

ABSTRACT

Title of Dissertation: BECAUSE WE WILL IT: THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS
OF DEMOCRACY IN LATE MODERNITY

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Cornelius Castoriadis' life can be characterized as one of engaged dissent. As a founding member of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group in France, Castoriadis maintained a consistent position as an opponent of both Western capitalism and Soviet totalitarianism during the Cold War. This position also placed Castoriadis in opposition to the mainstream French left, particularly Jean-Paul Sartre, who supported the French Communist Party and defended the Soviet Union. After the dissolution of the group, Castoriadis continued to assert the possibility of constructing participatory democratic institutions in opposition to the existing bureaucratic capitalist institutional structure in the Western world.

The bureaucratic-capitalist institutional apparatus of the late modern era perpetuates a system where the individual is increasingly excluded from the democratic

political process and isolated within the private sphere. However, the private sphere is not a refuge from the intrusion of the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary, which consistently seeks to subject the whole of society to rational planning. Each individual is shaped by his relationship to the bureaucracy; on the one hand, his relationships with other become subjected to an instrumental calculus, while at the same time, the individual seeks to find some meaning for the world around him by turning to the private sphere. Furthermore, a crisis of meaning pervades late modern societies, where institutions are incapable of providing answers to the questions posed to them by individuals living in these societies. As a result, when individuals are able to participate in the democratic process, they tend to carry political ideas constructed in the private world into the public sphere, often to the detriment of the democratic process itself.

Castoriadis seeks to reconcile liberty and broad public participation through the inclusion of the imaginary in democratic theory. He contends that it is possible to construct an autonomous society that emphasizes the creativity of the individual and the collective in the construction of the institutions that govern it. However, democratic theory conceived in this fashion must construct limits to political participation in order to insure that the democratic process itself is not destroyed by the emergence of political ideas antithetical to democracy.

BECAUSE WE WILL IT: THE POSSIBILITIES AND LIMITS OF DEMOCRACY IN
LATE MODERNITY

By

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Introduction: Why Castoriadis

When communism began its final collapse with the revolutions of 1989, many in the West proclaimed that socialism, as a political and economic theory was dead. Marx's predictions that the capitalist system would inevitably lead to economic crisis and self-destruction were apparently refuted. Theorists such as Francis Fukuyama argued that liberal democracy and free market capitalism represented the highest point of human social development and it was only a matter of time before the rest of the world would adopt Western political and economic systems. However, instead of a general acceptance of liberal democracy, the recent history of the post-Cold War era illustrates that new challenges have emerged that reject the liberal democratic tradition. The resurgence of ethnonationalism, the rise of radical Islamic fundamentalism, and the serious problems with instituting a democratic government in Iraq apparently refute the triumphal rhetoric of post-Cold War liberals. Experiments in building democracies in non-democratic states have been problematic at best and failures at worst, demonstrating the fact that liberal democracy has not been embraced as readily as those who support it had predicted. Furthermore, the spread of free-market capitalism has not "lifted all boats" as liberal economists and proponents of capitalist globalization predicted. In fact, relative poverty has increased throughout the world and the gap between the rich and the poor has widened tremendously, even in the industrialized West.

Instead of reaching the end of history, the world has become a more unstable and uncertain place. Existing democratic institutions in the West face a political and philosophical crisis. Politically, the most serious development in the post-Cold War world is the challenge to democratic institutions represented by the rise of anti-

democratic, radical Islamic fundamentalism in the form of al-Qaeda. Even as Western democracies confront this external threat, the political crisis of democracy cannot be reduced to this conflict. The political crisis of democracy also emerges within democratic countries in the form of chauvinistic nationalism, the encroachment on democratic liberties by states in the name of security, and a general apathy towards politics through much of the industrialized world, especially in the United States. This internal political crisis is linked to a broader philosophical crisis that pervades modern societies. Liberal capitalist democracy is unable to generate an adequate of democratic institutions in the face of both external and internal challenges. At their worst, liberals rely on an ideological justification, relying on the simple argument that there is no better system than democracy and capitalism. The “there is no alternative” argument is a weak defense of democracy, and ultimately unable to address the problems facing these societies in the twenty-first century. At its best, liberalism sacrifices the possibility of broad political participation in order to guarantee individuals’ protection from the state and from other individuals. While the protection of individual rights is a crucial element of democracy, liberalism does not account for non-political forms of power and coercion that can erode the rights of the individual. Democratic governance requires a political philosophy that can protect the rights of the individual *and* allow for broad participation by the citizenry, while at the same time constructing limits to participation in order to prevent the destruction of the democratic system itself. The work of Cornelius Castoriadis defends the possibility of constructing such a political philosophy.

Cornelius Castoriadis: Against the Current

Throughout his life, Cornelius Castoriadis assumed the role of an engaged dissenter in French, and international, intellectual life, advancing an anti-authoritarian political philosophy that targeted both the Soviet and Western political systems. This consistent criticism of the Soviet Union set Castoriadis apart from the mainstream French left, despite the fact that he also sought to enact revolutionary change in the Western capitalist world. His later work, after much of the French left had abandoned the political possibilities of revolution, exhibited a commitment to political and social change through an assertion of the emancipatory possibilities of participatory democracy.

Castoriadis was born in Greece in 1922, joining the Communist Party, which was illegal under the Metaxas dictatorship, at the age of fifteen. During World War II, Castoriadis left the Communist Party, believing it was a bureaucratic organization not interested in revolution, and joined a radical Trotskyist faction in Greece. After the war, his membership in this faction forced him to flee the country for France in 1945.¹ His life was endangered both by the right-wing Greek government and by the Communist Party, which was under orders from Joseph Stalin to purge unorthodox elements from the Greek left. In Paris he joined the Trotskyist *Parti Communiste Internationale* (PCI) and met Claude Lefort, a student of the French philosopher Maurice Merleau-Ponty.² One of the key tenets of Trotskyism at the time stated that the USSR, having been corrupted by Stalinism, represented a degenerated workers' state. The Trotskyists further argued that Stalin's policies had grafted a counter-revolutionary bureaucracy onto an otherwise revolutionary society. According to the PCI, the Soviet situation could be corrected by a second revolution against the Stalinist bureaucracy, which would restore the promise of

the original Russian revolution.³ Both Castoriadis and Lefort disagreed with this assessment, and, along with other like-minded Trotskyists, formed a new tendency, the Chaliou-Montal⁴ tendency, within the PCI. Castoriadis and Lefort disputed the Trotskyist method of revolution, which, like the traditional Leninist position, stated that the seizure of state power by a vanguard of revolutionaries should be the primary task on the road to socialism. Opposing this position, Castoriadis and Lefort argued that revolutionary tactics must be founded in workers' self-management in the factory and collective self-management in society as a whole. This, according to Castoriadis and Lefort, was the only conceivable path to socialism.⁵ The development of the Chaliou-Montal tendency represents an important step in the development of Castoriadis' thought. Throughout his life, until his death in 1997, Castoriadis advocated the position that socialism could only be achieved through worker self-management.

In 1948, the Chaliou-Montal tendency broke with the PCI after the latter argued for a United Front with Yugoslavia against the Soviet Union. The PCI's position was based solely on Tito's rejection of Stalinism and his assertion of an alternative Yugoslav road to socialism. Castoriadis and Lefort, however, saw no difference between the Stalinist and Yugoslav bureaucracies.⁶ To support Tito meant to support bureaucratic management, the central problem in existing socialist states. As a result, the Chaliou-Montal tendency could no longer associate with the position of the Trotskyists and broke with the PCI. One year later, Castoriadis and Lefort founded the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, publishing a journal of the same name.⁷

From its inception, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* presented itself as an explicitly political group, concerning itself primarily with the everyday struggles of the working

class. The role that the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group played in France was, in one important respect, typical, in that the intellectuals involved were directly engaged in the political struggles of the day. Historically, French intellectuals have played a more engaged role in politics and public life than their counterparts in the United States and other countries in Europe. French thinkers have often rejected “ivory tower” intellectualism and scientific analysis in favor of a more direct intervention in public life.⁸ In the post-war era, intellectuals with often radically diverse philosophies have participated in similar social movements. For example, André Glucksmann, one of the “new philosophers” brought together Jean-Paul Sartre and Raymond Aron to speak out in support of the Vietnamese boat people.⁹ Michel Foucault, who argued that individual transgressions were a more effective form of resistance than any organized social movement, marched for gay rights in the 1980's, and Pierre Bourdieu was active in leftist politics up until his death in 2001.

What these examples illustrate is an attempt to connect theory to practical politics, rather than simply remaining within the realm of academic speculation. “Criticism is most powerful...when it gives voice to the common complaints of the people or elucidates the values that underlie those complaints.”¹⁰ Any French political theorist would agree with this statement, but would go one step further, not content to simply give voice to the complaints of the average person. The French intellectual would insist on, and then participate in, a practical program of action that could alleviate these complaints. One could argue that there is an inconsistency between theory and practice in the French intellectual scene. To some extent, this is true. However, this apparent inconsistency illustrates the primacy of political participation and engagement in society. In the first

issue of *Les Temps Modernes*, for example, Sartre accuses the nineteenth century writers Flaubert and Goncourt of complicity in the brutal repression of the Paris Commune in 1871, arguing that neither of these authors wrote anything to prevent it.¹¹ This example illustrates the modern French commitment to intellectual engagement. According to Sartre, the intellectual has an obligation to participate in political life. Furthermore, this emphasis on political engagement suggests a willingness on the part of French intellectuals to be less dogmatic in thought, less bound to ideology, and more fluid in their definition of the relationship between theory and practice.

Like most intellectuals in France at the time, Castoriadis believed in the importance of political engagement. However, Castoriadis argued that political engagement should drive theory. The purpose of revolutionary theory, according to Castoriadis, is to connect the everyday struggles of the working class (or of those living in a society in general) to a broader, theoretical context.¹² Unlike Marxist groups like the PCF, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* never positioned itself as a vanguard of the working class. The concept of the Leninist vanguard implies that it is possible for a group to separate itself from its society in order to evaluate the maturation of objective historical conditions and determine the most opportune moment to strike against the capitalist system. Castoriadis' position is that the revolutionary (or the critic, or the philosopher) cannot extricate himself from the society in which he lives. The philosopher must be a participant in the social-historical world, because he is inextricably tied to the institutions and social significations of his society. Castoriadis' vision of the engaged intellectual represents an explicit criticism of the typical Western view of the intellectual's relationship to the world around him. In general, the Western philosophical tradition

begins with the assumption that the philosopher is an observer of the world, in the sense that the philosopher can extract himself from the particular society in which he lives and examine the society and the world in a more or less objective manner. If the philosopher claims the ability to view a society in its totality from a position of exteriority, he will conclude that it is also possible to develop an objective and complete explanation of the social phenomena in question. The philosopher will further conclude that he has discovered some Truth about the world that can be employed as a foundation for social and political institutions.

According to Castoriadis, no human being can stand outside the world and view it from an objective perspective. The philosopher does not possess privileged knowledge and is unable to stand outside the world as an objective observer. Every individual is a part of the society in which she lives in the sense that existing social institutions play a role in the production of each individual's particular being. She has been born into this particular world, socialized by particular institutions, and she has contributed and linked herself to this particular society through the construction of philosophical social imaginary significations. As such, the philosopher is always in participant in the society in which she lives. If she seeks to undertake an examination of her society, she must first reject the possibility of abstracting herself from the social context in which she lives. She must recognize that her philosophical undertaking will be, in part, a reflection of the society into which she is born. As such, the intellectual must formulate her critique from inside the society in which she lives, and must concern herself with the everyday life of the members of this community. Thus, for example, engagement in the workers' struggle itself, not the formation of a revolutionary vanguard that dictates when and where the

worker should act, becomes the only means by which the revolutionary can effect political change.

In addition to rejecting the possibility of philosophical objectivity, the philosopher must also reject the possibility of discovering objective and immutable Truths about the world and about the individual subject. No philosopher discovers any Truths about the world, because such Truths do not exist. The idea that it is possible to “possess” a whole and complete picture of the Truth is both absurd and reactionary.¹³ Philosophy is only possible because the world is not fully ordered. If the world were fully ordered, there would be one final system of knowledge, applicable for all time, thus eliminating the need for further thought and exploration.¹⁴ According to Castoriadis, “theory in itself is a doing, the always uncertain attempt to realize the project of clarifying the world.”¹⁵ Thus, philosophy exists alongside other ways of understanding the world, such as religion or mythology, and provides no more or less “objective” value or insight than these other forms of clarifying and making sense of the world. All of these ways of understanding represent creative acts, whose purpose is to construct meaning for the world. Each particular society will judge which method of understanding provides the best “picture” of the world and that society’s place within the world. Therefore, the question is not which way of understanding advances the most objectively accurate view of the world, but rather which method is the most appropriate, given the particular social-historical conditions that are present in a particular society.

Given the fact that the philosopher is presenting a particular way of understanding the world and the society’s place in that world, each philosopher bears a heavy responsibility, in the sense that the picture of the world advanced by each philosopher

influences the construction of the social institutions that will govern the philosopher's particular society. The responsibility of the intellectual is particularly relevant in modern societies, where the instituted-imaginary posits a more direct role for the individual in the material world. The fundamental problem of the Western political tradition is that in seeking to provide a comprehensive, systematic set of answers for the questions a society raises, the philosophers of the Western tradition have neglected the role of imaginary in the social construction of institutions. Positing a fully ordered world closes off the possibility of the political, leading to flawed, and often dangerous, political practice. In general, the Western philosophical tradition plays a key role in granting legitimacy to heteronomous and alienated institutions. This is a direct result of the fact that Western philosophers are primarily concerned with *answering* the questions each society raises in articulating itself. The construction of the political cannot be achieved on the basis of a philosophy that seeks to *answer* such questions. Rather, philosophy must be concerned with *raising* these questions vis-à-vis the existing social institutional structure. The political requires a philosophy that does not purport to discover immutable Truths about the world, but rather creates a framework for the continuous and consistent critique of society and established institutions. As such, a philosophy that opens the possibility for the instauration of the political must accept that there are certain aspects of the world that must remain unknown. Furthermore, it must recognize the role the imaginary plays in humanity's construction of the world in which it lives.

Democracy and Late Modernity: Problems and Possibilities

The greatest problem facing democratic societies in the late modern era is a crisis of meaning. Castoriadis describes late modern societies as “dilapidated”; nothing new is

created in these societies, in the sense that everything “new” that emerges is only a recycled product of already existing ideas. This dilapidation pervades all spheres of social life, from politics, to economics, to art, leading to a situation where new challenges are met with tired routines and ideologies. In essence, the existing institutional structure cannot articulate any significant meaning for those living in that society. As a result, the late modern instituted imaginary legitimizes itself based solely on what already exists, presenting this as the only feasible option for understanding the world. Furthermore, the legitimacy of existing institutions in dilapidated societies relies completely on the alienation of those living in the particular society rather than on their democratic participation. The only value in dilapidated capitalist societies is material consumption, which is incapable of providing a positive defense of democratic institutions. Individuals living in late modern societies become increasingly deracinated, depoliticized, and atomized. When material consumption is the predominant social value and political value, individuals retreat to the private realm, abandoning the ineffectual public institutions of liberal democracy. In addition, individuals lose the ability to construct identities other than that of a consumer, leading to an erosion of liberal values, a weakening of democracy, and a degradation of community and solidarity. The liberal defense of democracy exacerbates this situation through its failure to advance any substantive defense of democratic institutions.

Castoriadis’s central concept is that the imaginary, defined most simply as the human capacity to create, is the means through which societies define themselves as societies, create an understanding of the world and the society’s place in that world, and construct the social institutions that govern that society. As such, the imaginary

introduces the possibility for the construction of a critical epistemological prism through which one can comprehend, to a degree, the origin of social institutions. This epistemological prism attributes the construction of institutions to the creativity of the collective of individuals living in a particular society. As a group, the individuals living in a society create institutions that define their relationships to one another and to the world around them. The types of institutions that exist, and the justifications that are used to legitimize them, are linked inextricably to a particular social-historical context. In essence, the collective creates the institutions necessary for answering questions and meeting needs in a specific time and place in that society's history. Ultimately, therefore, the collective itself is responsible for the institutions that govern it.

The fact that the collective constructs the institutions that govern it does not insure that social institutions remain open to the questioning and criticism of individuals living within that society. Despite the fact that institutions are the product of the collective imaginary, the dominant trend in human history is the prevalence of heteronomous societies, where institutions are legitimized through reference to external, non-human agencies, such as God or a founding lawgiver. Even in modern societies, which represent a decisive break with heteronomy, institutions become alienated from the making/doing of the collective. Using the imaginary as an epistemological prism, Castoriadis seeks to examine the chasm that emerges between a collective's instituting imaginary and the alienated institutions that govern the society. Alienated institutions are able to endure and reproduce themselves primarily as a result of the influence an instituted imaginary exerts over the socialization process of every person born into that particular society. As such, the instituted imaginary becomes an integral part of each

individual's psyche, leading to a situation where individual's will tend to support the existing institutional apparatus, even when those institutions are alienated. Thus, the imaginary as an epistemological prism seeks, in part, to understand the role human beings themselves play in the dominance of heteronomy and alienation and why citizens accept institutions that are beyond their capacity to question or radically alter.

Recognizing that individuals construct the social institutions that govern them leads Castoriadis to advance a second role for a philosophy that emphasizes the role of the imaginary: to serve as a starting point for a radical praxis. "We term praxis that doing in which the other or others are intended as autonomous beings considered as the essential agents of the development of their own autonomy."¹⁶ Praxis is a conscious, lucid, and public activity that results in both the clarification and the transformation of reality. Castoriadis advocates the legitimation of social institutions through a public, democratic discourse among the citizenry, a process that requires recognizing the role the radical imaginary plays in the construction of institutions. The fact that existing institutions are alienated does not mean the imaginary does not play a role in their construction. The imaginary is *always* the source of social institutions and the society *always* creates such institutions through collective making/doing. Furthermore, the collective radical imaginary always raises questions vis-à-vis the existing instituted imaginary, forcing established institutions to respond to the making/doing of the society. The real issue, therefore, is whether or not the role of the imaginary is recognized, both in philosophical and in political terms. In Castoriadis's estimation, the problem that exists in most societies is that the imaginary is not recognized as the source of social institutions and therefore the collective is excluded from actively and openly calling the instituted

imaginary into question. The purpose of the imaginary as the starting for a political praxis is first to recognize that the relationship between the instituted and instituting imaginary continuously defines the society in question, as challenges are posed by the collective radical imaginary and answered by established institutions. Since every society is characterized by this relationship between instituting and instituted imaginary, the possibility exists for the incorporation of the radical imaginary into a political process whereby citizens in a given society can openly and democratically question established institutions and alter or re-create them if necessary. Thus, the imaginary as praxis calls for the inclusion of the radical imaginary into a political process wherein citizens actively and lucidly participate.

A radical praxis that takes the imaginary as its starting point emphasizes the spontaneous creativity of those engaged in political action. During his years as a member of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, Castoriadis focused his attention on the possibilities of the workers' movement in France and throughout the industrialized world. The type of political action that Castoriadis envisions is not a programmatic, ideological assault on state institutions by an organized Leninist vanguard party, as Communist parties at the time advocated. Rather, political action, according to Castoriadis, begins with the spontaneous organization of groups within a society that seek to confront the existing institutional structure. From the spontaneous creativity of the citizens themselves, a possibility for the construction of a democratic, autonomous society emerges. However, this possibility, which Castoriadis describes as the project of autonomy, has been covered over both politically and philosophically for the majority of history. In this sense, the project of autonomy represents what Hannah Arendt describes as the "lost treasure of the

revolutionary tradition.”¹⁷ Historically, the project of autonomy has briefly surged forth during various modern revolutionary situations, such as the Paris Commune, the February revolution in Russia, and the Hungarian uprising in 1956. “Each time they appeared, they sprang up as the spontaneous organs of the people, not only outside of all revolutionary parties, but entirely unexpected by them and their leaders.”¹⁸ These spontaneous organs of the people represent a surging forth of the creative potential of the radical imaginary. Furthermore, while these explicitly revolutionary situations were short-lived, because of the relationship between the instituted and instituting imaginary, the possibility of creating autonomous institutions exists in every modern society. However, it is important to recognize that the imaginary as praxis is not a final, programmatic solution to the problems of late modern society, but rather the instauration of an open ended process of democratic participation, where existing institutions are always subject to questioning and criticism by the populace of a particular society and where such institutions can always be altered or replaced by new ones. Attributing the creation of social institutions to the collective itself is crucial, because such recognition of the role of the imaginary allows for the instauration¹⁹ of the political.

Any discussion of the imaginary as praxis requires the recognition of the crucial distinction that Castoriadis makes between politics (*la politique*) and the political (*le politique*).²⁰ Related to this differentiation is the distinction between liberty and freedom. According to Castoriadis, politics is “a dimension of the institution of society pertaining to explicit power, that is, to the existence of instances capable of formulating explicitly sanctionable injunctions.”²¹ Every society can be characterized according to the existing sphere of politics, regardless of the form the institutions of governance may take. Thus,

the diversity between societies can be examined through the type of administrative politics that dominates within that society. Furthermore, politics is primarily technical, in the sense that the major questions that are raised concern how to adapt existing institutions to changing conditions within a society, while at the same time assuming the established institutional framework is the best for addressing this task. The legitimacy of existing institutions is not called into question. As such, the project of autonomy, and the role of the radical imaginary in the creation and alteration of institutions, is covered over within the sphere of politics. Furthermore, in the modern state, politics tends to intrude upon all other aspects of social life; politics is not restricted to domain of state power. Politics in every modern society is characterized by a bureaucratic state that seeks to expand its control beyond the boundaries of the political process.²² As a result, everyday life becomes politicized, such that the daily interactions of individuals with other individuals and between individuals and social institutions serve to reinforce the administrative power and capacity of the bureaucratic apparatus. As the bureaucratization process occurs, individuals are further excluded from political participation, they retreat into the private sphere, and the possibilities for instaurating an autonomous society diminish.

A society characterized by the dominance of the sphere of politics does not necessarily entail a coercive and overtly oppressive institutional apparatus. It is fully possible for the individual to be “free” in a society where the role of the imaginary is covered over and excluded from the political process. Given this fact, it is necessary to distinguish between liberty and freedom. Liberty is negative and reactive, concerned with the rights of the individual vis-à-vis other individuals and institutions. In essence,

liberty exists in societies where the individual is protected from the direct, coercive power of the state. As such, liberty is linked to power, or, more specifically, the possibility that the individual can assert and demand some restriction or limitation on the power of the state. Therefore, liberty is a negative reaction to the administrative power of an institutional apparatus within the realm of politics. Liberty, however, is a limited set of rights, concerned primarily with protecting the individual from the overt abuse of power by the state acting within the sphere of politics. As such, the rights afforded by a concept of liberty do not address non-state institutional forms of power. This limitation is particularly relevant in modern societies, where bureaucracies exert an indirect form of power over other aspects of the individual's life. Thus, for example, the rights of the individual do not apply to bureaucratic power in the economic sphere. For Castoriadis, these forms of power are more significant, particularly since they can coexist with apparently democratic models of decision-making. The impact of bureaucratic power, however, exacerbates the crisis of meaning in late modern societies, leading to a situation where the rights of the individual become increasingly irrelevant in confronting these non-state forms of power. As such, a praxis that takes the imaginary as its starting point must differentiate between liberty and freedom, in order to construct a model of the political as an independent sphere of democratic decision-making.

Freedom can be defined, in its most basic terms, according to the Kantian conception of autonomy. Individuals are free when they obey the laws that they have legislated for themselves, and do not rely on an external source of authority to dictate the laws to them. Freedom also requires the presence of others within a public sphere. The "individual" is not free as a discrete being. He is free only through his participation in

social living with other individuals. Thus, the freedom of all individuals living in a particular society reinforces the freedom of all other individuals. Finally, freedom can only be exercised publicly. Since freedom is tied to self-governance and the creation of laws autonomously, this can only take place within the public sphere. Thus, the political as a separate domain of action, requires a conception of freedom, as the freedom requires the political to exist.

The political represents an independent domain in which citizens are capable and free to explicitly put-into-question and alter the existing institution of society.²³ “I intend by [the political] the collective, reflective, and lucid activity that arises from the moment the question of the de jure validity of institutions is raised.”²⁴ The political is concerned primarily with the asking of the question and the process through which such questions can be asked. As such, the political is not a goal, a solution, or an answer; rather it is a process, a problem, and a question. The political is a domain wherein the individual and collective autonomy of the citizens can be expressed and wherein citizens can freely create and alter the existing institutional structure of the society. The political requires the lucid participation of a society’s citizens in order to be maintained. Lucidity requires several things. First, the members of a particular society recognize the role of the imaginary in the creation of institutions. Second, the citizens participate in some manner in the process of political judgment about the question at hand. Furthermore, lucidity requires the presence of persistent uncertainty about the future and further requires that the citizenry embrace this uncertainty. The instauration of the political carries with it an acceptance of uncertainty and of the fact that there are no final solutions to the problems of society. Rather, these problems must be addressed within the context

of an open, democratic discourse that begins with recognizing the role the imaginary plays in the construction of institutions.

It is here that one finds the real value of Castoriadis's philosophy. In contrast to the liberal argument concerning the inevitable spread of democracy, the theorist who takes the imaginary as his starting point positions himself as a consistent critic of existing institutions. While liberals seek to construct durable and lasting institutions that can respond to any challenge, the imaginary represents the possibility of questioning and resisting established institutions through a participatory democratic process. The imaginary serves as a weapon of critique, informed by Marx's maxim that "The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world, in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it."²⁵ For Castoriadis, a criticism that takes the imaginary as its starting point must embody a consistent attack on established institutions, forever questioning and always emerging. Since the imaginary is omnipresent in social life, the critic's task is to construct a participatory theory of democracy, centered on the possibility of instaurating the political. For example, during his years in the revolutionary group *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Castoriadis took an uncompromising position in favor of worker participation in public life. When marginalized and covered over, as has been the case throughout the majority of human history, the critic who roots his praxis in the imaginary can only take such a position. He must be uncompromising in the face of bureaucratic theories, such as capitalism and Marxism, especially with regard to his demand for openness, democracy, and participation. To do otherwise represents the victory of heteronomy over autonomy, the covering over of the imaginary, and the triumph of politics over the political.

Literature Review

The literature on Cornelius Castoriadis can be divided into two main subject areas. The first area examines the impact of Castoriadis and the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group on leftist politics in France during the Cold War. The second area of literature deals with Castoriadis's philosophy itself, focusing primarily on the imaginary. The English language literature in this area is sparse, and no comprehensive examination of Castoriadis's ideas has been published in English. The majority of work on Castoriadis appears in journals such as *Thesis Eleven*, *Telos*, *Constellations*, and *Praxis International*. French sources are more readily available, but are still sparse compared to other luminaries of the French left. Examinations of Castoriadis's work have appeared in a wide range of French publications. Numerous articles have been printed in mainstream French newspapers such as *Le Monde* and weeklies such as *La Nouvelle Observateur*. In addition, various left leaning journals such as *Esprit*, *Les Temps Modernes*, and *Anti-Mythes* have published works on Castoriadis. One particularly important source is a 1989 issue of *Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales* that published a multilingual, multidisciplinary symposium on Castoriadis, encompassing fields such as philosophy, political theory, sociology, and psychology. Contributors to this symposium included writers such as Edgar Morin²⁶, Pierre Vidal-Naquet²⁷, and Axel Honneth²⁸, covering topics such as Castoriadis's life²⁹, his psychoanalytic theory³⁰, and his political philosophy³¹. The symposium concludes with a lengthy response by Castoriadis, addressing many of the issues presented during the conference.³²

The most complete treatment of Castoriadis' work in English can be found in the works of Dick Howard. Howard devotes a chapter to Castoriadis in both editions of his

Marxian Legacy. In this work, Howard places Castoriadis within the Marxian tradition, which he differentiates from Marxism. This distinction is significant in the case of writers such as Castoriadis, Claude Lefort, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. These writers, according to Howard, sought to use the theoretical insights of Karl Marx to criticize the degeneration of Marxist political theory and practice represented by the twentieth century Marxist movement in the wake of totalitarianism in the Soviet Union. Castoriadis and Lefort took this to the furthest extreme, arguing that Marxism had to be rejected in order to maintain the revolutionary project itself.³³ In his studies of the French Left, Howard emphasizes the previously ignored contributions of Castoriadis, and has critiqued the mainstream French Left from a Castoriadian perspective.³⁴ Furthermore, much of Howard's other work exhibits a strong Castoriadian influence, especially with regard to Howard's emphasis on the imaginary and his concern with the restoration of the political. In works such as Defining the Political and Political Judgments, Howard has argued for "the political" as a sphere of public democratic action, where criticism can be leveled against existing social institutions and where the people democratically construct the institutions that govern them. Howard's call for the creation of the political parallels Castoriadis' support for the project of autonomy, where the individuals living in a particular society govern themselves and explicitly posit and instaurate their own institutions.³⁵ Howard, however, does not take the explicit revolutionary position that Castoriadis advocates. For example, unlike Castoriadis, who advances a direct model of democracy, Howard asserts that representative democracy is a necessity in the modern world. Despite these practical differences, however, Howard arguably represents the English "voice" of Castoriadis' work outside France.

References to Castoriadis's theories also appear in the work of political theorists and sociologists such as Agnes Heller and Ferenc Feher. Heller and Feher each devote a chapter to Castoriadis in The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism. In their respective examinations of Castoriadis, both Heller and Feher emphasize Castoriadis's reliance on the political traditions of the ancient Greeks, particularly Aristotle. Heller argues that, along with Hannah Arendt and Alastair MacIntyre, Castoriadis falls into the Neo-Aristotelian tradition. These authors are radical moderns; though they understand themselves as moderns, they "reject what they believe to be the self-deception of modernity: the creed of progression."³⁶ As such, Heller correctly argues, they are able to remain firm critics of liberalism as a political ideology, while remain liberal-minded themselves, concerned with certain liberal values such as the rights of the individual. Overall, in this work, and in several of her others where she addresses Castoriadis's ideas, Heller is sympathetic.³⁷ However, their main point of divergence is on the possibility of direct democracy. Castoriadis argued throughout his writings that some form of direct democracy was possible. Many of writings take the ancient Athenian *polis* as a starting point for the instauration of such a direct democracy. Heller, on the other hand, rejects the possibility of direct democracy. Furthermore, she argues that employing the Athenian *polis* as a model is dangerous and counterproductive. Heller argues that ancient Athens represented a despotic democracy, where women were excluded and citizens were only able to exercise autonomy on the backs of their slaves. As a result, in Heller's estimation, Castoriadis is wrong to argue that slavery and the position of women does not present a powerful argument against the value of the Athenian *polis*.³⁸ For Castoriadis, however, the value of Athenian democracy is that it represented the first

great break with heteronomy and the instauration of an explicitly autonomous society, wherein citizens were responsible for the construction of their own institutions, and where the political system relied on the continuous questioning and criticism of already existing institutions. On this issue, however, Heller is correct. Though there is value in the Athenian *polis*, namely the fact that it was, for a short time, an autonomous society, the question that must arise is, “Can this be translated to the modern world?” Given the status of women and the existence of slavery in ancient Athens, the answer is a clear “no”. The direct democracy of Athens cannot be translated to the complex modern world of today, simply because the institutions upon which direct democracy in Athens were built, namely slavery, do not, and more importantly, should not exist today in any form. The task, therefore, must be to find another democratic method for the practice of autonomy, rather than a reliance on obsolete and unacceptable political institutions.

The second field of literature on Castoriadis concerns his role in the post-World War II French Left. Phillippe Gottraux’s *Socialisme ou Barbarie* provides a comprehensive examination of the origins of the group, its rise, and its eventual collapse. Gottraux employs Pierre Bourdieu’s field theory to examine the role played by *Socialisme ou Barbarie* on the French Left. He argues that the group initially concerned itself solely with the political field, acting as a traditional radical leftist revolutionary organization. As such, the concerns of its members, as well as its philosophy, were driven primarily by an emphasis on direct political action. As the group progressed, according to Gottraux, the inability of the members to have a significant impact on the left led many of its members to abandon politics and transfer themselves into the intellectual field, usually in the form of academic appointments. Claude Lefort was one

the first to take this path, which Castoriadis would eventually follow.³⁹ However, Gottraux's argument that the members of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* left the political field in favor of the intellectual is a simplistic and limited reading of the situation. It assumes too stark a division between the political and the intellectual. The writings of Castoriadis remained explicitly political throughout his life, even if he did not actively engage in revolutionary politics in any consistent, organized manner. Furthermore, Castoriadis did in fact remain committed to the political field through his participation in various movements and through his role as a public intellectual. For example, Castoriadis attacked the French "new philosophers" for their rejection of political action as inherently totalitarian. Gottraux's exhaustive historical research represents a more important contribution to the study of the group. Gottraux meticulously describes the internal dynamics of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, which were often contentious and would eventually cause the dissolution of the group. In addition, he examines the often sectarian relationship between *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and other far left groups in France. This reveals one of the primary reasons the PCF was able to dominate the intellectual scene. Because *gauchiste* groups were too busy fighting one another, they were unable to provide a coherent, unified criticism of the orthodox Marxism of the PCF. As such, their voices were effectively diluted and drowned out by the better-known supporters of the PCF.

Castoriadis's role in the French Left after World War II is examined in various histories of the era, but in many of these works *Socialisme ou Barbarie* is relegated to a footnote or a few pages.⁴⁰ Considering the time period these works examine, this is not without justification. Judt's Past Imperfect and Poster's Existential Marxism in Postwar

France focus on the 1940's and the early 1950's, when the influence of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was marginal. Furthermore, the general arguments of both these books necessitate the exclusion of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Poster focuses primarily on Sartre's existentialism and his attempts to reconcile this philosophy with Marxism. The *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group rejected existentialism, and only came into conflict with Sartre as a result of his publication of *Les Communistes et la Paix*. In the case of Tony Judt, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* represents a counter-argument to his thesis that philosophers of the French Left were apologists for Stalinism. Castoriadis and the rest of the group were active critics of Stalinism and the Soviet Union in general. However, the marginality of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* bolsters Judt's argument that the French intellectual scene was closed to dissenting voices.

Several other histories of the period provide more elaborate examinations of Castoriadis work and the role he played in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and on the French left. Michael Scott Christofferson's work argues that the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group played a far more influential role on the French left during the "monolithic" Stalinism of the 1950's, particularly with regard to laying the groundwork for the anti-totalitarian philosophy that would be adopted by much of the French left during the 1970's. Christofferson's advances the argument that the publication of Solzhenitsyn's *Gulag Archipelago* did not lead to an "epiphany" on the French left, despite the claims that many French theorists made at the time.⁴¹ Groups such as *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, as consistent critics of Stalinism, were far more influential in the development of the French left and its eventually rejection of the Soviet model. Furthermore, Christofferson argues that many of the French philosophers who adopted an anti-Soviet position in the 1970's

directly attributed their intellectual development to the work of *gauchiste* groups such as *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, further illustrating the actual influence of the group during the 1950's.⁴²

Arthur Hirsh devotes a chapter to Castoriadis in his *The French Left*, examining his role in the development of the New Left in France. He points out the strong influence of Castoriadis' thought on the ideas of the student revolutionaries of 1968, especially Daniel Cohn-Bendit and the March 22nd Movement. Hirsh is critical of Castoriadis, pointing out that *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was a failure as a revolutionary movement, primarily because of the problem the group faced concerning their own role as intellectuals in the proletarian revolution. Furthermore, Hirsh argues that Castoriadis' critique of Marxism is superficial, because Castoriadis identifies Marxism with the economism of *Capital* and the later use of these theories to justify the totalitarian ideas of Lenin and Stalin.⁴³ This criticism, however, does not fully address the complexity of Castoriadis' development as a Marxist theorist or the reasons for his eventually rejection of contemporary Marxism as a revolutionary philosophy. Castoriadis did not reject Marxism solely because of its economism and the later revisions introduced by Lenin and Stalin. First, he criticized Marx for the incommensurability of the libertarian views of the early Marx and the focus on economic laws of his later works. Castoriadis did not perceive a shift in Marx's thinking between these two periods, but rather, found the two strains present throughout the entire body of Marx's writings. Castoriadis argued that this formed an irreconcilable contradiction.⁴⁴ On the one hand, Marx believed the proletariat had to play a role in its own emancipation, but on the other hand, it made no difference if the workers acted, because the laws of economics predetermined that

capitalism would inevitably collapse. Second, Castoriadis criticized Marxism because it purported to have solved the riddle of history. Castoriadis rejected any philosophical system that posited itself as true once and for all time, and was therefore closed to further examination.⁴⁵ Third, Marx wrote in a specific social-historical time. The fact that modern day Marxists espoused the same theories and consequent strategies as Marx, despite the evolution of the capitalist system over the ensuing century meant that modern Marxism was outdated and inappropriate for the conditions of the modern era.⁴⁶ Finally, Castoriadis argued that the result of the Marxist project was little different from the end result of the capitalist imaginary. He writes, “Au total, Marx représente le passage à la limite de significations imaginaires sociales du capitalisme: déterminisme, progrès, productivisme, économisme, et surtout, le phantasme social de l’expansion illimitée de la maîtrise ‘rationnelle’”⁴⁷ It is precisely these elements, which exist both in Marxism and in capitalism, that Castoriadis was most concerned with confronting. His work in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* as well as his later philosophical writings is an attempt to develop an alternative course for Western society, a course that would openly incorporate the radical imaginary into the construction of social institutions.

