purpose of maintaining the cohesion of dominant perspectives that impressions—such as Castoriadis's—arise which view contemporary experiences of alienation accompanying depoliticised modes of institution as being heteronomous. This is a crucial point that will be addressed in the following chapter.

[47] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary", *World in Fragments*, 84.

INSTITUTIONAL CHOICE: VALIDITY AND THE HIERARCHISATION OF DOMINANT SOCIAL IMAGINARY PERSPECTIVES

So far, this chapter has established that the cohesion of social-historical contexts are maintained through the instituting power of *dominant social imaginary perspectives*. This alludes to a deeper level of autonomous institution that regulates the capacities for alternate forms of cultural creativity to articulate themselves within broader social institutions. It must be understood that the regulation imposed by dominant social imaginary perspectives is not determined by the historical inheritance of a pre-determined ontological scaffolding—as Castoriadis would propose for heteronomous societies. Rather, the political dimension of autonomy emerges as a space of cultural contestation between differing interpretations of historical heritage. Autonomy therefore emerges as a creative relation between the creative temporality of culture and the historical heritage of a given context. This section will discuss how autonomy emerges in a way that harbours implicit and explicit tendencies of instituting power that structure social-historical institution. The innovative feature of Castoriadis's conception of instituting power can be described as follows: because instituting power is grounded in the social imaginary it does not simply embody the symbolism that structures institutions, but it also accounts for the collective 'choice' of the symbolism that shapes a given society. Instituting power is therefore seen to be established at two levels, because its collective legitimacy is validated through the affirmation of institutions that form the institutional context of heterogenous cultural perspectives.

As I discussed in chapter two, this 'choice' is not to be understood as intentional in any way that would attribute some kind of subjectivity to the collective dimension of the social imaginary, in fact quite the opposite is the case: this 'choice' represents the collectively anonymous constitution of social imaginary contexts. Institutional choice is reflected in the 'overall' form of social-historical institution, which is the result of the collective articulation of the matrix of significations that constitute and hierarchise institutional form: "it is only relative to these significations that we can understand the 'choice' of symbolism made by every society, and in particular the choice of its institutional symbolism".[48] In light of this notion of institutional choice, I want to pick up on a question that Castoriadis poses as central to social-historical autonomy:

> Can I say that I posit my own law when I am living, necessarily, under the law of society? Yes, if and only if I can say, reflectively and lucidly, that this law is also mine. To be able to

[48] Castoriadis 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 146.

> say this, I need not approve of it; it is sufficient that I have had the effective possibility of participating actively in the formation and the implementation of the law.[49]

I want to alter this question to reflect my concern for issues of instituting power in the context of the autonomous capacities opened up by cultural creativity, by asking: how can we account for those experiences of society, where, as autonomous subjects, we respond: 'I participate in the creation of a law that is *not* mine'? In responding to this question in this section, I want to highlight how institutional 'choice' in autonomous contexts involves *an implicit dimension of instituting power that serves as a structuring element for the capacity of dominant social imaginary perspectives to enact regulative explicit power*.

The social imaginary is constituted *culturologically*—as discussed in chapter two—which means that the autonomous capacities inherent to cultural creativity are based on pre-established patterns and interpretations of the world (which I referred to as *the symbolic dimension of societies*). It is worth reiterating the discussion in chapter two where I outlined how the world (as it is culturally articulated, as a social imaginary) is framed in relation to two points: first and foremost, the world is a totalising context or shared horizon that should be viewed as an open-ended social-historical context, and secondly, the cultural articulation of social-historical context is open to conflicting interpretations and therefore the 'overall' form of institutional choice is shaped anonymously. This means that institutional choice is consistently being shaped through an instituting power that is based on a 'shared' and 'interpretive' world horizon. This is a type of openness that is culturally articulated through the reproduction of social meaning or the expression of alternate forms of social-historical existence. The common social imaginary is therefore the context in which instituting power is, articulated collectively, that is to say *culturally:*

> We cannot conceive such a [cultural] creation as the work of one or of a few individuals who might be designated by name, but only as that of the collective-anonymous imaginary, of the instituting imaginary, to which, in this regard, we shall give the name *instituting power*. Such a power can never be rendered fully explicit.[50]

It is on this point that the idea that human societies have an autonomous capacity for cultural creativity offers an answer to the question, 'what brings about other and new forms of society'? The complementary question posed by Castoriadis, 'what holds societies together?', remains to be defined in detail and this is where it is important to understand the role of instituting power. In fact, Castoriadis did not go far enough towards developing the implications of instituting power in

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[49] Castoriadis, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*; 167.

[50] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary", *World in Fragments*, 84.

autonomous contexts for the reason that is compromise his radical vision of autonomy. The key is to examine how multiple cultural articulations of the world contribute to the 'totalising' context of the social imaginary, and to analyse which are the dominant social imaginary perspectives involved in shaping and altering the institutional form of these contexts.

This instituting power of the social imaginary owes its existence to the fact that the culturological dimension is not defined by established institutional formations. As I have already said, the formative power of the social imaginary comes from the fact that its historical heritage is merely *a resource* for new forms of social-historical existence. The social imaginary, on the one hand, is responsible for the "emergence of *other* types, *other* relations, *other* norms", which bring *new significations* into the fold of society and, in turn, alter the institution of a society.[51] This is the site of cultural creativity. While, on the other hand, the social imaginary simultaneously also produces hierarchical forms of instituting power. It is essential to grasp this latter point to understand the autonomous modes of institutional regulation. The hierarchisation of institutions emerges on the basis of explicit instituting power being harnessed by dominant social imaginary perspectives, this power is then wielded in ways that regulate the *implicit* cultural articulations of the social-historical world. An important aspect of what constitutes an autonomous mode of historicity, however, is that the culturological dimension of instituting power can never be made fully explicit, which is to say that the formation of explicit instituting power involves largely implicit processes because instituting power remains in large part hidden within the anonymous depths of the social imaginary.[52]

Forms of creativity emerging from specific cultural milieus within given social-historical contexts must challenge the institutional validation of dominant social imaginary perspectives that constitute the broader instituting power of such a context. By virtue of emerging from the context of established institutions, cultural creativity must therefore also bear a relation to the broader institutional 'choice' imposed by the instituting power structuring the social-historical domain. Castoriadis defines this choice as being "carried by a system of imaginary significations that value or devalue, structure and hierarchise an intersecting ensemble of object and corresponding lacks; and it is here that one can read, more easily than anywhere else, what is just as uncertain as it is incontestable—the *orientation* of a society".[53] This understanding of instituting power as an

[51] Castoriadis, 1993, "Institution of Society and Religion", 24.
[52] Castoriadis, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary", *World in Fragments*, 84-85.
[53] Castoriadis, 1987, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 150.

institutional ‘orientation’ can lead into a descriptive analysis of contemporary societies. Processes of hierarchisation between differing cultural articulations of the social-historical world can be understood in the context of which perspectives contribute to the validation of institutions that maintain dominant modes of instituting power. Key to this perspective is the need to view the ‘orientation’ of a society primarily through the question of knowing what significations are validated within a given social-historical context. It must be understood that processes of validation essentially boil down to perspectives that become dominant within the culturally contested but shared domain of the social imaginary. More specifically, it must also be understood that between particular interpretations of the significations structuring a social-historical context certain interpretations attain greater instituting power. In order to explore these processes of validation more closely in the final two chapters, it must be shown here that this validity is defined and sedimented in a way that leans on already established institutions, which are *implicitly* legitimised or delegitimized.

In Castoriadis’s social theory, the orientation of societies is framed by their institutional ‘choice’ and this is shaped both explicitly and *implicitly* by the instituting power of the social imaginary. This instituting power is taken in a largely positive way by Castoriadis to express how instituting power attenuates the temporal creativity of historicity and, more specifically, in the way that opens up the autonomous capacities of social-historical institution, without exposing the capacities for this autonomous capacities to engage in processes of regulation that produce dynamics of marginalisation that depoliticise the claims of certain social imaginary perspectives over others. The institutional choice of the social imaginary is seen to create society “afresh in each instance” by drawing on its symbolic foundations.[54] The important thing to be noted is that while the symbolic dimension constitutes the basis of historical continuity, *it is also a resource* for the establishment of a regulative framework through which the creative capacities of the social imaginary to *alter* institutions is oriented toward the maintenance of established institutions.[55] As has been argued in this chapter, instituting power is largely oriented toward the regulation institutional ‘choice’ in ways that regulate threats to the continuity of dominant social imaginary perspectives; discussed in the previous section in relation to the self-preservation of institutional coherence.

This tendency is envisaged by Castoriadis as an *explicit* instituting power that is distinct from the historical ‘ground’ power of the institution. The apparently slippery and ungraspable feature of the

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[54] Castoriadis, 1997, “Primal Institution of Society and Second-Order Institutions”, *Figures of the Thinkable*, 100.

[55] It should be noted, on this point, that Castoriadis always insisted that history is the creation and destruction of ontological form.

ground power of the social imaginary reflects the fact that the orientation of this collective anonymous power "is neither locatable nor formalisable" in static *instituted* form.[56] Rather, as Castoriadis proposes, the fact that creative capacities of instituting power operate "implicitly, is intended as such by no one, is realized through the pursuit of an undetermined number of particular ends".[57] The fact that Castoriadis frames the orientation of society as operating through an 'undetermined number of particular ends', due to the political dimension of cultural contestation, shows that he relates instituting power to a collective formation of the social imaginary, an anonymous totality, which constitutes a society's mode of historicity.

His point is that in order for *explicit power* to be effectively wielded in an attempt to regulate this modality, its power must be to some extent rooted within this anonymous institutional ground power that is legitimated from what he refers to as "*la communauté des fidèles*".[58] It is important to note that Castoriadis's discussion of *explicit power* therefore rests on the fact that the 'effective validity' of social institutions is grounded in these anonymous (totalising) social-historical processes of legitimation. Castoriadis is making the point that institutions are not validated through processes of formal State-sanctioned legitimacy. Rather this validation reflects deeper processes of legitimation that have their source in the ground power of the social imaginary. Institutional 'choice' is reinforced through an implicit infra-power, and therefore the validity of social institution is articulated at the level of the social imaginary.

Here the dichotomy of instituted society and instituting society rears its head again, as Castoriadis distinguishes between two respective forms of institutional validity: *de facto validity* (instituted infra-power) and *de jure validity* (instituting explicit power); *De facto validity* ultimately reflects the collective acceptance of historical-ontological forms, significations, institutions, etc., that are *instituted* as an inherent quality of the social-historical world; such a validity is established through an implicit instituting power. *De jure validity*, on the other hand, refers to the *explicit power* that can be collectively wielded through social institution; these forms of validation are said to appear 'universally', in one form or another, as judicial and governmental powers.[59]

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[56] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 168. Castoriadis uses the example of language, which is not restrained by any intentional forms of power, and whose alterations are potentially open to all who speak. He points to other 'activities that are beyond the scope of legislation'; i.e. family, mores, 'art', 'ideas'. See also: Castoriadis, 1984, "The Sayable and the Unsayable", *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*.

[57] Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 363.

[58] Castoriadis, 2002, *Sujet et vérité dans le monde social-historique*, 388.

[59] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 155.

De jure validity concerns the contested legitimacy of institutions. This is to say that social-historical norms are validated through competing capacities to wield an explicit instituting power that is intent on shaping the *de facto validity* that grounds institutions. In this way, *de jure* validity opens up the reflexive capacity to propose differing interpretations of the significations which constitute collective articulations of the social-historical world. Castoriadis frames this capacity as an autonomous reflexivity, which arises when "we raise the question of the *de jure* validity of this rule [i.e. of the *de facto* validity of instituted law]. We ask ourselves: what *ought we* to think of this rule and *what ought we to make of it*?[60] *De jure* validity therefore constitutes a self-altering mode of legitimacy that is structured around the hierarchisation of dominant social imaginary perspectives. What's more, this hierarchisation relies on the capacity to alter the grounding of *de facto* validity in a way that attempts to reinforce established institutional forms. And, further still, this reflexive dynamic opens up a contested political space through which the radical instituting capacity of the social imaginary emerges in such a way as to re-orient the institutional tendencies toward closure in 'new' and 'other' (implicit) directions.

Instituting power therefore establishes a framework of legitimacy, which in turn alters the emergence of cultural creativity in relation to already established institutional form. This involves an implicit alteration that occurs both *laterally*, through encounters with 'novelty' and 'multiplicity' from within and without given social-historical contexts, and *temporally*, such as with the various historical narratives that justify the structuring of social hierarchies.

In this formulation, the *de facto validity* of social-historical institution is reinforced through the establishment of a space through which cultural creativity can be regulated, as space through which instituting power can explicitly shape the *de jure validity* of institutions. Castoriadis connects the establishment of political space to the emergence of autonomous politics in general:

> This amounts to saying that through politics thus conceived man puts into question, and might possibly alter, his mode of being and his being qua social man. The social-historical is therefore also the site where the question of the *de jure validity* of institutions, and therefore also of people's *behaviours*, arises.[61]

It is in this sense that autonomy is conceived by Castoriadis as a political project where the space for such openness is ensured by the established institutional conditions of power. This idea constitutes the topic of the following chapter. And it is in this formulation of institutional validation that Castoriadis sets a clear definition of the political dimension of social institution as the exercise

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[60] Castoriadis, 1997, "Done and to be Done", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 388-389.

[61] Castoriadis, 1997, "Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics", 112.

of *explicit power* through "instances capable of formulating explicitly sanctionable injunctions".[62] It is through these injunctions that dominant social imaginary perspectives are able to form the grounds upon which the social-historical field is regulated, for the purpose of maintaining the stability of established forms of society.

Here it is useful to bring in a comment made by Johann Arnason that supports this interpretation of social-historical regulation, where he suggests that "the centres and mechanisms of explicit power are used to determine or change the instituted patterns of ground power".[63] I want to emphasise that the injunctions wielded through explicit forms of instituting power are aimed at altering the autonomous capacities of specific expressions of cultural creativity, or, in other words, they are aimed at the *regulation* of the cultural creativity that exists implicitly within any given social-historical context.[64] I contend that the major point to be developed in Castoriadis's thought is the fact that instituting power, even in the most autonomous institutional contexts, remains oriented toward managing the self-alteration of social-historical form. Instituting power is therefore always oriented toward the reinforcement of dominant social imaginary perspectives that consolidate the validity of established institutions.

There is, however, an underlying blind spot in Castoriadis's work that neglects to incorporate the experience of cultural multiplicity within given social-historical contexts and which leads him to homogenise the instituting capacities of the social imaginary in relation to a singular context ('the overall institution of society'). His analysis becomes homogenised because he focuses his discussion of instituting power toward a totalising perspective, that of the anonymous dimension of the social imaginary, without attempting to theorise the constitution of a social-historical context that comprises a *differentiation* of cultural experiences existing in relation to the totalising force of instituting power. In other words, he does not theorise the fact that a social-historical context harbours *multiple social imaginaries* and that each social imaginary perspective is replete with an historical complex that constitutes a *specific* relation to the totality of the social imaginary domain. In this sense, he is not able to develop, for example, a theoretical perspective on colonial or migrant experiences of a social-historical context, or link the marginalisation of cultural creativity to an autonomous wielding of instituting power. I argue that hierarchical structures emerge in the social

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62 Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 156.

63 Arnason, 2014, "The Religio-Political Nexus: Historical and Comparative Reflections", *Religion and Politics: European and Global Perspectives*, 20.

64 Calvin Warren has described this experience of regulative instituting power in the context of blackness in the United States. See: Calvin L. Warren, 2018, *Ontological Terror: Blackness, Nihilism and Emancipation* (Duke University Press, Durham).

imaginary domain in ways that produce the capacity for dominant social imaginary perspectives to regulate cultural multiplicity through processes of institutional legitimation. This blind spot in Castoriadis's conception of the social imaginary leaves significant gaps in his criticisms of contemporary societies.

DEPOLITICISATION WHERE IMPLICIT POWER REIGNS

Throughout his theoretical development of autonomy Castoriadis neglects to elucidate the implicit dimensions of instituting power. Due to the fact that he overemphasises the radical instituting capacities of the social imaginary he leaves significant blind spots regarding tendencies within such autonomous instituting capacities that lead to societies constituting themselves on the basis of hierarchical relations. In this chapter I have identified these tendencies constitute the regulation of cultural creativity, which is undertaken on the basis of a hierarchical structuring of power that validates dominant social imaginary perspectives. Castoriadis does, however, point to some important qualifications for conceptualising the limits of explicit instituting power. Namely, that historicity is shaped by anonymous conditions that can only *attempt* to regulate cultural creativity, and the fact that dominant social imaginary perspectives can therefore only maintain their instituting capacity through processes of legitimation. For Castoriadis, hierarchical domination can never fully enclose the social-historical domain, as instituting power is always partial. Historicity can never be mastered but, as I have emphasised in this chapter, radical instituting capacities are also restricted by the historical heritage of given social-historical contexts, to a greater or lesser extent:

> the possibility for a society to establish another relationship between the instituting and instituted is confined within bounds, which are at once indisputable and undefinable, by the anonymous constitution of the social imaginary. But this tells us nothing about what we ought to will as the effective institution of the society in which we live.[65]

This is to say that institutional contexts are not bound *ontologically*, and that the capacity to propose 'new' and 'other' forms of cultural creativity always emerge as an expression of the specific experiences of the social-historical world. Autonomy, as it has been described in this chapter, is therefore explicitly political in the sense that it concerns not only the political capacity to be culturally creative, but also for a political space that is open for these capacities to contest established forms of institution. This space has been shown to emerge through the *de jure* validation

[65] Castoriadis, 1991, "Power, Politics, Autonomy", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 171.

of institutions; and in the following chapter this idea will be developed in the context of democratic institution. However, the crucial point put forward in this chapter is that this space emerges in a way that is oriented toward the self-alteration of the *de facto* institutional field of power.

The important contribution of Castoriadis's work on this issue can be found in the fact that within his conception of social-historical autonomy, he affirms that the dominance of specific social imaginary structures is never concretely determined by established institutional form. In this regard, it is significant that the 'fundamental' ground power of societies is defined as an *instituting power* of the *social imaginary*, because it is in this sense that the social-historical field is subject to a collectively anonymous self-alteration of instituted historical limits and of the constraints that define a social-historical world. This is why I prefer to shift the definition of historicity from the idea of a tension between instituted and instituting poles, toward the question of regulation, the regulation of cultural creativity by institutional power. This is not to say that the regulation of cultural creativity is implemented in strictly anonymous ways, in fact when it comes to the wielding of explicit power, quite the opposite is true. This can be explained by the fact that the structuring capacities of dominant social imaginary perspectives can in fact be seen to consolidate hierarchical regimes of historicity. This will be the theme of the following chapter.

To summarise, the central argument presented by Castoriadis's work shows that what spurs autonomous modes of historicity is an essentially political capacity to reflexively interrogate established forms of instituting power. His argument suggests that with autonomous modes of historicity there exists a collective imperative to reflexively question the underlying validity of established institutions. I argue that he did not take his insights that crucial step further, which would have involved showing how autonomous instituting activity also, and to a large extent, involves a reflexive mode of self-alteration that is oriented toward maintaining dominant forms of instituting power. By developing Castoriadis's theorisation of autonomous historicity toward an account of hierarchisation, this chapter proposes that in order to analyse the political situation of contemporary liberal-democratic societies it is necessary to take into account the implicit instituting processes that are engaged in shaping the *de facto* validity of institutions. This chapter has also argued that within institutional processes there is a strong tendency for dominant social imaginary perspectives to occupy the political processes through which cultural contestation participates in the *de jure* validation of established instituting power; this is an issue that will also be explored in the following chapter. The argument that will be explored in the final chapter is that the occupation of political processes by dominant forms of social imaginary perspectives has introduced strong depoliticising tendencies into contemporary modes of institution. Depoliticisation must then be

analysed as a shift from ‘partially’ open democratic modes of instituting power toward a mode of autonomous historicity that increasingly invalidates non-dominant social imaginary perspectives. This is an altogether different conclusion than that drawn by Castoriadis, who considered depoliticisation to be a manifestation of heteronomy, therefore emphasising autonomy as its opposite (defined purely on the basis of it radical emancipatory attributes). Again, here, Castoriadis’s Marxist heritage finds an echo. In my view, societies that are engaged in autonomous instituting activity are always engaged in a fiercely implicit tension between the maintenance of established institutional power and the emergent political capacities that threaten to alter a given institutional context.

CHAPTER 5

LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC REGIMES: THE INSTITUTIONAL CONDITIONS OF DEPOLITICISATION

One of the most important insights in Castoriadis's work is that historicity is maintained through political regimes that must necessarily institute the conditions of their mode of instituting power.[1] He is talking specifically about the institution of *explicit* forms of power, namely the legislative, judicial and governmental forms. The particular mode of instituting power that is instituted defines the form of the political regime. Political regimes in the modern period structure instituting power according to modes of autonomous self-institution and these modes have taken a variety of forms concerning the organisation of society and its institutions. In the modern period political regimes can be characterised on the basis of a shift away from the institutional structures of 'pre-modern' instituting power—by which symbolic forms of political authority are validated through extra-social forms of sovereign power (as discussed in chapter two)—and are instead validated by 'modern' forms of symbolic political authority that are based on the 'collective will of the people', which is, in turn, defined through 'open' and 'autonomous' processes of legitimation. This is not to assume that the 'collective will of the people' is the universal ground of all autonomous modes of self-institution, but rather, it means that this term represents a symbolic form of power that defines the 'democratic' characteristic of modern political regimes. Democracy is conceived by Castoriadis as a political regime that facilitates the reflexive self-alteration of its institutional conditions in a way that is devoid of any fixed representations of authority that would determine a society's mode of historicity.

> [Democracy] implies the rejection of all 'authority' that would fail to render an account and provide reasons, that would not offer *de jure* justifications for the validity of its pronouncements. It follows from this, almost immediately, that there is: an obligation on the part of all to give an account of and reasons for their deeds and their words (this is what the Greeks called *logon didonai*); a rejection of preestablished 'differences' or 'alterities' (hierarchies) in individuals' respective positions, therefore a questioning of all power

[1] It has been argued by Christophe Premat that Castoriadis adopts the notion of a political regime from Aristotle's categorical description of monarchies, oligarchies, democracies, aristocracies, tyrannies and republics. See: *Christophe Premat, "Castoriadis and the Modern Political Imaginary: Oligarchy, Representation, Democracy", Critical Horizons* Vol. 7 Issue 1 (Taylor & Francis, UK), 253.

> flowing therefrom; an opening up of the question of what are the good (or best) institutions, insofar as these institutions depend on the conscious and explicit activity of the collectivity—therefore also an opening up of the question of justice.[2]

As discussed in the previous chapter, the autonomous mode of modern 'democratic' political regimes can be seen as being relatively 'open' to self-alteration by the community. The alteration of these societies is 'open' in the sense that their self-institution is based on political contestation within the constituent political community, and this contestation is formalised through processes of political legitimation which validate the institutional structure of power.

Political contestation can be seen as the basis of this democratic opening of modern instituting power to the 'collective will of the people' because sovereign power is no longer based on an arbitrary form of rule that dominates the cultural domain. The cultural dimension of societies has become autonomous because the terms of sovereign power are now open to a political contestation that defines the symbolic content of the 'collective will of the people', as was discussed in the previous chapter. It is this political contestation in the cultural domain that opens-up the capacity for heterogenous cultural perspectives to shape and alter the structures of instituting power in modern political regimes. Gerard Rosich and Peter Wagner provide a clear explanation of the 'democratic' conditions of sovereignty that are common within modern political regimes: "the collectivity [has] to be sufficiently closed and separate from others to master its own fate, on the one hand; and it [has] to be able to substantively determine its fate through internal communication, deliberation and decision, on the other".[3] The most significant aspect of modern political regimes is that these 'democratic' conditions became structured in the form of the State. Castoriadis, however, defines 'democracy' in a way that is clearly directed against the dominant form of modern political regimes, namely the State form: "there can be, there has been, and we hope there again will be societies without a State, namely, without a hierarchically organised bureaucratic apparatus separate from society and dominating it".[4] The State is the overwhelmingly dominant form of political regime in the modern period. The State regulates social conditions in a way that both limits and permits the capacity to alter these conditions within societies, all the while maintaining a form of political stability that reinforces dominant social imaginary perspectives.[5] In Castoriadis's view, the

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[2] Cornelius Castoriadis, 1997, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime", *Constellations* Vol. 4 Issue 1 (Blackwell Publishers, Oxford), 4.

[3] Gerard Rosich and Peter Wagner, 2016, "Re-Interpreting Democracy for Our Time", in Gerard Rosich and Peter Wagner (eds.), 2016, *The Trouble with Democracy: Political Modernity in the 21st Century* (Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh), 2-3.

[4] Castoriadis, Castoriadis, 1997, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime", 1.

[5] There are strong parallels to be made between Castoriadis's conception of the bureaucratic State form and Louis

'modern' State is an apparatus that governs regimes of historicity in ways that have "led to the institution, implicit and explicit, of arrangements that, although they have not succeeded in effectively achieving autonomy and self-government, have nonetheless made these societies open societies, in which active contestation from within remains possible".[6] This chapter will analyse one of the more prominent political regimes of historicity in the modern period, the liberal-democratic regime, in order to understand one of the most pervasive experiences of power within these regimes: depoliticisation.

It will be shown in this chapter that depoliticisation is a structural component of liberal-democratic regimes because the 'liberal' characteristic of these regimes paradoxically provides the institutional conditions for an oligarchical structuring of instituting power. In fact, Castoriadis characterises these regimes as *liberal oligarchies*: "oligarchies because they are dominated by a specific stratum of people, liberal because that stratum consents a number of negative or defensive liberties to citizens".[7] It is the State form of these regimes that structures oligarchical conditions in a way that simultaneously stabilises 'democratic' modes of self-alteration, institutes hierarchical processes of political legitimation, and reproduces dominant forms of instituting power that depoliticise 'open' political contestation. This may seem paradoxical, however, as Chantal Mouffe has pointed out, these regimes are constituted on the basis of a 'democratic paradox':

> We are dealing with a new political form of society whose specificity comes from the articulation between two different traditions. On one side we have the liberal tradition constituted by the rule of law, the defence of human rights and the respect of individual liberty; on the other the democratic tradition whose main ideas are those of equality, identity between governing and governed and popular sovereignty. There is no necessary relation between those two distinct traditions but only a contingent historical articulation… Let's not forget that, while we tend today to take the link between liberalism and democracy for granted, their union, far from being a smooth process, was the result of bitter struggles"[8].

This chapter will show how the 'democratic' characteristics of instituting power (i.e. the 'equalisation of conditions') have become instituted on the basis of a distinctly liberal interpretation

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Althusser's conception of the ideological State apparatus, both view the State as a repressive apparatus. Although their analyses differ; where Althusser was concerned with an emancipation of broader capacities of structural reproduction, instead, Castoriadis focused on emancipatory potential of social imaginary creativity. The notion of 'dominant social imaginary perspectives' is evoked as middle ground between their conceptions of the hierarchical stabilisation of the State form. See: Louis Althusser, 1971, "Ideology and Ideological State Apparatuses", in *Lenin and Philosophy and Other Essays*, trans. Ben Brewster (New Left Books, London).

6 Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 127.