Historians who have studied the later period of the French Left, from the late 1950's to the 1970's, concede to Castoriadis a more prominent role, consistent with the greater influence of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. After the 1956 repression of the Hungarian revolution precipitated a shift in French leftist attitudes towards the Soviet Union, Castoriadis's anti-authoritarianism moved away from its marginal position in the intellectual scene and was embraced by many as a viable leftist alternative to Marxism-Leninism. In an earlier work, Judt stresses the importance of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* in

formulating a radical critique of both Marxism and capitalism and the influence this would have in France in the late 1960's and early 1970's.⁴⁸ For Sunil Khilnani, the importance of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was in the leftist critique of totalitarianism, which was otherwise absent on the French Left. Once French intellectuals became disillusioned with the Soviet Union, this critique became more significant. In addition, Khilnani argues that the ongoing debate within *Socialisme ou Barbarie* over the role of the revolutionary organization influenced the post-1968 split in the intellectual community between Althusserian academics, who stressed the importance of the vanguard party and *gauchistes*, who rejected traditional forms of organization.⁴⁹

Regardless of how Castoriadis's contributions are characterized in the various works on the French left, the majority of the above authors agree on two things. First, the impact of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* was lessened by the internal tensions within the group, first between Castoriadis and Lefort over the group's relationship to the proletariat and later between Castoriadis and Jean-François Lyotard over Castoriadis's rejection of Marxism. By the time of the May 1968 revolution in Paris, which was inspired in part by the writings of Castoriadis, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* had disbanded. Second, these historians have pointed out that the stance taken by Castoriadis was one that weathered the ideological shifts of the French Left. While leftists such as Sartre and Merleau-Ponty were forced to undergo serious soul-searching as a result of the revelations concerning Stalin's oppressive regime, Castoriadis maintained his anti-authoritarian perspectives, saying what the rest of the Left refused to admit, namely that the Soviet Union was a bureaucratic capitalist regime and to support it was to be anti-revolutionary.

Outline of the Text

During the 1950's and 1960's, Castoriadis was a political activist, participating in the radical leftist *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group. The first chapter is concerned primarily with the history of the group and its impact on the development of Castoriadis's thought in terms of the imaginary. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* took a neither/nor position *vis-à-vis* the Cold War, situating itself against both the capitalist West and the Communist East. In their estimation, both East and West represented dead ends, as both were bureaucratic, alienated social systems, unrepresentative of the needs of the majority of humanity. Both systems, and the conflict between them, would inexorably lead to war, devastation and barbarism. The alternative was a revolutionary socialism, but a revolution that came from the workers themselves, and which would create a free, autonomous society. The importance of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group was that it was during these years that Castoriadis developed the concept of the imaginary, more through praxis than through theorizing. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* came to represent in practice the type of movement Castoriadis believed could bring about an autonomous society. The significance of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* is that it defined a praxis centered on the constant questioning of existing institutions and a continuous resistance to the instituted imaginary. The group represented one possible manifestation of the radical *instituting* imaginary against the existing *instituted* imaginary. For Castoriadis, only such a movement committed to continuous critique could begin to open the possibility for the instauration of the political.

Although the Western philosophical tradition is a diverse and rich one, the general trend since the time of Plato has been to cover over the role of the imaginary in the creation of social institutions. As such, Western philosophy emphasizes heteronomy over

the possibility of autonomy. Though there are exceptions to this rule, namely the philosophy of Immanuel Kant, one of Castoriadis's most important predecessors, the exclusion of the imaginary from philosophy leads to a situation where politics becomes the status quo and the possibility of the political is marginalized. However, the imaginary lies at the heart of human life, manifested primarily in the institutions that govern political, economic, and social life, but also evident in every aspect of human existence. The world surrounding us is ultimately one of our own making, not one that has been given to us or created by some external being or force. The failure, or refusal, to recognize the fact that the human world is one created by humans is a critical deficiency of the Western philosophical tradition. The result of this deficiency is that most theorists of the Western tradition are confined to examining the problems of politics, closing off the possibility of the instauration of the political as a separate and distinct sphere of social making/doing. The second chapter focuses on a critique of the Western philosophical tradition from an epistemological framework that takes the imaginary as its starting point. Several important trends are examined such as the question of Being, the relationship between subject and object, the role of the human subject as agent, and the origin of social institutions. These questions are central to the manner in which institutions have been constructed throughout human history. The exclusion of the imaginary has covered over the possibility autonomous society in favor of the heteronomous justification of institutions. By constructing a critique of these important trends in the Western philosophical tradition, it is possible to construct a philosophical framework for the political, where the imaginary becomes a central focus rather than a marginalized or excluded phenomenon, and where the possibility autonomy can be realized.

With the advent of modernity, the social institutions in Europe underwent fundamental changes. Castoriadis refers to modernity as the second great break with heteronomy. Chapter three examines the advent of modernity and the possibility of liberation that the instauration of these new imaginary significations represented. Furthermore, this chapter will examine the tension between liberation and alienation inherent in the conflict between the modern and the instituted-modern, where the modern represents the magma of social imaginary significations underlying the modern world, and the instituted-modern, represents the *institutional* manifestation of particular elements of the modern imaginary. The instituted-modern represents a particular instauration of social imaginary significations, encompassing only a fraction of the total set of imaginary significations that emerged, and continue to emerge, during the modern era. From this examination, one can see that the modern era did not result in the construction of an autonomous society in Europe, but rather the modern individual became the most alienated being in human history. The modern and the instituted-modern, the emancipatory and repressive aspects of modernity, respectively, exist in a relationship with one another, where the modern posits the possibility of autonomy, while the instituted-modern stifles and covers over this possibility, while simultaneously justifying itself in terms derived from the liberation of human potential embodied in the modern imaginary.

Late modern societies are characterized by the dominance of a bureaucratic-capitalist institutional structure. Chapter four will examine the consequences for late modern societies of the dominance of the instituted-modern institutional apparatus. These prevailing instituted-modern institutions reflect the tension between the repressive

capacity of the instituted-modern imaginary and the modern imaginary. These institutions are founded and justified on the premise that they are the product of human making/doing, but at the same time they perpetuate themselves through their separation and alienation from the society, constructing individuals who believe they have a hand in the maintenance of such institutions, but, in practice, are excluded from the operation and legitimation of the institution itself. As such, the possibility of the political continues to be covered over in instituted-modern society, despite the fact that the advent of modernity represents a significant break with previous heteronomous institutions. The instituted-modern emphasizes politics over the political and therefore represents a perpetuation of the alienation that has been the status quo for the majority of human history. The consequences of this persistent alienation are the depoliticization and atomization of individuals in late modern society, the intrusion of bureaucratic power into all spheres of life, and a crisis of meaning in advanced capitalist societies, where institutions rely solely on the degradation of the public sphere for their legitimacy and where individuals are less capable of posing challenges to the dominant instituted-modern imaginary. The ultimate danger of these social-historical circumstances is the totalitarian possibilities that lie within the logic of the instituted-modern imaginary. Bureaucratic-capitalist societies are descending into barbarism, which requires a political philosophy that can assert the democratic possibilities of the modern imaginary against the established instituted-modern institutional structure.

Democratic theory seeks to construct models of democracy that can respond to and limit the threat posed to democratic governance by the surging forth of destructive aspects of the radical imaginary. The final chapter examines two models for the

construction of such limits: John Rawls' theory of the overlapping consensus and Jurgen Habermas' vision of a public sphere bounded by discursively constructed rational limits. Castoriadis' conception of the autonomous society is similar to Habermas' public sphere, but with several critical differences. Castoriadis argues that democratic institutions are ungrounded, and he makes no effort to provide a foundational justification for democratic governance. The legitimacy of democracy is based solely on political judgment and the active participation of autonomous citizens. As Castoriadis argues, "La politique ... n'est pas une affaire d'*epistèmè* mais de *doxa* - et cela est la seule justification non procédurale du principe majoritaire."⁵⁰ As a proponent of autonomy, Castoriadis *believes* that democracy, and more specifically, direct democracy, is the best institutional regime for instaurating the political and maintaining an autonomous society. However, there is no theoretical or scientific justification for such a belief. As he writes, it is simply a matter of *doxa*. For Castoriadis, an autonomous society cannot be based on anything but *doxa*, as such a society requires the lucid participation of the citizenry and the recognition that the collective through the use of the radical imaginary creates institutions. The moment the existing institutions of an autonomous society cease to be justified through the *doxa* of the collective, the institutions become heteronomous, relying on a source of legitimacy outside the judgment of the collective. As an ungrounded form of government, Castoriadis argues that democracy must be conceived as a political, social, and economic regime, not simply a set of procedures for decision-making. The potential threat posed by the destructive side of the radical imaginary to political institutions can be diffused through the construction of supporting economic and social institutions that reinforce a democratic culture and identity. As such, Castoriadis seeks to reconcile the

rights of the individual with an expansive vision of political participation, where individual can be actively engaged in democratic governance, without imposing external limits on the decision-making process. Castoriadis' vision of the autonomous society, therefore, allows the autonomous citizen to express her creativity and spontaneity in the public sphere, while protecting the democratic system itself from the potentially destructive aspects that also emerge from the radical imaginary.

¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, "La Montée de l'Insignifiance," La Montée de l'Insignifiance (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996) 82-83.

² Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Only Way to Find Out if You Can Swim Is to Get into the Water," Castoriadis Reader, ed. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 1.

³ *ibid.* 2.

⁴ Pierre Chaliou was a pseudonym used by Castoriadis during his membership in the PCI and later in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. Claude Lefort adopted the name Claude Montal.

⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Pourquoi je ne suis plus marxiste," Une Société à la Dérive, eds. Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas, et Pascal Vernay (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005) 29.

⁶ *ibid.* 30.

⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, "General Introduction," Political and Social Writings, vol 1, ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 11.

⁸ Dick Howard, "Can French Intellectuals Escape Marxism," The Specter of Democracy, (New York: Columbia UP, 2002) 30.

⁹ Dick Howard, "The Burden of French History," The Specter of Democracy (New York: Columbia UP, 2002) 161.

¹⁰ Michael Walzer, The Company of Critics, (New York: Basic Books, 1988) 16.

¹¹ David Howarth and Georgios Varouxakis, Contemporary France (London: Arnold, 2003) 127.

¹² Castoriadis, "Pourquoi je ne suis plus marxiste," Une Société à la Dérive, 35.

¹³ *ibid.* 40.

¹⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy," Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy, ed. David Ames Curtis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 104.

¹⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 74.

¹⁶ *ibid.* 75..

¹⁷ Hannah Arendt, On Revolution (New York: Penguin Books, 1990) 215-281.

¹⁸ *ibid.* 249.

¹⁹ The modern usage of the term "instaurate" is to restore or renew. Castoriadis, however, returns to an older meaning of the term, which is to erect or establish something anew or for the first time. In Castoriadis's usage, "instauration" means the creation of something new, rather than restoration or renewal. See "Instauration," Oxford English

Dictionary Second Edition, 1989, www.dictionary.oed.com and David Ames Curtis, “Instauration,” Appendix I: Glossary in Castoriadis, Political and Social Writings Vol. 1, 335.

²⁰ In his writings on this subject, Castoriadis reverses the more commonly applied definitions found in English literature on the subject. See for example, the writings of Dick Howard (From Marx to Kant, Defining the Political, and Political Judgments). Howard defines the political and politics in the opposite manner. Chantal Mouffe also defines “the political” and “politics” in similar terms. Because I intend to bring some of these authors into the discussion, for the sake of clarity I will use the more commonly found definitions of the “politics” and “the political.”

²¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, “Power, Politics, Autonomy,” Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 156. See note 1.

²² Cornelius Castoriadis, “Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime,” Constellations 4:1 (1997) 1.

²³ Castoriadis, “Power, Politics, Autonomy,” Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy 159. See note 1.

²⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, “Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics,” Thesis Eleven 49 (May 1997) 112.

²⁵ Karl Marx, “Theses on Feuerbach,” The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker, 2nd ed. (New York: W.W. Norton, 1978) 145.

²⁶ Edgar Morin, “Un Aristote en Chaleur,” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales Tome XXVII: 86 (1989) 11-15.

²⁷ Pierre Vidal-Naquet, “Souvenirs à bâtons rompus sur Cornelius Castoriadis et ‘Socialisme ou Barbarie’,” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales Tome XXVII: 86 (1989) 17-26.

²⁸ Axel Honneth, “Une sauvegarde ontologique de la révolution” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales Tome XXVII: 86 (1989) 191-207.

²⁹ See Eugène Enriquez, “Cornelius Castoriadis: Un homme dans une oeuvre,” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales Tome XXVII: 86 (1989) 27-47. and Kan Eguchi, “Un portrait de Castoriadis,” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales Tome XXVII: 86 (1989) 49-58.

³⁰ Francis Guibal, “Imagination et Création sur la pensée de Cornelius Castoriadis,” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales Tome XXVII: 86 (1989) 125-140.

³¹ Sunil Khilnani, “Castoriadis and Modern Political Theory,” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales Tome XXVII: 86 (1989) 405-418 and Jean-Pierre Siméon, “La pensée de la démocratie chez Castoriadis,” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales Tome XXVII: 86 (1989) 375-382.

³² Cornelius Castoriadis, “Fait et à faire,” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales Tome XXVII: 86 (1989).

³³ Dick Howard, The Marxian Legacy 2nd ed. (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988).

³⁴ Howard, “Can French Intellectuals Escape Marxism?” The Specter of Democracy, 24-38 and Dick Howard, “The Anticommunist Marxism of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*,” The Specter of Democracy (New York: Columbia UP, 2002) 63-70.

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- ³⁵ Dick Howard, Defining the Political (London: Macmillan, 1989), Dick Howard, Political Judgments (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996), and Howard, The Specter of Democracy
- ³⁶ Agnes Heller, “With Castoriadis to Aristotle; from Aristotle to Kant; from Kant to Us,” The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism (New Brunswick, NJ: Transaction, 1991) 492.
- ³⁷ Agnes Heller, A Theory of Modernity (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1999); Agnes Heller, A Philosophy of History in Fragments (Malden, MA: Blackwell, 1993); Agnes Heller, A Radical Philosophy, trans. James Wickham (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1984).
- ³⁸ Heller, “With Castoriadis to Aristotle; from Aristotle to Kant; from Kant to Us,” The Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism, 500.
- ³⁹ Phillipe Gottraux, Socialisme ou Barbarie (Lausanne: Éditions Payot, 1997) 10-14.
- ⁴⁰ Mark Poster, Existential Marxism in Postwar France (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975) and Tony Judt, Past Imperfect (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1992)
- ⁴¹ Michael Scott Christofferson, French Intellectuals Against the Left (New York: Bergahn Books, 2004) 19.
- ⁴² *ibid.* 218.
- ⁴³ Arthur Hirsh, The French Left (Montreal: Black Rose Books, 1982).
- ⁴⁴ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 29.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.* 41.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.* 12.
- ⁴⁷ “In sum, Marx represents the highest realization of the social imaginary significations of capitalism: determinism, progress, productivity, economism, and overall the social fantasy of the limitless expansion of ‘rational’ mastery.” Cornelius Castoriadis, “Transition,” Domaines de l’Homme (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1977) 21. Translation mine.
- ⁴⁸ Tony Judt, Marxism and the French Left (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1986).
- ⁴⁹ Sunil Khilnani, Arguing Revolution (New Haven: Yale, 1993).
- ⁵⁰ “The political...is not a matter of *episteme* but of *doxa* – and this is the only, non-procedural justification for a majoritarian principle.” Cornelius Castoriadis, “Quelle Démocratie?” Figures du Pensable (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999) 155.

The Imaginary and Political Action

The publication of Castoriadis' The Imaginary Institution of Society in 1975 presented the most complete formulation of the concept of the imaginary. However, the concept of the imaginary evolved over time, first expressed in Castoriadis' early political works when he was a member of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group. The purpose of this chapter is to provide a brief intellectual biography of Castoriadis with the intention of tracing the development of the concept of the imaginary through an examination of Castoriadis's participation in the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group in the 1950's and 1960's. During these years, the imaginary developed through Castoriadis' critique of the mainstream French left's relationship to the *Parti Communiste Français* (PCF), his examination of bureaucratic capitalism in both the West and the communist East, his eventual rejection of Marxism as a revolutionary theory in the name of workers' self-management as an alternative, and his rejection of the post-1968 turn towards postmodernism and away from political activity. Each of these concerns played a significant role in the construction of the concept of the imaginary, leading to the more complete treatment of the subject in The Imaginary Institution of Society.

Socialisme ou Barbarie was founded on the tenets of workers' self-management, democratic socialism, and individual and social autonomy. Neither the United States nor the Soviet Union embodied these principles, leading the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group to refuse to support either side during the Cold War.¹ The refusal to choose between an authoritarian East and a capitalist West, instead declaring that both systems represented the dominance of bureaucratic institutions, differentiated the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group from the mainstream French left, but it also insured that the group would remain on

the political margins, especially during the 1950's when the PCF supporters dominated the French intellectual scene. In addition, the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group was founded as an explicitly revolutionary organization, committed to the advancement of its principles through political action.² The political activities of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, particularly Castoriadis's theoretical contributions, focused primarily on an examination of the role workers themselves played in the continued functioning of the capitalist system. From this perspective, Castoriadis concludes that since capitalism relies on the creativity of the worker on the factory floor, that same worker has the power to use this creativity to resist and change the system itself. This perspective informed the theoretical output of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group throughout its existence, weathering the shifts that occurred on the French left during the 1950's and 1960's, during which Castoriadis maintained a consistent position, backing the project of autonomy both against the PCF and its allies and, later, against the apolitical stance of many of the post-1968 movements.

The French Communist Party

For many left-wing intellectuals in France after World War II, political engagement required an alignment with the PCF, a party that explicitly claimed to narrowly represent the interests of the proletariat.³ As a result of this position, as well as its claim to be a Marxist revolutionary vanguard, the PCF eschewed wider political appeal in mainstream French politics, thus allowing the party to present itself as a consistent opponent of the bourgeoisie. Such a declaration, with its implicit rejection of existing democratic politics, resulted in the PCF's exclusion from government, which further facilitated the party's self-identification as an "outsider" confronting the

bourgeois French political system.⁴ The party's "outsider" status was strengthened by the fact that since its founding in 1919, the PCF followed the ideological lead of the CPSU through the Comintern. Unlike many other Western European Communist Parties that developed their own indigenous Communist traditions⁵, the PCF consistently maintained a pro-Moscow line until 1968, considering itself subordinate to the Soviet Communist Party (CPSU). For example, from 1927 to 1933, the PCF maintained the Stalinist class against class position, asserting that social democracy was a more dangerous enemy than the rising fascist trend in Europe, altering this position, in line with CPSU, in 1933 when Hitler came to power. Similarly, when the Nazi-Soviet pact was in effect, the PCF asserted that World War II was nothing more than a conflict between rival imperialist powers, changing this position once the Soviet Union was invaded and taking up arms in anti-fascist struggle.⁶ Throughout the Cold War, the PCF was the most stubbornly Stalinist party in Western Europe, resisting ideological reform even after Stalin's death and Khrushchev's denunciation of Stalin during his "secret speech" at the 22nd Party Congress.⁷ While the rest of the Communist world was de-Stalinizing, the PCF completely ignored this movement, to the extent that, for example, Roger Garaudy, the primary theorist of the PCF, did not even mention the issue of Stalin or de-Stalinization in *Perspectives de l'homme*, which he published in 1959.⁸ Furthermore, the PCF consistently placed itself on the wrong side of history: the party supported the Soviet invasion of Hungary in 1956⁹, tepidly criticized the crushing of Prague Spring in 1968¹⁰, refused to support in any way the student uprising in Paris in May 1968.¹¹ The hard-line positions taken by the PCF and its consistent subservience to Moscow would eventually lead to declining support, both among intellectuals and among the working class. During

the post-World War II era, the PCF would come to embody the worst aspects of a Leninist vanguard party, unable to adapt to the changing social-historical circumstances in France, and continuing to be hidebound by the ideological constraints of an Orthodox Marxism that had become completely incapable of addressing the real concerns of the working class. In essence, the PCF is a party that was left behind by history. Thus, it is not surprising that the party's history in the second half of the twentieth century is a chronicle of increasing irrelevance to French politics and declining support among its proclaimed base, the French working class.

Despite the PCF's proclaimed role as a revolutionary party and its consistent and unabashed subservience to the CPSU, it emerged from World War II with a high level of prestige and credibility. Communists throughout Europe became symbols of anti-fascism as a result of their resistance to the Nazis during the war. Right-wing politics had been thoroughly discredited in France as a result of the collaboration of intellectuals like Charles Maurras with the Vichy regime and thus with Nazi Germany. Furthermore, capitalism lost much of its legitimacy as a result of the cooperation of many prominent business owners with the program of the Vichy government. Furthermore, while many mainstream political parties in France had collaborated with fascism, the PCF had suffered tremendous losses under the Nazi occupation. Much of the PCF's organizational capacity had been decimated as a result of the war. These losses among both the leadership and the popular following earned the PCF the nickname the "parti des 75,000 fusillés" (the party of 75,000 Resistance martyrs).¹² As a result of these losses, the PCF was able to present itself both as an anti-fascist force that resisted the Nazi occupation and as a nationalist movement that defended France in its time of crisis.¹³ To further

contribute to the PCF's prestige as an "outsider" party untainted by the Vichy regime, Marxists were consistently excluded from many public positions in the immediate postwar era. For example, scientists who were members of the party were dismissed from their posts, the Sorbonne barred Marxist lectures and conferences, and Marxist publications were banned from schools, universities, public libraries, and in many bookshops and distributions chains.¹⁴ Despite these organizational setbacks, the PCF was able to parlay its prestige into significant electoral victories in 1945, winning the largest number of seats in the French parliament. However, the PCF did not receive a majority of the seats, and entered an alliance with the Socialist *Section Française de l'Internationale Ouvrière* (SFIO).¹⁵ Membership in the party itself also increased from a half million in June 1945 to 750,000 by the end of that year.¹⁶

Despite these early victories immediately after the war, the PCF quickly suffered political setbacks, leading to the party's exclusion from power, but also cementing its status as the perennial outsider in French politics. The intensification of the Cold War and a series of strikes in 1947 that were blamed on the PCF were the proximate causes for the PCF's expulsion from the Socialist Ramadier government in May 1947.¹⁷ At that time, all the major political parties in France denounced the PCF as a totalitarian party, working to undermine French democracy in the service of the Soviet Union.¹⁸ In the municipal elections later that year, the SFIO broke its previous alliance with PCF, allowing the Gaullist *Rassemblement du peuple français* (RPF) to win thirty-eight percent of the votes.¹⁹ The PCF responded to the SFIO's decision by returning to the Stalinist class against class rhetoric that had failed so miserably in Germany during the interwar years, accusing the SFIO of opening the door for the return of fascism.²⁰ By 1947,

therefore, the PCF was once again the outsider party, taking this opportunity to consistently condemn the French state.

The prestige of the PCF after World War II also attracted many intellectuals, who viewed the party as the best hope for a significant change in France. Intellectuals who sided with the PCF believed that they were allying themselves with a progressive force in world politics, defending (or, at the very least, refusing to condemn) the Soviet Union and the policies of Stalin in order to advance the cause of communist revolution in France and in the West.²¹ French intellectuals took this position despite the fact that since the 1930's, evidence of Stalinist atrocities, including the gulags, the show trials, and the purges, was well publicized in Western Europe and continued to mount during the post-war period.²² The denunciation of the PCF as a totalitarian party by the other major French political parties had little effect in intellectual circles, despite the efforts of Raymond Aron to introduce this concept into French thought.²³ Whenever the issue of Stalin's brutality or the totalitarian nature of the USSR arose, French allies of the PCF did not attempt to deny Stalin's crimes, but rather argued these atrocities were justified by the fact that Communism was the best hope for human emancipation. The use of violence in the Soviet Union was in the name of the progress of humanity, and therefore acceptable, while violence in the West was employed to maintain the capitalist status quo.²⁴ This position illustrates the binary logic through which the left in France viewed the world. An intellectual could either take a progressive position on the side of the PCF, making him ally of the worker or one defended capitalism and was therefore a reactionary as bad as any Vichy collaborator. Since the Soviet Union was the first and strongest Communist

country, it had to be ideologically defended against those in the West who sought to destroy it.

The defense of the Soviet Union during the 1940's and 1950's was motivated by a number of factors. First, capitalist industry had benefited under fascist rule, leading many on the left to equate capitalism with fascism. After 1947, party militants and theorists equated Gaullism with fascism, and argued it was the obligation of the workers to resist this trend in France.²⁵ Second, the French left believed that Communism represented the hope of humanity for progress beyond the capitalist present.²⁶ Judt correctly argues that both anti-Americanism and anti-anti-communism factored into this equation. Intellectuals were unwilling to condemn the Soviets out of fear that any criticism of the Soviet Union would serve as propaganda for the pro-American, anti-Communist government in France.²⁷ Judt argues that a certain amount of self-interest was involved as well. In the United States, public intellectuals played a marginal role. French intellectuals believed that if America represented the future, they would be excluded from public life.²⁸ Finally, in allying themselves with the Soviet Union, French intellectuals gave themselves a role to play in revolutionary politics. As intellectuals, the militants of the PCF considered them bourgeois. However, by defending the Soviet Union, they felt they were fulfilling Marx's prediction that in the course of the proletarian struggle, many bourgeois intellectuals would abandon their class and join the cause of the workers. Given all these factors, the mainstream intellectual French Left overlooked the atrocities being committed by the Stalinist regime in the Soviet Union, continuing to defend the USSR even as further evidence of Stalin's crimes mounted and as the PCF

became a reactionary defender of the political status quo, isolated from the real grievances of the working class in France.

The mainstream French left's alliance with the PCF soon proved to be a tenuous one. Intellectuals were forced to choose between their critical independence and their support for the party. The PCF had little use for independent thinkers who were unwilling to join the party or refused to adhere strictly to Marxist orthodoxy. The CPSU's domination of the PCF, and the Soviet intolerance of ideological deviation, reinforced the relative insignificance of independent fellow-travelers vis-à-vis the party leadership.²⁹ Since the PCF was loyal to Moscow, its leaders demanded that its supporters be loyal as well. Intellectuals who sought to reinterpret Marxism only served to undermine the political program of the party in France and its political masters in the Soviet Union. Some intellectuals, such as Maurice Merleau-Ponty, did in fact join the party, but became quickly disillusioned, both with the PCF's tactics and its subservience to Moscow.³⁰ Tony Judt aptly compares the relationship of intellectuals who allied themselves with the PCF to battered wives who return to their husbands after being beaten. As a result, Communism, like a violent husband, benefited from the faith of these individuals which was based on an initial infatuation.³¹

The members of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group differentiated themselves from the mainstream French left by their refusal to defend the Soviet Union, instead taking a position that the PCF and its allies in the CPSU did not represent the interests of the working class in France. According to the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* position, the PCF was solely concerned with advancing its own political interests, seeking to wrest state power from the bourgeois parties, even if this meant sacrificing the interests of the proletariat.³²

Thus, the PCF's self-proclaimed status as an "outsider" attacking the French political system was belied by the party's actions while in power. From 1945 to 1947, the CGT, the PCF's allied labor union, impeded any and all industrial action by the French proletariat in the name of rebuilding France. However, once the PCF was ousted from power, the party returned to its revolutionary rhetoric. As Claude Lefort observed at the time, Communist parties in power become less interested in revolution when it threatens their position in the government.³³ The lack of action by the PCF during the height of its political power illustrates the truth of this observation.

More important than the actions of the PCF, according to Castoriadis, was the fact that the Communist party as an organization mirrored the total bureaucratic nature of the Soviet Union. The structure of the Soviet system allowed the party bureaucracy to occupy a social position that generated its own interests antithetical to those of the working class. The party bureaucracy in the Soviet Union and in Communist parties in general exercised power to advance narrow capitalistic interests.³⁴ In France, the social base of the PCF was the labor aristocracy and the political and trade-union bureaucracy, denounced by Lenin as the social bases of reformism.³⁵ Thus, the very nature of the PCF precluded any advancement of revolutionary goals. Stalinist parties were interested only in seizing the bureaucratic apparatus of the capitalist state and employing the means of production to advance a totalitarian agenda. In a later work, Castoriadis argued, "The PCF can declare that it advocates democracy, total anarchism, or Zen Buddhism; its totalitarian aim is inscribed in the structure of its organization and in the constantly reproduced relations domination on the part of the Summit."³⁶ As such, the conclusion of the revolutionary could only be as follows: supporting the PCF and the Soviet Union

served counter-revolutionary goals. The only means through which a socialist system could emerge is the spontaneous creativity of the working class itself and the development of self-management. The task of the revolutionary must be to support this goal, not the political goals of a bureaucratic Communist party.

Given the narrow political goals of the PCF, intellectuals who supported the party were, according to Castoriadis, being played for fools. In the name of the progress of humankind, supporters of the PCF were instead aligning themselves with a bureaucratic political party taking orders from one of the most repressive, brutal regimes in existence. As such, the mainstream French left was betraying its purported commitment to political engagement. According to Castoriadis, political engagement required direct participation in the workers' struggles in France.³⁷ It was not enough to simply claim to represent the interests of the proletariat. Furthermore, no revolutionary group could claim to speak on the behalf of the French working class. The participation of intellectuals in the workers' struggles could only be effective if the intellectual followed the lead of the workers themselves.³⁸ Castoriadis and the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* members rejected the Leninist idea that the proletariat is only capable of achieving a trade union consciousness. There is a great revolutionary potential in the working class as it exists; there is no need for a revolutionary organization to step in and transform the consciousness of the working class. Castoriadis argues that the working class as it exists is fully capable of transforming the relations of production.³⁹ The task of the revolutionary organization is to place the everyday life of the proletariat into a theoretical, revolutionary context whereby the worker can recognize his true role in the capitalist system and use this recognition to fundamentally alter society and the relations of production. The creativity

exhibited by the workers on the factory floor that allows the capitalist system to function is the same force that can be turned towards a revolutionary reconstruction of the relations of production.

Jean-Paul Sartre and the French Left

Jean-Paul Sartre's participation in leftist politics is perhaps the best example of the emphasis on political engagement over theoretical speculation, as Sartre significantly altered his earlier philosophy to make it more appealing to the leaders of the PCF and to make it more relevant to contemporary political struggles. However, in altering his earlier existentialist philosophy, Sartre compromised his philosophy of freedom in order to defend the authoritarian tactics of the PCF in France and the totalitarianism of the Stalinist Soviet Union. In this regard, Sartre represented the mainstream of the French left at the time, which was too willing to embrace Marxist orthodoxy at the expense of its own integrity and, more importantly, at the expense of the possibility of effecting significant social change in France. In the end, the PCF proved to be more concerned with amassing political power for itself rather than bringing about revolutionary change in France. Throughout the 1950's and 1960's, the PCF turned its back on workers' unrest, refusing to support spontaneous strikes, opting instead for well-orchestrated, controlled, but wholly ineffectual political gestures. During the early 1950's, Sartre defended these hollow political moves by the PCF as expressions of revolutionary activity on behalf of the working class. By the time of the publication of *Communism and the Peace* in 1952, Sartre had become one of the staunchest defenders of the PCF, thus completing his transformation from an existentialist criticized by the PCF to a vociferous advocate of Marxist revolution.

The relationship between Sartre and the PCF was, as between all independent intellectuals and the party, a one-sided “love affair.” While Sartre sought to advance the PCF’s goals and agitate for revolution, the PCF had very little use for Sartre’s heterodox conception of Marxist theory. Orthodox Marxists roundly attacked Sartre’s early existentialist philosophy, primarily because in this early work Sartre rejects the idea of liberation through collective action on the part of a social class.⁴⁰ Sartre’s existential philosophy emphasizes the concept of freedom, which he views as the core of human existence. Freedom, for Sartre, requires an act of will on the part of the individual: each person has to make a conscious decision to be free. This, however, is not an easy task, as Sartre argues that existential anxiety emerges from the realization by the individual that every moment is a creative one and requires a decision.⁴¹ Any refusal to make a choice when confronted by a situation that requires one is, according to Sartre, an act of bad faith, a flight from freedom.⁴² Furthermore, expressing one’s freedom becomes difficult given the fact that the individual is surrounded by others who similarly seek to exercise their own freedom. Sartre argues that human existence consists of the interactions between monadic individuals, whose primary relationship to one another is defined by conflict. Because each individual is potentially free, the assertion of this freedom by one threatens the freedom of others. For example, Sartre argues that love cannot be a positive affirmation of each lover’s freedom, but rather is always an attempt by one lover to strip the other of his or her freedom.⁴³ When every individual exists in potential conflict with every other individual, the possibility of collective action diminishes. However, Sartre does not argue that political action and social change are impossible. The capitalist system, with its emphasis on rational self-interest and the pursuit of external economic

gains, reinforces bad faith among the individuals in the society in question. When confronted with the easy path of self-interest and the more difficult one of asserting one's will and creativity, especially when this conflicts with the dominant system, the individual will more often choose the former. This is where, according to Sartre, the revolutionary potential of existentialism lies. True freedom is by its nature a threat to the status quo.⁴⁴ Sartre's existentialist writings express a desire for the individual to choose freedom over bad faith. Throughout his writings, it is clear that Sartre has a political program in mind. Choosing freedom is preferable to fleeing from it, despite the existential anxiety the former decision may bring.

Given Sartre's implicit political program, it is no surprise that he eventually allied with the PCF. Sartre was attracted to the prestige of the PCF and clearly agreed with the position that the party represented the only hope for significant social change in France. As Sartre became more involved in political activity, he sought to reconcile his early existentialist philosophy with the Marxism of the PCF, despite the apparent conflict between these two philosophical systems. Sartre's intent was to rectify Marxism's lack of a coherent theory of liberation by combining it with the emancipatory aspects of existentialism.⁴⁵ In adapting existentialism to Marxism, however, Sartre altered many of his key beliefs in order to harmonize the two philosophies. He began to distance himself from his previous focus on the monadic individual, arguing instead that the possibilities for freedom were rooted in the historical situation, which determined limits and capacity for action at any given time.⁴⁶ Furthermore, a worker's freedom no longer depended solely on his own action, but rather the individual worker's freedom was dependent on the activity of the working class as a whole. In order to assert his own freedom, the

worker had to change the situation of his class. Specifically, the working class had to overcome its atomization if it ever hoped to defeat the capitalist system, and only the Communist Party provided the opportunity to do this.⁴⁷ This new emphasis on class liberation represents Sartre's ultimate betrayal of his earlier existentialist philosophy. In order to reconcile Marxism and existentialism, Sartre devalues the freedom of the individual member of the working class, subjecting the individual to the dictates of the PCF. The individual worker is no longer capable of asserting his own freedom vis-à-vis the society in which he lives. Rather, he must submit his will to the general will of the communist party. Only through the collective action of his class, directed and dictated by the party, can the worker become free in a capitalist system. In essence, Sartre abandons the concept of the worker as an individual will, opting instead for a desubjectivized working class, composed of workers who are no more than tools in the communist party's struggle to engage in revolution. Dick Howard accurately observes that in Sartre's philosophical shift to the defense of Marxism, the existential *a priori* of freedom is replaced by the *a priori* of a progressive history whose sense or direction only the Communist Party or the Soviet Union knows.⁴⁸

During the 1950's, Sartre's defense of the PCF was dogmatic. Merleau-Ponty, for example, broke with *Les Temps Modernes*, convinced that Sartre would not allow the publication of dissenting opinions in the journal.⁴⁹ In *The Communists and the Peace*, Sartre vehemently defends Marxism and the PCF, arguing that a revolution against the capitalist system is only possible through the party. This work is directed primarily against anti-communist leftists and *gauchiste* splinter groups who Sartre blames for the failure of the various strikes during the early 1950's. However, Sartre wrote this

systematic defense of Marxism at an inopportune time in the Party's history. At the time, the Party suffered declining support among the working class, apparently refuting Sartre's claim that the proletariat needed the party to act as a conduit for its hostility towards capitalism. While Sartre would claim that the lack of class consciousness was to blame for the PCF's waning support, the real blame lay squarely on the shoulders of the Party. The chasm that emerged between the PCF leadership and the party's mass base was a direct result of the Party's pursuit of its political goals over the demands of the French proletariat.