7 Castoriadis, ibid., 126.

8 Chantal Mouffe, 2000, *The Democratic Paradox* (Verso Press, New York). 2-3.

of sovereign power (i.e. the 'collective will of the people'). Rosich and Wagner reflect on the institutional conditions that have arisen as a result of this 'democratic paradox' to suggest that in general terms, but also increasingly within contemporary forms of liberal-democratic regimes, "the commitments to freedom and democracy are highly ambiguous and volatile, that they constitute a field of tensions that, in conceptual terms, is devoid of any inclinations towards stability".[9] What's more, it will be seen that a central aim of the State form through which these regimes are structured is to stabilise institutional conditions on the basis of *depoliticisation.*

The contemporary political issues arising from the depoliticised conditions of liberal-democratic regimes will be seen to reflect what Castoriadis identifies as the potentially tragic circumstances of 'democratic' sovereign power, which hinges on the question: "where does that power end? What are its limits? Obviously, that power must stop somewhere; it must have limits".[10] Further to this, Castoriadis proposes that "when a society no longer accepts any transcendental norm, or even any inherited norm, *nothing*, intrinsically, can set the limits at which this power must stop".[11] The answers provided by liberal-democratic regimes to the limits of their self-limitation have fallen short of promoting their 'democratic' characteristics. In fact, this chapter will argue that the oligarchical conditions of these regimes have become the basis for a gradual shift to 'authoritarian' modes of instituting power. This chapter will draw on the central themes of Castoriadis's work that have been developed throughout the thesis in order to offer a theoretical perspective on how depoliticisation is in fact a constituent feature of liberal-democratic regimes and a characteristic of their regulative mode of historicity. The criticism of Castoriadis's dichotomous conceptualisation of historicity will be extended to offer a specific understanding of the depoliticised political conditions of liberal-democratic regimes: that depoliticisation is an consequence of the implicit forms of instituting power that play a constitutive role within democratic regimes, which ultimately reflects a regulative mode of historicity that reinforces dominant social imaginary perspectives. Depoliticisation is a characteristic feature of the autonomous regulation of the heterogenous cultural creativity that constitutes the broader field of political contestation. Overall, depoliticisation is a condition of the established instituting power of liberal-democratic regimes.

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9 Gerard Rosich and Peter Wagner, 2016, "Re-Interpreting Democracy for Our Time", *The Trouble with Democracy: Political Modernity in the 21st Century*, 1. See also: Johann P. Arnason, 1991, 'Modernity as Project and as Field of Tensions', in Axel Honneth and Hans Joas (eds.), *Communicative Action: Essays on Jürgen Habermas's The Theory of Communicative Action* (MIT Press, Cambridge).

10 Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 122.

11 Castoriadis, ibid., 122.

MODERN POLITICAL REGIMES: POLITICAL AUTHORITY AND THE STATE FORM

Modern political regimes are informed by a social imaginary that harbour various interpretations of the autonomous instituting power that shapes them. In each case the central political question of modern political regimes remains the same: how should this autonomous instituting power establish the institutional conditions that shape specific societies? This is a question that fundamentally concerns how political authority is legitimated by 'the collective will of the people', which has emerged as the symbolic foundational principle of political authority within a democratic imaginary. This principle contends that political authority is granted to a 'collective will' that permits the political community to govern itself in the form of 'the people'. In order for the 'collective will' to be legitimated in the name of 'the people' modern political regimes must institute conditions of equality, which Castoriadis defines as "the equal possibility—effective, not just on paper—for everyone to participate in power".[12] This is an 'equality' that aims to include within the 'participation in power' all of the heterogenous cultural perspectives that constitute a political community. There have been a range of responses to this question of how to establish the institutional conditions of 'equality' based on the 'collective will of the people', and the most dominant manifestations of these include republicanism, socialism, totalitarianism,[13] and liberalism. However, it is the liberal form of the democratic imaginary that has acquired a dominant influence in the formation of contemporary political regimes (most particularly within Western contexts). As mentioned in the previous chapter, Castoriadis recognises the emergence of the democratic imaginary in medieval Europe, however, he also recognises that this did not manifest the social and political conditions that reflect his own interpretation of a democratic regime, rather, "almost as soon as they were born, the new [medieval] towns evolved toward oligarchic forms".[14] In fact, it is the oligarchical form of instituting power that strongly characterises the formation of modern political regimes; and this oligarchical form is what best characterises the liberal-democratic State form. Castoriadis, however, fails to provide an in-depth account of how instituting power structures the oligarchical characteristics that now prevail in modern political regimes. This

12 Castoriadis, Ibid., 124.

13 It may seem counter-intuitive to situate totalitarian regimes in the context of modern regimes that aim toward conditions of equality that are amenable to a mode of instituting power that validates 'the collective will of the people'. However, in a bizarre twist of fate, totalitarianism can be viewed as a political regime that emerges from the democratic imaginary. Claude Lefort's definition of totalitarian regimes is instructive on this point, because in his view the distinction between society and the State are collapsed. Therefore, political conditions of society are equalised and the State form itself encompasses the 'the collective will of the people'. See: Claude Lefort, 1986, "The Logic of Totalitarianism", in *The Political Forms of Modern Society: Bureaucracy, Democracy, Totalitarianism*, John B. Thompson (ed.), (MIT Press, Cambridge).

14 Cornelius Castoriadis, 2003, "Complexity, Magmas, History: The Example of the Medieval Town", *The Rising Tide of Insignificancy* (Not Bored!, http://www.notbored.org/RTI.pdf), 378.

point connects to a central argument in this thesis that considers how this failure relates to his incessant desire for modern Western societies to realise the radical potential of a democratic regime. The main issue that has been shown to plague his theoretical work is that this desire led him to pursue a problematic dichotomisation between two distinct modes of historicity, between the heteronomous characteristics displayed by every society that has existed in human history and the two autonomous exceptions where true democratic potential has emerged (modern Western societies and a brief historical moment in ancient Athens). This theoretical position—as pointed out throughout this thesis—bears a significant relation to his Marxist heritage, and it can be said to have limited the insights of his theoretical work. The failure to develop a theoretical account of the social, historical and political dimensions of modern oligarchical power leads to a substantial oversight in his analysis of modern political regimes. This section will attempt to correct this oversight by looking at how the democratic imaginary frames a specific mode of instituting power that constitutes the distinct State form of liberal-democratic regimes. This will provide a more nuanced understanding of how the democratic imaginary has contributed to the oligarchical characteristic of these regimes, which then makes it possible to provide a more insightful account of the depoliticising tendencies of contemporary political regimes.

Castoriadis suggests that in modern democratic regimes, "the attempt to found [the] sovereignty of the people on something other than itself" persists, for instance, in a forms of political authority that are grounded in 'natural law', universal Reason, or the rational legitimation of historical laws.[15] In these instances, the political community delegates authority to a symbolic framework of sovereignty that establishes the conditions of equality; and, at this point of the discussion, it is important to highlight that the 'collective will of the people' is the symbolic framework of liberal-democratic sovereignty. Castoriadis maintains his dichotomous framework of historical analysis to argue that there is a residual persistence of heteronomous modes of institution in the modern articulations of equality. In Castoriadis's view, there is a tendency for 'equality' to be interpreted as the equalisation of conditions *under* a universalised form of sovereign authority (i.e. natural or historical laws, rational legitimation, etc.). In his own words,

> discussions on equality as well as those on freedom have been mortgaged to an anthropological ontology, to a metaphysics of the human being which makes of this human being—of this singular example of the species *homo sapiens*—an *individual substance*, an individual of divine right, of natural law, of rational law.[16]

15 Castoriadis, 1997, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary", *World in Fragments*, 93.

16 Castoriadis, 1991, "The Nature and Value of Equality", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 127.

The conditions of equality are therefore subsumed under foundational forms of political authority. In Western contexts the shift from religious to modern equality can be interpreted through the prism of secular political authority, which signals the emergence of a democratic imaginary whose sovereign principle became 'the collective will of the people'. This principle implies a kind of monism that Castoriadis regards as one that potentially threatens to revert modern societies back into their previously heteronomous mode of institution. In modern political regimes it is the sovereignty of 'the people' that symbolically sanctions legitimate authority, and it is on the basis of this sovereignty that equality is articulated in a way that reflects dominant accounts of the 'collective will'.

In order to provide an in-depth account of how instituting power structures the oligarchical characteristics that now prevail in modern political regimes it is important to relativise Castoriadis's dichotomous interpretation of modern (autonomous) and pre-modern (heteronomous) modes of institution. This is not to discount the radical historical transformations that characterise the novelty of modern political regimes, nor to downplay the enhanced capacities for heterogenous cultural perspectives within a given social-historical context to participate in political power. What is important to stress is the fact that the emergence of modern sovereign power involved a range of metacontextual processes of symbolic alteration that have maintained forms of historical continuity within the new frameworks of political authority.[17] In the case of the transition from the pre-modern to modern political regimes, the emergence of a 'democratic' imaginary can be seen as co-extensive with a renewal of traditions that were engaged in radical social and political interpretations of power within religious culture. As Marcel Gauchet has aptly shown, in Western contexts it is the political culture of Christianity (as 'the religion of the end of religion'[18]) that initially conferred their autonomous characteristics upon modern societies. This can be seen most visibly in the transition from religious sovereign authority to secularised forms of political authority. This transition can only be understood in terms of a transformation of the instituting power that shaped the institutional conditions of these social-historical contexts and involved a shift in social imaginary perspectives from one dominant framework of legitimation to another. The

[17] The notion of metacontextual processes of institution was discussed in chapter two, where it is argued that there is a distinction between cultural creativity that takes shape within the social imaginary and the symbolic form of instituted power, a distinction which Castoriadis does not take fully into account. For an example of Castoriadis's insistence on maintaining a dichotomous perspective that emphasises radical historical discontinuity, see: Paul Ricoeur and Cornelius Castoriadis, 2017, "Dialogue on History and the Social Imaginary", trans. Scott Davidson, in *Ricoeur and Castoriadis: On Human Creation, Historical Novelty, and the Social Imaginary*, ed. Suzi Adams (Rowman and Littlefield, Lanham).

[18] See: Marcel Gauchet, 1999, *The Disenchantment of the World: A Political History of Religion*, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton University Press).

emergence of modern political regimes was associated with metacontextual processes that altered the symbolic ground of political authority. This emerging mode of historicity—like the emergence of any other—involved patterns of historical continuity that incorporated a creative and interpretive temporality that leaned on instituted symbolic form to articulate the new social-historical conditions of the present. These shifts were therefore closely aligned with forms of instituting power that contested and altered the institutional conditions of social life. They can only be understood with respect to the meta-contextual processes of symbolic transition that articulated new foundations for political authority and formed the basis of new regimes of historicity. The recognition of the role played by historical continuity in these transitional periods should be central to the analysis of implicit forms instituting power. Because such an approach sheds light on forms of implicit power that limit and regulate how the emergence of new dominant social imaginary perspectives reflect the transition into a new mode of instituting power, from one framework to another.

This challenges Castoriadis's purely heteronomous interpretation of religious political regimes. For example he proposed that Christianity "is concerned only with equality before God, not social or political equality", that " in its proper historical practice, Christianity almost always has accepted and justified terrestrial inequalities".[19] His point is mute: in modern political regimes inequality is similarly accepted and justified but in the name of autonomous (terrestrial) foundations of equality. The issue in modern political regimes is the fact that inequality is a constitutive feature of dominant forms of instituting power, and that it is symbolically legitimated by 'the collective will of the people' through *majoritarian rule*; this point will be explored further in the following section. The important point to emphasise now is that there is no weight to the dichotomous comparison between heteronomous and autonomous modes of institution. It does not offer a way to provide an in-depth analysis of liberal-democratic regimes.

Andreas Kalyvas argues that liberal-democratic regimes are framed around a dominant consensus that modern sovereignty is grounded in the form of the State; which he explains across five essential points.[20] Firstly, that political authority reconfigures and reproduces the regal paradigm of power, which instates a vertical structure of sovereignty that reproduces a pre-democratic mode of instituting power.[21] Secondly, the reproduction of a regal mode of power presupposes a shift from

[19] Castoriadis, 1991, "The Nature and Value of Equality", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 128.

[20] Andreas Kalyvas, 2016, "Rethinking 'Modern' Democracy: Political Modernity and Constituent Power", in *The Trouble with Democracy*, 50-52.

[21] This quality can be likened to a modern version of Ernst Kantorowicz's theory of 'the King's two bodies', which portrays the structure of medieval Christian sovereignty. In this account the political authority of the monarch is not so much legitimated by their 'physical' body, but by their symbolic 'spiritual' body whose proximity to 'divine law'

the monarchical form of political representation (monarch/divine law) to a State form. This is reinforced by what Kalyvas identifies as a belief that "democracy in its modern manifestation exists only in and through the centralised and hierarchical form of the State".[22] Thirdly, that the form of 'democracy' established by the State is instituted on the basis of liberal interpretations of the 'collective will'. This has promoted a doctrine of constitutionalism intent on limiting the power of government through the legislation of separate powers, which aims at constraining the excessive capacities of majoritarian rule that may pose direct threats to individuals and minorities. His fourth point is that the political theology of sovereignty becomes a political theology of democracy, in the sense that the transcendental power of 'divine law' is translated into the transcendental power of 'the collective will of the people'. And finally, the liberal-democratic States must be seen in the broader geopolitical context of 'European imperial expansion, transnational market and colonialism', which is the context through which power came to be structured and reproduced. These points establish a dominant narrative of modern sovereignty that Kalyvas describes as 'postmonarchical', in the sense that liberal-democratic States did "not necessarily eliminate the absolutist discourse of sovereignty as command but replace one supreme commander with another".[23] The postmonarchical mode of political authority, even in the form of 'the collective will of the people', tends to reduce modern democracy to the formal proceduralism of the State form.

Kalyvas argues that this dominant perspective of sovereign power does not, however, provide the full picture of modern democratic regimes. Instead, he proposes to redefine political modernity as "a series of struggles between two distinct ontologies of power and forms of sovereignty, irreducible and external to each other, the democratic and the monarchical, which have always ended with the victory of the latter over the former".[24] His argument proposes that there are in fact two competing conceptions of sovereign power that inform the historicity of modern democratic regimes, and that what is not present in this dominant narrative of modern sovereignty is the role that *constituent power* (as 'the power of the Many to constitute over the power of One to

validates their transcendent claim to sovereign rule. See: Ernst Kantorowicz, 2016, *The King's Two Bodies: A Study in Medieval Theology* (Princeton University Press, Princeton). Claude Lefort develops this notion further and used it to theorise a permanent theological-political dimension that underlies the institution of political authority. See: Claude Lefort, 2006, "The Permanence of the Theologico-Political?", in *Political Theologies: Public Religions in a Post-Secular World*, Hent de Vries & Lawrence E. Sullivan (eds.) (Fordham University Press, New York).

[22] Kalyvas, 2016, "Rethinking 'Modern' Democracy: Political Modernity and Constituent Power", *The Trouble with Democracy*, 51.