Since the end of World War II, the PCF had consistently ignored the grievances of the working class, especially while the PCF held political power. In the years immediately following the war, the CGT attempted to restrain the working class, exhorting its members to work first for the economic reconstruction of France, promising that if the workers deferred their demands, the union would seek concessions from the government at a later date.⁵⁰ The PCF was convinced that through the CGT, it would be able to exert control over the working class, and, for a time, this was true, as the proletariat obeyed the PCF's directive to refrain from industrial actions.⁵¹ However, worker discontent quickly began to grow, as many workers believed they were not reaping the benefits of the growing economy they had helped to reconstruct after World War II. *Gauchiste* elements in the French working class called strikes at the Renault Billancourt factory in 1947. The PCF, still a member of the French government, denounced the strikes and demanded that the workers return to the factory. At first, the strikes were limited, as the CGT, which dominated the plant, expressed hostility towards them. However, after a few days, the strike spread, primarily as a result of worker

initiative, forcing the CGT to call its own strike while negotiating with management. Soon after, the limited action of the CGT spiraled out of the union's control and became a full strike of all thirty thousand of Renault Billancourt's workers. The CGT finally supported the strike, but the negotiations with management fell far short of what the workers on the factory floor were demanding.⁵²

While the 1947 Renault Billancourt strike represented the first major break between the PCF and its proletarian base, the decline in PCF influence was more clearly evident in 1952 when the CGT called a series of strikes, all of which generated little response from the French proletariat. By this time, the PCF was no longer a party in power and had returned to its revolutionary rhetoric, seeking to embarrass the government and assert its power within civil society. The first strike called was against fascism and another strike was called to protest the visit of the American general Matthew Ridgway to France. Neither of these actions received working class support and only PCF cadres turned up for them.⁵³ The CGT also called for a strike at Renault Billancourt after Jacques Duclos was arrested in the "pigeon affair".⁵⁴ However, the workers at the Billancourt plant ignored the CGT's call for a strike to protest the arrest.⁵⁵ In the end, the workers at Billancourt were forced to leave the plant after CGT activists shut off the power, preventing them from continuing work.⁵⁶ The failure of these strikes can be attributed to the fact that they only served the political ends of the PCF. Once excluded from power, the PCF sought to embarrass the government by mobilizing the workers against it. However, none of these strikes addressed the actual economic grievances of the workers. Despite these failures on the part of the CGT, intellectuals continued to support the PCF, even though it was clear that the party had lost a

significant amount of its working class base. Instead of critically examining these failures, mainstream leftist intellectuals generated excuses for the failure of the Party.

The most prominent intellectual to defend the failure of the PCF was Jean-Paul Sartre, who wrote The Communists and the Peace partly in response to anti-communist groups who rejoiced over the apparent decline in PCF influence. Throughout this work, Sartre denigrates the working class, arguing that the lack of support for the strikes was the fault of the workers and *gauchiste* groups who undermined the PCF and the cause of the revolution itself. The PCF, according to Sartre, continued to represent the only organization through which the capitalist system could be confronted, and consequently the only hope for progressive change in France. Furthermore, The Communists and the Peace is a shrill attack against anti-communist leftists as traitors to the cause of the revolution, referring to the far-left groups as “dirty rats” (*rats visqueux*)⁵⁷, doing more to impede the revolution than any right-wing organization could hope to do. According to Paul Berman, the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, which had a significant amount of influence among radical workers at Renault-Billancourt⁵⁸, was one of Sartre’s primary targets.⁵⁹ The Sartre-Lefort debate, printed in the pages of *Les Temps Modernes* reveals the hard-line position Sartre was willing to take to defend the PCF. His Reply to Claude Lefort rarely addresses the criticisms that Lefort levels against him. Rather, Sartre engages in a strident personal attack on Lefort, asserting that Lefort is unable to distinguish between the real and the ideal⁶⁰, questioning his commitment to the political struggle against capitalism⁶¹ and, essentially accusing Lefort of being a fascist and trying to divide the working class against itself.⁶² Ironically, Sartre also attacks Lefort for being

an intellectual, arguing that Lefort, as an intellectual, cannot speak in the name of the proletariat or even about the proletariat.⁶³

Sartre's harsh tone in attacking Lefort is unsurprising, given the intellectual climate permeating the mainstream Left at the time. The tone of political discourse on the left was set early on in response to the Allies de-Nazification programs throughout Europe. After the war, leftist intellectuals, many of who had suffered severely during the Occupation, became embittered by the fact that many former collaborators had escaped unpunished. To rectify this situation, the *Comité national des écrivains* (CNE) created a blacklist of authors who had collaborated during the war, and attempting to pressure publishers not to publish these works.⁶⁴ This purge sought to punish intellectuals not only for deeds that were judged collaborationist but for beliefs that contributed to a climate of collaborationism.⁶⁵ The Committee punished intellectuals both for what they said and wrote before the war as well as during it, and it soon became clear that in many cases, the purge served as an excuse to settle personal and professional scores.⁶⁶ Despite this purge, membership in the CNE increased after the war, as did the influence of the PCF over the organization. The PCF directed many of the CNE's activities, aligning the writers' organization with the political goals of the PCF. Throughout the 1950's, the CNE advanced a one-sided defense of liberty, agitating for the rights of left-wing writers, but refusing to defend authors persecuted by communist regimes.⁶⁷ One of the primary motivations for this purge was the accepted fact that the role of intellectual was a public one. As such, responsibility becomes a central issue. Because the French intellectuals believe in the primacy of political participation, one must accept the practical consequences of one's philosophy. For collaborators, this meant being punished for

supporting the Fascist regime. The purges set a tone for the intellectual climate in France, which can be best described as a binary view of the world. This view dictated that either one was for revolution and on the side of progress or one was against it, and therefore a reactionary and against all those who had died during the war.⁶⁸ These purges set the tone of discourse on the French left, clearly stating that disagreement with the PCF would not be tolerated. Philosophers such as Raymond Aron were labeled “fascists” for refusing to adopt leftist positions. On the left, *gauchiste* critics of the PCF were marginalized and considered negative influences on the proletariat.

Given the intellectual climate on the left in 1952, it is not surprising that Sartre’s The Communists and the Peace represents more an attack on critics of the PCF than a coherent defense of Marxism. Throughout the work, Sartre advances contradictory arguments in defense of the party, shows his pure contempt for the proletariat, and refuses to acknowledge the political realities of post-war France, ignoring the very real failures of the Communist Party and its affiliated union, the CGT. In his defense of the PCF, Sartre invokes a return to Marx in order to legitimize the party as an organization and the actions of the party on “behalf” of the working class. Sartre writes:

I remind them of these words of Marx which they have read, reread, and commented on a hundred times: “The proletariat can act as a class only by shaping itself into a distinct political party,” and I ask them to come to their own conclusions: whatever they think of the “Stalinists”, even if they think the masses are mistaken or deluded, what maintained their cohesion, what assured the efficiency of their action, if not the Communist Party itself? The “proletariat shaped into a distinct political party”- what is it in France today if not the totality

of the worker organized by the Communist Party? If the working class wants to detach itself from the Party, it has only one means at its disposal: to crumble into dust.⁶⁹

Sartre exhibits the tendency of modern day Marxists to use the original writings of Marx to justify the ideology that the latter's philosophy had become. By quoting Marx, Sartre hopes to establish authority for the PCF. However, in the above passage, there is a subtle distinction that reveals Sartre as an ideologist, rather than someone concerned about reviving the original Marx. There is a tremendous difference between the working class "shaping itself into a distinct political party" and the proletariat "shaped into a distinct political party."⁷⁰ The former clearly states that the *praxis* of the proletariat itself is what will lead to its coherence as a distinct class. The latter, by contrast, is a typically Leninist notion, namely that the proletariat is incapable of *praxis*, and a vanguard party must act on its behalf. Sartre elaborates on his Leninist position by arguing that the masses on their own are only capable of spontaneous festivals, which, on the one hand, releases them from the painstaking work of organization, and on the other, proves its necessity.⁷¹ Trade-unionism alone is a limited means, whereby workers become satisfied with the compromises made by the capitalist system and take an implicit stand against revolutionary action. As such, those who advocate trade-union solutions betray the working class, which is clearly incapable of understanding the limitations of this form of organization.⁷² The task of the Communist Party is to explain events to the masses and to channel their hostility toward the capitalist system in the proper direction.⁷³ Only through the Communist party, and, by corollary, its affiliated trade-union, the CGT, can the working class advance the cause of revolution. Thus, the trade union must be

guided by the program of the Communist party in order to achieve the required organizational capacity for confronting capitalism and the necessary political consciousness that demands the overthrow of the capitalist system, rather than simply accepting the limited concessions capitalists will make to the proletariat.

Once Sartre establishes the necessity of the PCF, he defends the failure of the party in the 1950's by arguing that the blame lies with the working class itself. Sartre's reaction to the 1952 strikes was to argue that workers who did not strike were acting as individuals, not as members of the working class.⁷⁴ In Sartre's mind, "The workers refused to fight because they were sure of defeat: they had lost confidence in the power of the working class; they felt that it lacked a grip on events and that history moved without it."⁷⁵ The PCF, therefore, was not to blame. Sartre asserts that the workers had lost faith in the power of the *working class* as a force for change in French society. The more likely explanation is that the workers lost faith in the PCF as a legitimate representative of their grievances. Since the end of the war, the PCF had done little to advance the workers' interests, telling them instead to wait while France rebuilt. By the 1950's, however, the workers were dissatisfied with the benefits of this strategy, and began to question the PCF. Despite this, Sartre asserts that the workers passed no judgment on the PCF, but rather put their own interests first, unable to recognize their class interests.⁷⁶ The second error that Sartre makes in this statement is to assume that the PCF knows the interests of the working class better than the working class itself, especially given the fact that the purpose behind the failed strikes had very little to do with advancing the "class interests" of the workers. Calling for strikes to protest "American imperialism" or to protest the arrest of a PCF leader advances the political interests of the Party and not the

interests of the working class. Sartre's blindness to the fact that the political interests of the PCF and the economic interests of the working class do not coincide greatly weakens his argument that the PCF is a representative of the French proletariat. Only by devaluing the real interests of the workers, as well as their ability to express these interests autonomously, can Sartre defend the PCF in this manner.

Lefort attacks Sartre on this point, arguing that the working class is fully capable of articulating its own demands and advancing its own interests without the filter of the Communist party. According to the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* position, the PCF is a bureaucratic organization, concerned with advancing its own interests as a class separated from the proletariat. In this regard, the PCF resembles the bourgeoisie the latter claims to oppose. The vanguard party does not speak on the behalf of the proletariat, nor does the party advance the interests of the working class. Rather, the Communist party uses the proletariat to advance its own political interests, interests that are determined by the party itself, without any dialogue or input from the working class itself. "Comme le bourgeoisie, le stalinisme élabore sa politique en secret, dure les éléments qu'il veut entraîner, et ne tolère l'action populaire qu'à la condition d'en garder le strict contrôle."⁷⁷ This fact explains the PCF's opposition to the spontaneous action of the workers at the Billancourt factory in 1947 and all other incidents of worker-initiated industrial actions throughout the post-Cold War era.

The supposed necessity of the PCF is reinforced by the party's artificial distinction between "reformist" and "revolutionary" actions. Sartre agrees with this distinction in his condemnation of the working class as incapable of understanding its own class interests during the 1952 strikes. The distinction between reformism and

revolution allows the Communist party to dictate the appropriate time for industrial actions, the required tactics, and the political goals that must be achieved. However, the history of the PCF in France illustrates that the party simply used this distinction to advance its own political goals and allowed the party to denounce spontaneous action as counter-revolutionary. Lefort's position that the working class is capable of self-management relies on the elimination of the distinction between reformist and revolutionary tactics. The Communist party must insist on this distinction in order to reduce the proletariat to a passive object, acted upon by economic forces beyond the comprehension of the working class, but discoverable by the party through the application of Marxist theory.⁷⁸ In this manner, the Communist party can assert those actions approved by the party can be classified as "revolutionary", while any activity on the part of the working class itself can never be anything more than "reformist."

According to Lefort, the spontaneous action of the working class, even in pursuit of "reformist" goals, carries with it revolutionary demands against the bureaucratic nature of the capitalist system. Reformism and revolutionary action have their roots in the same source: the experience of the working class in their struggle against capitalism, which takes a myriad of forms, and shapes the proletariat as a class, opening new possibilities for future spontaneous action.⁷⁹ As such, the revolutionary organization must look to the working class for guidance in formulating the organization's goals, and not attempt to impose a program on the proletariat that does not taken into account the actual needs of the working class or a program that ignores the history of the workers' movement.

Agreeing with Lefort's position, Castoriadis illustrates the significance of a "reformist" demand by arguing the importance of wildcat strikes undertaken to win a fifteen minute

paid coffee break.⁸⁰ While Orthodox Marxists would dismiss such a demand as “reformist”, irrelevant, and doing nothing to advance the interests of the proletariat as a class, Castoriadis asserts that such a demand carries a revolutionary potential. First, the demand for a fifteen minute break represents the real interests of the worker in the factory, and therefore must not be dismissed as irrelevant by a revolutionary organization. Second, and more importantly, this demand represents a rejection by the workers of the time-clock imposed by bureaucratic planners that seeks to dictate and regiment every single action the worker will perform on the assembly-line. Since the goal of the bureaucratic manager is to reduce the worker to nothing more than another machine in the factory, the fifteen minute break represents a rupture from the imposed capitalist concept of time. By demanding a paid coffee break, the worker breaks free from the capitalist routine, asserting his fundamental humanity and autonomy by stating, “I am more than an automaton and I do not leave my humanity at the factory door.” The fact that he is being paid to drink coffee further asserts that his wage is not linked to constant output on the factory floor. Furthermore, the coffee break reinforces the community of workers. Taking a break during the workday is a social activity that allows the workers to talk to one another and to interact as human beings. As such, it represents an important check against the dehumanizing agenda of the bureaucratic-capitalist apparatus.

Lefort’s final critique of Sartre’s The Communists and the Peace deals with the messianic role Sartre attributes to the party. According to Sartre, it is the PCF that will lead the French working class to salvation. Working class action will occur through the PCF or it will not occur and the proletariat will “crumble into dust.” Later in the work,

Sartre argues that without the PCF, the working class will “distrust all politics, they will distrust their class; the universe will be bourgeois.”⁸¹ The only way to prevent such an apocalypse is if the working class devotes its allegiance and obedience to their savior, the PCF. Furthermore, Sartre argues, “The Party is *pure action*; it must advance or disappear; it is the strength of the workers who are at the end of their strength and the hope of those who are without hope.”⁸² Apart from the messianic mysticism Sartre exhibits in this statement, it clearly ignores the fact that the PCF did everything in its power to prevent the workers from acting during the immediate post-war period, when the party was more concerned with maintaining its position of power. The 1947 strike at Billancourt, opposed by the PCF, proved the capacity of the workers to find their own strength outside the party and make their own demands, far more radical than those the PCF was making of the behalf of the working class. In taking these positions, Sartre exhibits his contempt for the working class, believing that only the messianic intervention of the Communist Party can save the proletariat from its miserable fate. Lefort attacks Sartre on this point, arguing that Sartre is incapable of understanding the vast chasm that lies between the Marxism of Marx, Lenin, Luxembourg, and Trotsky and the “Marxism” of Stalin, the latter being the Marxism of the PCF.⁸³ Sartre’s contempt for the working class would last far longer than his allegiance to the Soviet Union. In a 1971 interview, Sartre states, “You know it’s much easier for a philosopher to explain a new concept to another philosopher than to a child. Because the child, with all its naivete, asks the real questions. So do the workers.”⁸⁴ Even in this attempt to argue for the “authenticity” of the worker, by comparing the proletariat to children, Sartre only succeeds in reinforcing the paternalistic attitude of Communist leadership. Such an attitude also came to the fore

in the PCF's standard response to any unsanctioned expression of worker discontent, which was condemned as adventurism or the work of *gauchiste* elements. In the eyes of the PCF, the workers were only supposed to be the revolutionary class when they were told to by the party leadership.

Sartre further asserts that the Communist party will “save” the working class from the horrors imposed by the mechanization of the assembly line. According to Sartre, mechanization in advanced capitalist society succeeds in completely atomizing the worker. Sartre asserts that the mechanization of the factory results in the dehumanization of the worker. The worker, according to Sartre, is a miserable being, cut off from other workers. The worker on the factory floor has no human connection with other workers. Instead, all relationships exist through the filter of the assembly line. Thus, the individual worker is only aware of other workers in terms of the errors the other makes on the assembly line, which leads to a loss of earnings. Thus, human relationships are fully atomized and instrumentalized.⁸⁵ This argument further legitimizes the role of the party, which can take a revolutionary stance on behalf of a splintered working class, incapable of advancing its own interests. Lefort counters this position by arguing that Sartre does not recognize the social-historical circumstances of the modern proletariat, relying instead on an outdated view of the industrial proletariat. First, Sartre must accept the fact that mechanization is a characteristic of modern capitalism and the clock cannot be turned back. Second, it is the capitalist system, controlled ultimately by men, that cuts off man: “C’est l’homme qui ampute l’homme.”⁸⁶ Capitalism, not the machinery of the factory, forces human beings to give their life to the production process. Sartre’s focus on mechanization is the wrong target. Rather, the workers must organize against

capitalism as an institution. In Lefort's estimation, this is in fact what the working class does on a daily basis, without the direction of the PCF.⁸⁷ The working class is already organized into political clubs, unions, and other voluntary organizations that exist outside the apparatus of the PCF.⁸⁸ Thus, the proletariat does not need the PCF to save them from the factory or from themselves.

The Lefort-Sartre debate represents an important milestone in the history of the mainstream French left's confrontation with the anti-communist groups that, at the time, were a marginal, but rising force in the post-war intellectual climate. The political positions taken by the PCF during the 1950's would lead to both a waning influence among the working class and an increased alienation from the party by intellectuals who were once its staunchest defenders. Sartre himself revised the stance he took in *The Communists and the Peace*, breaking with the party, but stopping short of completely denouncing communism. Instead, Sartre invoked the danger of reactionary politics rising in Hungary as a result of the insurrection, and as a justification for the Soviet invasion. Furthermore, he argued that Hungary de-Stalinized too quickly, and that Eastern Europe as a whole was not ready for change.⁸⁹ Meanwhile, the PCF completely ignored Khrushchev's "secret speech" denouncing Stalin and stubbornly resisted any attempt to de-Stalinize.⁹⁰ In addition, intellectuals broke with party over the PCF's failure to mount any significant resistance to DeGaulle's creation of the Fifth Republic. The PCF did little to resist DeGaulle's rise to power, and the near 80 percent approval of the referendum creating the Fifth Republic, and the subsequent PCF defeat in the 1958 legislative elections convinced many on the Left that the party was a waning political force.⁹¹

Aron, Camus, and Castoriadis versus Jean-Paul Sartre

Jean-Paul Sartre's defense of the Soviet Union defined the mainstream French left's relationship to the PCF throughout the 1950's. However, the debate between Sartre and Lefort proved the possibility of staking a position in opposition to the mainstream left's defense of Stalinism. While taking such a position guaranteed marginalization given the philosophical and political dominance of Sartre and his allies, theorists such as Cornelius Castoriadis (and the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group as a whole), Raymond Aron, and Albert Camus rejected the defense of Stalinism and the Soviet Union nonetheless. Two elements of the position taken by Aron, Camus, and Castoriadis against Sartre and the intellectual allies of the PCF are important to consider. The first element is that these three thinkers went beyond merely refusing to defend Soviet Communism. Rather, Aron, Camus, and Castoriadis consistently argued that the Soviet Union represented a political, military, and existential threat to Western Europe. From this perspective, each of these theorists argued that it was crucial to actively oppose and speak out against Western defenders of the Soviet Union such as Jean-Paul Sartre. The second element of this oppositional position illustrates the fact that Aron, Camus, and Castoriadis, in varying degrees, took seriously the issue of intellectual responsibility, particularly the Weberian distinction between the ethic of responsibility and the ethic of ultimate ends. According to Weber, an ethic of ultimate ends refuses to consider the consequences of a particular action, declaring that "if an action of good intent leads to bad results, then, in the actor's eyes, not he but the world, or the stupidity of other men, or God's will who made them thus, is responsible for the evil."⁹² By contrast, the follower of the ethic of responsibility recognizes his own limitations and the deficiencies

of other men. Rather than acting without limits and proclaiming, for example, that this particular act of violence will be the last one before the end is achieved, knowing that another act of violence will be necessary, the follower of the ethic of responsibility understands that when he reaches a certain point, he must state, “Here I stand; I can do no other.”⁹³ At this point, the follower of the ethic of responsibility understands that the means he must use to achieve his end are disproportionate to the end and are unacceptable. French apologists for the Soviet Union during the Cold War advanced an ethic of ultimate ends, arguing that the Soviet Union had to be defended, regardless of the crimes Stalin had committed against the Soviet people, because Soviet communism represented the best hope for humanity to escape from Western industrial capitalism. In opposition to this position, Aron, Camus, and Castoriadis argued that political theorists had to seriously consider the connection between means and ends. Particularly in the case of Castoriadis, the end of socialism did not justify any and all means. Rather, socialism could only be achieved by linking existing means, which were expressed through the actions of workers on the factory floor, to a broader theoretical context that could posit ends beyond the reform of conditions in one particular factory.

Throughout his life, Raymond Aron took a strong position against the Soviet Union, arguing that the Soviets represented a real threat to Western Europe. This threat was ideological, political, and military. The defense of the Soviet system by French intellectuals in the 1950’s was, according to Aron, a foolish and dangerous position. Intellectuals such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s, who declared that their problems with the French Communists were “just family quarrels”, took a naïve and irresponsible position vis-à-vis the Soviet Union.⁹⁴ According to Aron, the Soviet Union

had to be opposed ideologically as well as militarily. Aron's rejection of the Soviet Union was not simply a reaction to the gulags and Stalinist repression. Aron argued that the Soviet system was the product of the revolutionary movement itself, which placed the whole socialist movement into question.⁹⁵ According to Aron, one-party totalitarian rule in the greatest menace, and only political and intellectual liberalism, which permits the economic and social conditions of pluralism, insures strong protections against totalitarianism. Socialism's rejection of the free market makes it inadequate to guard against the threat of one-party rule.⁹⁶ Therefore, according to Aron, whatever problems might have existed in Western Europe, the fact that the Western world was founded on liberal principles that protected the rights of the individual made the capitalist system far superior to the Soviet system. The Soviet threat to Western Europe led Aron to defend France's alliance with the United States, an alliance that Sartre rejected. For Aron, the United States, despite its mercantile culture that many on the French left despised, was a liberal civilization and the offspring of European traditions.⁹⁷ "Since the Russian empire is, additionally, a Soviet or ideological empire, it seems to me there is every reason to take the Eastern menace seriously and to make a distinction between the Western multinationals and Soviet missiles."⁹⁸ This position led Aron to strongly advocate French participation in NATO, more as a psychological and political alliance than a military one, with the goal of reassuring Western Europe and diffusing the power of domestic Communist parties.⁹⁹ As such, Aron disagreed with de Gaulle's policy of breaking with NATO and establishing French nuclear autonomy, arguing that it would weaken NATO and benefit the Soviets.¹⁰⁰

Though a sharp critic of the Western capitalist model, Castoriadis concurred with Aron's assessment of the ideological and military threat posed by the Soviet Union. Throughout his years in the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group and in the years after the group dissolved, Castoriadis was a consistent critic of the Soviet Union and its expansionistic military ambitions, exemplified, in Castoriadis' eyes, by the Soviet invasion of Afghanistan and Soviet backed regimes in Angola, Mozambique, and South Yemen, among other places.¹⁰¹ Aron argued that "the Soviet Union today is essentially a military power with an economy that, on paper, produces a great deal of hardware, but provides very few goods to the population."¹⁰² Castoriadis advances a similar argument in *Devant la Guerre*, a work he wrote in 1981 during the debate over the presence of NATO nuclear missiles in Western Europe. During the protracted negotiations over the SALT II treaty, the Soviet Union began deploying SS-20 missiles aimed at targets in Western Europe. In 1979, Jimmy Carter responded with a plan to deploy Pershing II missiles in Western Europe to counter the Soviet installation of the SS-20's.¹⁰³ Castoriadis would argue that the less than successful SALT II agreement was the result of the fact that the Soviet Union had transformed into a militaristic empire, incapable of internal reform and concerned solely with expansion outside its borders. A significant portion of this work compares the quantitative differences between Warsaw Pact military strength and NATO forces, arguing that the Soviet bloc possessed a stronger military than the West.¹⁰⁴ This, according to Castoriadis, was a product of the fact that the Soviet economy had transformed into a war machine. The economic system of the Soviet Union had become one wherein the military industry was capable of producing weaponry on par with any of the Western European states or the United States, despite the fact that the consumer

goods industries in the USSR were inefficient and consistently under-produced in relation to the needs of the Soviet population.¹⁰⁵ A dual economy existed in the Soviet Union; the civilian sector was inefficient, while the military sector was fully modernized and efficient. As such, the army represented the only modern institution in the Soviet Union, completely dominating the existing social regime. The Soviet Communist Party, for example, served the army by serving as a propaganda machine for the military.¹⁰⁶ The military threat posed by the Soviet Union emerges from the fact that the institutional apparatus of the Soviet Union has reached a point where it has no other purpose other than to expand through military force.¹⁰⁷ “Il est absurde de se demander pourquoi un lutteur de sumo ne fait pas de tennis.”¹⁰⁸ The institutional petrification that pervades the Soviet system leads to a situation where the Soviet army takes advantage of all opportunities to expand outward, employing brute force solely for its own sake.¹⁰⁹ Given this fact, Castoriadis argues that Alexander Dubcek was wrong to believe he could reason with the Soviets in 1968 before the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia; the Soviet army does not understand such appeals.¹¹⁰ For Castoriadis, the West is confronting a completely new instituted imaginary, one that does not understand or respond to appeals to peace or reason, but only comprehends military strength. As such, Castoriadis staked a position far outside the mainstream left, more closely resembling “conservatives” during the Cold War who sought a military confrontation with the Soviets. However, the logic of Castoriadis’s consistent opposition to the Soviet Union throughout his intellectual career demanded that he take such a confrontational position, regardless of whether his fellow leftists might accuse him of being “pro-American” or a “right-wing warmonger”.

For Castoriadis, the Soviet threat was so great that a responsible intellectual could only advocate a strategy of military deterrence.

While Aron and Castoriadis emphasized the political and military threat posed by the Soviet Union, Albert Camus argued that the Soviet empire represented an existential threat to Western civilization and to the human capacity for spontaneity and creativity. For Camus, any hope for emancipation in the Marxian revolutionary project definitively died the day Lenin proclaimed that one could not determine beforehand how long the dictatorship of the proletariat would have to exist before the transition to the socialist utopia.¹¹¹ With this pronouncement, Lenin, in Camus' estimation, prepares the way for a permanent dictatorship of the Communist party, opening the door for Stalinism and justifying an ethic of ultimate ends. From this perspective, Camus emphasizes the threat that the Soviet Union posed to European civilization. According to Camus, Soviet Communism emphasized scientific determinism over human emotion and creativity to the extent that the Soviet project sought to decisively destroy spontaneity, art, and everything that Camus argues allows for the human subject to assert his own individuality in an absurd world.¹¹² As such, a Western European intellectual who defended the Soviet project essentially called for the creation of a world where his own creativity would be destroyed. Philosophy is not possible in the Soviet world.

Camus' position on the Soviet Union made him very unpopular among French leftist intellectuals, due to the fact that he pointed out the naivete of the intellectual who supported a project that would inevitably lead to the obsolescence and irrelevance of philosophy itself. For example, Albert Camus bore the brunt of some of Sartre's most savage personal attacks. Sartre and other left-wing intellectuals derided Camus' work as

philosophy for high-school children, playing on Camus' insecurities regarding his capabilities as a thinker vis-à-vis others on the Left such as Simone Beauvoir and Sartre himself.¹¹³ However, what this dismissive attitude towards Camus reveals is the French left's refusal to confront its own status vis-à-vis the PCF and the Soviet Union and the consequences of the unqualified support it lent to the Soviet project. Tony Judt characterizes Camus as a moralist, dedicated to telling the truth and making others, as well as oneself, feel uneasy, forcing the individual to examine the consequences of one's actions and ideas.¹¹⁴ Camus accurately observed that the French Left suffered from cultural despair and self-loathing, which led them to a fascination with violence.¹¹⁵ For example, even after his denunciation of the Soviet Union, Sartre continued to advocate violence from the safety of the Left Bank, declaring in the introduction to Franz Fanon's *The Wretched of the Earth*, that "to shoot down a European is to kill two birds with one stone, to destroy an oppressor and the man he oppresses at the same time: there remain a dead man, and a free man."¹¹⁶ For Camus, as well as for Aron and Castoriadis, this advocacy of violence represented the height of intellectual irresponsibility, a condition that pervaded the mainstream French left throughout the 1950's and 1960's.

The position taken by Aron, Camus, and Castoriadis against the Soviet Union illustrates the problem of responsibility in an intellectual climate of intellectual irresponsibility. Sartre and the mainstream left espoused an ethic of ultimate ends, arguing that the end of socialist revolution justified any and all means. This refusal to connect means and ends is best exemplified by the mainstream left's support for the PCF and its defense of the Soviet Union. Aron represented the theorist most committed to thinking seriously about political responsibility, recognizing that human actions have

consequences and outcomes and each individual must be responsible for the outcomes of her actions.¹¹⁷ Aron was particularly irritated by the irresponsibility of French intellectuals, who drew obsolete ideas from the past and attempted to apply them to contemporary problems. This loyalty to ideas, according to Aron, was matched only by the French intellectuals' indifference to reality.¹¹⁸ Leftist intellectuals, according to Aron, consistently refused to answer the question, "If you were in the minister's position, what would you do?"¹¹⁹ For Aron, this is the fundamental question of political responsibility, demanding that the intellectual consider the consequences of the position he espouses. For example, when Sartre and other leftist intellectuals signed the Manifesto of the 121, calling upon French youth to resist the draft, Aron declared, "I find it objectionable for intellectuals with nothing to lose to motivate young people to become deserters, thereby incurring risks."¹²⁰ In this particular case, Aron's criticism of French intellectuals is valid. However, Aron's general standard of responsibility is too restrictive, assuming from the outset that the "minister" is, in fact, practicing an ethic of responsibility and rejecting outright a revolutionary critique that attacks the political system itself.

Aron's question assumes from the beginning that the existing institutional structure allows for responsible action in the sense of connecting means to ends in a serious manner. During the Algerian war, the French military routinely tortured Algerian suspects in an attempt to root out terrorists. In this situation, the simple answer to Aron's question is: "Do not torture Algerians." However, this, in reality, answers nothing other than a policy question. What is necessary is an examination of what conditions exist that have allowed a liberal democracy to degenerate to a point where torture becomes a

legitimate instrument of policy. This question cannot be answered from the perspective of the “minister”, who is firmly embedded in the institutional context under which such a policy was implemented. By creating a standard of responsibility that demands that the intellectual place himself in the position of a government minister, Aron restricts the capacity of the intellectual to criticize the existing institutional structure. The acceptance of this high standard assumes that there is a single truth¹²¹, linked in this case, to the practical efficacy of an intellectual’s position in terms of whether or not the intellectual could actual implement his ideas if he were in the minister’s position. As such, Aron’s question is a trap for the revolutionary. Aron concedes that the revolutionary position is one that rejects existing social institutions. Aron argues that political action, at its most basic level, requires the individual to make a fundamental choice: one must either accept society or reject it. The rejection of society is a revolutionary position, and the individual who makes such a decision “chooses violence and adventure. From this fundamental choice flow decisions, timely decisions, by which the individual defines himself.”¹²² As such, answering the question, “What would you do in the minister’s position?” is completely irrelevant to a revolutionary intellectual who, from the beginning, rejects participation in the existing institutional apparatus. Furthermore, asking this question is, in essence, an exhortation to give a “realistic” answer, constraining the intellectual to what is feasible given the constraints and potential of the existing institutional apparatus. A revolutionary, who seeks to fundamentally change this institutional structure, cannot give a “realistic” answer to this question without compromising her desire to change society. Presumably, if one cannot answer this question, one should remain silent. This, however, is an unacceptable choice. As G.M. Tamas argues, if we accept that there is a

multiplicity of truths, as Aron himself argues, the freedom to speak is the essential and necessary freedom for the intellectual, regardless of whether what the intellectual says is irresponsible. “We value freedom of speech more than intellectual honesty – about the criteria of which in this world of unbelief we are unable to attain consent.”¹²³ Even in the face of rampant intellectual irresponsibility in Cold War France, what is important is to allow the intellectual to speak.¹²⁴ It is the task of intellectuals in a democratic society to criticize irresponsibility and propose alternatives beyond simply demanding that intellectuals be “realistic” or meet a strict standard of responsibility. Aron himself served in this capacity, consistently criticizing Sartre and others on the mainstream French left within the context of a democratic discourse, seeking to convince others that supporting the Soviet Union was an unacceptable and dangerous political stance. Aron’s own actions and statements are a far greater testament to intellectual responsibility than his demand that theorists must put themselves in the position of a government minister before they advance a political agenda.

According to Aron’s perspective, one could legitimately criticize Castoriadis as irresponsible, placing him in the same category as Sartre and the defenders of the Soviet Union, despite Castoriadis’ consistent opposition to the Soviet regime and his rejection of totalitarian political systems. For Castoriadis, however, Aron’s question is irrelevant, in that the “minister” is a member of the bureaucratic-capitalist institutional structure that must be resisted. The more appropriate question the revolutionary intellectual must ask herself is Agnes Heller’s question, “How should we live?”¹²⁵ This question allows for a plurality of responses, from all sides of the political spectrum. Furthermore, it allows the responsible intellectual to connect means with appropriate ends. How we should live is

about the means we use to achieve social ends. Using this standard, the responsible intellectual can categorically reject the French Left's defense of Stalinism and its fascination with violence. The fundamental problem with the French Left during the Cold War was the luxury of a safe environment. Intellectuals in France were able to defend Stalinism because they were not forced to experience it and suffer under it. By asking "How should we live?" the intellectual must reconsider violent means; would the intellectual want to live in a society where Stalinist violence was an arbitrary and everyday occurrence? Thus, one would ask Jean-Paul Sartre if he would be willing to live in the Soviet Union and risk execution or being sent to the gulag. Would he want France to adopt the policies of Stalin? Would he, as a European, sacrifice himself to a third-world revolutionary in order to end oppression and free the oppressor? Presumably, Sartre's answer would be "no". By asking Heller's question, one can demand accountability for the irresponsible means espoused to achieve a particular set of ends without infringing upon the irresponsible intellectual's ability to speak. The irresponsible intellectual can still refuse to connect means and ends, but he must present and justify this position to others. If, for example, Jean-Paul Sartre cannot answer whether France should institute a gulag system, a democratic society can reject this position through a counter-argument defending the values of democracy. Heller's question expands the definition of responsible and irresponsible, thus allowing for the revolutionary critique of existing society. The intellectual can reject the existing instituted imaginary and demand significant social and political change, while considering appropriate means for the achievement of this end. For example, throughout his life, Castoriadis sought to connect the already existing resistance of the workers on the factory floor vis-à-vis the

bureaucratic management structure to a broader revolutionary theory that espoused democratic participation and an opposition to rampant consumerism and the crisis of meaning that pervaded Western society. One need not defend the existing institutional structure absolutely; it is possible to argue that we do not want to live in the society we currently live in, but rather we want to live in a better world.

The Decline of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*

During the 1950's, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* remained a relatively marginal group, though many of the group's unorthodox ideas criticizing both the West and the Soviet Union, began to disseminate within the mainstream left that was becoming increasingly disenchanted with the PCF's subservience to the Soviets. However, the influence of the group would suffer a severe blow in 1956 when a schism occurred between Castoriadis and Claude Lefort over the issue "organizational question." At issue was the role a revolutionary organization such as *Socialisme ou Barbarie* should play in a workers' movement. Both Castoriadis and Lefort rejected a vanguardist approach. However, Castoriadis demanded a more active role in the workers' movement than Lefort was willing to concede.

Lefort's concern arose from a chasm he perceived between the intellectuals in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group and the workers' movement, despite the group's best efforts to address this problem. Lefort disagreed with Castoriadis' concept of the revolutionary organization, believing that it skirted too close to Leninism. He argued instead that the revolutionary organization had no direct role to play in a workers' uprising. The proletarian revolution could only be made by the workers, when the workers were ready for it. A group such as *Socialisme ou Barbarie* should serve only as

a conduit for information between workers' organizations. The result of this disagreement was that Lefort left *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and founded his own organization, *Informations et Liaisons Ouvrières* (ILO), which followed more closely Lefort's conception of a revolutionary group as a conduit for information for members of the working class.

Castoriadis responded to Lefort's criticisms by arguing that Lefort's conception of the revolutionary organization represented an abdication of the responsibility of the intellectual. According to Castoriadis' criticism, the purpose of the ILO was this: "La seule tâche réelle que devait se proposer le groupe était de recueillir et de rediffuser des informations."¹²⁶ Castoriadis argues that the working class cannot simply be left alone to develop its own revolutionary program, due to the simple fact that no other group will leave the proletariat alone. The working class is already enmeshed in a web of relationships with bureaucratic managers in the factory and with the militants of other political organizations, particularly the PCF. Thus, the revolutionary organization must step in to this network.

The purpose of the revolutionary organization is to connect the struggles the workers face on a daily basis on the factory floor with a broader theoretical context. This serves two purposes. First, it connects the workers in one particular factory with similar struggles occurring nationally and internationally. Second, it links the everyday concerns of the working class with a revolutionary theory calling for the working class to act to change the conditions it must face in the factory. Thus, the revolutionary organization cannot act as a "director" of the proletarian struggle, but rather it must serve as an instrument of the working class. The revolutionary group "ne pouvait que s'inspirer des

formes d'organisation que le proletariat avait créées, et de leur 'esprit'.”¹²⁷ The burden of taking action remains with the workers' movement, but the revolutionary organization serves a purpose by placing what the workers have done into a revolutionary, theoretical context. Thus, for example, if a factory adopts a program of self-management, the task of the revolutionary organization is to ask, “why is this important?” and then to connect the actions of the single factory to a broader theoretical context, pointing out the interdependency of factories, coordinate communication between factories, and continue to agitate for self-management throughout the system. Castoriadis argues that self-management across the capitalist system will not occur spontaneously, because the system itself acts against these tendencies by isolating workers in one factory from other factories and isolating the workers from each other within a single factory.

Castoriadis argues that a group such as the ILO did not play enough of a role in the revolutionary struggle. Serving as a clearinghouse for information is insufficient. However, Lefort raises an important critique of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group: there is a very fine line between assisting the working class and directing it. The development of theory itself is, in itself, a method of directing the working class. The militant in a revolutionary organization can never simply place the existing worker struggles into a broader theoretical context. Theorizing is itself a creative form of making/doing that will inevitably be the product of the intellectuals own creativity in synthesizing the struggles of the workers on the factory floor into a theoretical context. By simply writing theory, one is imposing a constructed meaning on the struggles taking place in the working class, whether this constructed meaning is justified or not. By connecting working class action

to broader theoretical constructs, one assumes that the working class is in fact interested in revolution. Instead, a wage increase may be nothing more than a wage increase.

Furthermore, Lefort is correct in pointing out the distinction between the workers at the factory floor and the intellectuals in a revolutionary organization. This divide can never be fully bridged. Daniel Mothé, one of the genuinely working class members of the group, commented,

Pour les travailleurs, nos idées sont des sujets constants d'ennuis. Dès que nous voulons former un groupe, faire un journal, un tract, les travailleurs mettent en question leur existence, c'est-à-dire leur travail, leurs camarades, leurs rapports avec leurs chefs et avec tout qui les entourent. Nos idées ne peuvent aider les travailleurs que lorsque ces derniers veulent agir.¹²⁸

The stakes for the worker on the factory floor are always higher; it is easy for an intellectual to call for revolutionary action, but it is the workers who must actually carry it out, threatening their ability to provide for themselves and for their families. As such, there is always a chasm between the workers' movement and the intellectuals in a revolutionary organization. Lefort was correct to be concerned about this chasm, fearing that the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group would degrade into a vanguardist organization. However, his answer to this dilemma is problematic. In the end, Castoriadis is correct: if one hopes to effect revolutionary change, one must take a more active role and run the risk that Lefort points out. The workers' movement does exist within a social context that will seek to shape and take advantage the struggle. It is imperative that a revolutionary organization such as *Socialisme ou Barbarie* take a more active role in the struggle in order to counteract the pressure from Orthodox Marxists, who seek to turn the

proletarian struggle to its own political advantage, and the pressure from the bureaucratic-capitalist apparatus that pushes for the degradation of the worker to a mere cog in the industrial machinery.

In the years after Lefort left the group, Castoriadis became increasingly disenchanted with Marxism. Throughout his years in the group, Castoriadis developed a critique of both the Soviet Union and the Western world, arguing that these two systems were not as different as other theorists, both on the left and the right, contended. On the surface, the two superpowers appeared as radically different political, economic, social, and cultural systems. Castoriadis argued instead that at the most basic level the United States and the Soviet Union both represented a form of bureaucratic capitalism, with a fragmented version existing in the West, and a totalitarian one in the Soviet bloc. For Castoriadis, the USSR was a class system, where a bureaucracy had taken the place of the bourgeoisie. However, his views differed from Trotskyism in that he did not believe that this bureaucracy had been grafted on to an otherwise revolutionary system. Rather, he argued that the bureaucratic class represented a key aspect of a Leninist system dominated by a single political party primarily interested in maintaining power. Castoriadis' perspective on the Cold War was one of the central ideas that differentiated *Socialisme ou Barbarie* from other leftist groups in France, placing it in opposition both to the orthodox Marxism of the PCF and the capitalism of the French establishment. This critique represented one of Castoriadis' most important contributions to leftist political thought, and would eventually contribute to his eventual rejection of Marxism itself.

In the 1960's, Castoriadis published *Marxism and Revolutionary Theory*, which served as his complete break with Marxist theory. Throughout the 1950's, Castoriadis

had questioned several particular elements of Marxist theory, such as the crisis of capitalist overproduction, the idea of pauperization of the working class, and the idea that the means of production could be seized and used for socialist goals.¹²⁹ By the early 1960's, Castoriadis called the entire Marxist project into question, arguing that it was no longer a useful tool for the revolutionary project.¹³⁰ On the most superficial level, Marxism had devolved into an ideological system, unconnected to the social-historical developments that had occurred within the capitalist West since the nineteenth century. The Orthodox Marxists still spoke in terms of the crisis of overproduction, the immiseration of the proletariat, and the inevitability of the capitalism's collapse. However, by the mid-twentieth century, capitalism had evolved into bureaucratic-capitalism and had addressed many of the criticisms Marx had discussed. Furthermore, the bureaucratic-capitalist system was capable of harnessing the workers' struggle in order to reproduce itself institutionally. As such, ideological Marxism was disconnected from the reality of the workers' struggle.

More importantly, Castoriadis asserted that Marxism *as a theory* served a counter-revolutionary purpose. Marx's economic reductionism neglected the role of the radical imaginary and the everyday struggles on the factory floor that did far more to advance the cause of proletarian revolution than any theoretical construct could hope to achieve. Furthermore, this economic reductionism, according to Castoriadis, was fundamentally bureaucratic. Marx took for granted many of the contestable concepts over which the workers' struggled, accepting the bureaucratic-capitalist framework. For example, Marx's labor theory of value ignores the contestability of the time clock, accepting the bureaucratic definition of the work hour. In this manner, Marx contributes to the

bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary, and as such, his theory is unsuitable for a revolutionary movement. Given this fact, it is incorrect to consider Soviet totalitarianism as a “perversion” of Marxism. Rather, one must concede that the roots of the Soviet system lie within the theory of Marx himself. Castoriadis argues that in order to remain committed to the workers’ struggle, one must reject Marxism. The bureaucratic ideology attempts to eliminate the everyday in favor of a determined tomorrow. Furthermore, it emphasizes the efficacy of capitalism and rationalization, calling for the further development of the productive forces. These are all elements of Marxist ideology, and for Castoriadis, since Marxism participates in capitalist culture it is absurd to use it as a tool for revolution.¹³¹ This rejection of Marxism would prove to be an important contribution both to Castoriadis’ political theory and his appeal to unorthodox leftists in France.

The immediate consequence of Castoriadis’ break with Marxism was another split in the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group. After publishing *Marxism and Revolutionary Theory*, another schism arose in the group, this time between Castoriadis and a faction led by Jean-Francois Lyotard and Pierre Souyri. This faction was associated with the newspaper *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, an offshoot of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* intended for a proletarian audience. The Lyotard faction espoused a more traditional view of Marxist revolution, against Castoriadis’ rejection of the theory. During this time, the schism impeded the activities of the group. By July 1963, the split was final, with the Lyotard faction taking over the *Pouvoir Ouvrier* newspaper and those who remained in the group continued to publish *Socialisme ou Barbarie*.¹³²

Shortly after the second schism, Castoriadis announced the journal would suspend publication, marking the end of the group. During the early 1960's, circulation of the journal was high, with about 1000 copies sold every issue. However, Castoriadis was disappointed by the lack of feedback on the articles in the journal. The readers of the journal had become passive consumers of ideas, rather than active participants in the theoretical project of the group. Furthermore, during the late 1950's and early 1960's, many young members rebelled against the older members of the group. In Castoriadis' estimation, discussions within the group became less coherent, dramatically affecting the theoretical output of the organization. As a result of these two factors, Castoriadis decided to dissolve the organization.

The dissolution of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the group's failure to reach a wide audience should not lead one to dismiss the importance of the group's work. From its inception, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* existed in an intellectual environment dominated by the orthodox Marxism of the PCF. As a result, the group was pushed to the margins of the intellectual scene, grouped with the numerous other *gauchiste* elements on the left. This marginalization was clearly reflected in the number of people who joined the group throughout the 1950's and 1960's. *Socialisme ou Barbarie* never exceeded one hundred members. At the height of its influence in 1961, there were eighty-seven militants involved in the group.¹³³ However, the contributions of *Socialisme ou Barbarie* after the collapse of the group are more significant. The student movement of May 1968 owed a great deal to the theories expressed in the group's journal. In addition, the group's resistance to the orthodox Marxism of the PCF and its intellectual supporters left *Socialisme ou Barbarie* untainted by the revelations of Stalin's crimes in the Soviet

Union. This allowed both Castoriadis and Lefort to remain committed to political engagement while many former Marxists became so-called “new philosophers” in the 1970's, who rejected politics in any form, and turned instead to an almost total resignation to the existing status quo. Finally, by the 1970's, French theorists who developed an anti-totalitarian philosophy recognized their debt to the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group. Francois Furet, for example, secured both Lefort and Castoriadis academic positions¹³⁴, recognizing the important role both these theorists had played in the French left's eventual rejection of Orthodox Marxism and the PCF.

Post-1968 France

By 1968, most of the French intellectuals who had once supported the PCF had become disillusioned with its subservience to Moscow, its inability to mobilize the French proletariat, and its almost complete abandonment of revolutionary tactics and goals. The student uprising in Paris and its environs in 1968 reinvigorated the French left, giving new hope to revolutionary goals. However, the 1968 uprising would come to represent a critical turning point for the French left. The relative failure of the student movement would lead many on the French left to a rejection of political action in favor of theoretical examinations of French society. Thus, one can argue that the post-modern turn and the development of “new philosophy” are a direct result of the failure of the student move to effect significant political change in France. While there were some gains as a result of the movement, such as wage increases, the right-wing victory in the June 1968 effectively rolled back the broader potential gains of the May movement. “The overall failure of the movement to bring about significant and lasting change meant

that no new social and political basis was created in France from which new ideas might grow.”¹³⁵

Though by 1968, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* had disbanded, Castoriadis’ work exerted a strong influence over certain elements within the uprising. Daniel Cohn-Bendit, one of the founders of the March 22nd Movement and a leader in the May 1968 revolt, had credited Castoriadis as a significant influence on his thought and choice of tactics.¹³⁶ Castoriadis, Lefort, and Edgar Morin published a critical appraisal of the 1968 movement, wherein the authors argued the student rebellion represented a critical “break” (*la breche*) with previous conceptions of revolution and as an important movement against advanced capitalist societies. The student movement rebelled against the university system as a bureaucratized institution, concerned only with producing future workers. Furthermore, the movement was a revolt against the stagnation and conservatism of the PCF, viewed as a force for reaction, rather than revolution.¹³⁷

The PCF proved the radical students’ charge that it was a corrupt and ossified organization through its reaction to the uprising. By this point, the PCF had abandoned its revolutionary stance *vis-à-vis* the French state. Furthermore, the party had lost most of its influence among the French working class. By the time of the student uprising, the PCF was still relatively subservient to the CPSU, though it had begun to break with the latter. In 1968, the PCF criticized Moscow’s military action against the Prague Spring movement in Czechoslovakia. However, the PCF’s political ideology remained resolutely Stalinist and the party continued its goal of achieving political power, even at the expense of the workers’ movement. In 1968, the PCF refused to endorse or provide any support for the students who revolted in Paris. In fact, the PCF sided with the

Gaullist regime against the students, and denounced the *gauchiste* elements in the uprising as adventurists, in part proving one of the primary criticisms of the PCF, namely that it was a bureaucratized, reformist party. The most the PCF was willing to concede was that students could serve as natural allies to the proletariat, but could not be part of any revolutionary struggle, as they were isolated from the production process.¹³⁸ Roger Garaudy was one of the few political theorists within the PCF to support the student movement, urging the rest of the PCF to follow his lead, arguing that the time of “official” theory was over, and the PCF had to embrace pluralism. Garaudy eventually broke with the PCF as a result of the Party’s failure to support the student uprising and the PCF’s tepid condemnation of the Soviet invasion of Czechoslovakia.¹³⁹ As the example of 1968 illustrates, the PCF had become an ossified organization, unable to recognize a potentially revolutionary situation. The students’ demands did not fall within the categories of Orthodox Marxism, as the student movement revolted against the stagnation of life in an affluent, advanced capitalist society. As such, the PCF had no frame of reference to even consider such demands as revolutionary ones. Instead, they turned to traditional Marxist orthodoxy, wherein university students have no place as revolutionary subjects and where the revolution must wait for the proper historical situation, making their judgment according to this orthodox ideology.

The 1968 revolt expressed many of the concerns about life in an affluent society, but politically, the uprising effected little change. Support for de Gaulle remained high, as evidenced by the thousands who marched in support of the government against the student uprising and by the later electoral victories of the Gaullist party.¹⁴⁰ However, the 1968 uprising laid bare the frustration and alienation many young Frenchmen and women

felt as they struggled to live meaningful lives in an advanced capitalist society. The reaction of the French working class to the 1968 uprising also revealed the bankruptcy of traditional Marxist theories of revolutionary action. Other than a few solidarity strikes and factory occupations by more radical elements in the working class, the French proletariat did very little to support or further the demands of the student movement. Castoriadis argued that in this context, the industrial French proletariat represented a passive, lumbering rearguard of the revolutionary movement. Few workers went on strike and those who did followed the lead of the union bureaucracies. While refusing to condemn the French working class, Castoriadis argued that one of the biggest mistakes the student movement had made was to continue to adhere to its workerist mythology.¹⁴¹ Furthermore, this fact reconfirmed Castoriadis' rejection of Marxist theory, as he argued that revolutionaries should not privilege the industrial working class, or any particular class, as a privileged revolutionary subject. The failure of the student movement further confirmed Castoriadis' contention that revolutionary organizations were needed to place action on the street into a theoretical context. One of Castoriadis' main criticisms of the student movement was that it was too disorganized, incapable of moving beyond street level action by students and connecting their struggle to the broader struggle of the society against bureaucratic-capitalist institutions. Despite these criticisms, Castoriadis argued that the student movement illustrated the possibility and importance of resisting the bureaucratic-capitalist apparatus, even in an advanced capitalist society where the necessities of life are essentially provided for by the system.

After the failure of the student revolt, a sea-change occurred on the left as many became disenchanted with radical politics, and, in the case of the new philosophers,

politics as a whole. Castoriadis levels harsh criticism against those who abandon politics, writing that the postmodern turn in French thought represents a capitulation to bureaucratic capitalist institutions. Postmodernism, in Castoriadis' estimation, is a fad that offers nothing that could lead to any greater understanding of the world or help to change it. Castoriadis argues, "The value of postmodernism as 'theory' is that it mirrors the prevailing trends. Its misery is that it simply rationalizes them through a high-brow apologetics of conformity and banality. Complacently mixed up with loose, but fashionable talk about 'pluralism' and 'respect for the difference of the other', it ends up glorifying eclecticism, covering up sterility, and providing a generalized version of the 'anything goes principle'."¹⁴² In general, while certain postmodern theorists offer interesting examinations of social relations and institutions, they fail to develop any political program to address the critiques they make. "L'image la plus claire de cette situation est fournie par les 'théories du postmodernisme,' qui sont l'expression la plus nette, je dirais le plus cynique, du refus (ou de l'incapacité) de mettre en question la situation actuelle."¹⁴³ The term "postmodern" cannot define the present period, but it express well "the pathetic inability of the epoch to conceive of itself as something positive."¹⁴⁴ According to Castoriadis, postmodernism is simply the latest example of intellectuals abandoning their critical function and "enthusiastically adhering to that which is there just because it is there."¹⁴⁵ As such, postmodernism lacks any political content and is therefore incapable of actually addressing the crisis of meaning that exists in instituted-modern society. In fact, postmodernism contributes to this crisis of meaning and the dilapidation that is prevalent in instituted-modern society as a result of its inability to assert any political critique of the existing institutional apparatus. Instead,

postmodernism simply confuses the situation even more by its inability to posit any critical method for judging between competing imaginary significations.

Worse than the postmodern retreat to the purely theoretical field, however, are the theories of the new philosophers, whose resignation to the status quo is total, driven by the fear that totalitarian possibilities lurk within any form of political activity. New philosophy emerged as a critique of totalitarianism during the 1970's in France, partially as a reaction to the impending victory of the PCF, by this point considered a totalitarian party by much of the mainstream left, in French elections in 1977. The PCF had allied itself with the Socialist Party (PS) and formed the Union of the Left. French intellectuals were concerned that the PCF would seek to take advantage of an electoral victory to introduce totalitarian policies in France. This fear did not manifest after the 1977 elections, primarily as a result of the PCF's relationship to the Socialist Party. In municipal elections in 1977, the Union of the Left, an alliance between the Socialist Party (PS) and the PCF, united according to a Common Program, won a landslide victory. However, the PCF soon demanded a radicalization of the Common Program, not content to occupy a subordinate position within the Union. Intellectuals regarded this as a dangerous power play by the PCF, which remained stubbornly Stalinist. The Socialists refused to comply, leading to the breakdown of the Union of the Left, and a right-wing victory in the 1978 elections.¹⁴⁶ Before the Union of Left self-destructed, however, anti-totalitarian theorists, calling themselves the "new philosophers" had emerged from the debris of post-1968 French left. Castoriadis vehemently attacked the anti-political theories of the new philosophers, rightly holding them in disdain for their abandonment

of any hope of political change in favor of acting “ethically” against the overbearing weight of state and social power.

“New philosophy” was in fact a marketing ploy by the publisher Grasset. Each of the new philosophers promoted one another’s books and the “movement” received a great deal of coverage in the cultural press. “*Le Magazine littéraire* vigorously promoted the books of its owner’s publishing house, to the extent of publishing a flow chart of the ‘Inter-fluences de la philosophie contemporaine’ in which the new philosophers appeared as the sole inheritors ... of the French philosophical tradition.”¹⁴⁷ The new philosophers are completely irresponsible politically. Though they speak out for democracy and human rights, they are unable to articulate a political position from which one can assert such claims against the existing institutional imaginary. As such, the new philosophers essentially engage in a soliloquy, asserting the importance of individual rights, but presenting no possibility for actually defending these rights against the intrusion of bureaucratic-capitalist power.

Bernard-Henri Levy’s Barbarism with a Human Face presents the typical position of the new philosophers. Levy argues that political action is futile and pointless, given the fact that power, and in particular, state power, is a fact of life of every society. Political action, according to Levy, can never, and should never, rise above individual bohemianism. “We no longer have a politics, a language, or a recourse. There remain only ethics and moral duty. There remains only the duty to protest against Marxism, since we cannot forget it.”¹⁴⁸ To engage in organized political activity is too dangerous, as the possibilities of totalitarianism become stronger as people organize to participate in politics. As such, criticism of the existing society remains the realm of the elite, *déclassé*

intellectual, sitting around the coffee-house decrying the state of society. Levy's position on the role of the bohemian "revolutionary" is summed up in this statement:

Yes, we know that the world is subject to the law of the Master, and we *do not believe* that that law will every give way to our desires. But we will continue *to think*, to think to the end, *to think without believing it*, the impossible thought of a world freed from lordship. Why so? Fools will ask. Why persist in what has all the appearances of a trap? Because it is from this place, and from this place alone, from this 'trap', as you call it, that it is at all possible to hunt down false appearances. And besides, without it, without its unreasonable demands, the world would be even worse than we say it is.¹⁴⁹

The world, therefore, is a terrible place, and we, the bohemians, will tell you how awful it is. However, we will do nothing to change it because politics is too dangerous an endeavor in which to engage. The rebel knows perfectly well "that rebellion is unthinkable inside the real world; that it is foolish to claim that rebellion can be socialized, because it is a negation of society, of what makes society livable."¹⁵⁰

Levy's critique of political action represents the most irresponsible resignation to the instituted-imaginary. Levy condemns those who seek to challenge the instituted-imaginary by arguing that, "'realistic' or 'progressive' politics is always reactionary; nothing good can come from reality and progress or from their oracular and evergreen authorities, nothing that can ever escape from the stifling grip of power."¹⁵¹ This complete resignation to status quo exposes the complete bankruptcy of both new philosophy and the instituted-imaginary social-historical context in which it is written. In essence, Levy calls on those living in instituted-modern societies to resign themselves

completely to the bureaucratic-capitalist institutional structure. To do otherwise, according to Levy, is to skirt too close to totalitarianism. As such, individuals should accept their fate and do nothing to change or challenge the instituted-imaginary.

Such a “philosophy” is completely unacceptable and Castoriadis rightly criticizes it. The choice is not between resignation and totalitarianism. There is in fact a democratic possibility that emerges through the emancipatory potential of the modern imaginary. Levy cannot conceive of this possibility because he revels in bohemianism and irresponsibility. Castoriadis criticizes Bernard Henri-Levy for referring to responsibility as the domain of the “flic”.¹⁵² In Castoriadis’s estimation, a society must consist of mores, rules, and standards. Without these, the threat of demagoguery becomes stronger. Responsibility is therefore a guard against both totalitarianism and the cultural emptiness that is too prevalent in modern Western society.¹⁵³ A democracy requires an ethos of responsibility. Without it, only the pseudo-truths of the bureaucracy, the Church, and the media exist in the public sphere.¹⁵⁴ The alternative, according to Castoriadis, is for citizens to actively engage in the political sphere, challenging the instituted-imaginary and constructing new significations through which a society can make sense of its world and the role the individual and the collective can play in this world. When one looks more closely at Castoriadis’ conception of the imaginary, the impact of his participation in revolutionary politics becomes clear. His emphasis on the spontaneous creativity of the workers, his insistence on self-management at the factory floor, and his critique of bureaucratic systems in the United States and the Soviet Union were all expanded and elaborated to form the foundation for the imaginary. In essence, Castoriadis drew upon his experiences in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* and the workers’

struggles in France and generalized them to create a theory of the origin of social institutions and argue for the potential for the creation of an autonomous society.

¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Socialism or Barbarism," Political and Social Writings, Vol 1, ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 86.

² Castoriadis, "The Only Way to Find Out if You Can Swim Is to Get into the Water," Castoriadis Reader, 6.

³ Maxwell Aderfth, The French Communist Party (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 1984) 1.

⁴ *ibid.* 1-3.

⁵ The Italian Communist Party (PCI), for example, developed its political program after World War II based on Italian Communists, such as Antonio Gramsci, often in opposition to the Stalinist ideology of the CPSU.

⁶ Aderfth, The French Communist Party, 6-7

⁷ Christofferson, French Intellectuals Against the Left, 18.

⁸ Michael Kelly, Modern French Marxism (Baltimore: Johns Hopkins University Press, 1982) 145.

⁹ Aderfth, The French Communist Party, 103.

¹⁰ George Ross, Workers and Communists in France (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1982) 222.

¹¹ Aderfth, The French Communist Party, 189.

¹² Christofferson, French Intellectuals Against the Left, 29.

¹³ *ibid.* 29.

¹⁴ Kelly, Modern French Marxism, 73.

¹⁵ Ronald Tiersky, French Communism 1920-1972 (New York: Columbia University Press, 1974) 140.

¹⁶ Aderfth, The French Communist Party, 131.

¹⁷ Tiersky, French Communism 1920-1972, 161.

¹⁸ Christofferson, French Intellectuals against the Left, 16.

¹⁹ *ibid.* 30.

²⁰ *ibid.* 31.

²¹ Judt, Past Imperfect, 38.

²² *ibid.* 40.

²³ Contemporary examinations of totalitarianism were unavailable in France during the 1950's. Carl Friedrich's and Zbigniew Brzezinski's *Totalitarian Dictatorship and Autocracy* was never translated into French. A full French edition of Hannah Arendt's *Origins of Totalitarianism* did not appear until 1984. Christofferson, French Intellectuals Against the Left, 16.

²⁴ Judt, Past Imperfect, 120-127

²⁵ Tiersky, French Communism 1920-1972, 228.

²⁶ Judt, Past Imperfect, 38.

²⁷ *ibid.* 179.

²⁸ *ibid.* 202.

²⁹ George Lichtheim, Marxism in Modern France (New York: Columbia University

Press, 1966) 62.

³⁰ Hirsh, The French Left, 49.

³¹ Judt, Past Imperfect, 158

³² Cornelius Castoriadis, "Stalinism in France," Political and Social Writings, Vol 1, ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 60.

³³ Claude Lefort, "De la Reponse a la Question," Éléments d'une Critique de la Bureaucratie (Genève: Libraire Droz, 1971) 105.

³⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, "On the Regime and Against the Defense of the USSR," Political and Social Writings, Vol 1, ed. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 40.

³⁵ Castoriadis, "Stalinism in France," Political and Social Writings, Vol 1, 59.

³⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Evolution of the French Communist Party," Political and Social Writings, vol 3, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 286.

³⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Proletariat and Organization I," Political and Social Writings, Vol 2, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 216.

³⁸ *ibid.* 215.

³⁹ *ibid.* 216.

⁴⁰ Poster, Existential Marxism in Postwar France, 126.

⁴¹ *ibid.* 84.

⁴² *ibid.* 88.

⁴³ *ibid.* 94.

⁴⁴ *ibid.* 85.

⁴⁵ *ibid.* 166.

⁴⁶ *ibid.* 166.

⁴⁷ *ibid.* 67-168.

⁴⁸ Dick Howard, Defining the Political, 34.

⁴⁹ Christofferson, French Intellectuals Against the Left, 35.

⁵⁰ Ross, Workers and Communists in France, 31.

⁵¹ *ibid.* 32-33.

⁵² *ibid.* 46.

⁵³ *ibid.* 70.

⁵⁴ In 1952, Jacques Duclos, a PCF leader, was arrested with several pigeons in his possession. The French government asserted that these were homing pigeons with which to communicate with Moscow. The pigeons were, in fact, Duclos' dinner for that evening. *ibid.* 70.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* 70

⁵⁶ *ibid.* 70.

⁵⁷ Jean-Paul Sartre, The Communists and the Peace (New York: George Braziller, 1968) 9.

⁵⁸ Daniel Mothé, one of the working class members of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* group, was a worker at Billancourt and wrote for and distributed the *Pouvoir Ouvrier*, the "popular" newspaper of the group, in the factory. Gottraux, Socialisme ou Barbarie, 127.

⁵⁹ Paul Berman, Power and the Idealists (New York: Soft Skull Press, 2005) 183.

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- ⁶⁰ Sartre, The Communists and the Peace, 284.
- ⁶¹ *ibid.* 296.
- ⁶² “*Le Figaro*, which like you although for different motives, aims at dividing the working class from its leadership...” *ibid.* 289.
- ⁶³ *ibid.* 244.
- ⁶⁴ Christofferson, French Intellectuals Against the Left, 36.
- ⁶⁵ Judt, Past Imperfect, 64
- ⁶⁶ *ibid.* 64.
- ⁶⁷ Christofferson, French Intellectuals Against the Left, 36.
- ⁶⁸ Judt, Past Imperfect, 40
- ⁶⁹ Sartre, The Communists and the Peace, 88.
- ⁷⁰ In the French text, Sartre writes first, “Le prolétariat ne peut agir comme classe qu’en se constituant en parti politique distinct,” using the reflexive form of the verb. In the second case, he employs the passive voice, writing that the PCF is the “prolétariat constitué en parti politique distinct.” Jean Paul Sartre. “Le Communistes et la Paix.” Situations, VI. (Paris: Gallimard, 1964) 195.
- ⁷¹ Sartre, The Communists and the Peace, 83.
- ⁷² *ibid.* 34.
- ⁷³ *ibid.* 57-58.
- ⁷⁴ *ibid.* 77.
- ⁷⁵ *ibid.* 83.
- ⁷⁶ *ibid.* 89.
- ⁷⁷ “Like the bourgeoisie, Stalinism develops its policy in secret, prolongs the elements in wants to embrace, and does not tolerate popular action unless it can maintain strict control.” Lefort, “De la Reponse a la Question,” Éléments d’une Critique de la Bureaucratie, 104. Translation mine.
- ⁷⁸ Claude Lefort, “L’expérience prolétarienne,” Éléments d’une Critique de la Bureaucratie (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1971) 40.
- ⁷⁹ Claude Lefort, “Le Marxisme et Sartre,” Éléments d’une Critique de la Bureaucratie (Genève: Librairie Droz, 1971) 63.
- ⁸⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, “Wildcat Strikes in the American Automobile Industry,” Political and Social Writings, Vol 2, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 9.
- ⁸¹ Sartre, The Communists and the Peace, 132.
- ⁸² *ibid.* 59.
- ⁸³ Lefort, “De la Réponse à la Question,” Éléments d’une Critique de la Bureaucratie, 80.
- ⁸⁴ Jean Paul Sartre, “Sartre Accuses the Intellectuals of Bad Faith,” New York Times Magazine, October 17, 1971. Quoted in Paul Hollander, Political Pilgrims 4th ed. (New Brunswick: Transaction Publishers, 1998) 64.
- ⁸⁵ Sartre, The Communists and the Peace, 193.
- ⁸⁶ “It is man that cuts off man.” Lefort, “De la Reponse a la Question,” Éléments d’une Critique de la Bureaucratie, 89. Translation mine.
- ⁸⁷ *ibid.* 90.
- ⁸⁸ *ibid.* 94.
- ⁸⁹ Christofferson, French Intellectuals Against the Left, 37.

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- ⁹⁰ *ibid.* 38.
- ⁹¹ *ibid.* 39.
- ⁹² Max Weber, "Politics as a Vocation," From Max Weber, eds. and trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958) 121.
- ⁹³ *ibid.* 127.
- ⁹⁴ Raymond Aron, The Committed Observer, trans. James McIntosh and Marie McIntosh (Chicago: Regnery Gateway, 1983) 105.
- ⁹⁵ *ibid.* 147.
- ⁹⁶ *ibid.* 205.
- ⁹⁷ *ibid.* 145.
- ⁹⁸ *ibid.* 205.
- ⁹⁹ Tony Judt, The Burden of Responsibility (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1998) 158.
- ¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* 158.
- ¹⁰¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, Devant la Guerre, 2nd ed, (Paris: Fayard, 1981) 13.
- ¹⁰² Aron, The Committed Observer, 234.
- ¹⁰³ John Lewis Gaddis, The Cold War (New York: Penguin Press, 2005) 202.
- ¹⁰⁴ Castoriadis, Devant la Guerre, 9.
- ¹⁰⁵ *ibid.* 21.
- ¹⁰⁶ *ibid.* 31.
- ¹⁰⁷ *ibid.* 240.
- ¹⁰⁸ "It is absurd to ask a sumo wrestler why he doesn't play tennis." *ibid.* 240.
- Translation mine.
- ¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* 245.
- ¹¹⁰ *ibid.* 248.
- ¹¹¹ Albert Camus, The Rebel, trans. Anthony Bower (New York: Vintage, 1956) 231.
- ¹¹² *ibid.* 240.
- ¹¹³ Judt, The Burden of Responsibility, 100.
- ¹¹⁴ *ibid.* 122.
- ¹¹⁵ *ibid.* 102.
- ¹¹⁶ Sartre, Jean-Paul, "Preface," Frantz Fanon, The Wretched of the Earth, trans. Constance Farrington (New York: Grove Press, 1963) 22.
- ¹¹⁷ Judt, The Burden of Responsibility, 142.
- ¹¹⁸ *ibid.* 180.
- ¹¹⁹ Aron, The Committed Observer, 158.
- ¹²⁰ *ibid.* 178.
- ¹²¹ G.M. Tamás, "The Political Irresponsibility of Intellectuals," The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals, eds. Ian Maclean, Alan Montefiore, and Peter Winch (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1990) 253.
- ¹²² Aron, The Committed Observer, 49.
- ¹²³ Tamás, "The Political Irresponsibility of Intellectuals," The Political Responsibility of Intellectuals, 253.
- ¹²⁴ *ibid.* 253.
- ¹²⁵ Heller, A Radical Philosophy, 36.
- ¹²⁶ "The only real task that this group could propose was to collect and distribute

information.” Castoriadis, “Pourquoi je ne suis plus marxiste,” Une Société a la dérive, 38. Translation mine.

¹²⁷ “could not help but be inspired by the organizational forms the proletariat had created and its ‘spirit’.” *ibid.* 36. Translation mine.

¹²⁸ “For the workers, our ideas were constantly boring subjects. As soon as we want to form a group, publish a journal, a tract, the workers assess their existence, that is to say, their work, their comrades, the relationships with their bosses and with everything surrounding them. Our ideas could not help the workers except when they wanted to take action.” Daniel Mothé, “Contribution à la discussion sur le travail en direction des ouvriers,” Bulletin Interieur 23 (Mars 1961). Quoted in Gottraux, Socialisme ou Barbarie, 127. Translation mine.

¹²⁹ Castoriadis, “Pourquoi je ne suis plus marxiste,” Une Société a la dérive, 42.

¹³⁰ *ibid.* 42.

¹³¹ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 67.

¹³² Castoriadis, “Pourquoi je ne suis plus marxiste,” Une Société a la dérive, 43.

¹³³ Gottraux, Socialisme ou Barbarie, 104.

¹³⁴ Christofferson, French Intellectuals Against the Left, 256.

¹³⁵ Kelly, Modern French Marxism 176.

¹³⁶ Daniel Cohn-Bendit and Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, Obsolete Communism, trans. Arnold Pomerans (London: Andre Deutsch, 1968) 18.

¹³⁷ One of the slogans of the May 1968 revolt was “Please leave the Communist Party as clean on leaving as you would like to find it on entering,” well illustrating the low regard with which the party was held. Cohn-Bendit, Obsolete Communism, 50.

¹³⁸ Aderfth, The French Communist Party, 191.

¹³⁹ Kelly, Modern French Marxism 180-182.

¹⁴⁰ Patrick Seale and Maureen McConville, Red Flag, Black Flag (New York: Ballantine Books, 1968) 213, 216.

¹⁴¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Anticipated Revolution,” Political and Social Writings, vol 3, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 140.

¹⁴² Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Retreat from Autonomy,” World in Fragments, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 42.

¹⁴³ “The clearest picture of this situation is found in ‘postmodern theory,’ which is the most distinct, I will say the most cynical, expression of refusal (or inability) to challenge the actual situation.” Cornelius Castoriadis, “Le Delabrement de l’occident,” La Montee de l’insignifiance (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996) 78

¹⁴⁴ Castoriadis, “The Retreat from Autonomy,” World in Fragments, 32.

¹⁴⁵ *ibid.* 42.

¹⁴⁶ Christofferson, French Intellectuals Against the Left, 184.

¹⁴⁷ *ibid.* 192.

¹⁴⁸ Bernard-Henri Levy, Barbarism with a Human Face, trans. George Holoch (New York: Harper and Row, 1979) 190.

¹⁴⁹ *ibid.* 195-196.

¹⁵⁰ *ibid.* 24.

¹⁵¹ *ibid.* 34.

¹⁵² Cornelius Castoriadis, “L’Industrie du Vide,” Domaines de l’Homme (Paris: Seuil, 1977) 29.

¹⁵³ *ibid.* 29.

¹⁵⁴ *ibid.* 30.