[23] Andreas Kalyvas, 2018, "Constituent Power", in *Political Concepts: A Critical Lexicon*, Jay M. Bernstein, Adi Ophir, Ann L. Stoler (eds.) (Fordham University Press, New York), 89.

[24] Kalyvas, "Rethinking 'Modern' Democracy: Political Modernity and Constituent Power", *The Trouble with Democracy*, 52.

command'[25]) plays in maintaining their autonomous modes of historicity. The definition of constituent power put forward by Kalyvas "evokes the principle of liberty as political autonomy, whereby the members of a collectivity constitute the political forms of authority in order to organize and institutionalize their common free life".[26] The recipients of the law become its authors and legitimisers. Constituent power is therefore a popular form of modern sovereignty that affirms "the basic democratic value of self-government"[27]. In his view, the autonomous capacities of constituent power are consistently depoliticised in modern societies by the dominant mode of 'postmonarchical' sovereign power that finds its most prevalent manifestation in the liberal-democratic State form. It can be argued that Kalyvas internalises Castoriadis's dichotomisation of historicity and recasts this as a struggle between 'constitutional and absolutist' or 'federalist and statist' interpretations of political authority. It must be said that Kalyvas offers, therefore, a more concise conception of modern democratic regimes than Castoriadis, particularly in the way that he theorises modern political regimes as the outcome of a co-constitutive tension between heteronomous and autonomous institutional tendencies that exist *within* the modern democratic imaginary. This co-constitutive account of modern political regimes provides an indication of the 'democratic paradox' suggesting that the foundation of political authority needs to be grounded (represented) through the institution of plural and contestable values. The point that is made by both Kalyvas and Castoriadis is that the State form mediates the institutional manifestation of the sovereignty of 'the people'. Through its mediating role the liberal-democratic State can be seen to regulate the instituting power of 'the people'. Rather than facilitating institutional conditions that open up the capacity for heterogenous cultural perspectives to question and alter the values that constitute the 'collective will' of the political community, the State governs 'collective will' in order to establish institutional conditions of 'equality' based on 'democratic processes' that produce social hierarchies and form oligarchical structures. The contemporary political issues in liberal-democratic regimes can therefore be seen to reside in the fact that, because they are essentially autonomous regimes, no clear lines are drawn between postmonarchical and constituent modes of power. Contemporary modes of instituting power reinforce established institutional agendas (of the *oligoi*—we are here talking mainly about the structural conditions of capitalism) and regulate any threats to the implementation of these agendas. These threats are seen to be essentially cultural, because they emerge from interpretations of the symbolic framework of instituting power in the

[25] Kalyvas, 2018, "Constituent Power", *Political Concepts*, 90.
[26] Kalyvas, ibid., 87.
[27] Kalyvas, ibid., 87.

form of social imaginary perspectives that differ from those that have attained institutional dominance.

As was discussed in the previous chapter, the perceived threats to the constitutive integrity of dominant social imaginary perspectives initiate both explicit and implicit strategies of self-preservation. They are perceived as threats to the historical continuity of established forms of power. It was also shown in the previous chapter that Castoriadis understood these threats to be among "the ultrarare instances of social-historical universals", because the creative instituting temporality of the social imaginary is consistently informing and challenging established forms of instituted power.[28] Kalyvas shows that in the context of the liberal-democratic State, this social imaginary creativity amounts to what he has called the 'revolutionary excess of constituent power'. He proposes that the liberal-democratic interpretation of this creative excess carries a double meaning that relate to the strategies of self-preservation. On the one hand, "it reveals the conditional and authorized existence of all constituted powers", which places constraints and limitations on the duty of obedience that is required of a citizen.[29] On the other hand, "it argues for an extraconstitutional check on the constituted authorities", with certain constraints established in order to maintain the rule of law and limit the dangers posed by arbitrary forms of majority rule.[30] Both of these perspectives on constituent power will be analysed in the following section as they constitute the institutional conditions of equality imposed by the liberal-democratic State. It will be shown that depoliticisation is a constitutive feature of the profess through which this modern political regime interprets the democratic imaginary. It is the self-preserving tendency of instituting power contained within the State form that leads Castoriadis to highlight the "essentially negative, defensive character, that lead us to call Western political regimes liberal oligarchies, and the societies that sustain them, *relatively* open societies".[31] The idea that oligarchies are sustained through 'relatively' open regimes resonates with Kalyvas's notion that there is a strong 'postmonarchical' streak within liberal-democratic modes of instituting power. The liberal-democratic State form sets up a framework for power to be consolidated through dominant social imaginary perspectives that set an agenda for the negative demarcations of freedom and equality. It will be shown, in the final section of this chapter, that liberal-democratic regimes implicitly institute conditions of inequality that structure the social hierarchies that are regulated by State institutions.

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[28] Castoriadis, 1997, The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary, 84.
[29] Kalyvas, 2018, "Constituent Power", *Political Concepts*, 97.
[30] Kalyvas, ibid., 97.
[31] Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 128 (emphasis added).

The force of the depoliticising tendencies of contemporary modern societies is a direct consequence of the ceaseless regulation of social imaginary creativity that characterises liberal-democratic regimes. The conditions of this regulation are instituted for the purpose of reinforcing the dominance of established institutional conditions. In no way, however, can liberal-democratic modes of instituting power be considered as heteronomous; this is because the exercise of this power is given authority by a 'collective will' and legitimised through the constitutional power delegated by 'the people'. The capacity to participate in power is open and accessible to those who reinforce dominant social imaginary perspectives and are able to orient instituting power toward their own agenda. What Kalyvas's analysis reveals about the modern 'nature' of instituting power—in a way that is more precise than Castoriadis—is the fact that, despite this oligarchical form, there is still an underlying democratic imaginary that fuels political attempts to harness the capacities of modern constituent power. The impetus of this modern democratic imaginary, however, is not simply a desire to institute autonomous conditions for politics to take place, but to alter the established institutional conditions of social life that reorient instituting power. It is important to be aware of the fact that the role of the democratic imaginary is not benign in that it would simply lead to the equalisation of conditions within a given social-historical context, Rather, it merely opens up the capacity for heterogenous cultural perspectives to participate in processes of political contestation that shape institutions. The fact that inequality is produced under the guise of 'the collective will of the people' comes as no surprise to those who experience marginalisation and exclusion within regimes that claim to be based on democratic political processes. To a larger or lesser degree the production of inequality through 'democratic' political processes has been the prevailing tendency of modern liberal-democratic regimes. In order to reach an understanding of the conditions underlining the contemporary transition of liberal-democratic regimes toward a new mode of instituting power, it is now necessary to shift the discussion from the role of dominant modes of political authority to the question of knowing how liberal-democratic States have enhanced the institutional conditions of depoliticisation.

LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC REGIMES: OLIGARCHICAL HIERARCHY AND DEPOLITICISATION

Now that it is understood that modern democratic regimes are stabilised by their adherence to forms of political authority that are defined by 'the collective will of the people', a more specific question needs to be asked: how do liberal-democratic modes of legitimisation reinforce oligarchical political conditions? This section will discuss Castoriadis's interpretation of the oligarchical conditions of

liberal-democratic regimes and the ideological role that liberalism plays in establishing these conditions. It will be shown that the delegation of sovereignty to representative-procedural forms of instituting power essentially depoliticises and alienates the heterogenous sources of constituent power. This will lead to an explanation of how the institutional conditions of equality come to serve as the basis for implicit modes of regulation within these regimes; the implications of this within contemporary political regimes will be explored in the following section. What this explanation of the oligarchical structure of liberal-democratic regimes will show is that depoliticisation is an inherent feature of the institutional condition of these regimes.

Castoriadis develops a theoretical analysis of the political experience of social life in order to understand how societies are governed.[32] This framework establishes a topographical schema of social life (which he defines using ancient Greek references), which includes: the 'private sphere' (*oikos*), *public* 'private sphere' (*agora*), and the *public* 'public sphere' (*ekklēsia*).[33] He claims that these are 'universally valid' spheres of human activity that "the overall institution of society must both separate and articulate".[34] The important point to be highlighted is that Castoriadis considers each sphere in relation to the way instituting power structures the conditions of social life. Each sphere corresponds to his typology of instituting power, outlined in chapter three, whereby the private sphere is the domain of the 'infra-power' of instituted meaning and the public/public sphere relates to the 'explicit power' of instituted regimes. In making these distinctions, Castoriadis's intention was to distinguish between the ways instituting power is structured in democratic and non-democratic political regimes. His dichotomisation of regimes of historicity returns, yet again, in his belief that: "these spheres are clearly distinguished (and properly articulated) only under a democratic regime".[35] I have dealt at length with the necessity of relativising this dichotomy. [36]

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[32] There is a second framework through which Castoriadis analyses the structuring of instituting power. This framework distinguishes between three institutional techniques of political power: these are the domains of legislative (nomos), juridical (*dike*) and governance (*telos*). However, due to limitations of this thesis only the technique of governance will be analysed in some detail.

[33] Castoriadis, 1997, "Done and to be Done", *The Castoriadis Reader*, 405. It is worth noting that Castoriadis's theorisation of relation between the public sphere and politics has parallels to Hannah Arendt's work, particularly in the way that they both draw inspiration from ancient Greek notions of political space. See: Ingerid Straume, 2012, "A common world? Arendt, Castoriadis and Political Creation", *European Journal of Social Theory* Vol. 15 Issue 3 (Sage, Thousand Oaks), 367-383.

[34] Castoriadis, 1997, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime", 7.

[35] Castoriadis, ibid., 7.

[36] The idea that there is a 'proper' articulation of the social spheres of human activity signals a fundamental eurocentrism underlying Castoriadis's dichotomization of autonomous and heteronomous modes of historicity; particularly, his complement of a democratic regime as a 'truly' autonomous mode of institution. The implications of Castoriadis's eurocentrism can't be explored within the confines of this thesis. I will restrain myself to one comment on the issue, which is to point out that Castoriadis denies the radical ontological perspective of his theoretical work on social-historical institution that implies openly creative and plural capacities for human societies to institute social space within the world as they define it. Surpassing Castoriadis's eurocentrism is paramount to

What is central to the argument of this thesis is that Castoriadis does not develop the implications of the existence of an 'implicit instituting power' that would correspond to the private/public sphere, and this means that he neglects to factor in a significant portion of political activity that actually shapes social imaginary perspectives and contributes to the alteration of social-historical institutions.

None the less, it is instructive to consider how Castoriadis assesses the way that these social spheres are governed by differing political regimes. This entails an analytical perspective on how these social spheres are governed in relation to the way differing regimes articulate the parameters of their instituting power. It is through this lens that Castoriadis distinguished between different types of political regimes; and, further to this, how it will be possible in the next section to articulate the role of implicit instituting power in contemporary liberal-democratic regimes. In Castoriadis's view, the central distinction that allegedly distinguishes the democratic regime from all others is the fact that it can be defined as the moment when "the public/public sphere—which in other regimes is more or less *private*—becomes truly public".[37] The 'true' democratic regime is then required to institute the conditions for what he considers to be the 'proper' articulation of these spheres, which can be summarised as follows:

A private sphere (*oikos*) that concerns 'strictly private matters', which is conceived as an apolitical space in the sense that it is a sphere of private social activity that is not explicitly governed (trivially speaking, where it would be agreeable that the decision to brush your teeth is not explicitly governed). This is where the infra-power of institutions shapes social activity in a reflexive sense.[38] What is clear, however, is that regimes articulate differently the parameters defining the private status of social life, and by extension the limits of political power in relation private concerns; for instance, the extent to which family matters are deemed private, or similarly the extent to which social activities should be a public concern of instituting power.

This grey area *between the private and the public sphere* refers to the domain of cultural activity that Castoriadis characterises as the *agora* (the private/public sphere). It is unfortunate that he seems to characterise this sphere as some kind of 'marketplace of ideas', which reflects in many

addressing his theory of social-historical institution to political questions that relate to contexts of colonialism, globalisation and multiculturalism. It can be suggested that the multinaturalist anthropology developed by Eduardo Viveiros de Castro offers pathways beyond the limits of Castoriadis's theoretical approach. See: Eduardo Viveiros de Castro, 2014, *Cannibal Metaphysics*, trans. Peter Skafish (ed.), Univocal Press, Boston

[37] Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 125.

[38] The political implications of rendering the private sphere apolitical is clearly insensitive to the political work of the feminist movement, which is clearly among the strongest dimensions of the modern autonomous imaginary and one of the most effective capacities for radical social-historical alteration in contemporary liberal-democratic regimes. For one of the more influential responses to this issue, see: Federici, Silvia. 1975. Wages against housework. London: Power of Women Collective.

ways the liberal interpretation of social life that is focused on individual activity. This is a sphere where, as he says, he would "talk with other people, buy books, or do other things", this is a space that is public and at the same time private because "no political decision (be it legislative, governmental, or judicial) can be made there. The collectivity, by its legislation, simply guarantees freedom within this space".[39] This sphere remains otherwise unarticulated by Castoriadis, and the implications of this is that he fails to develop an extensive understanding of the political dimension of this sphere of social activity. Specifically, it is this sphere that not only shapes the parameters of explicit instituting power but also implicitly regulates and alters established institutions at the social imaginary level; this will be explained further in the following sections.

For now, it must be understood that Castoriadis equates the democratic regime with the institution of *a 'truly' public sphere* (*ekklēsia*). There are two main features that constitute the public sphere: on the one hand the *ekklēsia* is the sphere of explicit (i.e. legislative, governmental, or judicial) power, which is wielded through the established institutions such as "the 'government' and the courts"; on the other hand, the 'truly' democratic feature of the *ekklēsia* is that it is the sphere through which politics emerges as an activity of the 'public assembly' to *deliberate* and *decide* on 'common' matters, and where the decisions of 'the people' (*demos*) are "sanctioned by the public power of the collectivity".[40] It is the latter feature of the public sphere that Castoriadis argues is unique to the democratic regime; evident in his definition of democracy as "a regime in which the public sphere becomes truly and effectively public—belongs to everyone, is effectively open to participation of all".[41] The distinction between democratic and non-democratic regimes therefore hinges on the institution of *equal* conditions, where "equality means the equal possibility—effective, not just on paper—for *everyone to participate in power*".[42]

The capacity for 'everyone to participate in power' is obviously not a feature of liberal-democratic regimes. In fact, as Castoriadis observed, these regimes are 'pseudo-democracies' that have "rendered the public sphere in large part private: the decisions that really count are those made in secret or behind the scenes (of the government, the parliamentary system, and the party apparatuses)".[43] Castoriadis maintained that the most significant feature of liberal-democratic regimes is the fact that 'deliberation' and 'political decision-making', which are the principal activities of politics, are privatised. The public sphere is structured upon conditions that can be

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[39] Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 124.

[40] Castoriadis, ibid., 124-125.

[41] Castoriadis, 1997, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime", 7.

[42] Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 124 (emphasis added).

[43] Castoriadis, 1997, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime", 7.

better characterised in relation to oligarchical political regimes; "it is in the hands of the political oligarchy", in which liberal democracy bears a close relation to totalitarian regimes that subsume the public sphere (the political domain, in general) into the 'the party apparatus' (i.e. the State).[44] The oligarchical character of liberal-democratic regimes reflect the distinction within modern sovereignty, discussed in the previous section, between the 'postmonarchical' and 'constituent' modes of power that constitute the State form. The remainder of this section will discuss in specific detail how both of these modes of power constitute the oligarchical conditions of liberal-democratic regimes, which will serve to explain how depoliticisation has become a core feature of these regimes. Firstly, it will be discussed how 'postmonarchical' power achieves its 'democratic' credentials through the mechanism of political representation that leads to a procedural-bureaucratic structuring of instituting power. And, secondly, it will be shown how the State apparatus is shaped by a liberal ideology that establishes political power on the basis of an 'equalisation of conditions', which, in reality, establish oligarchical conditions; these are the conditions that distinguish liberal-democratic regimes from totalitarian ones, and gives them what Castoriadis defined as their 'pseudo-democratic' character.

Political representation in liberal-democratic regimes is the mechanism that centralises and hierarchises the political authority of the State. The legitimacy to govern the public sphere in the name of 'the people' is delegated to the political authority of the 'postmonarchical' mode of modern sovereign power. The representative model of politics within liberal-democratic regimes is legitimised on the basis that the sovereign power of 'the people' is delegated to the State. The delegation of sovereign power to State authority is administered through processes that *interpret* the 'collective will' and *structure* the institutional conditions in accordance with this 'will'; this essentially means that liberal-democratic regimes "make of democracy a mere set of 'procedures' that govern the public sphere (i.e. 'deliberates' and 'makes decisions').[45] This means that the 'collective will' is procedurally administered by the institutions of the State. The State is, therefore, given a 'mandate' to establish the institutional conditions of social life, and this mandate is a symbolic representation of the sovereign power of 'the people'. Castoriadis proposes that the electoral system at the heart of the model of representative politics delivers an 'irrevocable and long-term' mandate that produces an *institutional mechanism* for the 'irreversible' delegation of sovereignty to the procedural-bureaucratic State apparatus; "the outcome being that they themselves

44 Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 125.

45 Castoriadis, 1997, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime", 1.

determine the parameters and the themes of their 're-election'".[46] Castoriadis observes the symbolic nature of this mechanism in a way that highlights the 'postmonarchical' constitution of the 'collective will';

> "These 'elections' themselves are an impressive resurrection of the Mystery of the Eucharist and the true Presence. Every four or five years… the collective will melts, turns liquid, and is collected drop by drop in sacred/profane vases called ballot boxes, and in the evening, following several other operations, that liquid, condensed one hundred thousand times, is poured into the henceforth transubstantiated minds of several hundred elected officials".[47]

This rather cynical account of 'postmonarchical' legitimacy highlights how the symbolic delegation of sovereignty to the State apparatus has established purely procedural conditions under which the 'collective will' (i.e. constituent power) is *sacralised* via institutional mechanisms whose mandate becomes legitimised by the 'parameters and themes' set by those who reinforce particular interests through their 'participation in power'. Political representation channels participation in power into a procedural mechanism of legitimation that consolidates and reproduces dominant claims to authority. It can therefore be said that "the alienated sovereignty of those who delegate to the delegates" is fed back to 'the people' on the terms that are imposed by the oligarchical structure of majoritarian rule.[48] I would argue that *these formal procedures of majoritarian rule initiate the structural conditions of depoliticisation*. This phenomenon can be regarded as an implication of the 'postmonarchical' modes of social hierarchisation whereby the public sphere becomes increasingly inaccessible to the constituency from which the representative mandate acquires its symbolic legitimacy.

The representative model of politics instituted by liberal-democratic regimes therefore does not escape Castoriadis's critical assessment of the State form in general, which, according to him, sets up a 'hierarchically organised bureaucratic apparatus that is separate from society and that dominates it'. The formal procedures of liberal-democratic regimes, however, can be seen to open channels for constituent power to contest established institutions simultaneously. This liberal form of constituent power is aimed toward the liberation of the 'collective will', liberation in this sense means to allow the substantive values that exist within the collective to shape institutions in ways that represent the interests claimed by the constituency. Liberal interpretations of the 'collective will' aim to ensure that institutional conditions promote liberty in the social spheres, most

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[46] Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 128-129.
[47] Castoriadis, ibid., 129.
[48] Castoriadis, ibid., 129.

particularly regarding the freedom to express individual and specific cultural values within the private sphere of social life. It is pertinent to liberal-democratic regimes that these rights and liberties reflect the popular mandate conferred to legislative and judicial procedural powers and that these rights are 'enshrined in law' (as would be said in the postmonarchical lexicon); because this is the basis of the legitimacy of these regimes. The constituent power of the 'collective will' is contained within procedural channels of legitimation. Liberal-democratic regimes are based on a mode of legitimatisation that establish oligarchical conditions by 'sacralising' dominant social imaginary perspectives. In her discussion of the modern State, Natalie Doyle sheds light on the modern incarnation of 'sacral' power, which highlights how heterogenous sources of constituent power emerge from, both, mutual and antagonistic relationships with 'postmonarchical' sovereignty;

> "The sacred is essentially a cultural representation but with empirical consequences: it underpins the hierarchical relationships that structure human societies. The sacred simultaneously produces both social unity and social antagonisms but as a result of its constraining logic, antagonisms always remain contained by the definition of unity/identity on which the possibility of differentiation originally depends. There can be no antagonisms without unity, the two being mediated by social differentiation. In other words, the sacred produces difference and conflict at the same time as it produces unity".[49]

The State form can therefore be shown to produce an institutional mechanism that deals with social contestation within *open* liberal-democratic regimes by promoting cultural participation in those perspectives that are dominant, because these are the perspectives that privilege access to power, whilst perspectives that do not coincide with dominant interests are subject to implicit and, sometimes, explicit forms of regulation. It will be shown in the following section that the structural features of depoliticisation endemic to liberal-democratic regimes have become a catalyst for tendencies that are leading toward the *delegitimisation* of these regimes in contemporary societies. The reason for this is that the 'enshrinement' of liberal freedom to express either individual or cultural values outside of the private sphere—which is to say in both the public sphere (i.e. the exercise of explicit power) and the sphere of the *agora* (which relates to the sphere of *implicit power* shaping the public sphere)—encounters starkly different institutional conditions. In these spheres the procedural mechanisms of the liberal-democratic State intervene to promote a negative interpretation of liberal freedom that draws on the structural features of depoliticisation and intensifies the regulative dimension of its delegated authority.

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[49] Natalie J. Doyle, 2006, "The Sacred, Social Creativity and the State", *Critical Horizons* Vol. 7, Taylor & Francis, UK, 224.

The mandate of sovereign power that is delegated to the State to govern on behalf of 'the people' has begun to shift from majoritarian representations of the 'collective will' toward liberal-authoritarian modes of institution. This latter mode of institution is based on intensified forms of liberal regulation, where perceived threats against the 'collective will' are increasingly interpreted on the basis of perceived threats to established forms of instituting power. This shift is occurring because the liberal-democratic mandate of State sovereignty is becoming delegitimised. These States are no longer considered capable of representing the 'collective will' through procedural-bureaucratic mechanisms that are fundamentally based on oligarchical conditions. These oligarchical conditions provide a context for the procedural mechanisms of the State to institute social hierarchies and set the institutional conditions of 'equality'; this, in turn, provides a framework for the definition and distribution of rights and liberties that promote dominant social imaginary perspectives. This is why Castoriadis claims that the public sphere has in reality become privatised, because acceptance into the political community is defined and legitimated by the established forms of instituted power. The heterogenous sources of social imaginary perspectives are hierarchised according to whether or not they coincide with dominant forms of power within institutions. If they do not coincide with dominant interests they are depoliticised, excluded from participation in shaping the institutional conditions of social life, and stripped of their constituent power. At the same time, liberal-authoritarian regimes promote the liberalisation of autonomous cultural activities that reflect 'non-political' values (many of these containing a strong rational and economic dimension that reinforce dominant interests). The political community legitimises social hierarchies under the principle of majoritarian rule that in fact consolidates oligarchical power; this is because, where liberal perspectives are dominant, the 'the people' consists of individuals whose 'collective will' represents an individualised community, which means that cultural contexts within the political community become depoliticised. For those whose perspectives are not depoliticised (i.e. those who are complicit with liberal values), the role of the State has become a matter of stabilisation, which secures the interests of the individualised community from perceived threats to the established conditions of instituting power. The cross-contamination of 'postmonarchical' representation and of the procedural mode of constituent power therefore structures the oligarchical conditions in which the public sphere is depoliticised.

It can be said, however, that that the public sphere in liberal-democratic regimes, as defined by Castoriadis, is only *partially* privatised. This is owed to the 'relative' *openness* of procedural decision-making within these regimes, although, as has been shown, this model of procedural-bureaucratic representation is fundamentally oligarchical because it privileges dominant interests

and therefore creates the conditions in which decision-making is only partially legitimised by the constituent power (the 'collective will'). Liberal-democratic regimes structure the oligarchical conditions of instituting power by governing social spheres according to dominant interests, which means that they have effectively 'partially' privatised the political dimension of public sphere. It is this feature of privatisation that informs Castoriadis's understanding of contemporary depoliticisation. This is evident in the social life that exists under liberal-democratic regimes, where "discussions take place as if the political sphere were entirely independent of the rest of social life", and furthermore, where the "political sphere is not discussed on the basis of any real processes, arrangements, or effective mechanisms, or even according to the true spirit of the laws, but according to the letter of the laws".[50] The contemporary oligarchical conditions of these regimes lead Castoriadis to conclude that, "reality is obliterated, formalism is preferred, the implicit is replaced by the explicit, the latent by the manifest".[51] This liberal interpretation of instituting power therefore prevails and establishes a conception of negative freedom within the structures of social life that places cultural creativity under the control of the dominant interpretations of the 'collective will'. The liberal interpretation of the representative 'mandate' therefore becomes focused on the regulative role of the State to protect the political community from the excesses of constituent power. This liberal 'mandate' legitimates the political authority of the State to regulate the public sphere according to its definition of the 'collective will' and to set limitations on the exercise of political power within the political domain. This becomes obvious, for instance, when looking at the State responses to threats to the financial interests of State power (which has become increasingly beholden to corporate power).[52] At its core the public sphere is governed by a negative conception of freedom that constrains the constituent power, because the 'collective will' is interpreted in a way that is fundamentally regulative and conditioned by dominant interests. The regulation of internal threats to dominant interests within liberal-democratic regimes is now the primary role of the State, and this role is undertaken with a new mandate to secure the equalisation of conditions upon which the sovereign power of 'the people' (as an individualised community) is based; increasingly, in contemporary regimes, this mandate is secured through authoritarian forms of rule. The heterogenous constituency of the political community are subjugated to values of social cohesion that privilege liberties under the control of law, which serves to interpret rights in a way

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[50] Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 128.

[51] Castoriadis, ibid., 128.

[52] These depoliticising forms of regulation are particularly acute within colonial contexts, where indigenous sovereignty is interpreted by the State on the basis of indigenous rights. In these situations, the interests of corporate power often dominate claims of indigenous rights (without even raising the issue of sovereignty). It is common that the protection of sites that are sacred to indigenous peoples are regulated by procedural mechanisms of the State that interpret the basis of their rights over territory.

that cohere with the normative standards set by established forms of power. The procedural mechanisms that legitimate participation in power therefore become utilised in a way that reinforces the legitimacy of dominant representations of the 'collective will'.

CONTEMPORARY DEPOLITICISATION: THE EQUALISATION OF CONDITIONS AND IMPLICIT INSTITUTING POWER

The contemporary conditions of depoliticisation are such that liberal-democratic regimes are in the process of evolving into new modes of instituting power, whose distinct features can be characterised as liberal-authoritarian. Despite popular reactionary discourses that propose the delegitimisation of the liberal-democratic mandate is a 'crisis' that marks the failure of these societies, the present period of liberal-democratic delegitimisation should be understood in terms of an exacerbation of political conflict that has intensified oligarchical conditions of liberal sovereignty and shifted these regimes into an authoritarian mode of instituting power.
a strong historical continuity flows into these new configurations of instituting power. It is liberalism that provides the cohesive line of continuity that secures the emergence of a new type of legitimacy within these regimes. As I will discuss in this section, the 'democratic' character of these regimes, which has been shown to be essentially oligarchical, has begun to shift toward 'authoritarian' modes of institution. Castoriadis's conceptualisation of depoliticisation opens up ways of understanding this transition; however, as has been pointed out, there is a significant blind spot in the way he understands depoliticisation, namely: he does not recognise the fact that depoliticisation largely occurs through autonomous modes of *implicit instituting power* that maintain dominant forms of instituting power. Not only does implicit power shape the parameters of explicit instituting power but also implicitly reinforces established institutions at the social imaginary level. Where my analysis differs from Castoriadis is that the implicit reinforcement of established institutional conditions is fundamentally ontological, whereas I argue that social imaginary creativity is not limited by ontology but is in fact implicitly regulated by dominant modes of instituting power. This thesis therefore challenges Castoriadis's understanding of the contemporary conditions of depoliticisation, by questioning whether the 'the implicit' has really been replaced by 'the explicit'. In fact, the inverse can be identified in the trend of depoliticised liberalisation that characterises the authoritarian shift of liberal-democratic regimes. The 'explicit' and 'visible' channels of legitimisation established by the 'relative' openness of earlier forms of liberal-democratic regimes (as oligarchical as they have always been) are increasingly becoming depoliticised and have been increasingly rendered 'invisible' by implicit forms of instituting power. The implicit reigns over the explicit. This is what characterises the tendency towards

depoliticisation in contemporary liberal-democratic societies. As this thesis has made clear, Castoriadis seriously underplays the implicit dimension of instituting power. Implicit instituting power, however, is pertinent to understanding how the political dimension of societies are structured through social imaginaries. What's more, a description of implicit power provides a deeper perspective on how the broader cultural dimension of the social-historical world is legitimately (and illegitimately) regulated by power. This section will look more closely at the role of liberalism in the shift of liberal-democratic regimes toward authoritarian modes of institution. It will be argued that this shift marks not only a continuity of liberal frameworks of power but also signals the fact that these frameworks have enhanced depoliticisation and intensified the regulative dimension of instituting power in these regimes. The section will address two elementary questions: How has the distribution of rights and liberties paradoxically become the framework of new liberal-authoritarian modes of social hierarchisation? And following from this, what, then, characterises these new liberal-authoritarian modes of institution?