The Imaginary and the Western Political Tradition: Constructing a Framework for a Philosophy of the Political

The fundamental question Castoriadis explores in his evaluation of the Western philosophical tradition is to what extent Western theorists create a philosophical possibility for the instauration of the political as a separate sphere of action. His simple answer is this: what links the diverse theorists of the Western tradition is their failure to fully account for human creativity and because the role of the radical imaginary is covered, the possibility of instauration of the political is closed off. The political is by definition a sphere of creation, requiring openness and an acceptance of uncertainty. Western philosophy seeks to provide answers to “big” questions concerning, among other things, Being, justice, and good government. While questions such as these are crucial to the philosophical endeavor, the possibility of the political is closed off when philosopher seeks to *answer* such questions definitively. When philosophers seek to construct closed philosophical system the role of the radical imaginary is covered over. The purpose of philosophy is to pose such questions to established institutions, not to answer them definitively. When a philosopher pursues the latter goal, he confines himself to the realm of politics, where philosophy is limited to the defense of established institutions or the replacement of one alienated instituted imaginary with another. As such, the political as a domain of creation becomes unnecessary, as politics will suffice, given the fact that the philosophical system can provide all the answers to whatever question we may pose to the instituted imaginary.

Regardless of whether the philosopher accounts for it, the imaginary always plays a role in the construction of institutions. In the simplest of terms, the imaginary is the

human capacity to create. It points to a relationship between human beings and their society wherein people both construct and are constructed by social institutions. The imaginary is the source of this capacity to create meaning for the world in which human beings exist. The imaginary “is the unceasing and essentially *undetermined* (social-historical and psychical) creation of figures/forms/images on the basis of which alone there can ever be a question of ‘something’.”¹ Most importantly, the imaginary underlies every existing social institution, whether its role is explicitly posited in the construction of institutions or not. Every social institution is the product of the imaginary. At the heart of every philosophical project, one finds the imaginary. More importantly, at the heart of every social institution one finds the imaginary.

The Construction of Meaning from the Meaningless

“Man is a being that seeks meaning and that, for that purpose, creates it.”²

Castoriadis contends that no inherent or objective meaning exists in the world, but rather human beings create meaning in order to organize and make sense of the world. This idea contradicts one significant trend in the Western tradition that posits an underlying, universal mode of Being that characterizes the world and determines modes of being-in-the-world. In essence, philosophers who adhere to this position argue that an underlying order exists in the world itself that shapes society and human relationships. While philosophers of the Western tradition disagree on the extent to which the world is determined by an inherent Being, what links these variations is an assertion that this underlying order exists beyond what is immediately apparent to human perception. Furthermore, these theorists argue that this underlying order can be discovered and employed politically to create social institutions that reflect this metaphysical Truth and

therefore be used to “correctly” govern human interaction, both between individuals and between the individual and societal structures. Thus, the knowledge of Being can be reliably employed to guide human action. From this perspective, “to be” is “to be determined.” Human social existence is linked to and determined by a broader, metaphysical mode of Being. Philosophers who posit an inherent meaning (defined according to a broader concept of Being) to the world seek to ground the capacity to understand the world in this mode of Being. The human capacity to understand the world is determined according to, and limited by, a mode of Being that exists prior to any particular society.

The most significant manifestation of this concept of Being as an order underlying human society is present in the work of Plato and Martin Heidegger, both of whom argue that there is a “hidden” meaning in the world, accessible only to the privileged few. Both Plato and Heidegger argue that if such a higher order exists in the face of a flawed or inauthentic existence, the only logical goal of human beings should be to strive to achieve a form of society determined by the ideals of this higher truth. Since a higher truth already exists, and the only question is how to alter political institutions in order to conform to it, society need only be governed through politics, and the possibility of the political is removed completely from human endeavor. These visions of Being as a hidden Truth are the most dangerous ontological positions, as they completely eliminate the possibility of the political. The danger of this mode of thinking is that to assume there is an inherent meaning in the world leads one to the conclusion that there is a “True” way of shaping human relationships and humans’ relationship to the world. What the examples of Plato and Heidegger indicate is that by relying on an inherent meaning

for the construction of social institutions, one removes human creativity completely from the equation. According to such theorists, the ideal society is predetermined by the very fact that a hidden “Truth” exists, underlying the world of appearance.

Plato’s allegory of the cave posits both the possibility of understanding this hidden Being and the role such an understanding can play in guiding human action and shaping social institutions. According to Plato, those who are trapped in the proverbial cave are only capable of sensory interaction with the world. As a result, they are easily convinced that the shadows they see projected on the wall in front of them are real. However, the senses are poor guides to understanding Truth and one cannot achieve knowledge (*episteme*) through everyday interaction with the material world.³ Guiding Plato throughout the entire body of his work is the theory of the forms as a higher mode of Being, from which the reality around us, our sensory reality, is derived, though ultimately as a pale shadow of its respective form.⁴ The average person, and, more significantly for Plato’s anti-democratic project, the average citizen, is guided solely by opinion (*doxa*), unaware that there is something beyond the shadows they see on the wall. Thus, according to Plato, any form of democratic governance is inherently flawed, due to the fact that the citizenry is incapable of making decisions based on true knowledge (*episteme*). Only the philosopher, who devotes his life to knowledge, is able to escape the cave and understand reality and the forms from which reality is derived. For Plato, the philosopher, who is able to understand Truth, should rule the state, given the fact that only the philosopher-king is capable of understanding the Form of the Good and using it to create and govern his state.⁵ Though Plato recognizes that the philosopher-king is an unlikely possibility, given the fact that the average citizen is incapable of understanding

him, Plato's political project throughout the Republic and other works such as the Laws represents an attempt to institute as closely as possible the ideal state posited in the Republic. Plato constructs a regimented hierarchical society based on his theory of the forms, wherein human society is derived from a Form of the Good. For Plato, societies can be judged based on how far degraded they are from this Form of the Good.⁶

Furthermore, Plato's intention is to undermine the democratic polis of Athens by attacking the philosophical basis of the political. The Athenian political system relies on the idea that *doxa* guides individual decision-making in the political sphere. Within the context of the democratic Assembly, a rough consensus on what the best policies for the city-state can be achieved through democratic debate. By degrading *doxa* to "mere" opinion, Plato completely undermines the democratic decision-making process.

According to Castoriadis, Plato is the first philosopher to leave the *polis*, but still seeks to dictate its laws, ignoring the instituting imaginary of the citizens who remain.⁷ If there is a Form of the Good and if the philosopher-king can discover it and rule according to its dictates then democracy is unnecessary. The philosopher-king can lead the state and the people can keep their "mere" opinions to themselves. According to Plato, only when the philosopher-king rules according to his "special" knowledge (*episteme*) can a society progress towards the ideal form of government as dictated by the Form of the Good. Any other form of government, such as a democratic one, is degraded and incapable of achieving the Good.

Similarly, Martin Heidegger advances an idea of Being as a "hidden truth" that is concealed from the majority of those living within a particular society. According to Heidegger, *Da-sein*, the human subject, is unique in that she alone is capable of raising

and reflecting upon the question of Being. However, Heidegger further argues that reflecting on this question of Being is impeded by the fact that Da-sein lives among others in a world constructed in such a way that Da-sein's Being is covered over by other modes of being. Heidegger characterizes Da-sein's everyday mode of being as being-thrown into an inauthentic they-self. "Everyone is the other, and no one is himself. The *they*, which supplies the answer to the *who* of everyday Da-sein, is the *nobody* to whom every Da-sein has always already surrendered itself, in its being-among-one-another."⁸ The they-self exerts a powerful, constitutive influence over Da-sein's everyday mode of being, in that this condition of thrownness and being-among-others creates a world defined by the impossibility of living authentically. "As everyday being-with-one-another, Da-Sein stands in *subservience* to the others. It itself *is* not; the others have taken its being away from it."⁹ As such, Da-sein's potentiality is restricted by the fact that the existence of others in the they-self serves to cover over the Being of Da-sein; the they-self creates an inauthentic world where each Da-sein is cut off from its own potentiality. In this manner, Da-sein falls prey to a world constructed by the they-self. "Falling prey to the 'world' means being absorbed in being-with-one-another as it is guided by idle talk, curiosity, and ambiguity."¹⁰ Heidegger posits that Da-Sein must begin reflection on Being from a starting point of being-thrown, where Being is covered over by the inauthenticity of being-among-others and Da-sein is absorbed into the they self.

The reflection on Being begins through glimpses of Being that arise from feelings of *Angst*, where Da-sein's potentiality-for-being is briefly revealed despite the fact that Da-sein is absorbed by the they self. "As attunement, being anxious is a way of being-in-

the-world; that about which we have *Angst* is thrown being-in-the-world; that for which we have *Angst* is our potentiality-for-being-in-the-world.”¹¹ Da-sein catches a glimpse of Being and the potential for authenticity through these feelings of *Angst*, opening the possibility for reflection on the inauthentic being of the they-self. Heidegger argues that the seeking to discover authentic Being against the inauthentic being of the they-self can be a daunting and lonely task. In Heidegger’s estimation, it is fully possible to live inauthentically without ever reflecting upon the glimpse of Being revealed by *Angst*. Inauthentic being is tempting and tranquilizing, but it leads to an uninhibited “busyness” not stagnation. An inauthentic society can be a thriving, active, and dynamic one, though, according to Heidegger, one that will never rise above the idle chatter and meaningless busyness that is characteristic of Da-sein’s being-thrown. Concerned with this busyness, the right questions about Da-sein are never asked. This entanglement in the world leads to alienation, closing off the possibility of authenticity.¹² As a result, the potential for discovering Being is impeded by the constant presence of the they-self and the idle talk that characterizes the discourse of the they-self.

What is significant here is that Heidegger characterizes idle talk as *public discourse*, the discourse that occurs through the groundless understanding of everyday Da-sein. As such, this form of public discourse is incapable of understanding innerworldly beings.¹³ Heidegger’s characterization of public discourse as the idle chatter of the they reveals his anti-democratic political stance. If one accepts Heidegger’s argument that the everyday mode of being of Da-sein is characterized by being-thrown into the they self, and furthermore, if one accepts that the only discourse possible in the they self is idle chatter, one must come to the conclusion that democracy is an inauthentic

form of government. Public discourse as idle chatter condemns democratic forms of government, in that democracy relies solely on “idle chatter”, the “inauthentic” public discourse of citizens seeking to achieve some political goal. If this discourse is inauthentic, it will consistently cover over the hidden “Truth” of Being. In this regard, Heidegger’s distinction between public discourse as idle chatter and a “higher” form of discourse is equivalent to Plato’s distinction between *doxa* and *episteme*.

Heidegger’s anti-democratic position is further illustrated through his discussion of the possibility of breaking free from the inauthenticity of the they-self and seeking the authentic truth of Being. The disclosure of Being through feelings of *Angst* is a private affair, in the sense that *Da-sein* glimpses Being in the privacy of his own mind. The public world of social living with others represents an impediment to such glimpse of Being; feelings of *Angst* can be easily dispelled once *Da-sein* immerses himself in the busyness of the they. *Angst* forces *Da-sein* to make a decision: retreat into the being-thrown of the they-self or heed the call of conscience that arises from these glimpses of Being. The retreat from Being is easy, as *Da-sein* becomes lost in the they self. “Losing itself in the publicness of the they and its idle talk, it *fails to hear* its own self in listening to the they-self. If *Da-sein* is to be brought back from this lostness of failing to hear itself, it must first be able to find itself, to find itself as something that has failed to hear itself and continues to do so in *listening* to the they.”¹⁴ According to Heidegger, only the few will be capable of such a task, because the they-self exerts such a powerful influence over the typical individual. *Da-sein* can begin to find itself through the call of conscience, a form of discourse that summons *Da-sein* to itself. The call of conscience as a form of discourse passes over the everyday discourse of idle-talk, such that the they

collapses.¹⁵ “The summons calls back by calling forth: *forth* to the possibility of taking over in existence the thrown being that it is, *back* to thrownness in order to understand it as the null ground that it has to take up into existence.”¹⁶ The call of conscience is an elitist discourse, available only to the few. While these few will undertake this examination of their own being, the rest of the world, thrown into the they self, will continue living inauthentically.

Heidegger’s discussion of authenticity is inherently anti-democratic, setting apart a chosen few who are “superior” to all those who continue to wallow in the inauthenticity of the they. Politically, this can only lead to proto-totalitarian or totalitarian political systems. Philosophers who posit the concept of a “hidden truth” accessible only to an elite reject the democratic decision-making potential that exists within each particular society, limiting autonomy to the select few while denying this capacity to the majority of the collective. Heidegger’s vision of authentic life cannot be achieved through democratic decision-making. Rather, the authentic *Da-Sean* exists as a Nietzschean superman, standing above the idle chatter of the they, able to live in accordance with true Being. In this manner, Heidegger differs little from the Platonic conception of the philosopher-king. What is most dangerous about Heidegger’s ontology is that he never makes a connection between the individual living authentically and the type of government that would exist in an authentic society other than the implicit rejection of democracy. As a result, Heidegger’s support for the Nazi regime in Germany is not surprising and does not represent a distortion of his philosophical position. There is no indication in Being and Time that Nazi ideology does not present an “authentic” representation of Being.

The problem of authenticity also emerges in the work of Herbert Marcuse, who attempts to attribute a revolutionary political content to this idea. Marcuse argues that the industrial proletariat is no longer a revolutionary subject, thus forcing a reconsideration of the nature of late modern society and the possibilities for social and political change. Late capitalism, according to Marcuse, has successfully stupefied the industrial proletariat by providing a higher standard of living to this class. Advanced capitalist society can “deliver the goods” to the masses, such that the average worker is able to live a comfortable life, not questioning the oppressive aspects of the existing economic system. As a result, Marcuse concludes that the traditional Marxist category of the proletariat no longer exists as a negation of the system; revolution will not arise from the industrial proletariat. Liberation, according to Marcuse, requires a consciousness of servitude on the part of the individual, which is hindered by the replacement of “true” needs by the “false” ones promoted through the culture industry.¹⁷ In this regard, Marcuse recognizes the dynamic nature of capitalism and the system’s capacity to adapt to changing social-historical circumstances. However, his solution to this dilemma relies too greatly on the possibility of discovering an authentic revolutionary subject that is capable of distinguishing between “true” needs and “false” ones.

Marcuse argues that the culture industry in late capitalist societies creates a set of “false” needs and convinces those living in that society that the fulfillment of these needs is essential to their survival. However, such “false” needs only serve the purpose of reinforcing the dominance of the capitalist system. “No matter how much he identifies himself with them and finds himself in their satisfaction, they continue to be what they were from the beginning – products of a society whose dominant interest demands

repression.”¹⁸ The construction of these “false” needs creates a situation where the possibilities of political and social change are blocked. Marcuse defines “utopian” not as that which no longer has a place in historical universe, but rather the range of possibilities that are blocked by established society. He argues that utopian possibilities are inherent in the technology of advanced capitalism; global poverty could be completely eliminated if the technological structure of capitalist society were turned toward this purpose.¹⁹ However, capitalist society blocks this possibility by burying human potential through the construction of false needs.

The distinction between “true” and “false” needs is a dangerous one that carries anti-democratic possibilities. First, who determines what needs are “true” and which are “false”? Marcuse argues that “the only needs that have an unqualified claim for satisfaction are the vital ones – nourishment, clothing, lodging at the attainable level of culture.”²⁰ If this is the definition of “true” needs, it reduces political and social life to a state of bare existence, where survival itself becomes the purpose of collective living. Second, because Marcuse argues that the industrial proletariat is stupefied by the “false” needs created by the culture industry, an authentic revolutionary subject must be found elsewhere. If the definition of “true” needs depends on the needs of this revolutionary subject, the anti-democratic dangers of this distinction increase. Any revolutionary subject will have a particular set of needs and interests, which might conflict with the needs and interests of other groups in the society. Thus, if the revolutionary subject’s needs are “true” needs, there is nothing to prevent them from enforcing this definition of needs on the rest of the society. As such, the distinction between “true” needs and “false”

ones falls into the same anti-democratic category as Heidegger's conception of "authenticity" and "inauthenticity".

Marcuse's emphasis on needs eliminates the possibility of the political, concerning itself solely with politics. If it were possible to truly distinguish between "true" and "false" needs, the only purpose for political association would be to create the social institutions necessary to distribute the "true" needs to the society in question. While Marcuse certainly intends to address the malaise that affects late capitalist societies, the artificial distinction between "true" and "false" needs, and the inherent anti-democratic possibilities that this distinction carries, is an inappropriate framework for effecting political change. Furthermore, Marcuse's emphasis on needs leads him, and many other radical theorists, to a futile search for an authentic revolutionary subject. For example, in the Essay on Liberation, argues that the African-American population represents the best hope for an authentic revolutionary subject in the United States.²¹ Other radical theorists looked to the Third World to find this revolutionary subject. What none of these theorists recognize is the possibility that if the culture industry is so powerful, able to alter a person's identity and redefine her needs, it is fully possible that late capitalism can "buy off" everyone.

A philosophical framework for the political must, first and foremost, reject any concept of an inherent truth that underlies the world. Castoriadis wholly rejects the theory that a universal mode of Being underlies the world and that this Being differs from the manner in which we experience the world. Instead, human beings create meaning for the world in which they live through the imaginary. Castoriadis argues that human beings are defined by their ability to create, differentiating the human race from all other

forms of life on this planet. Unlike other animals, which will respond with fixed routines to specific stimuli, human beings are capable of responding in different ways to the same stimuli and, more importantly, are able to construct completely new responses to these stimuli.²² The imaginary is at the heart of every human endeavor to understand and construct meaning for the world. However, *the imaginary has no content and determines nothing*; meaning as such is in no way derived from the imaginary in a deterministic manner. It is only through the imaginary that one can even conceive of “content” and “determinacy”, which are posited in the form of social imaginary significations.²³ When a society constructs meaning for itself, it takes the form of the social imaginary signification that structure representations of the world in general, which are specific to each society; define the limits of action by imposing what can and cannot be done, and what is good and what is bad; and finally, “elles établissent les types d’affects caractéristiques d’une société.”²⁴ Castoriadis’s response to Plato and Heidegger is that there is no “hidden truth” underlying the world as it is presented to us through *doxa*, in Plato’s case, or through the “they” self, in Heidegger’s. No Truth or Being underlies any society. Social existence is about the construction of truths and beings through the mechanism of the radical imaginary.

Castoriadis makes the following “dogmatic” assertion about Being: “‘Being’ is not a system, is not a system of systems, and it is not a great chain. Being is abyss, or chaos, or the groundless.”²⁵ “To be” therefore does not imply “to be determined”. The mode of Being as chaos and groundlessness cannot lead to any particular mode of being. Rather, Being-as-chaos posits a multiplicity of modes of being, expressed through representations created by individuals and collectives. Being is chaos and

groundlessness, but it is also creation. It is a *vis formandi* (a power of formation) which is not predetermined and which superimposes on chaos a world that is ordered in some way. *Vis formandi* is accompanied by a *libido formandi*, a desire for formation.²⁶ Human beings living in any society desire to make sense of their relationship to one another and to the world around them. In order to accomplish this, they construct meaning for the world around them and their society's place in that world by positing social imaginary significations.

The role of imaginary significations is to posit an answer for the questions society raises in articulating itself. It is in the doing of each collectivity that these answers are embodied.²⁷ Thus, within every society there is a constant and continual positing of social imaginary significations in order to come to terms with and create an order for the world. These significations impose an order on the world and serve as the cornerstone for the construction of every social institution. Being, therefore, is posited by those living in a society. Order does not emerge from an extra-social source, but rather it is imposed on chaos by the creative capacity of those living in society. "Being" and "being determined" both represent the result of the imposition of a particular meaning at a particular time by a particular society.

The set of possible social imaginary significations is not infinite. The first natural stratum, the natural world, imposes limitations on the imaginary.²⁸ One cannot, for example, seriously posit that world hunger can be solved through the magical conjuration of enough food to feed the entire human race. Or, one cannot be born male and become a female capable of giving birth to a child. Thus, the social imaginary must "lean on"²⁹ the

first natural stratum. As such, the natural world imposes limitations on the possible set of imaginary significations that can be constructed within a particular society.

The first natural stratum in no way determines the social imaginary. A cross-cultural examination will quickly reveal that societies have diverse methods by which they organize the world. This diversity of social imaginaries can be understood through an examination of *how* a society incorporates these limits into its social imaginary. For example, human subjects living in a particular society endow physical objects and the processes that govern them with meaning through the exercise of the imaginary. Objects in the physical world simply exist; they carry no ontological meaning or being-in-themselves. It is only through the collective imaginary that objects have any meaning in the world; ontological being is created by placing objects in a social relationship with the rest of the world. By placing objects into a social relationship, the limitations imposed by the first natural stratum become embedded in the institutions that exist within the society. While these limitations are significant, they in no way determine the form the instituted imaginary will take. For example, determinacy, especially in the form of “scientific laws”, exists to some extent in the first natural stratum, and this can serve as a limitation on human action. The laws of gravity, conservation of energy, inertia, and other laws of physics are objectively true. These are facts of the natural world, governing cause and effect relationship that are always true and we cannot break them through force of will. However, scientific laws in themselves carry no social meaning. Their meaning, as well as the meaning of the limitations they impose is constructed through the imaginary. The form these limitations take is expressed by the instituted imaginary of the particular society in question, and only when the natural world is placed in relation to a social-

historical context does the determinacy that exists have any ontological meaning. Max Weber argues that science is based on certain presuppositions, the most important of which is that science itself is a worthwhile pursuit and actually contributes something to the world. He writes, “No science is absolutely free from presuppositions, and no science can prove its fundamental value to the man who rejects these presuppositions.”³⁰ Thus, the real question one must examine is this: “In what kind of society does this have any meaning for human beings?” The first law of thermodynamics has no meaning for a pre-modern society, even if one were to tell them and demonstrate it in some way. For people in such a society, thermodynamics has no relevance to their social institutions or their lives, and as such, does not play a part in that society’s social imaginary. The foundation of the pre-modern world is most often magic or mythology, with the gods setting limits on human society, making such physical laws irrelevant. Thermodynamics does have meaning for a modern society founded on the centrality of science and the importance of knowing the processes of the physical world. Modern societies posit themselves as relying on science in order to insure progress and development in every sphere of life. As a result, thermodynamics and scientific laws in general have significance because they are relied upon to explain and give meaning to the world in which the society is situated. However, in modern societies, these scientific laws do not determine the form the existing social institutions will take. Determinism is always fragmentary; it is a partial dynamic that allows the discovery or positing of causal laws, but these laws in no way determine the form social institutions will take in any particular society.³¹ The actual organization of the natural world by human beings is an act of

creativity, where the partial determinism that exists in the natural world is incorporated in a system of meaning through the construction of social institutions.

In addition to accounting for the limitations imposed by the first natural stratum, social imaginary significations also draw from the existing social imaginary in any given society. Each social imaginary signification consists of an ensemblist-identitary, or ensidic, dimension, which makes the signification comprehensible to other members of a particular society.³² The ensidic dimension represents constraints imposed by the society delimiting a domain within which a signification must fall in order to be coherent. Within this ensidic dimension are two components. The first is *legein*, which Castoriadis describes as “distinguish-choose-posit-assemble-count-speak.”³³ Language is the primary instrument of *legein*; in order for a social imaginary signification to have any coherence, it must be able to be communicated from one person to another within a particular society. The second aspect of the ensidic dimension is *teukhein* or “assembling-adjusting-making-constructing”³⁴ which takes into account common ways of doing in a society. *Legein* and *teukhein* have been accurately described as “îles de détermination dans une mer d’indétermination.”³⁵ They represent partial dynamics through which determinism can be posited. However, they cannot be integrated to form a completely determined system. To a certain extent, *legein* and *teukhein* are fixed, in the sense that certain aspects are immutable. In language, rules of syntax are fixed, limiting the possibilities of speech (where speech is conceived as a mode of communication with others). One *can* violate syntactic rules, but to do so would render speaking incomprehensible to others. Similarly, *teukhein* limits the individual with regard to what practices and techniques of doing are comprehensible to others.

In every society, the ensemblist-identitary dimension exists as a magma underlying each particular instauration of the instituted-imaginary.³⁶ Magma is an apt metaphor, evoking the image of churning molten rock, erupting forth from time to time and solidifying once it emerges through the Earth's crust. In terms of the imaginary, a similar churning, chaotic force underlies social institutions. No institution can encompass the whole of the magma. As such, the magma always represents a remainder, a large set of existing and potential imaginary significations underlying every particular instauration of a social institution. Castoriadis writes, "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."³⁷ Magmas are not pure chaos but, rather they represent a different, non-logical organization that underlies each particular society.³⁸ Human beings can solidify this magma by creating institutions, drawn in part from the magma. When creating institutions and social imaginary significations, human beings draw upon pre-existing knowledge in the form of *legein* and *teukhein*. This ensidic knowledge is fragmentary and is therefore not the sole component to the signification. Rather, the ensidic dimension bounds the realm of the possible, allowing the signification to be coherent to the whole of the society. In doing this, the ensidic dimension creates a link between the individual's radical imaginary and the society in which that person lives, which allows the separation between fantasy and the social imaginary. For example, if a person were to fantasize a world where people communicated through telepathy, this would remain within the realm of the radical imaginary. Since people interact through speech, a society founded on telepathic

communication would be incoherent at the social level. However, if one were to argue the idea that existing technology should be used to reduce the duration of the working day, this could leave the sphere of fantasy and be understood by the members of a technologically advanced capitalist society, and therefore become a part of the social imaginary.

The positing of a social imaginary signification is a creative act by an individual or by a collective. No signification or institutions simply arises from the ensidic magma underlying each particular society. Rather, every social imaginary signification, and consequently every social institution, emerges through a creative act. The ensidic dimension is incomplete, representing partial determinisms that are can only be given meaning through their incorporation into a set of social institutions. This is only possible through the *poietic* dimension, which represents the creative capacity of a particular society to attribute and construct meaning for themselves and for the world around them.³⁹ *Legein* and *teukhein* make the new signification comprehensible to others within a particular society, but the social imaginary signification represents a new *eidōs*, created *ex nihilo*.⁴⁰ The role of the *poietic* dimension represents the fact that each instauration of an institution will represent, in some manner, the creation of a completely new mode of organizing the world. Accepting the creative novelty of each particular mode of organizing the world requires a rejection of the idea that an underlying Being or truth exists that defines the universe and can be discovered in order to guide the construction of social institutions. If human beings are defined by their ability to create, this thwarts any theory of an inherent Truth in the universe. The *poietic* dimension, the creative capacity of the human subject, is irreducible, inexplicable, and undeducible⁴¹, thus

insuring that there always is some unknown, unpredictable variable present in the instauration of each particular society. Furthermore, the poietic dimension accounts for the diversity of human social imaginaries; “not only is it in and through the institution of society that individuals, things, and world exist ... But each society is *this particular* institution, bringing into being *this* particular magma of social imaginary significations and not some other one, in *this particular* way and not in any other, by means of a given socialization of the psyche and not some other.”⁴² This particularity of social imaginary significations requires recognition of the role temporality plays in the instauration of social institutions. To account for the role of time, Castoriadis develops the concept of the social-historical.

Castoriadis’ makes another “dogmatic” assertion concerning the social-historical, which links a particular instauration of being with time. Thus, Castoriadis asserts that “being is not only ‘in’ time, but is through (by means of, by virtue of) time.”⁴³ Furthermore, time is creation. “Time, properly speaking, is unthinkable without creation; otherwise, time would be only a supernumerary fourth spatial dimension.”⁴⁴ Castoriadis argues that philosophical systems that posit Being or an order underlying the social universe are ahistorical. If one accepts that there is a Being beyond human perception, one must also accept that this Being is universal and timeless, in the sense that it is an unchanging order that determines every society in human history. Therefore, if Plato is correct in his theory of the forms, the Being of ancient Greece is the same as the Being of twenty-first century America. If this were true, one could apply Plato’s political philosophy to the contemporary world without any contradiction.

Castoriadis rejects the notion that Being is an ahistorical, atemporal universal, arguing instead that our understanding of the world changes as new social imaginary significations are posited. What might have made sense two hundred years ago in a particular society might be meaningless given contemporary “reality.” As such, it is critical to recognize that our understanding of the world, and the way that we conceive of the world, is contingent upon historical conditions. Castoriadis refers to such conditions as the social-historical, recognizing the critical role temporality plays in any society’s understanding of itself. Castoriadis defines the social-historical as “the anonymous collective whole, the impersonal-human element that fills every given social formation but which also engulfs it, setting each society in the midst of others.”⁴⁵ As such, the social-historical represents the recognition that each instauration of an institution takes place within a context of already existing institutions, previously existing institutions, and the possibility for the instauration of new institutions, both within the given society and in the wider world as a whole, as represented by other societies. “In short, it is the union and the tension of instituting society, and of instituted society, of history made and history in the making.”⁴⁶ The social-historical does not represent “objective” historical conditions. Rather, the social-historical recognizes that each society, in articulating itself at any given time, must reconcile its past with its present and its future. The past of any given society casts its shadow over the present and the future of that society, but it does not determine the manner in which the society will articulate itself at any given time. Rather, the social-historical represents the boundaries of the possible; in articulating itself, each society is limited by its history and the already-existing ensidic dimension of

the social imaginary. Within these boundaries, however, the second dimension of the social imaginary signification, the *poietic*, creative element, is expressed.

At the collective level, if one compares two distinct societies, one will see that they will respond to the world around them in different ways. Given similar social conditions, each particular society will construct a different view of the world and their place in it. This will occur despite the fact that the respective societies might face very similar conditions. In these instances, one can see the role the creative plays in the construction of meaning for the society in question. For example, a giant redwood tree is a biological entity that exists in certain climates and is characterized by tremendous height and size. Human beings who have seen a redwood, heard of it, or live nearby create the ontological meaning of the redwood tree. This meaning varies according to the characteristics of the particular society. Thus, a pre-modern society, where magic and mythology plays a central role, might view a redwood as the home of spirits who play a direct role in human life. For an industrial society, on the other hand, the redwood might represent an obstacle to progress, or, conversely, for a modern environmentalist, the tree signifies the grandeur of a too quickly vanishing natural world. In a desert society, the giant redwood would have no significance at all. None of these meanings are inherent to the redwood, but rather are created by human beings through the exercise of the imaginary.

Over time, the responses of a particular society to the same stimuli will also change, given the particular social-historical conditions facing that society. The social-historical contains non-causal elements as elements of its essential moments. These non-causal elements exist on two levels. The first level is comprised of deviations from

typical behavior by individuals at any given time, which introduces uncertainty into the system. The second is creativity, which introduces the positing of completely new forms and types of behavior.⁴⁷ Thus, in accounting for the role the human creativity plays in the construction of institutions, one must also account for time. Social-historical conditions impact the manner in which human beings living in a particular society organize and understand the world. As time progresses, new conditions in the world arise, and the response by the collective will also change. Furthermore, the collective may respond to the same conditions in a new manner, thus introducing uncertainty into the manner in which the established institutions organize and make sense of the world.

It is important to recognize that the ensidic and poietical dimensions are not discrete and cannot be completely separated from one another. Furthermore, the ensidic and poietical are tied to the particular social-historical circumstances that are present within a society. Ensidic logic is not a collection of immutable “Truths” serving as a foundation for creative activity. *Legein* and *teukhein* are the result of human creativity in the sense that both are social institutions. *Legein* and *teukhein* are not *a priori* to human making/doing; at some point in time, they were created and continue to be altered through the instituting imaginary.⁴⁸ The Internet, both as a word and a tool, is a good example of this. Twenty years ago, if a person were to say “Internet”, most people would not know what he was talking about. Today, this word has become common parlance, often across adapted across diverse languages. Furthermore, it has become a standard tool for carrying out various practices, from business to information gathering and dissemination. In this way, the Internet, as a word and as a tool, has become part of *legein* and *teukhein*. However, one can also see the social-historical particularity of the

Internet as a social imaginary signification. If a person has never seen a computer, the Internet is meaningless to him. Furthermore, any and all social imaginary significations that include the Internet in its ensidic context would be incoherent to this person. In a society where computers are present, the Internet has ensidic meaning, in that each person knows what the Internet is and recognizes the word and its function as a tool, even if he has never himself used it. Furthermore, in such a society, the Internet has a poetical meaning. While the Internet is part of *legein* and *teukhein*, its meaning goes far beyond the ensidic dimension. The Internet as an imaginary signification, for example, posits the possibility and the desirability of a more integrated global system.

The Individual and Subjectivity

Having established that the world around him is given meaning only through the creativity of the human subject, the next question must concern the subjectivity of the individual himself. The question posed here is, “Does an individual *qua* individual possess any inherent characteristics, and, if so, how do these characteristics influence the manner in which the individual agent interacts with the world?” Many theorists of the Western tradition, particularly social-contractarians like John Locke, found their philosophical systems on the subjectivity of the individual, creating a division between the subject, the autonomous individual, and the object, the world with which the subject interacts as the objective target of human subjectivity. According to these theorists, the individual subject *qua* subject has meaning and an inherent Being while the world of things in which she lives only has meaning insofar as the subject interacts with it.

For example, Locke’s labor theory of value posits a subject-object relationship between the independent human subject and the objective material world. The

foundation of Locke's philosophy is his belief that human beings are inherently rational creatures whose primary motivation is individual self-interest. Because of their essential rationality, humans are able to discover and obey natural laws, which guarantee relative peace in the state of nature.⁴⁹ The state of nature is characterized as one of plenty, where God has provided ample sustenance, so long as men are willing to work to acquire it. Locke writes that "God gave the world to men in common; but since he gave it them for their benefit and the greatest convenience of life they were capable to draw from it, it cannot be supposed he meant it should always remain common and uncultivated."⁵⁰ The material world exists as a storehouse of raw material that enables human beings to express their fundamental nature as rational, self-interested laborers. The material world is reduced to the position of mere object, the target of the human subject's making/doing. The only agent with inherent meaning in the world is the human subject, and the objective world exists to allow this subject to express his subjectivity. Locke removes any independent meaning from the objective world. Therefore, the object's value and meaning is completely dependent upon the action of the subject. Furthermore, objects are drawn into the subjective world through labor, where they are endowed with "value". The "meaning" of these objects is restricted solely to the instrumental calculus of value. The tree becomes lumber which is assessed an exchange value in the market and which is then used to purchase various goods and services for the individual. No other meaning is attributed to these objects that are brought into the subjective world beyond their use-value for the individual subject. What remains in the material world unworked retains its status as mere object until it is imbued with value through labor.

Philosophical systems such as Locke's differ significantly from theories that posit an underlying order in the world in that the former focuses on the individual agent and recognizes, to some degree, the role the individual plays in the construction of social institutions. Social contract theorists, for example, recognize that society itself is a construction of its constituent members, though they posit this creation as a single event, the "signing" of the social contract. This differs greatly from Plato's conception of an organic society, where each individual plays a prescribed role in an already existing social order. As such, theorists such as Locke move closer to the possibility of instaurating the political, in the sense that these theorists recognize and posit an active role for the human subject. However, a serious flaw exists in this view of the individual subject in that the characteristics of the individual are posited as a foundation from which the organization of the world can be derived. Social contractarians argue in favor of the individual as the prime mover in the world. Such theories posit that if the individual is inherently X, then the world must logically be organized according to this characteristic in order to best express the inherent qualities of the subject. This view fails to account for human creativity, and the possibility of responding in different ways to the external world that confront the human subject. Furthermore, such a view eliminates the necessity of the political. If the world should be organized in a certain way to best express the fundamental qualities of the human subject, politics is sufficient to achieve this task. In essence, social contract theorists overvalue the agency of the individual. What the social contract theorists do not recognize is that society is not something created once and for all, but rather represents a continuous creation through the radical imaginary by its

constituent members. Furthermore, they do not recognize the role society itself plays in the construction of the individual.

Karl Marx presents one important critique of the social-contractarian vision of subjectivity, arguing that subjectivity itself can be altered by the value given to objects. In his critique of the liberal tradition, Karl Marx asserts the important influence of “objects” on the social sphere. This is most evident in his essay “The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society.” In this essay, Marx argues that money, an object in the terms of the traditional subject-object dichotomy, in fact plays an important role in the construction of social reality. In Marx’s estimation, money has a magical power to transform human beings and human relationships. He writes, “Money’s properties are my properties and essential powers - the properties and powers of its possessor. Thus, what I *am* and *am capable* of is by no means determined by my individuality.”⁵¹ In essence, Marx reverses the subject-object dichotomy, positing that human beings in capitalist society are in fact the objects, manipulated and constructed by property and money as a subject. The Marxist tradition is, in part, about the reassertion of subjectivity, through revolution, against the objective conditions of capitalism. What Marx, and other Marxist theorists point to, however, is that the world of objects is not simply a world to be manipulated by human subjects, but rather it has a powerful influence on the nature and structure of human relationships.

Foundationalism of this sort is ultimately a limited and limiting concept, because it essentially restricts the possibilities of the human subject in constructing social institutions. The point of foundationalism is to assert a set of first principles that are denoted as “given” and true. From these principles, the theorist deduces an

understanding of the world he intends to examine.⁵² However, as illustrated above, there is no “Truth” underlying the world, hence, first principles are not possible. If we accept that meaning in the world is constructed by those living within a particular society through the imaginary, we must reject the deterministic first principles can be discovered from which political theory can be deduced. Foundationalist theories represent the construction of a social imaginary framework with which a theorist can attempt to understand the world in which he lives. However, the assertion of first principles carries no more Truth than any other social imaginary signification. Furthermore, the positing of founding first principles endangers the possibility for the instauration of the political. Foundationalism relies on the exteriority of the theorist, the idea that the theorist can stand apart from society and view it from an objective perspective. The theorist positions himself objectively and purports to discover truths about the world or, in the case of the social contract theorists, human subjectivity. Foundationalism is a static perspective, assuming that human beings do not change and are not affected by the environment in which they live or by others around them. It is incapable of dealing with anything that falls outside its perspective on the world. What if a person is not rational? Locke has no answer to this but to declare such persons “rebels” and exclude them from civil society until they learn how to act rationally.⁵³ As history shows, however, human beings do not act the way philosophers believe is in their nature to act. Furthermore, if one accepts foundational principles, there is no need for the political. A domain of decision-making based on the active, democratic participation of citizens is unnecessary if human beings do not change. The answers to political questions are always already answered by theory. Thus, theorists who adhere to foundational principles are constrained to politics, the task

of which is the construction of “ideal” institutions that reflect the inherent characteristics of the human subject. In practical terms, once these ideal institutions have been created, they can limit themselves to the administration of governmental tasks and the distribution of public goods. The institutions themselves need not be challenged, thus eliminating the need for the political.

The political requires that first principles be subject to the same critique as any other social imaginary signification. Locke, for example, advances a certain argument regarding human nature, while Rousseau advances a different one. Within a political domain, neither of these ideas would be taken as “given”, but rather would be open to questioning and criticism. Similarly, any institutions founded upon these first principles must also be subject to questioning by the collective. The institution, and its proponents, must defend the legitimacy of the institution and explain why it is appropriate for society at a given social-historical point. If an institution defends itself through recourse to the “truth” of a first principle, it is an alienated institution and has removed itself from the political sphere.

Castoriadis responds to foundational theories of the subject by arguing that the human subject, and the concept of subjectivity itself, is a product of the prevailing social imaginary framework that exists in a particular society. Subjects exist as subjects and as particular subjects through the existing social imaginary significations that have been created at a certain time in each particular society.⁵⁴ Thus, a strong subject emerges in societies where the social imaginary posits a central role for the individual. The modern age in Western Europe represents such a social-historical period, where strong individual subjectivity is a central imaginary signification. In other societies, such as medieval

Europe, where the role of the divine occupies a more central role than the individual subject, this may not be the case. Therefore, the critical question in examining the idea of subjectivity is to examine the type of society in which the concept of strong subjectivity emerges. The individual subject as a dominant agent is not an inherent attribute of the individual human being. Strong subjectivity is a constructed concept that emerges only in societies that posit the individual as an independent, potentially autonomous being. Furthermore, Castoriadis argues that a reciprocal relationship exists between human beings and the world of things, such that one cannot think of the subject in relation to objects. It is through social imaginary significations that these objects and any relationship of reference are made possible.⁵⁵ Objects are endowed with subjectivity when drawn into the magma of social imaginary significations in a given society through the creation of meaning for the given object. These subjective objects become enmeshed in the social relations of the particular society and influence the construction of the individual through the socialization process. They are no longer “objects” in the terms of the subject-object dichotomy, but rather they exert a powerful influence on the social imaginary of a particular society. At the same time, these subjective objects are in turn shaped and re-conceptualized by the human subjects living in the given society, such that the meaning attributed to these objects is consistently open to change and questioning. Neither, however, dominates the other, but rather the world of things becomes subjective through a thing’s incorporation into the imaginary structure of a given society at a particular point in time.

In essence, Castoriadis rejects philosophies that attribute inherent characteristics or a basic nature to human beings. The individual subject cannot be conceived as a

subject outside the context of the society in which she exists. Therefore, Castoriadis argues that one must account for human sociability and the impact this has on the *construction* of the human subject. In Politics, Aristotle asserts that humans are political beings by nature; their nature draws them together to form societies and political institutions.⁵⁶ Aristotle's philosophy is, in part, the product of Athenian democracy, where the citizen played an important role in the governance of the city-state. As such, the Athenian citizen is constructed as a strong subject, capable of influencing the political world around him through his own action. The Athenian is not a citizen by nature; rather the Athenian social imaginary constructs the individual citizen as an active participant in the democratic system. Socialized in this manner, the Athenian citizen is more likely to play an active role in the political system than if that individual had been born in a different social-historical period. Castoriadis agrees with Aristotle that human beings are social, but not because it is ingrained in their nature. He reverses the relationship between human beings and sociability, arguing that each particular society exists before the individual is born into it. Humans do not form societies because of any inherent characteristic or nature. Instead, the history of the human species is a history of social living. Castoriadis asserts that it is absurd to consider the nature of a pre-social man, as many political theorists have done. "Pre-social man" is a contradiction in terms, because a pre-social creature would also be pre-human.⁵⁷ Human beings are human beings solely through their participation and integration into a society, so without society there is no such thing as a "human being." A person is born and socialized into a particular society; this is what makes him human. Given this fact, one can assert that there is no such thing as the "individual" in the sense of a being born with a certain bundle of attributes, such as

a “human nature”, “reason”, or “self-interestedness”. Instead of the “individual”, Castoriadis conceives of humans as “socially fabricated individuals”⁵⁸, conditioned to act and believe a certain way based on the dominant social imaginary significations in their particular societies. The individual as a discrete and essential being does not exist; the “individual” is a fabricated product of the particular society into which he or she is born.

At the moment of his birth, one cannot consider the infant a human subject. Every human being is born insane and unfit for life, completely disconnected from others and having no conception of the outside world or even the existence of other beings.⁵⁹ It (and “it” is the appropriate word, since the infant essentially exists in a pre-human state) lives as a narcissistic monad, concerned only with the gratification of its desires and convinced of its own omnipotence in achieving this goal.⁶⁰ However, from the moment of birth the socialization process, the process of becoming human, begins. Through the process of socialization, the infant is torn from this primal state and becomes a social being, a functioning human. “Socialization is the process whereby the psyche is forced to abandon (never fully) its pristine solipsistic meaning for the shaped meanings provided by society.”⁶¹ This occurs primarily through the infant’s relationship with his mother who serves a twofold purpose. First, she is the means through which the infant gratifies its desires. Second, and more importantly for the socialization process, she acts as a representative of the society, embodying the dominant social imaginary significations of the society into which the infant is born.⁶² Socialization progresses through the infant’s relationship with its father, who represents an agent completely external to the infant-mother dyad. This third party exists as an Other to the infant, forcing it to recognize the existence of beings beyond its completely self-referential conception of the world.⁶³

The socialization process represents a violent break; the infant is torn from its narcissistic existence, its psyche is forced to integrate into a social existence. The psyche is forced into socialization through its relation to others, which takes the form of an invasion of others *as* others.⁶⁴ Socialization “culminates in the social individual, 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 that are sufficiently stable for its behavior to be, most of the time, foreseeable ... for other individuals.”⁶⁵ Though individuals only become human through the socialization process, human beings are not automatons completely determined by social institutions. Social institutions must lean on the remnants of the psychic monadic state. Thus, “the social institution of the individual must make a world exist for the psyche as a public and common world. It cannot absorb the psyche into society.”⁶⁶ Thus, while the instituted-imaginary wrenches the infant from its monadic, insane state, it must provide a meaningful world to the individual. In this manner, the social institution of a society relies on the madness of the psyche. The radical imaginary is the source of the construction of the social imaginary; as such, it must lead on this creativity, constructing a world within which the newly socialized individual can find meaning for itself.

Socialization is not, and cannot be, total. “Man cannot be extricated from what has made him as he is, nor from what, being what he is, he makes. But neither can he be reduced to this.”⁶⁷ The process of socialization culminates in the creation of a human being, capable of living with others and functioning within society. The goal of society is to force the psyche back to “reality” and place it in a milieu of other individuals and

things.⁶⁸ However a monadic core of the original undifferentiated and unsocialized psyche remains. This unsocialized and unsocializable core is the source of the radical imaginary. The radical imaginary is similar in some ways to Freud's concept of the id, but where Freud emphasizes the darker elements of this primal core of the psyche, Castoriadis argues that the radical imaginary is multifaceted with both positive and negative aspects.

According to Freud, the Unconscious is the source of humanity's most base desires and most destructive impulses. The fundamental human desires of murder, cannibalism, and incest emerge from the Unconscious.⁶⁹ For society to exist, these desires must be repressed through the imposition of social rules, one of the earliest of which is the taboo against incest.⁷⁰ The construction of such rules allows for the creation of the superego, the element of the psyche responsible for keeping human desire in check. The superego employs guilt to punish the individual for even considering acting on these base desires.⁷¹ For Freud, therefore, there is a fragile balance between civilization and human destructiveness, but one that must always be maintained, regardless of the cost to the human psyche, in order for people to be able to exist alongside one another.⁷² For example, in The Future of an Illusion Freud argues that religion is a social construction whose purpose is to restrain human instincts and provide a meaningful world for the individual. Only through this restraint, which comes in the form of a series of rules, internalized in the superego as "sin", can human beings live together in society. Furthermore, the cruelty and suffering that does exist in the world can be explained through reference to some form of divine order.⁷³ However, Freud also argues that the hold religion has over people is weakening. Fewer and fewer people believe that they

will be punished in the afterlife for their transgressions in this world. As a result, according to Freud, the world is becoming more chaotic leading to a situation where violence and transgression play a central role in both politics and social life as a whole.⁷⁴ Freud's solution to this dilemma is to replace religion with social institutions founded upon scientific principles. In Freud's view, society would be better off if people recognized their fundamental desires and instincts and created institutions based on this recognition.⁷⁵ The significance of Freud's theory for Castoriadis is that Freud recognizes two important aspects of the individual's relationship to institutions and to the world around him. First, the human subject requires social institutions to provide meaning for his own life and for the world in which he exists. Second, Freud recognizes the tension that exists in every society between institutions and the desires of the individuals living in that society. However, a significant point of difference exists between Freud's theory of the Unconscious and Castoriadis' conception of the imaginary. Castoriadis does not accept Freud's argument that the Unconscious represents an element of human nature, nor does Castoriadis agree that Unconscious desires exist in a wholly antagonistic relationship with social institutions.

Castoriadis recognizes the destructive aspects of the Unconscious in his conception of the radical imaginary, but also argues that this unsocialized remnant of pre-human infancy also represents the source of human creativity. The creative aspect of the radical imaginary is unpredictable and irreducible. The Unconscious "is determinate in its mode of being and in the nature of its manifestations, but it is not determinate in the content of what unfolds therein. In what unfolds therein is emergence, a surging forth."⁷⁶ Thus, Freud is mistaken in attributing particular, destructive desires to the Unconscious.

While these desires exist, the radical imaginary is not reducible to such desires, nor can it be characterized solely according to these desires. The radical imaginary is a far more complex vision of the Unconscious than that advanced by Freud, in the sense that the radical imaginary gives human beings the capacity to create *ex nihilo*, to posit something that hitherto did not exist. This capacity is what differentiates human beings from other animals. “The living being goes beyond a simple mechanism because it can provide new responses to new situations. But the historical being goes beyond the simply living being because it can provide new responses to the ‘*same*’ situations or create new situations.”⁷⁷ Human beings are capable of more than mimesis; they are able to posit completely new forms, or *eide*. The sculptor, for example, is able to change a block of stone into a work of art, and this work can be a completely new style of sculpture, previously unknown and unseen in the world. “The statue is brought into being as a statue and as this particular statue only if its *eidos* is invented, imagined, posited out of nothing.”⁷⁸ Similarly, in the construction of social imaginary significations and institutions, human beings are capable of creating something completely new to the world.

Peter Shaffer’s Equus illustrates the role of the radical imaginary in the creation of imaginary significations. In the play, a young man named Alan is remanded to the care of a psychiatric institute after being caught blinding several horses. A psychiatrist, Dysart, is determined to figure out what led Alan to commit this horrible act. During the course of psychoanalysis, Dysart discovers that Alan has created an entire religion based on the worship of a horse-god named Equus. This religion is fully formed, with sacred rituals of riding horses, holy relics, and a Scripture that Alan is able to recite. Both the ensidic and poietic dimension of the imaginary are revealed in Alan’s description of his

religion. Alan's mother is a religious Christian, who would recite passages of the Bible to him in his youth. In his Equus religion, Alan borrows many of the trappings of the Christian religion, especially in the Scripture he has created. However, the fact of worshiping horses represents the poetic dimension. Alan lives according to a completely unique and new *eidōs*. Furthermore, Equus reveals the depth and complexity of the radical imaginary. During the last session of psychoanalysis, Dysart forces Alan to confront the repressed memory leading to the maiming of the horses. Alan reveals that a young woman led him to the stables after a date and the two of them had sex. For Alan, this is a desecration of Equus' temple and an affront to his God. As a result, Alan blinds the horses and represses the memory of what he had done. Having confronted this memory, Alan is psychologically destroyed. Dysart recognizes he has cured Alan and made him normal, but at the cost of the young man's passionate adherence to his religion. In the end, however, Dysart never discovers the incidents in Alan's life that led him to create this religion. There are situations throughout his past that may have contributed, but Dysart is unable to determine any cause. In this sense, Dysart's psychiatry has failed completely. After curing Alan, Dysart says, "And now for me it never stops: that voice of Equus out of the cave - 'Why me? ... Why me? ... Account for me!' ... All right - I surrender! I say it! ... In an ultimate sense I cannot know what I do in this place - yet I do ultimate things. Essentially I cannot know what I do - yet I do essential things. Irreversible, terminal things. I stand in the dark with a pick in my hand, striking at heads!"⁷⁹ The radical imaginary is creative and therefore irreducible, inexplicable, and undeducible.⁸⁰

The radical imaginary is a persistent unknown in the human psyche. As such, it becomes a source of dread for the individual, who is unable to comprehend this aspect of himself and unable to predict the desires the radical imaginary will produce when confronted with certain external stimuli. If I am caught up in the middle of a riot, how will I act? Will I be rational and leave the scene or will I be caught up in the frenzy and help turn over the nearest police car? The socialized aspect of the self will always choose to act according to morality and law. However, within the self there will always be the desire to join the mob and lose oneself, giving in to the incomprehensible desires of the radical imaginary. Every individual is confronted with this self-uncertainty: if given the chance, will I act on my darkest desires? The individual cannot answer this question with any certainty and must live with the constant dread produced by the radical imaginary. Dysart's reaction to Equus staring back at him in the dark void is characteristic of the individual's psychological relationship to the radical imaginary. Though the radical imaginary is the source of creativity and consequently the source of humanity's greatest achievements, as the unsocialized core of the original narcissistic state of the infant psyche, the radical imaginary is also the source of our basest desires and instincts. This element of the radical imaginary persists in being solely concerned with the gratification of pleasure by any means necessary. In treating Alan, Dysart discovers that he secretly envies the young man's passion and dedication to his religious beliefs. As a result, Dysart is reluctant to "cure" Alan, believing that such a cure will destroy the heroic aspects of Alan's personality. Knowing this, Dysart proceeds and succeeds in destroying Alan and consequently destroying that which Dysart admires, envies, and fears the most about the young man.

This same source of dread is also the source of the human capacity to create new social imaginary significations and new social institutions. The radical imaginary provides the ability to question and reflect upon existing social imaginary significations and established institutions. Because the radical imaginary is the unsocializable core of the original monadic self, the possibility for resistance always exists within each particular society. No institutional organization of the world can completely socialize the radical imaginary. As such, it represents a constant threat to the established institutional organization of the world. While many institutional forms throughout history have sought to completely eliminate the radical imaginary from their respective societies, such a project always fails. Castoriadis argues that,

No human system can stay alive...unless it postulates, even under slavery, some minimum capacity for autonomy among its subjects. And this is, as a matter of fact, the ultimate contradiction of heteronomous systems, at least from the moment when these systems are not completely internalized by their subjects. So long as a slave, in the southern United States, picks cotton devotedly because that's the way things are, because for him it's nearly a divine mission, heteronomy prospers. But let him say, 'I am picking cotton for that bastard of an owner', starting from that moment it's over; there's already an antimony in the system.⁸¹

In every society there is a gap between the instituted imaginary and the instituting imaginary. "A life in which we had rules made to fit us the way a good tailor makes our clothes fit would indeed be total slavery. It would be the ideal penal colony. *But it's precisely in the twofold existence of a rule and a certain gap in relation to this rule that*

what we can have as autonomy qua social beings is established."⁸² The radical, instituting imaginary represents an unresolved remainder in each particular instauration of a social institution. Because this gap exists between the instituted imaginary and the radical, instituting imaginary, the capacity to resist and question established institutions also exists. Was this not the case, it would be possible to construct an institutional system that would endure for all time. However, given the fact that the radical imaginary cannot be socialized and controlled by the instituted imaginary, and given the fact that the social-historical conditions in any society will change over time, challenges to the established institutions will always arise in some form or another.

The persistence of the unsocialized radical imaginary does not mean that social institutions are constantly under attack by those living within the society. In fact, heteronomy and alienation have been prevalent throughout human history. The reason for the predominance of heteronomous institutions lies within the human desire for certainty and the need to make sense of the world and our place in it. Living with the radical imaginary as a constant threat to the self, individuals turn to society for the certainty they cannot achieve within themselves. In constructing its institutions, a society will seek to guarantee the optimal level of certainty and predictability in order to compensate for the psychic uncertainty individuals must face on a daily basis. As a result, societies are willing to attribute the construction of institutions to other-worldly powers in order to deal with the psychic dread each individual must confront on a daily basis. To deal with the radical imaginary, individuals are willing to sacrifice their autonomy for the certainty provided by alienated social institutions. Hannah Arendt accurately argues, "Escape from the frailty of human affairs into the solidity of quiet and

order has in fact so much to recommend it that the greater part of political philosophy since Plato could easily be interpreted as various attempts to find theoretical foundations and practical ways for an escape from [the political] altogether.”⁸³

Institutions

Michel Foucault’s post-structuralist account of the formation of institutions and the impact they have on a given society represents one perspective on this topic.

Foucault’s general thesis is that institutions exercise disciplinary power over the members of a particular society. For Foucault, disciplinary power and knowledge are inextricably linked; those who claim knowledge are best able to accrue and exercise the power that flows throughout the network of social relations.⁸⁴ Thus, the state is not the sole power in society. More powerful in fact are the institutions that exist within the social sphere.

These are the nodes of power that are most able to influence the individuals living in a particular society. In works such as Discipline and Punish and the Birth of the Clinic, Foucault illustrates how techniques developed in prisons and mental hospitals are adapted by other social institutions to serve the need for disciplining and controlling the members of a society. These common practices and informal institutions are best able to enforce conformity and an adherence to the dominant power/knowledges that exist within a given society. In essence, these institutions construct a set of rules and punishments with which they are able to enforce conformity to specific social norms.⁸⁵ Foucault recognizes that this type of discipline is necessary in order to insure the continued functioning of the society in question. However, he also recognizes that the conformity imposed by these institutions can stifle and oppress the individual.⁸⁶ Foucault, however, is also ambivalent about the possibilities of resistance to these dominant discourses. On the one hand, his

theory seems to allow no escape from the network of power that exists in every social interaction. Richard Wolin argues that “in the work of Foucault ‘power’ is elevated to the status of an impregnable prime mover. Its workings persist in defiance of the best-intentioned efforts to cast them off. Popular sovereignty and the virtues of public reason have a negligible effect on power’s capacity to persevere and proliferate.”⁸⁷ However, at the same time, he praises transgression of the dominant discourses as a mode of resistance.⁸⁸ Such transgressions, however, are politically ineffective. In most cases, transgression can only occur at the individual level. Thus, for Foucault, resistance is possible, but only for those who are willing to fly in the face of the dominant discourse and act against the dictates of social power. For most of those living in society, however, this is not possible, as it is far safer to conform to the dominant discourse than it is to transgress it.

Foucault’s discussion of disciplinary power emphasizes the role of institutions in the production of a particular, conforming subject. However, he conceives of the relationship between institutions and the subject as unidirectional, where disciplinary power flows from the institution to be exerted on the subject. As a result, resistance can only take the form of transgression, where the individual breaks with conformist discipline and asserts his non-conformist individualism against the institution. Castoriadis agrees with the constitutive power of the institution, in the sense that the existing instituted-imaginary exerts a powerful influence on the socialization of the individual. The individual born into a particular society will be socialized by the instituted-imaginary to accept the dominant social imaginary significations present in a certain social-historical context. However, Castoriadis disputes Foucault’s conception of

the relationship between the individual and the institution. The institution does not ensnare the individual subject in a web of power that enforces discipline upon the human subject. While the instituted-imaginary fabricates the “individual”, the unsocializability of the radical imaginary insures that the collective of individuals living in a particular society plays a constitutive role in the reproduction of the instituted-imaginary. Institutions must respond in some way to challenges that surge forth or face crisis and possibly collapse.

As such, Castoriadis presents a very different picture of the creation of social institutions. He argues that institutions do not simply emerge from particular spaces in a given society to influence the manner in which other institutions govern individuals. Instead, social institutions are the product of a creative act by the collective imaginary of a particular society. “Society is self-creation, ‘that which’ creates society and history is the instituting society, as opposed to the instituted society. The instituting society is the social imaginary in the radical sense.”⁸⁹ The instauration of an institution is not simply the formalization of pre-existing social customs and norms. While such pre-existing customs and norms are indeed taken into account in the construction of institutions, in the sense that each social imaginary signification incorporates the existing ensidic dimension, every institution also represents a new way of organizing this dimension. Furthermore, each institution is constructed in order to answer some question posed by the individuals living in a particular society about their relationships to one another or to the world around them, always affected by the prevailing social-historical conditions. In this regard, each new institution is the product of a creative act by the collective itself.

Institutions exist in order to organize the world in which the collective exists and to provide certainty and stability for the individuals in that collective. Every society develops an image of the universe in which it lives, attempting to make it a signifying whole in which a place must be made for nature and for the collectivity. The construction of its own world by each society is the creation of a world of meanings which “organize the (presocial, ‘biologically given’) natural world, instaurate a social world proper to each society (with its articulations, rules, purposes, etc.), establish the ways in which socialized and humanized individuals are to be fabricated, and institute the motives, values, and hierarchies of social (human) life.”⁹⁰ Every institution is constructed as a closed system that attempts to fully organize and explain whatever domain it is created to govern.⁹¹ These institutions endure to the extent that they are able to answer any challenge posed by the instituting imaginary.

The social imaginary significations created by individuals do not necessarily lead to the instauration of social institutions. However, such social imaginary significations form the building blocks of the social institution. The difference between the individual imaginary and the social imaginary is that the latter is constrained by the limits imposed by the first natural stratum, the existing magma of social imaginary significations, and the social-historical of the particular society. Society constitutes a symbolic order in a different way than the individual can. An individual can construct private fantasy, not institutions. A junction can occur between these, but this occurs at the right time and place, where it fills holes in others’ unconscious and possesses enough rational and functional coherence to prove itself viable.⁹² While the individual can constitute such an order based solely in fantasy, society must take its material form based in part on what is

already there. First, there is nature, and since natural objects are connected to one another, certain consequences ensue as a result.⁹³ Each social institution must “lean on” the first natural stratum and no institution can violate the limits imposed on it by the natural world. Second, there is the ensidic dimension of *legein* and *teukhin*, both of which must be taken into account in order to insure the coherence and comprehensibility of the social institution. Finally, the creation of institutions is bound by the social-historical. Thus, society constitutes its symbolism, but not with total freedom. Society is bound up with nature, history, and it partakes of rationality, but none of these limiting factors are deterministic; they do not dictate the form social imaginary significations, or society as a whole, will take.⁹⁴ For example, in each instance, rational lines are used to construct a closed view of the world. However, these rational lines are subordinated to significations that do not belong to rational order, but to the imaginary.⁹⁵ Thus, a collective creates an image of the world that is in accordance with a “rational” order, but this is a rationality created by the collective itself. In other words, the ordering of the world makes sense to the collective itself, rather than being determined by some *a priori* rules of rationality. Since there is no extra-social rationality governing the world, the society must create such an order, and it does so through the imaginary.

The purpose of the social institution is to provide meaning to some aspect of the world and to explain any question an individual or the society poses about the institution’s respective domain. If the institution is unable to accomplish this task, it begins to lose legitimacy in the eyes of the collective. Institutions, and those individuals who benefit from the continued existence of a particular institution, seek to perpetuate the instituted imaginary. When they begin to lose legitimacy, they rely on sources of

legitimacy outside the imaginary of the collective. By relying on an extra-social source of legitimacy, such as religion, myth, rationality, or science, to name a few, the institution is able to insulate itself from the radical imaginary of the collective. The institution essentially seeks to disconnect itself from the society, elevating itself to a position where it is beyond the questioning of the collective.

Castoriadis's primary concern with regard to the construction of institutions is their tendency to become alienated from the collective that created them. The concept of alienation is most often conceived in Marxist terms. Marx argues that alienation is the condition of the proletariat under capitalism, whereby the worker is cut off from a fundamental element of himself. "The more the worker produces, the less he has to consume; the more value he creates, the more valueless, the more unworthy he becomes; the better formed the product, the more deformed becomes the worker; the more civilized his object, the more barbarous becomes the worker."⁹⁶ The worker produces for the capitalist, but in doing so, he is forced to sell his creativity for a pittance, thus selling an essential element of his own being. According to Marx, the worker is alienated from the product he makes, the creativity he uses to manufacture this product, and most importantly, his species being.⁹⁷ Species being represents a concept of the complete and fulfilled human, able to develop himself to the greatest extent, through the full use of his senses. Furthermore, species being represents the essential connectedness of the individual with the collective.⁹⁸ Under communism, every person is free because all are free, and one person's freedom to develop himself is strengthened by the ability of all to do the same. In its Marxist context, alienation under the capitalist system can be compared to a lobotomy, where each individual is cut off from something fundamental to

his or her being, which can only be recovered through a revolution and the transition to communism.

Castoriadis argues that Marx is wrong in his assertion that alienation is linked to the class system. First, alienation is not tied to the class relationship in a particular society, because alienation can exist in societies without a class system. More importantly, however, the dominant class is also alienated. This dominant class cannot use ideology to mystify society without also mystifying itself.⁹⁹ Alienation can only be understood through an examination of the society's relationship to the institutions that govern it. "Alienation is neither inherent in history nor the existence of the institution as such. Alienation, however, appears as a modality of the relation to the institution and, through its intermediary, as a modality of the relation to history."¹⁰⁰ Alienation occurs when the institution becomes disconnected from its society by covering over the role of the radical imaginary in the construction and legitimation of social institutions. "The institution is a socially sanctioned, symbolic network in which a functional component and an imaginary component are combined in variable proportions and relations. Alienation occurs when the imaginary moment in the institution becomes autonomous and predominates, which leads to the institution's becoming autonomous and predominating with respect to society."¹⁰¹ Thus, the alienated institution relies on some extra-social source for its legitimacy, insulating itself from the questioning of the collective. In essence, the alienated institution attempts to close itself off from the radical imaginary by basing its legitimacy on its original *raison d'être*, ignoring the existing social-historical conditions and seeking to force the world as-it-is into its own view of the world.

Throughout the majority of human history, heteronomy has been the norm, where institutions are legitimated through reference to some extra-social force beyond the control of the collective. It is important to recognize that ultimately the collective itself posits these heteronomous justifications for the existing social imaginary. Heteronomy is an attractive proposition for human beings seeking certainty and security in their individual and collective lives. The nature of the radical imaginary explains why human beings create social institutions that are legitimated heteronomously. The radical imaginary confronts human beings as an incomprehensible Abyss. It cannot be understood, categorized, or compartmentalized in any meaningful way. Human beings create meaning for the world around them because they must do so in the face of this horrifying element of their own psyches. The fact that the radical imaginary is the root of both creation and destruction is difficult for human beings to accept. Though Michelangelo's Sistine Chapel is a product of human creativity, so too are the horrors of Auschwitz and the Gulag. To accept the radical imaginary as a fundamental part of the human self is to accept the dark instincts that are an essential element of this Abyss. In response to this, human beings must create a stable and ordered place for themselves in the world. To accomplish this, they construct social institutions that can provide answers for their own existence. To provide stability, human beings tend to reify these institutions, abstracting them from their own making/doing, and, in so doing, from any responsibility for their creation. We as human beings create meaning for the world because we must in the face of the radical imaginary. Human beings crave certainty. "The social institution of the individual must make a world exist for the psyche as a public and common world. It cannot absorb the psyche into society."¹⁰² The social

institution seems to be able to make of the psyche what it wills, but it must provide meaning for the psyche in terms of its life and its death.¹⁰³ In this regard, heteronomous institutions have three advantages. First, birth and death are outside human responsibility. Second, such institutions replace the burden of choice with the injunction to follow rules. Finally, these imaginary significations cannot be proven false.¹⁰⁴ When heteronomous institutions exist, the individual does not need to question his relationship to the institution or his relationship to the world around him. These answers are provided to him by the dominant instituted-imaginary. As such, he can abdicate all responsibility for questioning the failures of the instituted-imaginary and resign himself to an alienated existence.

Castoriadis' second response to the Marxist concept of alienation is that alienation is not the result of human beings being cut off from some fundamental element of themselves. The radical imaginary is always present. Alienation emerges when the radical imaginary is covered over by the instituted imaginary. The radical imaginary always plays a role in the construction of new institutions. However, we attribute this and justify it based on a heteronomous source of legitimacy. The example of the Marxian revolutionary project illustrates both the impact the social-historical has on the continuing relevance of an institution and the consequences of alienation. In Castoriadis's estimation, Karl Marx makes an important contribution to Western philosophy through his recognition of the fact that theory could not be understood if it was isolated from historical and social practice.¹⁰⁵ In this regard, Marx continues the tradition of philosophers such as Kant and Hegel, but his contribution lies in his concrete construction of a revolutionary project derived from the real social-historical conditions

of nineteenth century Europe and in the development of a praxis through which the proletariat can fundamentally recreate economic and social structures. “Philosophy is not a neutral or contemplative knowledge separated from society. If it pretends to play the role of educator, philosophy perpetuates the social divisions consecrated by the separation of manual and mental labor. This makes philosophy itself into an ideology that hinders progress. The task of the revolutionary is to make the world ‘philosophical’ by overcoming social divisions.”¹⁰⁶ While Kant and Hegel restricted themselves primarily to the domain of ideas, Marx rooted his philosophy in the existing material conditions of nineteenth century Europe. As such, Marx represents a shift from the idealism of previous philosophers to a primary focus on material conditions. In this regard, Marx’s intention is to create a philosophy of praxis that can achieve a revolutionary goal. For Marx, theory and revolutionary praxis must be derived from the material conditions of the prevailing economic system.

Marx sought to ground a theory of revolution in the objective historical laws that he argued governed every society. Marx believed that by applying scientific methods to the study of history and his theory of revolution he could overcome the obstacles faced by previous utopian socialists. His use of the dialectical method was an attempt to erase the distinction between fact and value. The moral imperative for revolution would become a historical inevitability. The significance of Marx’s work was the attention he paid to the actually existing material conditions of industrial capitalism, which served as the foundation for his theories. However, Marx’s reductionism assumes an economic motive for every individual and this is his primary error. He overlooks the fact that types of motivation are social constructs, created by particular societies and linked to the

prevailing social-historical circumstances.¹⁰⁷ As a result, while Marx may have accurately described the conditions of late nineteenth century Western Europe, his model collapses when removed from those social-historical conditions. What Marx did not foresee was the evolution of the capitalist system. Essentially, the material conditions in which Marx grounded his theories changed dramatically. Capitalism adapted to historical developments and to the very criticisms that Marx himself had made. Rather than operating in a free-market system, capitalism evolved to include a significant role for the state in the market, primarily through state intervention to protect business. Furthermore, workers in the capitalist system could rely on their governments to protect them to some extent from the excesses of the market. Most Western countries instituted minimum wage laws, protection for labor unions, pension systems, and the various elements of the social safety net. As a result, the Marxist prediction that capitalism would continue to pauperize the proletariat and eventually lead to the collapse of the system did not come true, because the capitalist system was able to alter itself in order to address the contradictions Marx had pointed out in the nineteenth century. Applying Marx's theories to twentieth century conditions without modifications makes Marxism an ideology, in Marx's own definition of the term. Twentieth century Marxists use this ideology to veil and justify reality, not to shed light on it or change it.¹⁰⁸ The point of Marxism was not to establish eternal truths, but to think the real.¹⁰⁹ When removed from its social-historical context, Marxist theory becomes an alienated social institution, incapable of addressing the problems of late capitalist societies. According to Castoriadis, this is the central problem of constructing a philosophical system that seeks to answer all the questions that are posed to it. The same inability to answer the criticism of the collective toward social

institutions exists with the relationship between Marxism as a theory and its proponents and critics in the twentieth century. When this occurs, the institution will defend itself through reference to extra-social sources of legitimacy. Social institutions will attribute their authority to a source of legitimacy beyond the actual making/doing of the collective. In the case of Marxism, its proponents find authority in historical inevitability. The result, however, is the same as with any other social institution: the alienation of the institution from the society in which it exists.

Despite the fact that heteronomy is an attractive proposition for dealing with the radical imaginary, in the end, the instituted imaginary can never completely insulate itself from the instituting imaginary. In every society, three things will always menace the instituted imaginary. First, itself, since the underlying magma of significations can resurge and put the instituted imaginary into question. Second, individuals, by means of the radical imaginary, will always pose questions to the instituted imaginary that the established institutions cannot answer. Finally, it is menaced by the imaginary of other societies with which it comes into contact.¹¹⁰ As a result, the established institutions of every heteronomous society are constantly threatened by the creativity of individuals living within the societies they govern. The heteronomous institution must rely on the fact that it is alienated and disconnected from the society in order to continue functioning. It is because of this fact that resistance to the instituted imaginary is always a possibility in any society, no matter how alienated the institutions are from the collective.

The gap that exists between the instituted-imaginary and the radical instituting-imaginary is the space from which a collective is capable of instaurating an autonomous society where the political exists as an independent domain of decision making. This

space is the central concern for Castoriadis' philosophical and political project. Late modern societies have constructed a world where the individual plays a central role and where liberty and the possibility of freedom represent a pillar upon which existing social institutions are built. However, social institutions in late modern societies continue to rely on alienated sources of authority to assert their legitimacy. The political project that Castoriadis advances is one where individuals are able to recognize the role their creativity plays in the construction of institutions and to create a political domain where each individual actively participates in the legitimation of existing social institutions or in the construction of new institutions when the instituted-imaginary no longer fulfills its purpose.

¹ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 3. Author's italics.

² Castoriadis, "Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics," 107.

³ Plato, The Republic, trans. Desmond Lee (London: Penguin Books, 1987) 318.

⁴ *ibid.* 265-273.

⁵ *ibid.* 282.

⁶ *ibid.* 359.

⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Intellectuals and History," Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy, ed. David Ames Curtis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 8.

⁸ Martin Heidegger, Being and Time, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Albany: State University of New York Press, 1996) 120.

⁹ *ibid.* 118.

¹⁰ *ibid.* 164.

¹¹ *ibid.* 178.

¹² *ibid.* 166.

¹³ *ibid.* 158.

¹⁴ *ibid.* 250.

¹⁵ *ibid.* 252.

¹⁶ *ibid.* 264.

¹⁷ Herbert Marcuse, One Dimensional Man (Boston: Beacon Press, 1964) 7.

¹⁸ *ibid.* 5.

¹⁹ Herbert Marcuse, Essay on Liberation (Boston: Beacon Press, 1969) 4.

²⁰ Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, 5.

²¹ Marcuse, Essay on Liberation 57-58.

²² Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 44.

²³ *ibid.* 3.