Historically speaking, the 'liberal-democratic' emancipation of modern sovereign power from monarchical regimes hardly deviated from oligarchical concentrations of power. It has been shown, so far, that these conditions have been reinforced through liberal political frameworks based on majoritarian rule, where the 'equalisation of conditions' under which 'the people' express their 'collective will' is hierarchised through the procedural mechanisms of the State. The crucial aspect that needs to be understood regarding the liberal frameworks that inform the oligarchical conditions of contemporary societies concerns the way the 'equalisation of conditions' provides a context for the distribution of rights and liberties in ways that allow dominant forms of power to institute new forms of hierarchical inequality. This inequality is not 'ontologically' derived, as was the case in premodern mode of dominant political authority, rather, inequality is instituted structurally and reinforced by the dominant mode of liberal instituting power that individualises the framework of equality and therefore depoliticises the cultural contexts of the political community. The State plays a central role in this hierarchical framework and provides an institutional apparatus that both politicises and depoliticises the instituting power of its constituents (and the heterogenous 'ontological' perspectives within its constituency).

In liberal political regimes the role of the State is to regulate the instituting power of 'the people' in such a way that the institution of 'collective will' reflects an equalisation of conditions that structure its hierarchical framework. Castoriadis turns to Alexis de Tocqueville to elaborate on this point, because the 'equality of conditions' is "the general trend of [modern] human societies that… leads

those societies to reject the old forms of social discrimination".[53] But also, for the purposes of this discussion, the way that Castoriadis interprets Tocqueville can also be seen to intuit something about the shift of modern societies toward authoritarian modes of institution. Castoriadis accepts that, "the evolution of Western societies shows they really are tending toward the 'equalisation of conditions' in the Tocquevillian sense", and that on the one hand equality is established through the 'dimension of the old order' that structures power, but on the other hand, this power is legitimated by a 'project of individual and collective autonomy' that is validated by "the capitalist transformation of money into the true general equivalence".[54] Here, Castoriadis points out that the constitution of dominant interests within autonomous structures of power establish the equalisation of conditions on the basis of capital. It should also be pointed out that, in his rather 'Marxisant' reading of Tocqueville, Castoriadis highlights an important historical observation: as the 'old' forms of discrimination were rejected, 'new' forms of discrimination based on capital (which are not to be dissociated from discrimination based on race and gender) began to take form.[55] The 'equalisation of conditions' therefore emerged as a discriminatory framework that recreates inequality in ways that reinforce the hierarchical conditions of oligarchy.

The tendency toward the 'equalisation of conditions' is a provision for the delegation of power to the State, which sets a mandate to govern the individualised community of 'the people' under the rule of sovereign law; which is to say that no person is exempt from the sovereign law of 'the people'. It has been argued so far in this chapter that sovereign law is governed by the liberal-democratic States in a way that engenders non-democratic forms of depoliticisation. More specifically, it has been shown that the 'collective will' is articulated through procedural mechanisms of the State, which maintain the 'equalisation of conditions' (of all under law) while these conditions are simultaneously utilised to establish oligarchical forms of rule. Castoriadis turns to Tocqueville to explain this seemingly paradoxical character of modern 'democratic' societies. Tocqueville identified a durable connection between the tendencies of 'equality' within modern 'democratic' societies and the conditions that lead to depoliticisation. On the basis of this connection, Tocqueville envisaged a general tendency of modern sovereign States to degenerate into *despotic democracies*. What Tocqueville meant by despotic democracy was "not the perfectly feasible case where a 'tyranny of the majority' would be taken to the extreme, oppressing

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[53] Castoriadis, ibid., 121.

[54] Castoriadis, ibid., 122.

[55] This 'Marxisant' reading of the 'equality of conditions' is in fact more specifically analysed in relation to the influence of Aristotle on Marx. The specificity of Castoriadis's analysis of 'equality' in relation to Marx and Aristotle relates primarily to the economic dimension of 'general equivalency', a question which falls outside the scope of this thesis. See: Castoriadis, 1991, 'The Nature and Value of Equality', *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*.

individuals or minority groups, thus violating [their] own laws".[56] As it has already been discussed, the mandate of liberal-democratic States is to regulate the public sphere in order to counter this threat. The rule of law in liberal regimes is justified on the basis of negative freedoms preventing the potential for a tyranny of the majority; in fact, I would argue, the systematic hierarchisation of social imaginary perspectives has concentrated dominant interests in power in such a way that this mandate has become liberalised for the purpose of securing dominant interests (this point will be discussed further). Castoriadis's interpretation of despotic democracy depicts a regime where there is "perfect 'equality of conditions' but in which citizens are so politically apathetic, so lethargically conformist, that they leave every power in the hands of a 'tutelary state'".[57] It would be tempting to conclude that this is the situation of contemporary liberal-democratic regimes, where depoliticisation would be understood as a disengagement of citizens who have retreated to the private sphere, and whereby sovereign authority wouldn't be simply delegated to the State anymore but rather gifted to it wholesale.[58] In fact, Castoriadis does conclude that this is an apt description of 'liberal oligarchies'. Castoriadis draws on Benjamin Constant to emphasis this description, who wrote that "in modern societies, what interests people is not the management of common affairs but the guarantee of their enjoyments [*jouissances*]".[59] Castoriadis regards Constant's observation to be somewhat prescient in that it speaks to the evolution of constituent power under the 'equalisation of conditions'.[60] It can be said that under liberal-democratic conditions the political power of individuals in the public sphere is relinquished due to their retreat into the private sphere, which reflects a broader forfeiture of the constituent power to representative forms of rule. As has been shown, this leads Castoriadis to view contemporary regimes as liberal oligarchies, whose State form he describes as the following: ''a bureaucratic pyramid filled with privileged petty despots, solidly

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[56] Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 121. Castoriadis notes that the law of 'the people' was delegitimised via a 'tyranny of the majority' in the Athenian *ekklēsia* in 406. This marks a political moment where the implicit dominance of particular social imaginary perspectives manifest explicitly to overrule the political rights and liberties of the democratic constituency. This can be regarded as a populist moment, and this explanation has some resonance with contemporary populist moments. What is of concern in this discussion, however, is that these moments represent broader historical shifts of instituting power within the societies concerned.

[57] Castoriadis, ibid., 121.

[58] This gift of sovereign power would come with all of the Maussian connotations that this implies; in the sense that it would be gifted in order to establish reciprocal relation of power between individuals and instituting power

[59] Castoriadis, 2013, *Democracy and Relativism*, 42. See: Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns", *Benjamin Constant: Political Writings*, trans. Biancamaria Fontana (ed.) (Cambridge University Press, Cambridge).

[60] Tocqueville, on the other hand, viewed constituent power as being consistently dominated by the sacralisation of postmonarchical State power, in saying that: although "the principle of the sovereignty of the people… is always to be found, more or less, at the bottom of almost all human institutions… [it] remains there concealed from view . . . [and] if for a moment it is brought to light, it is hastily cast back into the gloom of the sanctuary" (Alexis de Tocqueville, 1990, *Democracy in America*, trans. Henry Reeve (Vintage Books, New York), 55).

entrenched in their position, and who would be more equal than the others".[61] What Tocqueville calls *despotic democracy* and what Castoriadis labels *liberal oligarchy* are merely two descriptive accounts of the 'equalisation of conditions' that occur under liberal-democratic regimes and subsequently guide, not only, the 'tendencies toward equality', but more importantly, also, 'the tendencies toward depoliticisation' within these regimes.[62]

In short, both Tocqueville and Castoriadis intuit that the 'equalisation of conditions' under law is paradoxically the basis of the oligarchical structures of liberal-democratic societies. However, their assessment of the kind of regimes that emerge from these conditions do not adequately explain the reality of the present situation of these regimes. There are two critical problems with their assessments. Firstly: citizens have not disengaged from the public sphere due to an apolitical culture of individualism. *They have disengaged due to structural features of liberal democracy that justify depoliticisation.* The shift toward authoritarian modes of power has meant that constituencies are governed as privatised individuals. These individuals, otherwise, do attempt to politicise themselves in ways that identify with a myriad of collective and culturally established identities. Individualism is but a reflection of depoliticisation in the sense that individuals whose cultural perspectives do not coincide with dominant interests are restricted from collective participation in power. And, secondly: sovereignty has not been gifted to the State. The role of the State has shifted into an authoritarian mode because dominant interests have delegitimised its 'tutelary' role. *What we see in the contemporary situation of these regimes is an intensification of the 'regulative' State whose role is to secure dominant interests within society*.

The 'postmonarchical' structures of power in liberal-democratic regimes ensure that forms of instituting power that are based on interests connected to capital are reproduced. This reproductive mode of instituting power gains its legitimacy by reinforcing the social imaginary perspectives that coincide with dominant interests. This mode of instituting power therefore regulates the heterogenous cultural values that are privileged in the participation of political power. This form of regulative instituting power echoes Castoriadis's reading of 'despotic democracy', in that such a regime is realised "for the benefit at least of someone, and this someone never can rule alone in society. Therefore, it is always established for the benefit of some portion of society; *it implies inequality*".[63] The framework of 'equality' is based on the exercise of instituting power, which is to

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[61] Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 122.

[62] Castoriadis, 1997, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary" *World in Fragments*, 96.

[63] Castoriadis, 1991, "The Nature and the Value of Equality", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 138 (emphasis added).

say, on the capacity of participation in legislative, juridical and governing processes. Participation in power is subject to inequal conditions because equality itself is established on the basis of hierarchical conditions. The 'equalisation of conditions' in liberal-democratic regimes are based on a framework of rights granted to each citizen (i.e. 'the people' constituted by 'individuals' presumably detached from heterogenous 'cultural' interests). It is clear that the postmonarchical role of the State is to structure these rights in a way that reproduce dominant social imaginary perspectives (i.e. 'interests' of the 'collective will'), which means that rights are conditioned by normative standards which structure procedural mechanisms that only 'partially' open the capacities of the constituent power to participate in power. This highlights the fact that liberal interpretations of equality accept that the public sphere is a field of social contestation that is managed by the dominant interests that constitute it. Equality in the public sphere is therefore governed by the regulative mechanisms of State, overall (as opposed to totalitarian conceptions of equality, where the State commands the public sphere). Again, this shows that the hierarchisation of instituting power is fundamental to liberal-democratic regimes.

What, then, characterises these new liberal-authoritarian modes of institution? This can be understood by a) explaining how heterogenous cultural perspectives (that inform constituent power) have become disengaged from instituting power due to the structural features of depoliticisation; and, b) how the role of the State is shifting toward increasingly regulative authoritarian modes of power. The 'equalisation of conditions' in its liberal-democratic manifestation has depoliticised participation in the public sphere (i.e. explicit power). The oligarchical conditions of these regimes cannot be understood simply as the depoliticisation of constituent power within the public sphere. According to Castoriadis's analysis these oligarchical conditions breed a culture of 'insignificancy', where constituencies "find themselves facing a society which is becoming less and less interested in 'politics'—i.e. less and less interested in its fate as a society".[64] In his view, this breeds a culture of individualism that conforms to established forms of power, which represents a shift of historicity back into a heteronomous 'sleep'. Rather, as I outlined in the previous chapter, contemporary institutional conditions are instead highly autonomous in the sense that there are 'deliberate' and 'lucid' mechanisms that legitimate modes of political authority based on self-institution; the issue is that liberal-democratic modes of institution privilege oligarchical structures of power that depoliticise participation in these autonomous modes of power. This means that the interests of the

64 Cornelius Castoriadis, 1982, "The Crisis of Western Societies", *Telos* Issue 53 (Telos Press Publishing, New York), 21. I have addressed in detail Castoriadis's assessment of the 'crisis' of depoliticisation in Western societies here: Sean McMorrow, 2016, "Castoriadis on the Crisis of Western Societies" (Telos Press, https://www.telospress.com/castoriadis-on-the-crisis-of-western-societies).

constituency under liberal-democratic conditions are only represented politically through dominant social imaginary perspectives. In contemporary regimes dominant interests are secured through frameworks of procedural regulation that marginalise and exclude the majority of citizens from 'participation in power'. Those that are excluded and marginalised are so because of structural mechanisms that discriminate against non-dominant cultural perspectives. These contemporary regimes are therefore governed on the basis that political equality is granted to cultural perspectives that are validated through 'relatively' open procedural mechanism of legitimation, those that are not validated by dominant interests are therefore rendered unequal within the procedural mechanisms of instituting power. Inequality is therefore prevalent in liberal-democratic regimes, as Castoriadis describes;

> "There is a tendency for some conditions to be equalized, and at the same time for others, constantly reproduced and ever present, to be unequalised. From the standpoint of effective social-historical reality, not of the letter of the law, we live in highly inegalitarian societies, including and above all, with respect to power of all sorts. It hardly matters, as regards this inequality, that the ruling classes may be revitalized by recruiting or co-opting the most capable, clever, and intelligent members of the dominated classes".[65]

The procedural mechanisms that open-up liberal-democratic societies to their own self-alteration are therefore subject to intensive regulation. Procedural mechanisms of the State have enhanced the regulative dimension of instituting power in ways that both explicitly and implicitly limit the rights granted to citizens and their application in specific contexts. There are significant implications that result from equality being adjudicated through a normative framework of rights that validate and invalidate particular cultural perspectives. Most significant of these is the fact that a social hierarchy is established through the stratification of cultural validity that is legitimated by dominant social imaginary perspectives. Liberal-democratic regimes reinforce dominant interpretations of the 'collective will of the people' through this ceaseless regulation of cultural validity. This mode of institutional regulation results in either *implicit* forms of marginalisation within structures of instituting power (i.e. the law), or the *explicit* exclusion of these perspectives from power, which eventuate in these perspectives becoming rendered illegal.