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- ²⁴ “They establish the types of characteristic traits of a society.” Cornelius Castoriadis, “La crise du processus identificatoire,” La Montée de l’Insignifiante (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996). 127-128. Translation mine.
- ²⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Imaginary,” World in Fragments. ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 3.
- ²⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, “Culture in a Democratic Society,” Castoriadis Reader, ed. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 342.
- ²⁷ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 147.
- ²⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, “Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary,” Castoriadis Reader, ed. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 333.
- ²⁹ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 228.
- ³⁰ Weber, “Science as a Vocation,” From Max Weber. ed. and trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958) 153.
- ³¹ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 44.
- ³² *ibid.* 221.
- ³³ *ibid.* 223.
- ³⁴ *ibid.* 238.
- ³⁵ “Isles of determinacy in a sea of indeterminacy.” Hans Joas, “L’Institutionnalisation Comme Processus Créateur,” Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales Tome XXVII: 86 (1989) 163. Translation mine.
- ³⁶ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 341-360. See also Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy,” Castoriadis Reader, ed. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 290-318.
- ³⁷ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 343.
- ³⁸ *ibid.* 341.
- ³⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, “From the Monad to Autonomy,” World in Fragments, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 185.
- ⁴⁰ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 3.
- ⁴¹ Castoriadis, “From the Monad to Autonomy,” World in Fragments. 185.
- ⁴² Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 334.
- ⁴³ Castoriadis, “The Imaginary,” World In Fragments. 3.
- ⁴⁴ *ibid.* 3.
- ⁴⁵ Castoriadis, The Imaginary Institution of Society, 108.
- ⁴⁶ *ibid.* 108.
- ⁴⁷ *ibid.* 44.
- ⁴⁸ *ibid.* 238.
- ⁴⁹ John Locke, The Second Treatise of Government, ed. Thomas P. Peardon (New York: MacMillan, 1952) 5.
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.* 20.
- ⁵¹ Karl Marx, “The Power of Money in Bourgeois Society,” The Marx-Engels Reader ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972) 81,
- ⁵² Tom Rockmore, On Foundationalism (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 2004) 49.
- ⁵³ “For when men, by entering into society and civil government, have excluded force and introduced laws for the preservation of property, peace, and unity amongst

themselves, those who set up force again in opposition to the laws do *rebellare* – that is, bring back a state of war – and are properly rebels.” Locke, The Second Treatise of Government, 127.

⁵⁴ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 364.

⁵⁵ *ibid.* 365.

⁵⁶ Aristotle, Politics, T.A. Sinclair, trans. (London: Penguin, 1992) 59.

⁵⁷ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 294.

⁵⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, “Institution of Society and Religion,” World in Fragments, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 311.

⁵⁹ *ibid.* 311.

⁶⁰ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 301.

⁶¹ Castoriadis, “Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary,” Castoriadis Reader, 330.

⁶² Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 304.

⁶³ *ibid.* 306.

⁶⁴ *ibid.* 301.

⁶⁵ Cornelius Castoriadis, “The State of the Subject Today,” World in Fragments, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 155.

⁶⁶ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 320.

⁶⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, “Epilegomena to a Theory of the Soul Which Has Been Presented as a Science,” Crossroads in the Labyrinth, trans. Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984) 19.

⁶⁸ Castoriadis, “From the Monad to Autonomy,” World in Fragments, 181.

⁶⁹ Sigmund Freud, The Future of an Illusion, trans. W.D. Robson-Scott, ed. James Strachey (Garden City, NY: Anchor Books, 1964) 12.

⁷⁰ Sigmund Freud, Totem and Taboo, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1950) 144.

⁷¹ Sigmund Freud, Civilization and its Discontents, trans. James Strachey (New York: Norton, 1961) 84.

⁷² *ibid.* 82.

⁷³ Freud, The Future of an Illusion, 26.

⁷⁴ *ibid.* 61.

⁷⁵ *ibid.* 64.

⁷⁶ Castoriadis, “From the Monad to Autonomy,” World in Fragments, 186.

⁷⁷ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 44. Author’s italics.

⁷⁸ *ibid.* 197.

⁷⁹ Peter Shaffer, “Equus,” Equus and Shrivings (New York: Atheneum, 1976) 106.

⁸⁰ Castoriadis, “From the Monad to Autonomy,” World in Fragments, 185.

⁸¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, On Plato’s Statesman, trans. David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford UP, 2002) 143.

⁸² *ibid.* 143-144.

⁸³ Hannah Arendt, The Human Condition (Chicago: University of Chicago Press) 222. Original text reads “escape from politics altogether.”

⁸⁴ Michel Foucault, “Two Lectures,” Power/Knowledge, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 89.

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- ⁸⁵ Michel Foucault, Discipline and Punish, trans. Alan Sheridan (New York: Vintage, 1979) and Michel Foucault, The Birth of the Clinic, trans. A.M Sheridan Smith (New York: Vintage, 1975).
- ⁸⁶ Steven Best and Douglas Kellner, Postmodern Theory (New York: Guilford Press, 1991) 55.
- ⁸⁷ Richard Wolin, The Seduction of Unreason (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2004) 188.
- ⁸⁸ Michel Foucault, "Power and Strategies," Power/Knowledge, ed. Colin Gordon (New York: Pantheon Books, 1980) 139-140.
- ⁸⁹ Castoriadis, "The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy," Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy 84.
- ⁹⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Social-Historical," Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy, ed. David Ames Curtis (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991) 41.
- ⁹¹ *ibid.* 37.
- ⁹² Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 144.
- ⁹³ *ibid.* 121.
- ⁹⁴ *ibid.* 125.
- ⁹⁵ *ibid.* 149.
- ⁹⁶ Karl Marx, "Estranged Labor," The Marx-Engels Reader, ed. Robert C. Tucker (New York: W.W. Norton, 1972) 59. See also Leszek Kolakowski, Main Currents of Marxism Vol 1, trans. P.S. Falla (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1981) 138-141 and Robert C. Tucker, Philosophy and Myth in Karl Marx (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1961) 136-149.
- ⁹⁷ Marx, "Estranged Labor," The Marx-Engels Reader, 62.
- ⁹⁸ *ibid.* 61.
- ⁹⁹ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 115.
- ¹⁰⁰ *ibid.* 115.
- ¹⁰¹ *ibid.* 132.
- ¹⁰² *ibid.* 320.
- ¹⁰³ Castoriadis, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary," Castoriadis Reader. 334.
- ¹⁰⁴ Zygmunt Bauman, In Search of Politics (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1999) 34.
- ¹⁰⁵ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 10.
- ¹⁰⁶ Dick Howard, From Marx to Kant 2nd ed. (New York: St. Martin's Press, 1993) 114.
- ¹⁰⁷ Castoriadis, Imaginary Institution of Society, 25.
- ¹⁰⁸ *ibid.* 11.
- ¹⁰⁹ *ibid.* 65.
- ¹¹⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Imaginaire Politique Grec et Moderne," La Montée de l'Insignifiance. (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996) 160.

The Modern and Instituted-Modern Imaginaries

Modernity represents what Castoriadis refers to as the second great break with heteronomy, which introduced a long historical period where people questioned society and created new forms in art, literature and politics.¹ As the second great break, the modern era represents the emergence of a possibility for the creation of the political as both a separate sphere of action and as the source of legitimacy for social institutions. As such, the modern imaginary opens the possibility for the active participation of human subjects in the construction of the social institutions that govern them. Furthermore, modernity posits the capacity for a society to openly and actively question established institutions through participation in the public sphere. In essence, the early modern era represents a resurgence of the radical imaginary to challenge the heteronomous institutions of the medieval period in Europe. By placing human beings at the center of the universe, the modern imaginary posits the possibility of integrating human creativity and the radical imaginary into political life. With the advent of the modern era, the possibility arose for the instauration of an autonomous society, where social institutions relied on the making/doing of those living within the society for their legitimacy.

The first decisive break with heteronomy emerged through the development of the democratic *polis* of fifth century BC Athens.² The significance of the second break with heteronomy that occurred with the advent of modernity is that it posits the possibility for the construction of expansive democratic systems based on human agency in the material world. Unlike the Athenian polis, modern democratic systems allow for equal participation by the individual subject as an individual subject, unrestricted by social class, human nature, or the contingencies of a the particular city into which the individual

is born. As such, the modern imaginary makes possible the types of democratic systems that emerged in the eighteenth century and which continue to be developed to this day. Furthermore, according to Castoriadis, it is only within modern societies that the forms of democratic participation that exist today are possible. For example, in an article on the first Persian Gulf War, Castoriadis rejects the possibility of imposing democracy in the Middle East, arguing that these many of these societies must first break with religious heteronomy and “modernize”, though not necessarily as clones of Western democracies. What is required is a social imaginary that posits active human agency in the construction of meaning, rather than a reliance on divine law as the source of legitimacy for existing institutions.³ Any form of democratic governance requires a decisive break with heteronomous authority and recognition of the role that individuals play in the material world.

The modern imaginary introduced new significations that placed the individual human subject as the active agent in the material world, allowing the subject to understand and shape the material world around him. The roots of the modern imaginary can be traced to the early Renaissance period where innovations in the arts and sciences dramatically altered the manner in which people viewed the world around them. A humanist perspective that emphasizes the role of the human subject in this world is the predominant characteristic of these innovations. Early modern theorists placed the human subject as the focus of philosophy, arguing that the material world was the domain of man and it was up to him to shape it as he saw fit. The humanistic turn in Western thought pervaded all spheres of creativity, from art to philosophy to science. In the field of art, Renaissance painters broke with the traditional conventions of medieval art

through realistic portrayals of human beings and the natural world, employing techniques such as one-point perspective and the use of light and shade to lend a sense of realism to their works. Early scientists such as Galileo challenged the institutional authority of the Church by asserting the accuracy of the heliocentric theory of the universe over the geocentric theory, basing his challenge on empirical observation, thus rejecting the authority of the Church in favor of what he himself could test empirically.

One of the most significant imaginary significations constructed during the transition to modernity is the idea that the individual represents an active agent, capable of comprehending and shaping the world around him, rather than a passive object of an otherworldly will. The Cartesian *cogito*, for example, defines man both in terms of his individuality and his ability to exercise reason.⁴ Descartes' assertion of individual subjectivity allows each human being to become an active agent in the material world, rather than a passive member of a world already ordered by a divine subject. As such, Descartes contributes to the construction of individual subjectivity. This signification of the individual as an active subject is reinforced by modern political theory, which shifts the focus from legitimizing political structures based on heteronomous authoritative sources to institutional justifications founded on human subjectivity. Thomas Hobbes, for example, argues that that the sovereign power must be founded in the consent of the governed, presenting a systematic justification for state power based on the transition from the state of nature to civil society through the creation of a social contract. In order to escape the dangers of the state of nature and guarantee their personal security, human beings must bind themselves together in a social contract and cede certain rights to the sovereign power. The authority and legitimacy of the sovereign is derived from the

social contract made between independent, autonomous subjects, where the sovereign's sole purpose is to provide order and stability. As such, modern political theory emphasizes the role of state power in the maintenance of social stability, the form of government institutions necessary for the exercise of this power, and, most significantly, the justification of institutions based on the consent of individuals living in a particular society. Human life is no longer dictated by rules imposed by an external, supernatural authority; the world is no longer presented to the human subject, but rather is constituted by that subject.⁵ Furthermore, the rise of the modern state, founded on the interaction between the government and the people, created a system wherein the state had to account for the nature of the human subject and tailor its policies accordingly. The state relies on some measure of consent by the people it governs in order to continue to function. As such, legitimacy is linked to human agency, which introduces the possibility of constructing democratic systems wherein each individual can become an active citizen. According to Habermas, the public sphere, defined the domain in which individuals can shape the political and social order of their society through the collective pursuit of free and rational inquiry,⁶ emerges through the transition to modernity in the Western world. The construction of the bourgeois public sphere represents a significant break with pre-modern societies. In pre-modern societies, the legitimacy of institutions is tied to rituals performed in the life-world. As such, system and life-world become intertwined, in the sense that institutions rely on the beliefs and practices of the private sphere for legitimacy. Furthermore, in the pre-modern world, there is no concept of subjectivity. With the transition to modernity, the system and life-world become separated through the construction of an objective world of things confronting the human subject. Only when

this division occurs can subjectivity arise.⁷ The bourgeois public sphere, which introduces purposive rationality, mediates between the state and the private domain. As a result, institutions must perform in order to legitimize themselves; the possibility of legitimation crises emerges as a result of the advent of the modern era.⁸ When an institution is incapable of performing according to the dictates of the collective of individuals participating in the public sphere, the institution's legitimacy is called into question.

Descartes reinforces the relationship between the individual subject as a constitutive agent and the world around him and the institutions that govern him by arguing that the individual is capable, through the exercise of reason, to fully comprehend the natural world. Descartes argues, "There is nothing so far removed from us as to be beyond our reach, or so hidden that we cannot discover it, provided only we abstain from accepting the false for the true, and always preserve in our thoughts the order necessary for the deduction of one truth from another."⁹ Descartes' foundational principle is skepticism. In searching for the truth, Descartes' first principle is, "never to accept anything for true which I did not clearly know to be such."¹⁰ The only given Descartes accepts is the *cogito*. Descartes argues that this maxim is self-evident, that it "was so certain and of such evidence, that no ground of doubt, however extravagant, could be alleged by the skeptics capable of shaking it."¹¹ Once this assumption is made, everything else must be demonstrated through empirical inquiry. The significance of Descartes' skepticism is that the doctrines of established authority must be called into question. Cartesian doubt introduces the capacity to examine the inherited wisdom of institutional authority and to criticize and question the existing instituted-imaginary. The

authority of the institution is no longer sufficient grounds to accept a statement as true. Descartes' skepticism represents a radical break with the heteronomy of the Middle Ages, particularly with regard to the institutional authority of the Catholic Church. Descartes essentially argues that each individual must question the doctrines of the Church; only with proper critical inquiry should the individual accept the truth of religious authority. The individual, according to Descartes, should not rely on the inherited truth of institutional authority, but rather should seek to discover truth and meaning in the world on his own.

Descartes' call for the use of reason to discover truth reinforces the modern scientific concern for the progressive accumulation of knowledge. In the modern mind, the accumulation of knowledge is equated with progress, both in terms of the development of scientific knowledge and the moral development of society. Beginning with the assumption that it is in fact possible to know everything about the natural world, modern philosophers follow with a normative claim that this knowledge should be disseminated to the population as a whole in order to improve society. Implied in this claim is the idea that science and knowledge are neutral, unallied forces; the dissemination of such objective knowledge can only improve the material condition of the human species. The progressive development of science and technology can improve the lives of every individual by harnessing the now comprehensible natural world. Famine can be eliminated by advances in agriculture, developments in medicine can prolong the individual's lifespan, and the everyday well-being of the individual can be improved by the development of the means of production through industrialization. Furthermore, a moral imperative emerges from this signification of progress: the human

race as a species can be improved through the continued accumulation of knowledge.¹²

The more the human species can understand about itself and the world around it, the greater the potential for making the human species better and more moral. Moral progress thus becomes closely linked to the development of the scientific method and the possibilities science brings for more fully comprehending the natural world.

The project of autonomy, as Castoriadis conceives it, and the construction of democratic institutions in general, relies on the transition to modernity. The modern imaginary posits a world in which the individual subject can reflect upon himself and the world around him. The construction of the Cartesian individual subject contributes to the possibility of conceiving a political system that incorporates an expansive definition of political participation. If each individual has the capacity to exercise reason and if each individual is equally endowed with this capacity, this creates the possibility for the equal participation of each individual in the political system as an independent subject.

Autonomy and an expansive concept of freedom, which Castoriadis asserts, requires a subject that is not dependent on external forms of authority, neither in terms of the subject's identity nor in terms of an authority that limits the capacity of the human subject to construct meaning for the world around him. Furthermore, the project of autonomy requires the construction of a world where the individual is an active agent in the construction and legitimation of political institutions. The emergence of the bourgeois public sphere links institutional legitimacy to the capacity of these institutions to provide meaning for the individual subjects living within particular society. The institution, constructed by the collective of individual subjects, must be able to perform;

when an institution can no longer do this, the instituted imaginary can be called into question and altered through democratic processes.

From the Modern to the Instituted-Modern

Though the advent of modernity represents a break with the heteronomy of the Middle Ages, and the second great break with heteronomy in Western history, alienation is a persistent characteristic of modern institutions. Thus, the advent of the modern era, while it introduced radically new, potentially emancipatory significations, did not lead to the construction of an autonomous society where the role of the radical imaginary in the construction of social institutions is recognized. In essence, the emancipatory promise of modernity is not fulfilled. Both Habermas and Castoriadis argue that modernity represents a dual heritage. On the one hand, modernity represents the emancipation of human beings from sources of authority beyond their control introducing the possibility for the active participation of citizens in the legitimation of institutions. On the other hand, however, modernity, particularly through the development of instrumental rationality, has a repressive face, manifested through the development of bureaucratic institutions that intrude upon all aspects of modern life.

Therefore, recognizing that the emancipatory potential of the modern imaginary has not been fulfilled does not require a rejection of the modern imaginary as a whole. A crucial distinction must be made between modernity and instituted-modernity.

Modernity is the magma of social imaginary significations that began to be created during the Renaissance and continue to be created to this day, encompassing a diverse and multifaceted tradition, where the conception of the role the human subject plays in the world varies greatly from theorist to theorist.

By contrast, instituted-modernity represents the particular instauration of a particular set of modern significations in an institutional form. The instituted-modern imaginary posits a world subject to the rational control and rational planning by human agents. As with any institution, instituted-modern institutions institute themselves as closed systems, in the sense that they claim to represent the whole of the modern imaginary. In fact, they only encompass a small part of the myriad of social imaginary significations created, and which continue to be created, during the modern age.

This distinction is important because while the modern imaginary asserts the subjectivity of the individual and his independence from the domination of extra-social forces, it does not lead to the creation of the political domain necessary for modern society to construct autonomous institutions. In essence, two paths emerge with the advent of the modern age. The first path, the project of autonomy, creates the possibility for the instauration of the political where human beings recognize the role they play in the construction of the institutions that govern them and actively participate in the questioning and alteration of the instituted imaginary. This path represents the emancipatory potential of the modern imaginary. However, this path requires the construction of the political as an independent domain and the active, democratic participation of a citizenry. These conditions are not an inevitable result of the emergence of the modern imaginary, but rather require an active expression of individual and social autonomy. Without the active participation of those living in a particular society, modernity follows the second path, where modern institutions become alienated, resulting in the creation of the instituted-modern and the instauration of institutions that rely on instituted-modern significations for their legitimacy.

While instituted-modern institutions are in fact the product of human making/doing, the societies in which they exist do not recognize the creative role of the collective in the construction of these institutions. The instituted-modern is a unique set of significations in human history in the sense that though instituted-modern institutions are alienated, they rely on the subjectivity of the individual for their legitimacy. The instituted-modern emerges from the broader magma of modern imaginary significations that emphasizes the central role of the human subject in this world. As such, the instituted-modern relies on the *legein* and *teukhein* of modernity. However, it conceives of the relationship of the individual to institutions in a particular manner that reinforces alienation. The instituted-modern develops as a particular institutionalization of the modern imaginary, reinforced by the changing social-historical conditions in Europe from the end of the Renaissance to the present day. The development of the instituted-modern represents a creative transformation of many of the key aspects of the modern imaginary. Reason is transformed into instrumental rationality, individual subjectivity becomes depoliticized atomization, and progress is conceived as limitless human control over the natural world.

The distinction between modernity and instituted-modernity expresses an important characteristic about modern freedom. Modern freedom is deeply paradoxical in the sense that liberation and repression are closely linked to the extent that apparent expressions of freedom in fact reproduce the repressive aspects of the instituted-modern imaginary. Marshall Berman accurately asserts, “The process of modernization, even as it exploits and torments us, brings our energies and imaginations to life, drives us to grasp and confront the world that modernization makes, and to strive to make it our own.”¹³

Even though human beings liberated themselves from the heteronomy of the Middle Ages, they continue to be frustrated by the new forms of alienation that are created during the modern age and which are sustained by instituted-modern institutions. The paradox of modern freedom is this: as beings socialized into modern societies by institutions founded originally on human making/doing, we are convinced that we are autonomous subjects, but in the face of instituted-modern institutions, our autonomy is severely constrained. The ability to act is constrained by the limitations imposed by the instituted-modern imaginary's conception of the human subject and his relationship to the world. On the one hand, modernity places human beings at the center of the universe and instituted-modern institutions are explicitly posited as the product of human making/doing. This represents the emancipatory potential inherent in the modern imaginary, allowing, for example, the construction of democratic forms of governance. At the same time, however, the human-oriented sources of legitimacy, such as science and reason, become alienated from the making/doing of the collective. As such, instituted-modern institutions become alienated, covering over the role of the radical imaginary and relying on these alienated sources of legitimacy rather than on an explicit justification rooted in the radical imaginary of the collective. The human subject's range of actions therefore become reduced to a narrow spectrum and constrained by an instrumental calculus. As a result, thought loses the element of self-reflection,¹⁴ reduced to an individual calculation of utility. Thus, while the modern individual conceives of himself as an autonomous being, in reality he is subject to the dictates of instituted-modern institutional forms. Since the radical imaginary is covered over, our autonomy is constrained by the limits imposed by the instituted heteronomous institutions.

Furthermore, our own actions as seemingly autonomous subjects in fact reinforce and reproduce the alienation and repression that pervades modern societies. “Liberation”, as it is conceived in the instituted-modern imaginary, allows for limited human participation in existing institutions, but it is through this participation that we also contribute to the reproduction of the imaginary significations that perpetuate our own alienation. As a result, we are simultaneously freer than in the past, but frustrated by the very institutions we have created to administer an increasingly complex society.

The construction of the instituted-modern as the dominant imaginary relies on a transformation of reason from the objective reason of the pre-modern and early modern era to subjective reason. Max Horkheimer argues that in the pre-modern era, “reason was supposed to regulate our preferences and our relations with other human beings and with nature. It was thought of as an entity, a spiritual power living in each man.”¹⁵

Horkheimer classifies this form of reason “objective.” According to the precepts of objective reason, an act is reasonable if it conforms to the totality of man’s relationship to other men and to nature.¹⁶ In other words, “there is a universally valid hierarchy of ends, but there are no universally valid rules of action.”¹⁷

Furthermore, the hierarchy of ends posited by objective reason is linked to a broader conception of the common good in society as a whole.

These two ideas lie at the center of Aristotle’s *Nicomachean Ethics*, which aptly illustrates the concept of objective reason. According to Aristotle, *arête*, or excellence, is achieved through acting in moderation.¹⁸ Any potential action must be conceived in terms of the situation at hand and the consequences of this action on others in society. A reasonable act in one situation might not be reasonable in another. For example, courage

lies in the mean between cowardice and recklessness.¹⁹ However, there is no single standard for a courageous act. A meek individual would not be expected to act in the same manner as a person of strong character. However, both are able to find a mean between cowardice and recklessness that can be called courage, though the actual action may not be the same. Furthermore, objective reason relies on the will of the individual to choose the proper path. In the example of the soldier above, while reason might tell him to choose a course of action that aims for the mean between cowardice and recklessness, he is free not to choose this path, and to act contrary to what reason tells him to do. For Aristotle, reason is a set of guidelines for action that exists independently of the human subject. The individual must choose to participate by allowing proper reason to guide the actions he selects. As such, objective reason confers upon the individual subject a degree of autonomy. Reason does not determine the actions of the individual. Rather, the individual himself must choose to act according to the guidelines that reason dictates.

In addition, the individual must consider his action in the context of his relationship to others. For an act to be reasonable, it must be judged as such by others. As a result, the consideration of the mean is not the sole purview of the individual deciding on which action will be best to take. Any action by an individual is entwined within the broader social context in which he acts. A soldier in battle, while expected to act courageously, must take into account the lives of his fellow soldiers and the broader victory of the army. Thus, a single-handed assault on an enemy position, even if the soldier were victorious, would be a reckless act, as it could have endangered the lives of his fellow soldiers and jeopardized the successful outcome of the battle. The mean between cowardice and recklessness can only be judged by other soldiers, his

commanders, and the wider context of the battle in which the individual soldier makes his decision. The social context within which such judgments of excellence occur illustrates the public nature of objective reason. The hierarchy of ends need not be dictated by a source external to the society nor does it require that ends be constructed once and for all time. Rather, the hierarchy of ends can be publicly contestable and be the product of the autonomous making/doing of those living within a particular society.

As such, reason can be used to properly guide a society towards the achievement of this common good. This element of reason dominates Aristotelian thought, but is also evident in early liberalism. The early liberals such as John Locke argue that reason, as an inherent attribute of the individual, can properly guide a society towards a limited common good. Locke, for example, posits that human beings are able to achieve the good of living up to their nature as rational beings through participation in civil society and through labor. Thus, while self-interest is the primary characteristic of human nature, Locke does not conclude that human beings are selfish by nature. Rather, self-interest derives from reason as an ordering principle in the definition of ends. The end of civil society is to promote prosperity through labor and the possibility of living in a secure society. Locke does not argue that men in civil society will pursue self-interest at the expense of their reason, but rather reason serves as a guide for living as a human being in civil society.

Within early liberalism, however, the move toward subjective reason is also evident. Equating reason and individual self-interest is problematic, leading to later liberal theory asserting a purely utilitarian definition of reason. Locke's emphasis on self-interest as the defining characteristic of human nature opens the door for the

construction of subjective reason. Locke posits no limitation to human accumulation²⁰ and does not preclude the possibility of selfishness. In the state of nature, war arises due to conflict over resources that each individual seeks to accumulate for his own use. Thus, greed and selfishness can be derived from self-interest given the proper conditions. The fact that Locke posits a minimal role for government does little to insure that those living in civil society will not revert to a selfish pursuit of wealth instead of a self-interested pursuit of wealth. Furthermore, early liberals privilege the private domain over the public. Objective reason cannot exist without a publicly defined hierarchy of ends and actions cannot be judged separated from a web of social relationships. Liberalism removes the individual from the presence of others by emphasizing the importance of the private domain of material accumulation. As a result, reason is transformed into a private means for the pursuit of an end of material accumulation. The individual no longer requires the presence of others to determine the rationality of his actions; she herself becomes the sole judge of the rationality of her actions.

The private nature of early liberal reason contributes to the construction of the instituted-modern concept of instrumental rationality. Instituted-modern reason, or, in Horkheimer's terms subjective reason, is specifically defined as individual utility maximization. The instituted-modern imaginary posits that humans, by nature, are driven primarily by self-interest and given a set of options, each individual will rank them according to her preferences and choose based on which option will maximize her own utility. An act is considered rational only insofar as it reflects the individual calculation of utility and seeks to maximize that utility.²¹ Thus, an individual can only be rational if she acts in such a way as to maximize her own utility. To act contrary to this is, by

definition, irrational. In this manner, subjective reason determines the actions of the rational individual, in the sense that the rational individual is defined as a rational being through the calculation of utility and the pursuit of utility-maximization. Human beings are defined as human beings by their rationality; to act contrary to rationality is to be less than human.

The calculation of utility, according to the logic of subjective reason, is the domain of the individual divorced from the social context within which he makes a decision. The ranking of preferences may differ from person to person, but both individuals can be considered rational so long as they choose an action based on their own personal calculation of expected utility. As such, subjective reason eliminates the standards set forth by objective reason for judging an act as reasonable. This transformation of reason creates a view of the world wherein an action is rational only if it serves some other purpose.²² No rational individual will choose an action “for its own sake” or as an end in itself. Rather, each decision is made in the pursuit of further utility-maximization. Following this logic, only “productive” activity is valid, and all else is superfluous.²³

Subjective reason essentially disconnects the individual from the social context in which he exists. The individual is the sole calculator of utility. The judgment of others affects the calculation of utility only insofar as the individual believes that the judgment of others can positively benefit his own self-interest. As a result, in pursuit of utility-maximization, the relationship of the individual to others is reduced to instrumentality; others are significant only insofar as they are incorporated into the calculus of means and ends. More importantly, other individuals become mere means through which the

calculating individual can achieve his ends. Other individuals are degraded into a means towards achieving the end of utility maximization. The instituted-modern conception of the rational individual prevents the possibility of community and solidarity with others. When all others are reduced to a means for maximizing utility, the instauration of the political becomes nearly impossible. In essence, the repression of the hierarchical, organic society of the medieval era is replaced by the repression that emerges from an atomized society, where individuals are unable to connect with others in any meaningful manner.

Subjective reason's emphasis on the subject as rational utility maximizer reinforces atomistic individualism, the second central imaginary signification of the instituted-modern imaginary. The instituted-modern imaginary conceives of the individual as the primary agent in the modern world, emphasizing the actions of the individual as an individual, and de-emphasizing the individual as a member of a community. Atomistic individualism disconnects the individual from other beings living in his society, emphasizing the primacy of the private sphere against the public realm of the political. The consequence of atomistic individualism is this: over the course of modern history, while the citizen has involved himself primarily in the private sphere, the bureaucratic-capitalist apparatus has expanded to encompass a greater share of modern life and politics. According to Habermas, the problem that emerges during the development of modernity is that the state and private corporations intrude into the bourgeois public sphere, which then degenerates into a sphere of domination.²⁴ Capitalism, for example, privileges instrumental rationality, which colonizes the public realm to the extent that decisions made in this sphere are made according to the dictates

of this form of rationality. Habermas does not reject instrumental rationality; he argues that this form of reason has its functions within particular contexts, such as the economic market. However, instrumental rationality is not suitable for the discursive practices of the public sphere.²⁵ As a result, when instrumental reason invades the public domain, the discursive practices of this sphere are degraded, such that the public sphere becomes an appendage of the state and the capitalist economic system. Public institutions such as the state and the bureaucracy intrude into the private sphere, regulating the actions of citizens once considered off-limits to the state. The life-world, the private domain, becomes subjected to the dictates of instrumental rationality, further eroding the possibility of public discourse. The colonization of the life-world represents the extension of instrumental reason over all other value-spheres. This occurs through the rise of information industries as a form of veiled domination, the rise of corporate experts and their management of almost all social functions, the bureaucratic control of consumption, the erosion of personal integrity and the rise of ‘administrative despotism’, the transformation of public citizens into private consumers, and the decline of bourgeois individualism.²⁶ In essence, individuals become atomized and restricted to the life-world, unable to participate in any meaningful way in the legitimation processes of the society in which they live. The liberal concern for individual rights has little meaning when the bureaucratic-capitalist apparatus has intruded into the private sphere to the extent that it is able to constrain the choices of the individual citizen.

The liberal emphasis on negative liberty reinforces the atomistic individualism of the instituted-modern imaginary. Liberal philosophy conceives of rights as absolute protections against both the state and against other individuals. The classic view of these

negative liberties is aptly described by Judith Shklar, who argues, “Every adult should be able to make as many effective decisions without fear or favor about as many aspects of his or life as is compatible with the like freedom of every other adult.”²⁷ Shklar posits an absolute injunction against the infringement of individual rights by either the state or other individuals. However, this defense of the rights of the individual is problematic in that it constructs too sharp a delineation between the public and private and prevents the possibility of constructing the political as a domain of action built around the collective decision-making of those living in society. Shklar’s conception of liberalism is entirely negative. Liberalism does not have a positive doctrine of how one should live one’s life.²⁸ She is primarily concerned with protecting the individual from abusive governmental power and the infliction of cruelty by the state. According to Shklar, “liberalism must restrict itself to politics and proposals to restrain potential abusers of power in order to lift the burden of fear and favor from the shoulders of adult men and women, who can then conduct their lives in accordance with their own beliefs and preferences as long as they do not prevent others from doing so as well.”²⁹ By founding her philosophy on the fear of governmental abuse, Shklar contributes to the atomized view of the individual and neglects to address the potential oppression that can occur in the private realm. Combined with the instituted-modern view of reason, there is no injunction against treating another individual as a means to some end. So long as the basic rights of the individual are respected, any individual can treat another as a means. As such, the instituted-modern imaginary erodes the possibility of freedom introduced by the modern break with medieval heteronomy. When individuals can treat each other as means, they create inegalitarian dependences between human subjects. A dependent

individual cannot participate freely in the political domain. As a result, the instituted-modern imaginary thwarts the possibility of constructing the political.

Furthermore, when freedom is defined solely in negative terms, it becomes constrained to a private freedom to participate in the economic market. According to Hannah Arendt, human life can be divided into labor, the biological processes that sustain human life; work, concerned with the artificial world of man-made things; and action, the social relations between humans that is the condition for political life.³⁰ Subjective reason and atomistic individualism privilege labor and work over action by constraining the modern individual to private sphere. The individual acts according to a calculation of utility, asking how he will benefit from each and every particular action. Any action that serves some purpose is considered rational; the decision to opt out of the market, or to act in any other way that does not serve some ultimate economic purpose is, by definition, irrational. As a result, a society of individual laborers is instituted. The individual on her own, disconnected from the other individuals living in her society, finds it difficult to confront or resist bureaucratic-capitalist institutions. Furthermore, concerns that were once private intrude into the degraded public realm. Thus, a politics emerges that is concerned primarily with the maintenance of biological life and the protection of private property instead of the collective questioning of existing institutions.³¹

The significations of atomistic individualism and instrumental reason combine with an instituted-modern concept of limitlessness to posit both a technical and normative argument for the organization of society. The instituted-modern signification of limitlessness posits that the world *can* and *should* be fully classified and organized by human beings. As individual subjects possessing reason, human beings confront the

world of objects around them by subjecting it completely to their own imaginary constructs. Zygmunt Bauman argues that this is a requirement of the transition to modernity:

The war against mystery and magic was for modernity the war of liberation leading to the declaration of reason's independence. It was the declaration of hostilities that made the unprocessed, pristine world into the enemy. As is the case with all genocide, the world of nature ... had to be beheaded and thus deprived of autonomous will and power of resistance. At stake in the war was the right to initiative and the authorship of action, the right to pronounce on meanings, to construe narratives. To win the stakes, to win all of them and to win them for good, the world had to be *de-spiritualized*, de-animated: denied the capacity of the *subject*.³²

The world as an independent subject confronting us represents uncertainty and a lack of control. As such, the world must be disenchanting. Human beings must make an attempt to fully understand the uncertainty and the mystery of the natural world. By disenchanting the world, the modern individual subject is able to eliminate the supernatural (defined as the uncertainty presented by the natural world) as an Other confronting human society. In constructing modern institutions, the supernatural Other is brought "down to earth" and incorporated into the modern imaginary through the practice of science.³³ As a result of this development, the natural world can be objectified and put under complete human control. This leads to the idea that the world should be organized and controlled in such a way as to benefit the individual subject. Therefore, institutions *can* and *should* be organized in such a way as to allow individuals to pursue self-

interested utility maximization *vis-à-vis* the world in which they live. The logic of limitlessness, combined with instrumental reason, dictates that humans will seek to fully dominate the world around them according to the potential utility the individual and the collective can gain from this domination.

For the ancient Greeks, the instituted-modern signification of limitlessness would be defined as *hubris*. According to the Greeks, forces beyond human control, such as Fate or the Gods, limit human beings. To act as if these forces have no bearing on one's life is to court disaster. As the classical Greek tragedies show, the hero who ignores the limits placed on him by outside forces is ultimately destroyed. Oedipus, for example, leaves his home in order to escape the Oracle's prophecy that he would kill his father and marry his mother. However, because Fate always limits human action, Oedipus actually fulfills the prophecy by leaving the home of his adoptive parents, meeting his true father, killing him, and then marrying his true mother, Jocasta. This tragic vision was not restricted to literature, but extended to encompass the Athenian political imaginary. The Athenian democratic system has been described as necessarily self-limiting.³⁴ There are certain policies that could not be undertaken, lest they threaten the democratic system itself. "In a democracy, people *can* do anything – and must know that they *ought not* to do just anything."³⁵ Furthermore, in the ancient Athenian *polis*, the continued existence of the democratic system was predicated on the continuous participation of the citizenry. If the citizens did not show up for the assembly, the democracy could not continue to function. The self-limiting nature of the Greek *polis* marked this institution with impermanence.³⁶ The democratic system only existed insofar as the citizens participated. Furthermore, the impermanent nature of the institution allowed for the continuous

criticism of the institution itself. Democracy was not assumed in the ancient Greek system, but rather was always open to the questioning of its citizens. A person such as Socrates could subject the Athenian democracy to fundamental questions about its existence and being, which had to be addressed by its supporters in order to insure that the institution continued to exist. When Greek politicians went beyond these self-imposed limits, an act of *hubris*, the system found itself in a serious crisis. Athens' imperialistic expansion during the Peloponnesian War and the trial and execution of Socrates both represent situations where the *polis* overstepped its self-limiting boundaries. As in the Greek tragedies, the *hubris* of the late Athenian *polis* led to a fall.