The stability and coherence of liberal-democratic societies are based on forms of marginalisation and spaces of exclusion that secure dominant interests.[66] These interests are reinforced by social

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[65] Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 122.

[66] It is worth noting that this also occurred in ancient Athenian democracy, with the exclusion of woman, slaves, and foreigners from becoming citizens of the polis. The present concern, however, is not to outline the potential for the Greek example to contribute to the emergence of an emancipatory autonomous politics, which is clearly visible in

hierarchies that are supported by the prevailing dominant social imaginary perspectives. That is, *these hierarchies are reinforced through implicit practices of instituting power that are in themselves cultural*. This means that the instituting power of the dominant interests are reproduced by incorporating—using the term 'co-opting' would perhaps make it look too consciously intentional—new social imaginary perspectives into the domain of dominant interests by sacralising their complicit relation and validating this relation through procedural mechanisms of legitimation. Castoriadis describes regime of historicity that are instituted by these very mechanisms;

> "that regime of so-called indetermination is perfectly 'determined' by real, informal mechanisms. These are essentially distinct from the formal (juridical) rules but are permitted and covered by them, and they ensure, as far as possible… that nothing changes. It is that very reproduction of sameness that we see in contemporary 'democratic' societies…which are the core of any social-historical regime. Be it in the economy, politics, or culture, we have reproduction of the same".[67]

In liberal-authoritarian regimes the implicit reigns over the explicit and this is due to the complicity that exists between the dominant social imaginary perspectives and the reproduction of social hierarchies that legitimate the political authority of the regime. While implicit instituting power does manifest explicitly through the procedural mechanisms of the State, its most effective form is within the cultural dimension of social-historical life: it is the sphere of the *agora* (in Castoriadis's terms) that is pertinent to this complicit relation between dominant social imaginary perspectives and social hierarchy. Castoriadis, however, did not analyse how the implicit power of political regimes is wielded within the social imaginary domain.[68] Social hierarchy is maintained implicitly through an allegiance between dominant social imaginary perspectives and the dominant interests of established power. They are complicit because hierarchisation privileges participation of particular interests in power, and invalidates and marginalises those perspectives that do not coincide with dominant interests. This is why the *agora* is the seat of the implicit instituting power that maintains the integrity of political regimes. In Castoriadis's view, this is a *non-political* sphere, where he would 'talk with other people', 'do' or 'buy' whatever, which is subject to 'freedom' derived by the political regime. However, this is, in fact, a sphere whose fundamental fabric is woven by power, which means that it is the sphere through which political regimes are both altered and

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Castoriadis's 'Marxisant' intentions to engage the Greek example, but rather, how marginalisation and exclusion operates in contemporary liberal-democratic contexts.

[67] Castoriadis, 2007, "What Democracy?", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 126.

[68] It is interesting to note that Heller criticises Castoriadis's denial of the role that liberalism has played in furthering a number of political causes, most specifically how this ideology has aided the political struggles of women to acquire an instituting power that challenges patriarchy. See: Heller, 1989, "With Castoriadis to Aristotle; From Aristotle to Kant; From Kant to Us", 169-170.

reproduced.[69] This blind spot remains in Castoriadis's work because he did not provide an in-depth account of the historical continuities of postmonarchical rule within the autonomous articulation of constituent power. This, however, is understood perfectly by those who are marginalised and excluded by the complicit relation between dominant social imaginary perspectives and the established instituting power.

[69] For instance, racism, homophobia, transphobia, and a range of other forms of discrimination provide clear examples of how practices of implicit power depoliticise these subjectivities and, in turn, reinforce and reproduce dominant social imaginary perspectives.

CONCLUSION

THE SHIFT FROM LIBERAL-DEMOCRATIC TO NEOLIBERAL-NEOAUTHORITARIAN MODES OF HISTORICITY

The major achievement of Castoriadis's work was to elucidate the role of the social imaginary within the social-historical context of all human action. This is an important contribution to understanding the political dimension of historicity because, from Castoriadis's perspective, history is viewed as the ongoing creative formulation of a societal self-image that shape institutions. What is significant about Castoriadis's perspective is that this societal self-image is understood to be shaped through a mode of instituting power that establishes the legitimacy of institutional order in relation to the extensive social imaginary representations of the world that exist within a political community. The social imaginary is an important context to understand if one wants to identify and examine the political field of power, to determine the legitimacy of established forms of instituting power, and to attempt to formulate new social-historical *eidos* on which to base forms of political action that are inspired by differing articulations of the world and will, in turn, alter existing institutional conditions. It has been shown within this thesis that the notion of a *social imaginary* opens up significant theoretical potential to understand how the political dimension of human societies encompass the capacity to regulate historicity. It is a useful critical lens to understand how historicity is a mode of social-historical alteration. It allows the institutional processes involved in shaping modes of historicity to be put under the microscope and understood in terms of the power relationships that temporalise social reality. It is also a useful lens to consider the anthropological foundations of society as based on a fundamentally autonomous capacity to create and institute societies on the basis of their imaginary interpretations of the world. Here it must be repeated that, although it was never articulated clearly by Castoriadis, there is an important distinction between social-historical autonomy as a general anthropological capacity (and, it should be added, philosophical notion), and autonomy as it takes shape in the form of a political regime. Castoriadis's project of autonomy, ultimately, harbours the post-Marxist vision of a revolutionary political regime. A vision that led him to privilege the radical capacities of autonomous subjectivity against the established institution of ontological form. His conception of historicity therefore remained somewhat limited because it does not provide any clarity on the fact that autonomous instituting power has its basis in already established institutional conditions.

This thesis has explored how the autonomous capacity of collective self-institution that shapes the historicity of social-historical institution is thoroughly political and not ontologically defined; which is to say that it relates directly to *instituting power*, rather than to the ontological determination of instituted form as proposed by Castoriadis. What Castoriadis fails to consider in any detail is that, if representations of the world are already formulated in the social imaginary they are already lived; that institutional contexts do not wholly encompass the cultural dimension of social-historical existence, in fact institutions are predicated on processes of regulation, marginalisation and, in some instance, domination of cultural representation. Here arises the reality of social-historical existence as *a mode of historicity*; the creative capacity for communities to implement heterogenous cultural representations of the world into a corresponding institutional context does not mean that the capacity to alter the existing institutional conditions is open to all. In fact, articulations of the world are subject to regulation by the established forms of instituting power within a given social-historical context, and in this sense social-historical existence is defined through a conflictual encounter with the institutional conditions of society. Social life is therefore shaped by the broader context of instituting power. I have sought to argue in this thesis that it is the inheritance of instituted form and meaning that propels even the most radical collective action. While the significance of instituted meaning for even the most creative radical politics may have been downplayed by Castoriadis he did emphasise an inverse problem for radical politics that concerns how instituted form puts up 'historical constraints' against political action. I have argued that these constraints are fundamentally political and not ontologically derived, as Castoriadis's analysis suggests. I have also demonstrated that in the contemporary context the imposition of institutional 'constraints' are subject to an autonomous mode of instituting power that reflects an aspect of historicity which Castoriadis failed to develop: the instituting capacities of social imaginaries to exploit already 'instituted forms' of explicit power through implicit modes of institutional alteration. This aspect of historicity is important because it develops the role of cultural autonomy within processes of institutional hierarchisation that shape social-historical contexts. Political action that aims for a radical revisioning of institutional conditions must therefore also negotiate with the creative capacities of an implicit mode of instituting power that maintains a continuity to institutional contexts. Historicity involves an implicit maintenance of dominant forms of cultural representation within institutional contexts, which aim to reinforce favourable institutional conditions by maintaining the 'effective validity' of instituted 'constraints'; or, in other words, maintaining the 'effective validity' of institutions ensures that there is a legitimacy to instituting power which is established and granted a capacity to regulate the political community and to close down the capacity for institutional conditions to be altered.

This thesis has also proposed that there is still great benefit in engaging with the political implications of Castoriadis's work if the ontological emphasis he places on the dichotomous distinction between autonomy and heteronomy, as two distinct modes of historicity, is relativised. By abolishing the strict dichotomy between autonomous and heteronomous modes of historicity it is possible to understand that tendencies toward 'closure' can be characterised as a strategic mode of social-historical regulation that aims toward the reproduction of established political regimes. Castoriadis views this tendency to be a significant ontological feature of established forms of instituting power, particularly in the sense that it reflects a need to preserve the instituted form that defines a society from alteration. Castoriadis's view of the tendency toward 'closure', however, remains an ontologically determined assertion which proposes that instituting power tends toward the closure of significance at an institutional level that encompasses culture more broadly. In order to relativise this perspective this thesis developed an important line of thought within Castoriadis's work itself that is centred on his conception of the social imaginary dimension of historicity. The alternative perspective developed throughout this thesis emphasises a culturological perspective, which proposes that the political dimension of social-historical institution remains open to a perpetually creative temporality of human societies. Rather than maintaining Castoriadis's dichotomous distinction, which emphasises the tendency toward ontological closure, it has been argued that the political community shapes institutions *also* according to a tendency of ontological 'openness'. This argument develops a point that remains underexplored in Castoriadis's own work; the fact that, to a large degree, and even in contexts that Castoriadis deemed to be heteronomous, there is also this tendency toward establishing a relationship to otherness. This is a relationship marked by a tendency of 'openness' that aims to establish a meaningful understanding of novel experiences, rather than experience otherness as a threat to constitutive integrity. Whether or not this involves a situation of experiencing 'otherness' that has its own pre-existing history, or an 'otherness' that emerges as a novel cultural expression, what is important is the context within which this situation arises. It must be understood that institutional closure is a feature of instating power (not instituted form), and that 'openness' is contingent upon the context through which heterogenous cultural perspectives confront established forms of institutional power. What is important about this perspective is that it relativises the dichotomisation of distinct regimes of historicity, introducing an institutional dynamic that privileges an auto-poietic temporality to cultural life regardless of how instituting power attempts to regulate its institutional parameters, and that this dynamic is what accounts for creative and self-altering modes of historical continuity.

It is necessary to understand that the tendency toward closure in contemporary political regimes operates on the basis of autonomous modes of instituting power; this is to say that the tendency of

institutional ‘closure’ in contemporary social-historical contexts must be seen as a response to the ‘partially open’ political conditions of liberal-democratic societies that potentially threaten the constitutive integrity of the established forms of institutional power. The tendency toward closure can therefore be re-framed in the context of democratic politics by showing it to be a feature of instituting power that can be regarded as a regulative tendency toward self-limitation. Castoriadis considered self-limitation to be a characteristic of ‘true’ democracy, which involves a “regime that explicitly renounces ultimate ‘guarantees’ and knows no other limitation than its self-limitation”.[1] He stressed that this makes it “the sole regime that *takes risks*, that faces openly the possibility of its self-destruction”.[2] While he did consider the way that liberal-democratic regimes took an oligarchic form, Castoriadis, however, did not consider the increasingly autonomous nature of this political mode of historicity and how it represents the essentially autonomous principle of self-limitation that is characteristic of democratic regimes. Yet he, regardless, picked up on the significance of the contemporary situation of these societies by highlighting their predicament: that they were on the cusp of a significant shift in their mode of institution. He went so far as to say that democratic self-limitation could lead to the transgression of its logic of representative authority, and either “sink into oblivion (*s’abîmer*) or turn into its contrary”.[3] It is clear that Castoriadis had intuited quite early that the mode of instituting power within liberal-democratic societies was shifting, however his theoretical analysis could not sufficiently account for this phenomena because he could only perceive this shift as a regression into heteronomous modes of institution. The argument put forward in this thesis is that democratic forms of self-limitation have not turned into their contrary, but rather this exact autonomous feature of liberal-democratic societies has intensified and extended into highly regulative and authoritarian political regimes.

In closing this thesis, I will now assess what can be regarded as a significant shift in contemporary liberal-democratic societies toward neoliberal-neoauthoritarian regimes. This assessment takes into account the argument put forward in this thesis that depoliticisation is not only a direct result of the forces of institutional closure, but that it is also a constitutive feature of the mode of instituting power that takes the form of the liberal-democratic State. Ultimately, this will reveal how contemporary tendencies toward institutional ‘closure’ can be seen to operate through an autonomous mode of instituting power that is highly regulative; a perspective that Castoriadis was not able to develop due to his strict definition of heteronomy as mode of ontological determination.

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[1] Castoriadis, 1994, “Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary”, *Rethinking Imagination: Culture and Creativity*, 151.

[2] Castoriadis, ibid., 151.

[3] Castoriadis, ibid., 151.

Natalie Doyle has provided a succinct analysis of the shift of liberal-democratic societies into new political regimes, which can be formally summarised as "a shift in the perception of democratic legitimacy, away from the notion of government and toward that of governance".[4] Doyle analyses this shift in relation to the implications of liberal institutional conditions that are established on the basis of democratic sovereignty, by which the capacity to govern is seen to be "diffused through a plurality of institutions ranging from statutory and regulatory institutions to constitutional courts, whose task is to ensure that governmental action is both effective and respectful of the individual rights defining contemporary pluralism".[5] In Doyle's view the fundamental problem facing modern representative democracy is "the tendency of 'governance' to trump 'democracy' when it comes to managing crises".[6] Doyle's analysis makes reference to the work of Marcel Gauchet, who contextualises contemporary depoliticisation in the context of a series of democratic crises, involving successive revisions of the very notion of democratic sovereignty.[7] In many ways, as Doyle has argued, Gauchet is the most important theorist to have developed the central themes of Castoriadis's work—particularly the notions of heteronomy and autonomy—in order to develop an understanding of the role historicity plays in the institutional conditions of contemporary liberal-democratic societies.[8] He takes the theme of autonomy developed by Castoriadis and instead of historicising autonomy as a mode of institution he analyses the role it plays in establishing the mode of historicity that characterises how liberal-democratic societies institute themselves on the basis of their own histories.

Gauchet analyses the development of liberal-democratic societies in a way that foregrounds the fact that these societies are established on the basis of political regimes that are characteristic of the more fundamental mode of autonomous institution upon which they are based. He similarly views the 'openness' of liberal-democratic political contexts (even if only partial) as 'risky' and structured through regimes of power that define a mode of historicity. More importantly, what he sees as emerging from this 'openness' are political visions of social organisation that acquire institutional

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[4] Doyle, 2014, "Governance and Democratic Legitimacy: The European Union's Crisis of De-Politicisation", in *Democracy and Crisis*, Benjamin Isakhan (ed.) (Palgrave Macmillan, Basingstoke), 108.

[5] Doyle, ibid., 108.

[6] Doyle, ibid., 110.

[7] Gauchet was a colleague of Castoriadis on the committee of two journals, *Textures* and *Libre*, and even though they do not explicitly engage with each other's work the fact that they had a significant influence on each could hardly be denied. This influence, however, could not be explored within the framework of this thesis.

[8] See: Natalie J. Doyle, 2012, "Autonomy and Modern Liberal Democracy: From Castoriadis to Gauchet", *European Journal of Social Theory*, Vol.15 Issue 3 (Sage Thousand Oaks) & Natalie J. Doyle, 2017, *Marcel Gauchet and the Loss of Common Purpose: Imaginary Islam and the Crisis of European Democracy* (Lexington Books, Lanham).

power in order to institute conditions that reflect such visions. It is due to the essentially contestable ground of power in these regimes that democracy is often perceived as sitting on the precipice of crisis. Gauchet presents the discourse that considers crisis to be a perpetual condition of democratic politics as a complex phenomenon precisely because it is essentially "a form of a government in which discord, protest and the questioning of what has been established cannot ever cease", this is the condition of a democratic regime, which begs the question of when a democratic crisis really ever 'begins and ends'.9 It can therefore be seen that Gauchet presents the crises of democratic politics in a similar way to Castoriadis, in that a true democratic crisis arises when political visions of social organisation emerge that contravene the conditions of political 'openness' that allow for 'the participation of all in power'. Gauchet's analysis differs from Castoriadis's notion that democratic crisis threatens to trigger a 'retreat from autonomy' that can devolve into the reinstatement of heteronomous modes of institution; in fact, Gauchet argues the opposite. Gauchet's position, which corresponds to the argument presented in this thesis, is that the contemporary crisis of democratic politics is fundamentally and paradoxically *a crisis in the very development of autonomous modes of historicity*.

It is instructive to highlight how Gauchet's approach to democratic crisis can support the development of Castoriadis's work that has been presented in this thesis, because his analysis explicitly links depoliticisation to a contemporary shift in the mode of instituting power that shapes the historicity of liberal-democratic societies. He identifies the first crisis of democratic politics in these regimes during the period of totalitarian visions of social organisation began to gain traction in the social imaginary of these societies, this was a period "when a substantial proportion of citizens [came] to reject the principle binding its institutions and to support parties whose ambition [was] to establish an alternative system".10 Gauchet regards this as a crisis of reconstitution that presented itself as a muddy cross-roads between the democratic potential of liberalism (to "re-conquer democratic power and construct it anew, as capacity for self-government in the framework of a society geared towards history and its liberal structures") or the secularised form of transcendental authority promised by totalitarianism (to "break with these liberal structures to rediscover the mastery of collective destiny").11 According to Gauchet, the present crisis, began to rear its head in the mid-seventies and has increasingly intensified ever since. It is seen to involve a "*re-launch of the process of disengagement from religion*", which is described as a shifting mode of

9 Marcel Gauchet, 2015, "Democracy: From One Crisis to Another", *Social Imaginaries* volume 1 Issue 1 (Zeta, Bucharest), 163.

10 Gauchet, 2015, "Democracy: From One Crisis to Another", 165.

11 Gauchet, ibid., 172.

historicity that is not explicitly religious but also fundamentally political.[12] Gauchet regards the crisis of liberal-democratic societies to reflect the contemporary phase in the drawn out exit from religion, which involves a further deconstruction of postmonarchical authority. He therefore frames the present shifting mode of instituting power to be a new phase in the maturation of 'autonomous' historicity.[13] Gauchet suggests, in a way that is in parallel with the argument proposed in this thesis, that the liberal triumph of the previous democratic crisis "established the foundations for, and accumulated the means of, a new phase of expansion for social organisation directed towards autonomy",.[14] In his view, this new mode of autonomy is based upon a procedural legal framework of social organisation and informed by what he calls a structural vision of autonomy to be distinguished from substantive autonomy (*autonomie substantielle*).[15] What Gauchet argues is that there is a "new operational ideal of democracy, which does not need to be explicit to function, [which] amounts to a procedural coexistence of individual rights.". Ultimately, with this new mode of institution 'more rights for everyone means less power for all', because "such a power is excluded from the start and the political community ceases to govern itself", which means that politics builds less and less upon collective capacities to formulate the institutional limitations that relate to larger structural configurations such as globalised capitalism, environmental crisis, technoscientific development, etc.[16] In this context, Gauchet views depoliticisation as a distinct feature of the contemporary political regime he calls the *political market society*.[17]

The new mode of historicity presented by Gauchet sets out to understand the autonomous characteristic of the procedural frameworks of institutional power that can be regarded as nothing other than a 'politics without power' (i.e. structural depoliticisation).[18] Doyle's analysis of

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[12] See: Gauchet, 1997, *The Disenchantment of the World*. The reception of Gauchet's theory of a post-Christian exit from religion has been met with some considerable confusion, by which it has been interpreted as an explanation of secularism rather than a political history that outlines the deconstruction of a previous mode of historicity characterised by hierarchy, tradition and *incorporation* (the subordination of individuals to the collective).

[13] Gauchet, 2015, "Democracy: From One Crisis to Another", 172.

[14] Gauchet, ibid., 172.

[15] Marcel Gauchet, 2017, *L'avènement de la démocratie IV: le nouveau monde* (Gallimard, Paris), 720. See also: Natalie J. Doyle, 2019, "The Political Imaginary of European Hypermodernity: Marcel Gauchet and Contemporary Neo-Liberal Democracy", in (eds.) Suzi Adams and Jeremy C. A. Smith, *Social Imaginaries: Critical Interventions*, Rowman & Littlefield, Lanham.

[16] Gauchet, 2015, "Democracy: From One Crisis to Another", 172.

[17] In Gauchet's words, the notion that contemporary liberal-democratic societies have become political market societies, does not refer to "a society where economic markets dominate the political choices made, but a society whose very political operation borrows its market model from the economic sphere and generalises it, with the whole configuration appearing as a consequence of the initiatives and claims of different players, at the end of a self-regulated process of aggregation." (Gauchet, ibid., 172).

[18] Gauchet, ibid., 172.

governance as the defining feature of this new political regime is an important development of Gauchet's work.[19] She interprets Gauchet's notion of 'political market societies' from the perspective of what might be considered to be the mandate of this new form of political regime, whereby "a self-regulating aggregate emerging naturally from the subjective interaction of individuals and requiring only contractual regulation overseen by governance".[20] What is significant about these new political regimes is that the shifting orientation of political power has been driven by a thorough *neo*liberalisation of institutions. As Doyle points out, this shift involves an abandonment of the notion of State sovereignty that harbours electoral democratic processes, in favour of the new model of governance that has transformed the State into a regulator of public interest (i.e. cultural creativity): "a more diffuse understanding of legitimacy took form whereby the qualities with which governmental power is exercised became more important than the intrinsic properties of the electoral system or of public administration".[21] She argues that the implications of this development have played a significant role in the depoliticisation of liberal-democratic societies, in which case, "conscious of their diminished steering capacity, governments displaced policy issues from the sphere of political contest towards spheres of state action possessing non-political legitimation principles".[22] Doyle's analysis is important because she identifies in these regimes a new mode of *procedural legitimacy* that has created two specific institutional forms: the concentration of power in the procedural mechanisms that are founded on technical, juridical and economic expertise, and the colossal expansion of the State's capacity to wield authority through techniques of surveillance and regulation. As I argued in the final chapter of this thesis, these developments have transformed the State into a *neo*authoritarian regulative apparatus that aims toward the production of *neo*liberal forms of social cohesion that secure the instituting power of the dominant social imaginaries perspectives within the context of a given State.

In this respect, what, both Gauchet and Castoriadis don't analyse in their considerations of contemporary modes of historicity is how exactly the instituting power is wielded by the dominant forms of the political regime, and most importantly, how the reproduction of instituting power is maintained through implicit modes of social-historical regulation. They both make reference to the oligarchical characteristics of the contemporary political regimes that were once called liberal-democratic societies; however, they do not consider the ways that these conditions are reinforced by

[19] It should be noted that Doyle applies this development of Gauchet's work to the specific context of politics within the European Union, however it stands as an important application of this theoretical perspective.

[20] Doyle, 2014, "Governance and Democratic Legitimacy: The European Union's Crisis of De-Politicisation", 120.

[21] Doyle, ibid., 113.

[22] Doyle, ibid., 112.

the implicit dominance of particular social imaginary perspectives that actively regulate the political domain. It is not enough to lament the decline of democratic politics. It is in this respect that I tend to deviate from Gauchet's assessment that these new political regimes involve a 'politics without power', even though his recent work does suggest that this mode of politics has enhanced the power of neoliberal ideology responsible for the depoliticisation of conditions that have ushered in a neoauthoritarian shift, it is perhaps instructive to interrogate contemporary forms of political autonomy that do not emphasise a democratic heritage. One step in this direction is to view these regimes—crystallised in the form of the State—as agents of instituting power that are based on postmonarchical notions of authority, and whose mode of institution is based on an implicit wielding of power that gives rise to mechanisms of governance that enforce an increasingly regulative mode of politics.

The contemporary wave of depoliticisation that reflects the shift away from democratic forms of politics was, likewise, viewed by Castoriadis to reflect a state of crisis that concerns the foundation of liberal-democratic societies. He even goes so far as to call the present period a cross-roads in history; where one path lead to "the loss of meaning, of the repetition of empty forms, conformism, apathy, irresponsibility, and cynicism, along with the growing takeover of the capitalist imaginary" and the other to "a fresh upsurge of the project of individual and collective autonomy", that is to say, "of the will to be free".[23] These cross-roads are clearly demarcated along the lines of his theoretical dichotomisation between heteronomous and autonomous modes of historicity. This thesis has argued that the fact Castoriadis maintains the dichotomous distinction between societies defined by instituted form and those that are open to the radical creation of new form, ultimately, limits Castoriadis's theorisation of historicity. In this respect, he is unable to see exactly to what extent institutional power is not driven by tendencies toward closure and that the tendency toward closure is also a creative mode of institution. It is worth reiterating that the critique of Castoriadis's work put forward in this thesis proposes that the shifts we are currently witnessing in these societies can only occur if societies are 'open' to creative self-reflective interpretation, and not confined within an ontologised form of heteronomous closure, as would be the case if historicity was dichotomised. Having said this, Castoriadis is very clear to maintain that, "like justice, like freedom, like social and individual autonomy, equality is not an answer, a solution which could be given once and for all to the question of the institution of society".[24] This is because there is no pre-given content to the signification, as "the question of knowing what is implied and required in

[23] Castoriadis, 2007, "Imaginary and Imagination at the Crossroads", *Figures of the Thinkable*, 86.
[24] Castoriadis, 1991, "The Nature and Value of Equality", *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy*, 139.

each case by the equal participation of all in power remains open".[25] Indeed, the openness afforded by autonomous instituting contexts has led to far more creative developments in the institution of inequality and the liberal-democratic political regime has indeed proven to be fundamentally structured upon oligarchical forms of instituting power.

To present the crisis of democratic politics as the central issue that concerns the shift toward neoliberal-authoritarian regimes remains too limited in scope, and is in itself a depoliticising perspective because it does not take into account a swathe of creative capacities that are emerging from the political community of these societies. What's more, politics in liberal-democratic societies have always been 'partial' in its forms of representation that apparently 'opens' a society to participation in its instituting power. Participation in the institutional mechanisms of these regimes have also always been conditionally regulated as to which cultural expressions, within a given context, are validated. In this sense, there are significant structural forms of power that orient the political dimension of these societies, such as postcolonialism, which remained a significant blind spot in Castoriadis analysis because his theoretical perspective was too euro-centric. Postcolonialism is significant because it marks a strong form of historical continuity that accounts for the extension of postmonarchical power into autonomous projects of cultural domination. From the perspective of postcolonial contexts, it is difficult to regard the shift of liberal-democratic societies toward authoritarian regimes as anything other than a reconsolidation of institutional conditions that are marked by strong forms of continuity regarding the structural conditions of globalised capitalism and, in many ways, the reconsolidation of cultural imperialism in neoliberal form.

It is not enough to conflate an analysis of depoliticisation with a generalised notion of democratic deficit, because this would depoliticise the gains being made by particular marginalised cultural perspectives, most particularly in their capacity to participate in broader instituting power. This is why this thesis has proposed to approach the issue of depoliticisation from the perspective of how 'autonomous' institutional conditions established 'open' modes of historicity. The value of Castoriadis's work that I have presented in this thesis is to show that these forms of regulation are not only based on institutional frameworks but also operate implicitly at the social imaginary level. These new political regimes must therefore be seen to be shifting into increasingly regulative modes of institution that can be defined simply as neoliberal-neoauthoritarian regimes of historicity. My concluding point with regard to depoliticisation in liberal-democratic regimes is that the shift

25 Castoriadis, ibid., 139.

toward neoliberalism has facilitated the conditions upon which authoritarian visions have emerged, and that this situation ultimately reflects the autonomous character of these societies. The strongest social imaginary visions emerging out of liberal-democratic societies in the contemporary period largely reflect desires to control historicity and to implement authoritarian modes of self-institution. In many contexts this vision is well on the way to becoming instituted in the form of neoliberal-neoauthoritarian regimes.

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