The instituted-modern imaginary has no conception of *hubris* and modern bureaucratic institutions do not recognize any limits to the possibility of fully organizing and dominating the world. As the world becomes disenchanting and the instituted-modern is constructed as the dominant set of social imaginary significations, science replaces religion as the means through which human beings explain the world around them. Because science and reason are so closely connected in the modern imaginary, the instituted-modern posits that science is the only acceptable methodology for making sense of the world. All other perspectives are labeled irrational and anti-modern. Furthermore, modern science asserts that there are no limits to the capacity for human beings to understand the natural world in which they live. This claim about the "hard" sciences transcends the narrow field of scientific discovery and intrudes upon all other aspects of human life. The instituted-modern imaginary posits that the scientific method can be applied to the organization of any aspect of human life, thus transforming science from a pursuit of an understanding of the mechanisms of the natural world to a moral

imperative asserting that science alone is the engine of societal progress. The institutional organization of society itself becomes a field where the scientific method can be applied. As such, instituted-modern institutions claim to efficiently and rationally order each aspect of society, thus intruding into every domain of human life. At the same time, this instituted-modern logic posits that no sphere of human existence need be excluded from this drive to dominate. At its most basic level, this drive towards “rational mastery” can be seen in the subjugation of the natural world to the needs and desires of human beings. The drive to dominate and master the natural world has two crucial consequences for societies constructed according to the instituted-modern imaginary. First, it empties the self of all substance except its attempt to transform everything into a means for its preservation. Second, nature is emptied and degraded to mere material with no other purpose than to be dominated.³⁷ As a result, modern life revolves around a drive to fully subjugate the natural world through the breaking of any previously conceived limits to expansion.

In positing that there are no limits to the possibilities of science, scientists are simply ignoring both the natural and the human limitations to the understanding of the world. The most significant example of this is the place of the radical imaginary. In essence, since the radical imaginary cannot be reduced to a quantifiable essence or to a deterministic relationship between cause and effect, modern science simply ignores the role it plays in human life and in the construction of meaning in society.

The dominance of science and the covering over of the radical imaginary creates a unique problem for modern society. Science is a human endeavor, an expression of human making/doing. As such, it is subject to the same constraints as any other social

institution. The collective radical imaginary of a particular society will always exist to challenge both the methodology of science and the consequences of scientific discovery. There will always be a struggle to force science into the network of social institutions that exists within a particular society. At the same time, however, science and scientists actively seek to disconnect scientific practice from the social imaginary context in which they carry out this endeavor. Science makes a claim of objectivity and neutrality, when it is neither. The scientist claims that in practicing science, he stands above the social-historical conditions that exist in a given society. The work the scientist does, in his eyes, is universally valid, as it seeks to promote the progress of the human species, regardless of the social imaginary in which he is embedded. Furthermore, the scientist claims the work he does is value-neutral. He simply seeks to discover something about the world in which he lives. What is done with his discovery is, according to the scientist, beyond his control. In reality, science is an institution and “as such, it is caught up in the material means, the forms of organization and the ideas which it both takes from and brings to the world.”³⁸ Science, therefore, cannot be divorced from the social-historical conditions of the particular society in which it is practiced. However, science as an imaginary institution is constructed around the premise that it, in fact, can be practiced objectively and neutrally, outside the boundaries of the social-historical. Challenges to science as an institution can be dismissed as irrational. “Like every institution, [science] is an inertia sustained by a myth. Left to itself, it continues in the same direction at the same speed; to question its value, its method, its orientation and its results, amounts to iconoclasm.”³⁹ By delegitimizing criticism of the institution, science is able to insulate itself from the

questioning of the collective. As a result, scientists are able to operate freely, regardless of the consequences of the discoveries they make.

Divorced from the social-historical, the practice of science contributes to the instituted-modern signification of limitlessness. It becomes a means by which modern society can continue to ignore any limits to growth. The emphasis placed on economic growth and development is an appropriate example of this signification. For every nation-state, economic growth is one of its primary imperatives. However, absent from any discussion of development is a real acceptance of the fact that there are limited resources on this planet. It is clear that not every country in the world can attain the level of industrialization that the United States and Europe has reached, simply because there are not enough resources to do so. However, this issue is never raised when it comes to discussions of growth in the developing world. To do so is to be considered politically incorrect or oppressive to less developed countries. The assumption that everyone makes is that every country can and should develop, despite the physical limitations to such a task. By claiming the ability to surpass any natural boundaries, science reinforces the idea that every country in the world can become industrialized, despite the environmental consequences such growth would have on the ecosphere. Environmental problems, and the limitation such problems impose, can and will be solved by science.

In terms of the impact on society, the supposed objectivity and neutrality of science releases the institution from any consequences that might arise from the manner in which scientific discoveries are implemented in society. As the prevailing method of understanding the world, scientific logic posits that whatever is “true” must be proven “scientifically.” However, every truth claim purports to be “scientifically proven”,

regardless of the validity of the claim or the consequences of such a claim in a particular society. Thus, Nazism and Marxism-Leninism adhere to a scientific logic, both claiming to be “true” according to the scientific method.⁴⁰ By relinquishing responsibility for the consequences of scientific discovery in the name of pursuing a “pure” form of science, scientists create a situation where their methods can be used for the most sinister of purposes. Horkheimer argues that “like any existing creed, science can be used to serve the most diabolical social forces, and scientism is no less narrow-minded than militant religion.”⁴¹ When science is used as a weapon of the powerful against the weak, as during the Nazi Holocaust or in the movement to sterilize “undesirables” in the United States, this exacerbates the ambivalence people living in modern society feel towards institutions founded upon scientific principles. If science can be so easily subverted to serve monstrous ends, what prevents such a situation from occurring again? The answer is “nothing” and instituted-modern institutions are incapable of providing any other answer. Since science is part of the instituted imaginary, the type of science conducted will reflect the instituted imaginary of a particular society. In modern societies, science posits itself as capable of breaking every limitation imposed on the human species, all in the name of progress. Progress, however, is an institution that emerges from the particular social-historical conditions of a given time and place. Eugenics, for example, is considered unacceptable in the contemporary Western world. At the beginning of the twentieth century, however, it was widely accepted. Progress was defined as eliminating undesirable characteristics of the human species, such as indolence, poverty, and low intelligence. As a result, scientists mobilized to weed out these supposedly natural characteristics through the forced sterilization of the poor and the mentally incapacitated.

This logic of progress culminated in the Nazi regime's attempt to eliminate all "life unworthy of life." Abuses such as these are the product of an institution that is instaurated as existing outside the social-historical and which seeks to transcend all limits imposed on it by the first natural stratum and by the particular collective radical imaginary in which it operates. Instituted in this manner, science is able to violate all taboos and break all limits by referring to its own self-described objectivity and neutrality.

The increasing importance of technology in everyday life reinforces both the dominance of science and the instituted-modern signification of limitlessness, while degrading and covering over the role of the radical imaginary. Technology privileges calculation, the instrumental use of thought aimed at effectiveness, over contemplative thought.⁴² "We are entering into the reign of instrumental thought, in which every problem must find a purely technical solution. This perspective deeply influences the organization of life in society...The possibility of doing something becomes sufficient reason to do it: *capability* becomes *wish*, which is transformed in turn into *duty*."⁴³ As a result, technological development for the purpose of dominating the world becomes a moral imperative. Science allows human beings to develop the technology that will bring the natural world under human dominion and the instituted-modern signification of limitlessness asserts that it is therefore the duty of the human race to dominate the world through advanced technology. Technology allows the world to be reduced to mere matter under the control of human beings. As such, technology reinforces and reproduces the signification of *homo faber*. As *homo faber*, man instrumentalizes, and thereby degrades all things into means.⁴⁴ Everything he builds is a means to achieve something else.

Furthermore, in a society constructed around this imaginary signification, individuals born into that society will be conditioned to privilege instrumental reasoning over contemplative thought. Technology reinforces this tendency, in the sense that individuals living in such a society have access to technology that will assist them in instrumental calculation. This has a devastating effect on political participation in the sense that

people whose lives are mediated by a technology that uproots and subjects them to the empire of calculation are particularly vulnerable to the superficial appeal of the politics described here as characteristic of the universal homogeneous state—a politics wherein thoughtless submission to perceived technological imperatives is identified with freedom and prosperity.⁴⁵

As technology develops, there is also a “democratization” of access to this higher technology. Thus, each individual in an advanced society can interact with the natural world as a master of that world. However, such a world is completely devoid of meaning.⁴⁶ Technology cannot answer questions about the meaning of the world or the individual’s place in that world. However, it can allow the individual herself to assert more control over the natural world around them. “The essence of technology—and its greatest danger—is not located in this or that particular instance of pollution or disemployment or privacy invasion, but, rather, in its propensity to enframe the condition of Being, mistakenly, as one of calculation and rootlessness.”⁴⁷ Each individual interacts with the world, and with other individuals through the medium of technology, where this interaction is driven by an instrumental calculus. As such, the primary drive of each individual becomes to expand the reach of technology and his own mastery over the

world around him, both in terms of the environment and in terms of other individuals with which he comes into contact. Technology allows each individual to become an island, exacerbating the atomization of the world that emerges as a result of the development of the instituted-modern.

According to Anthony Giddens, modernity is like a juggernaut, “a runaway engine of enormous power which, collectively as human beings, we can drive to some extent but which also threatens to rush out of our control and which could rend itself asunder.”⁴⁸ The construction of the instituted-modern exacerbates this problem by eliminating responsibility and political participation in late modern societies. The dominant significations of the instituted-modern imaginary create a world where the individual citizen need not participate in democratic decision-making. As such, she has no say over the direction the society takes. The result of this is a continuous expansion of bureaucratic institutions, the subjugation of the natural world without limits, and the increasing atomization and depoliticization of the society. Individuals resign themselves to this situation by retreating in the private sphere, allowing the existing instituted-imaginary to reproduce itself and continue to expand into all spheres of life. The danger here is the fact that since the instituted-modern imaginary does not conceive of any limits to expansion, the existing institutional structure will continue to expand, regardless of the damage to democracy, society, or the natural environment.

The Kantian Alternative

Though the instituted-modern imaginary represents the dominant imaginary of the contemporary era, this does not suggest that the modern imaginary as a whole represents a monolithic tradition. Throughout the modern era, philosophers have challenged the

instituted-modern significations of instrumental rationality, atomistic individualism, and limitlessness. Therefore, one need not reject modernity as a whole in order to challenge the instituted-modern imaginary. In this regard, Immanuel Kant's challenge to the instituted-modern is particularly important for Castoriadis' project. Kant represents the possibility of asserting the modern, and the emancipatory potential of the modern imaginary, against the instituted-modern and the alienation that this imaginary reproduces. Castoriadis in no way rejects modernity, but rather he seeks to reclaim the emancipatory potential of the modern imaginary and construct institutions that fulfill the promise represented by modernity's great break with the heteronomy of the pre-modern era. Kant's philosophy encompasses several critical points for Castoriadis' work. The first of these is the limited scope of human understanding.

Kant argues that human beings are by nature rational. However, his vision of rationality is not monolithic and independent of the world, such as that found in the work of Descartes. Where Cartesian rationalism argues that an objective description of the world is possible, uncontaminated by the perspective of the observer, Kant disagrees, asserting that the experience of the observer plays an important role in certain cases. As such, Kant asserts that reason has multiple modalities.

The first of these modalities is pure reason, where Kant posits a theory of transcendental idealism, arguing that some truths, *a priori* truths, are true propositions regardless of experience. *A priori* truths are absolute, universal, and create a framework of concepts that are presupposed in experience; such knowledge is not gained through experience and is therefore not empirical. *A priori* truths differ from *a posteriori* truths in the sense that the latter are empirically demonstrable and are the result of experience,

whereas the former are not.⁴⁹ “Empirical objects are real, whereas transcendental objects are ideal. A transcendental object is not perceivable, and does not belong to the world of space, time, and causality.”⁵⁰ Thus, Kant’s concept of pure reason posits that there are limits to what the human subject is capable of knowing. Reason is not a means through which the individual can come to understand the whole of the world. In Kant’s estimation, there are elements of the world and of human behavior that cannot be empirically known and must simply be taken as a given. These givens, however, are not supernatural in the sense that they do not derive from some higher power to govern human action. Instead, they are rooted firmly in human subjectivity itself. Therefore, Kant asserts that there are aspects of the human subject that must always remain unknowable, despite the fact that our reason is in fact a powerful force capable of understanding much of the world in which we live.

The most important of these *a priori* truths for Kant is the moral sense that guides every human being. Within each individual, according to Kant, there is a moral law that acts as a guide for human behavior. Kant writes, “Two things fill the mind with ever new and increasing awe ... the starred heaven above me and the moral law within me.”⁵¹ This quote represents the transcendental, in terms of the moral law that guides our actions, and the empirical, that which we can comprehend through the use of reason. Kant’s assertion of a moral law within us subverts instrumental rationality by arguing that pleasure and pain are not determinants of how an individual will choose to behave. For example, Kant asserts that while it may be pleasing to steal from someone, the individual knows that what she is doing is wrong and furthermore knows that she would not want to live in a

world where everyone could steal from each other at any time. Thus, what is pleasant is not, and cannot be, the determining factor in how we choose to live our lives.

The second modality of reason, according to Kant, is practical reason. This is the second aspect of Kant's philosophy that is significant in Castoriadis' work because it posits the autonomy of the human subject. Pure reason lacks a moral agent, which is why practical reason, which guides us in our actions, must also play a role. Practical reason "facilitates the derivation of universals, which scientific reason employs, but whose existence it cannot explain."⁵² Kant posits that one of the central characteristics of human actors is their ability to make free choices in the decisions they make. Freedom, a central concept for Kant, is a transcendental idea; it is not subject to empirical inquiry and it cannot be deduced from knowledge of the empirical world.⁵³ Kant is not concerned with the nature of freedom, but rather he is concerned with developing imperatives that can guide the human subject in his autonomous actions. As such, practical reason is concerned with imperatives, not a description of the world. It tells the agent what he should do and is concerned with ends and means.⁵⁴ Furthermore, practical reason guides the autonomous agent. This agent acts through his own will alone, not as a conduit for some higher power or concept. Free action requires that the agent will an act and choose it for its own sake as an end in itself.⁵⁵ "For Kant, autonomy consists not only of governing oneself but also of obeying only the law that we ourselves have prescribed."⁵⁶ Thus, while the actor is autonomous, this does not give him *carte blanche* to act in any way he sees fit. Kant argues that each autonomous actor exists within a web of all other autonomous individuals. This assertion of human sociability is the final aspect of Kant's philosophy that is significant for the later work of Castoriadis. For Kant, the human

subject is social, not an atomized individual. His actions must take account of the autonomy of all other actors within his society. As such, a categorical imperative must exist to guide the human agent in his decision making.

The categorical imperative emerges from practical reason. It is universal, stating what all free agents ought to do. This imperative states that when I will an action, and thus choose an end, I will be constrained by reason to act only if I would will that end as a universal law.⁵⁷ We as human beings can only be free if all rational beings are similarly free. This is the only way freedom can be a universal law. As such, we must always respect the autonomy of our fellow beings.⁵⁸ Kant, however, recognizes that not every individual will adhere to the categorical imperative. As such, the categorical imperative does not determine human action. Instead, the categorical imperative serves as a guide for the individual exercising his freedom in an ethical fashion.⁵⁹

The importance of Kant's philosophy is that it illustrates the possibility of asserting the modern imaginary as a challenge to the instituted-modern. Thus, one need not reject the modern in order challenge instituted-modern institutions. Rather, it is possible to develop a critique centered on the emancipatory potential of the modern imaginary and use this critique to construct new social imaginary significations in opposition of the instituted-modern. For Castoriadis, this possibility is crucial for his project of autonomy. Castoriadis is not a Kantian. For example, he argues that the categorical imperative cannot guide us in difficult cases. "The overwhelming fact of human life, however, is that what is Good and what is Evil under given circumstances is often obscure or can be attained only through the sacrifice of other Goods."⁶⁰ According to Castoriadis, any conception of the "categorical imperative" must be a publicly

contestable set of guidelines that can be altered or criticized by the collective at any time. By rooting the categorical imperative in the moral sense of the individual subject, Kant limits the political possibilities for the exercise of practical reason. Thus, while Kant recognizes the importance of creating laws autonomously, Castoriadis does not agree with Kant's emphasis on the individual nature of freedom. However, Kant shares several crucial concerns with Castoriadis, namely that human knowledge is limited, against the instituted-modern signification that human beings are capable of fully understanding the world. Furthermore, there are elements of human subjectivity that cannot be understood. In Kant's philosophy, this is illustrated through *a priori* concepts, while Castoriadis asserts the role of the radical imaginary. Finally, Kant insists upon the role of practical reason and judgment in political decision-making. Castoriadis shares this concern. As such, though these two philosophers assert different theories, Castoriadis and Kant both represent the possibility of challenging the instituted-modern through a return to the emancipatory potential of the modern imaginary.

¹ Castoriadis, "Le Délabrement de l'Occident," La Montée de l'Insignifiance, 64.

² Castoriadis, "The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy," Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy 82.

³ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Entre le vide occidental et le mythe arabe," La Montée de l'Insignifiance (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996) 53.

⁴ Rene Descartes, "Discourse on Method", Discourse on Method and the Meditations, trans. John Veitch (Buffalo: Prometheus Books, 1989) 44-45.

⁵ Marcel Gauchet, The Disenchantment of the World, trans. Oscar Burge (Princeton: Princeton University Press: 1997) 95.

⁶ Best and Kellner, Postmodern Theory, 235.

⁷ Jurgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, Vol 1, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1984) 51.

⁸ Howard, The Marxian Legacy, 124.

⁹ Descartes, "Discourse on Method", 21.

¹⁰ *ibid.* 21.

¹¹ *ibid.* 30.

¹² Tzvetan Todorov, Imperfect Garden (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2002) 179.

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- ¹³ Marshall Berman, All That is Solid Melts into Air (New York: Simon and Schuster, 1982) 348.
- ¹⁴ Max Horkheimer and Theodor Adorno, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, trans. John Cumming (London: Allen Lane, 1972) 37.
- ¹⁵ Max Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason (New York: Seabury Press, 1974) 9.
- ¹⁶ *ibid.* 4.
- ¹⁷ Leo Strauss, Natural Right and History (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1953) 162.
- ¹⁸ Aristotle, Nicomachean Ethics, trans. Martin Oswald (Indianapolis: Bobbs, Merrill, 1962) 43.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.* 68-77.
- ²⁰ The only limit to acquisition, according to Locke, is spoilage. The individual is not permitted to accumulate perishable goods beyond his capacity to use such goods. This problem is solved through the invention of currency, which can be accumulated without limits. Locke, The Second Treatise of Government, 19, 29.
- ²¹ Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason 3.
- ²² *ibid.* 37.
- ²³ *ibid.* 41.
- ²⁴ Best and Kellner, Postmodern Theory, 235.
- ²⁵ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action Vol 1, 61.
- ²⁶ Ales Debeljak, Reluctant Modernity (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1998) 88.
- ²⁷ Judith Shklar, "The Liberalism of Fear," Liberalism and the Moral Life, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge: Harvard UP, 1989) 21.
- ²⁸ *ibid.* 21.
- ²⁹ *ibid.* 31.
- ³⁰ Arendt, The Human Condition, 7.
- ³¹ *ibid.* 45.
- ³² Zygmunt Bauman, Intimations of Postmodernity (London: Routledge, 1992) x. Author's italics.
- ³³ Gauchet, The Disenchantment of the World, 163.
- ³⁴ Castoriadis, "The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy," Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy, 115.
- ³⁵ *ibid.* 115.
- ³⁶ *ibid.* 115.
- ³⁷ Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason 97.
- ³⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Modern Science and Philosophical Interrogation," Crossroads in the Labyrinth, trans. Kate Soper and Martin H. Ryle (Brighton: Harvester Press, 1984) 221.
- ³⁹ *ibid.* 221.
- ⁴⁰ Heller, A Theory of Modernity 76.
- ⁴¹ Horkheimer, Eclipse of Reason 71.
- ⁴² Darin Barney, Prometheus Wired (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2000) 44.
- ⁴³ Todorov, Imperfect Garden, 231.
- ⁴⁴ Arendt, The Human Condition, 156.
- ⁴⁵ Barney, Prometheus Wired, 267.

⁴⁶ Arendt, The Human Condition 155.

⁴⁷ Barney, Prometheus Wired, 45. Barney is mostly correct in this assertion, though he errs when he states that technology “mistakenly” enframes a particular condition of Being. There is no “correct” condition of Being.

⁴⁸ Anthony Giddens, The Consequences of Modernity (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1990) 139.

⁴⁹ Immanuel Kant, “Critique of Pure Reason”, The Philosophy of Kant, ed. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: Modern Library, 1949) 25.

⁵⁰ Roger Scruton, Kant (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2001) 58.

⁵¹ Immanuel Kant, “Critique of Pure Practical Reason,” The Philosophy of Kant, ed. Carl J. Friedrich (New York: Modern Library, 1949) 261.

⁵² Stephen Eric Bronner, Of Critical Theory and its Theorists, 2nd ed (New York: Routledge, 2002)14.

⁵³ Scruton, Kant 75-76.

⁵⁴ *ibid.* 79.

⁵⁵ Scruton, Kant 80.

⁵⁶ Todorov, Imperfect Garden, 47.

⁵⁷ Scruton, Kant 85.

⁵⁸ *ibid.* 86.

⁵⁹ Bronner, Of Critical Theory and its Theorists 15.

⁶⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, “The Ethicists’ New Clothes,” World in Fragments, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997) 114.

Capitalism, Bureaucracy, and Bureaucratic Capitalism

The previous chapter examined the development of the modern imaginary and the subsequent construction of the instituted-modern as a particular constellation of modern imaginary significations. Within modern societies, a tension exists between the emancipatory promise of the modern imaginary and the repressive potential of the instituted-modern. The purpose of this chapter is to examine the consequences of the instauration of the instituted-modern in the forms of capitalism and bureaucracy on the individual and on modern society. As the two institutional pillars of the instituted-modern imaginary, capitalism and bureaucracy embody the dominant instituted-modern significations: individualism, limitlessness, and rationality. The repressive capacity of capitalism and bureaucracy emerges through the relationship between the modern and instituted-modern imaginaries. The instituted-modern imaginary is a particular creation based on the significations of the modern imaginary. Thus, instituted-modern institutions are constructed, and base their legitimacy, on the centrality of the human subject in the material world. Instituted-modern institutions legitimize themselves by referring to human making/doing and human participation in these institutions. However, these institutions exert a repressive capacity by sharply limiting actual participation, and most importantly, by preventing the questioning of the instituted-modern, thus suppressing and covering over the emancipatory promise of the modern imaginary. The consequence of the tension between these two imaginaries is a strict definition of freedom by the instituted-modern imaginary and, as a result, the emergence of a social situation where individuals become complicit in their own alienation through their participation in established institutional forms.

Bureaucracy and capitalism are distinct, in the sense that each has its own set of institutional purposes and goals. However, in advanced modern societies, the capitalist imaginary and the bureaucratic imaginary combine to instaurate a new institutional form: bureaucratic-capitalism. In bureaucratic-capitalist societies, the repressive potential of established institutions is maximized in the sense that the pervasiveness of bureaucratic-capitalist institutions increases. Both capitalism and bureaucracy rely on modern imaginary significations for their legitimacy. As such, the authority of these institutions is based on the fact that they are created through the participation of human subjects; they do not rely on heteronomous authority beyond the society. For example, God did not create the free market, those individuals living in society and freely participating in economic life did. However, free participation in the market is a strictly delimited concept, defined according to the instituted-modern imaginary, rather than the modern imaginary. Freedom is limited to participation in established institutional structures; the possibility of questioning these structures is covered over. Thus, one can buy and sell goods in the economic market, but one cannot question the market system itself. Since bureaucracy and capitalism are the predominant established institutions, they are able to reproduce this definition of freedom through the socialization process. Furthermore, the more the individual “participates” in the existing institutional apparatus, the more she contributes to the reproduction of the imaginary significations that perpetuates her own alienation. As such, instituted-modern institutions cover over the role of the radical imaginary, relying on anomie, disorientation, atomization, and depoliticization to endure as institutions rather than on an explicit justification rooted in the radical imaginary of the collective.

The real problem is the totalitarian possibility present in the combination of an alienated institutional apparatus, repression, and the paradox inherent in modern freedom. Because of this fact, Castoriadis argues that resistance and the instauration of the political is critical to avoid the descent into barbarism. In his earlier work, Castoriadis argues that the division of the world economy into two “hermetically sealed sectors”¹ is an untenable situation that will result in war between these two poles. The result of such a war, according to Castoriadis, will be the dominance of one of these poles and the subsequent concentration of productive forces that will emerge through the unification of capital and the ruling class.² The result of such unification will be the total domination of the world by one pole, the subjugation of the masses, and a regress into barbarism. According to Castoriadis, only the resistance of the masses can prevent this catastrophe from occurring.³ For Castoriadis, the world faced a stark choice: either socialist revolution or the total domination of the world by the bureaucratic-capitalist apparatus. Clearly, the war Castoriadis predicted did not occur; the Soviet Union collapsed under its own weight, making the Soviet bureaucratic class the only class in history to have self-destructed.⁴ As a result, the fragmented bureaucratic-capitalist economic system rose to dominance without an armed conflict with the Soviet Union. While Castoriadis concedes that a fully totalitarian system is unlikely to emerge in the Western capitalist societies, the repressive potential still exists within such societies. As such, it is absolutely essential to assert the power of the radical, instituting imaginary against the established institutional apparatus. In the twenty-first century, the regress into barbarism takes the form of the increasing privatization, depoliticization, and bureaucratization that occurs in instituted-modern societies. Bureaucracies are able to intrude upon and dominate more and more domains

of social living, leading to a situation where individuals are disconnected from one another, forcing them to retreat into the private realm, thus eroding community and the possibility of exercising their autonomy. However, the possibility of resistance to the dilapidation of instituted-modern societies remains despite the increasing bureaucratization of society. The existence of the radical imaginary thwarts any attempt to completely subsume the world to scientific or rational methodology. No attempt at applying the scientific method or rational planning can be completely successful because the unpredictability of the radical imaginary will always exhibit itself. No matter how much institutional repression exists in a given society, a gap always exists between the instituted and the instituting imaginary. It is in this gap that resistance to the instituted imaginary is possible, and therein lays the possibility for the instauration of the political.

Modern Institutions: Capitalism and Bureaucracy

The modern capitalist system is a possessive market society, where labor and land are both owned by individuals and are alienable in the market; where there is no authoritative allocation of resources or work and no authoritative allocation of rewards for any labor performed; and where individuals are rational, utility-maximizers. In any such society, there are those who seek a higher level of utility than they currently possess and there are those who have more energy, skills, or possessions than others.⁵ Liberal theorists such as Jeremy Bentham and James Mill, writing in the historical context of a rapidly developing free-market economic system and developing the earlier pre-capitalist theories of John Locke, argue that individuals will act out of self-interest in their interactions with others and with the market. MacPherson characterizes this form of self-interest as possessive individualism, positing that in such a society the purpose of life is

to accumulate goods, with no upper limit on the amount of resources one can accumulate. Competition in the market is endless and the whole of life is directed towards accumulation.⁶ The individual's ability to accumulate without limits serves as an incentive to participate in the economic market. In addition, it separates the public and private realms into discrete domains, where the private sphere is privileged.

Thomas Hobbes is one of the first theorists to assert the necessity of privileging the private sphere over the public. By creating a distinct division between the public and private spheres, Hobbes is able to ground the legitimacy of the sovereign in the material world, without relying on an external authoritative source. Since Hobbes' primary concern is order and stability against the passionate nature of the individual human subject and because Hobbes' state is founded ultimately upon the consent of the people through the formation of the social contract, he must conceive of a way to guarantee the legitimacy of the sovereign power without reference to an external, supra-human authority. Furthermore, the sovereign power, responsible for dictating the moral code of the society and promulgating the laws necessary for maintaining order and stability, must be able to rule without challenges to its authority.⁷ To accomplish this, Hobbes argues that the public domain and the private sphere must be separated. The public domain must be the sole realm of the sovereign, while the private realm becomes the domain of the individual subject. The task of the sovereign becomes the protection of individuals living and working in the private sphere. Hobbes directs human beings to the private realm of accumulation in order to prevent them from participating in political life. The subjects of the state, according to Hobbes, are to submit themselves completely to the sovereign power of the state in political matters and are forbidden from challenging the authority or

actions of the state. The sovereign should grant his subjects total freedom in the pursuit of “commodious living.”⁸ Thus, so long as a subject does not infringe upon the security of other subjects, she is free to do what she wills in the private sphere and her attention will be sufficiently diverted from the public realm. Essentially, Hobbes closes off the public realm in the name of order and security, which fulfills the purpose of the social contract, thus guaranteeing the legitimacy of the sovereign power. The trade-off is that the individual is “free” to pursue his own interests in the market, accumulating goods without limits in exchange for allowing the sovereign to remove him from political life. In Hobbes’ estimation, all parties to the social contract will be satisfied: the sovereign can insure the stability of the society and the individual in the private sphere can continue to satisfy her desires without living in constant fear of death.

The later liberal theorists rejected Hobbes’ vision of the individual as subject rather than citizen. However, the foundation for the legitimacy of the state remains the same: the consent of those living in a particular society and the separation of the public and private spheres. From Locke onward, liberalism envisions equal citizenship for every individual. This transformation is possible due to a conception of the state where the government serves the private sphere. Locke envisions the government as a type of limited “sheriff”, responsible for adjudicating disputes between citizens and enforcing the law of contracts. Thus, Locke’s state does not require the same level of coercive power as Hobbes’ Leviathan. Furthermore, Locke’s conception of the state allows for democratic participation through the election of representatives. As such, Locke opens a space for participation in the public sphere; the individual is no longer confined to the private realm. However, the construction of a minimal state paradoxically serves to

further degrade the public realm, in the sense that the public domain becomes less necessary as the state itself plays a far more limited role. Where Hobbes closes off the public realm to participation, later liberal theories make participation in the public sphere unnecessary. The private realm of accumulation is the preeminent domain of human life. So long as individuals can essentially obey the rules of competition and commerce, the state need not intervene in society.

The liberal separation of the public and private sphere, with the consequent privileging of the latter over the former, insures that capitalist institutions become alienated from the society in which they exist. What liberal theorists are unable to reconcile, according to MacPherson, is political participation, for which each of them allows a significant space, and private accumulation.⁹ If the public realm becomes less important, so too does political participation, despite the fact that liberal theorists emphasize the role the citizen can play in governance. If the individual is essentially “bought off” by the promise of a possessive individualist society – the ability to accumulate without limits – she has little incentive to participate in the public domain. Furthermore, the capitalist imaginary’s degradation of the public sphere, where political participation is strictly limited to the preservation of established institutions, rather than the putting-into-question of the instituted imaginary, is a further disincentive to participation. As a result, despite the possibility for participatory governance, capitalism succeeds in convincing citizens to limit themselves to the private realm.

The development of bureaucratic institutions, which play an increasingly central role in advanced capitalist societies, exacerbates the decline of the public sphere. The emergence of bureaucratic organizations coincides with the rise of the modern state and

the transition from the pre-modern, face-to-face community to the modern, complex society. Bureaucracies emerge as power shifts from local communities to national states, requiring the development of systems capable of delivering resources to the society in a stable, fixed manner. The dominant goal of any bureaucratic organization, whether it exists in the public realm or in civil society, is the rational planning and distribution of resources or services to whatever field bureaucratic governance is assigned.

The organizational framework of the bureaucracy is determined by the central task of any bureaucracy: to provide services in an organized and rational manner. In order to insure that bureaucracies fulfill this mandate, the modern bureaucracy is organized in a three-fold manner. First, regular activities required for bureaucratic functioning are distributed in a fixed way. Second, authority to give commands is distributed in a stable manner and strictly delimited by rules. Finally, methodical provision is made for the continuous fulfillment of the bureaucracy's duties.¹⁰ These requirements are fulfilled by the bureaucracy's independence from the political process, by the development of standard operating procedures governing the distribution of bureaucratic resources, and finally through the role of the individual official within the bureaucratic organization.

Modern bureaucracies are independent of the political process in order to insure that they continue to rationally distribute the resources or services in the field they are tasked to govern, regardless of power shifts in the political system. The primary purpose of any bureaucracy is to serve a purely administrative, distributive function. When a bureaucracy is created to govern a particular field, that bureaucracy is given full authority to distribute the resources as it sees fit. As such, the bureaucracy will develop its own

standard operating procedures to efficiently and fairly distribute the particular resource or service it has been tasked to distribute. Bureaucratic independence is crucial for the fulfillment of the bureaucratic task, in that it allows the bureaucracy to stand beyond the partisan political process. As a result, the bureaucracy is not beholden to political interests. Government officials are unable to use the bureaucracy to achieve partisan gain or to serve narrow domestic interests. Furthermore, the integrity of the institution is maintained through the hiring process. No political leader can fill the bureaucracy with political allies. Instead, civil service protections are instituted in order to insure that the bureaucratic official adheres to the standard operating procedures and to the central bureaucratic task of rational planning. The bureaucratic official views his task as a duty rather than simply a job and receives specialized training in order to carry out his obligations.¹¹ The bureaucrat is tenured for life, which is intended to insure he will carry out his task in an impersonal manner.¹² The education, hiring practices, and job security provided by the bureaucracy serve to insure that decision-making is carried out rationally, removed from any personal, irrational, or emotional appeals.¹³ The bureaucrat is bound by standard operating procedure in every bureaucratic interaction, but accepts this constraint as necessary for the continued functioning of the system. The efficient distribution of resources is insured by the fact that in almost every situation, it is impossible for a single member of the bureaucracy to impede the functioning of the institution through individual action.¹⁴

The bureaucracy is self-preserving, self-reproductive, and also self-catalytic, in that the higher the degree of bureaucratization already attained, the faster the rate of further bureaucratization.¹⁵ Bureaucratization produces more bureaucratization. The

application of bureaucratic expertise to a particular field is both productive and creative. When a bureaucracy exerts expert control over a particular field, the nature of that field is fundamentally altered. The particular field can no longer be governed without the expertise of the bureaucracy, due to the transformation that occurs when the knowledge of the bureaucracy is applied. The field in question becomes subject to the rational control of the bureaucracy, alienating it from the society itself. For example, a government creates a bureaucracy to govern the distribution of medical care. In constructing a bureaucracy, medical services become subject to the rational planning and distribution practices of bureaucratic managers. These managers decide when, where, and how medical services are doled out to patients. The doctors involved are removed from the equation and the actual needs of the patients are not taken into account. Instead, bureaucratic methods become the sole determining factor in how medical services are distributed. As a result, the field of medical care is fundamentally transformed from one where doctors decide how their patients are treated to one where a bureaucratic manager, following the standard operating procedures of the bureaucracy for which he works, makes decisions about medical care.

Bureaucracies reinforce their dominance of a particular field through their reliance on secrecy and through the creation of specific methods of language and practice. “Every bureaucracy seeks to increase the superiority of the professionally informed by keeping their knowledge and intentions secret. Bureaucratic administration always tends to be an administration of ‘secret sessions’: in so far as it can, it hides its knowledge and action from criticism.”¹⁶ Bureaucratic secrecy is achieved through the creation of new forms of language and practice that serve to disconnect the bureaucracy

from existing forms of public discourse. The bureaucracy relies on a specialized form of *legein* and *teukhein* that appears arcane and incomprehensible to anyone who is not a member of the bureaucratic institution. Essentially, bureaucracies develop their own languages and practices that allow communication within the bureaucracy, but will be incomprehensible to the average individual consumer of bureaucratic services. For example, “bureaucratese” as a separate “language” for communication between bureaucracies and the creation of standard operating procedures to streamline problem solving represent the creative contribution bureaucratic institutions make to the instituted-modern imaginary. Bureaucracies rely on the modern ensidic imaginary, basing these new forms of *legein* and *teukhein* on the already existing language and practice of progress and science. For example, as technology develops, the capacity for greater rational control increases. In the name of progress, a language well understood in modern societies, bureaucracies create new methods for exerting rational control over a particular field. As these new methods for rational control develop, the bureaucracy creates new languages and practices that increase the bureaucracy’s ability to conduct its business in secret, free from any possible criticism by the society in which the bureaucracy operates. This creative capacity of the bureaucracy insures the reproduction of bureaucratic institutions.

By claiming expertise in performing a particular task, bureaucracies are able to justify their participation in the political process and their continued growth and development as institutions. Bureaucracies seek to “stand above the fray” of politics in order to more efficiently fulfill their tasks. “Bureaucracy exists solely through bureaucrats and through their collective intention to constitute a world set apart from

dominated groups, to participate in a socialized power and to define themselves in relation to one another in terms of a hierarchy which guarantees a material status or prestige for each of them.”¹⁷ The ultimate goal of bureaucratic-capitalist institutions is to replace politicians and interest groups with experts who are able to stand above the political process and distribute scarce resources rationally and efficiently in order to solve social problems and serve the public interest.¹⁸ As many politicians who have sought to curtail the power of bureaucracy have found, once instituted a bureaucracy is almost impossible to dismantle. Bureaucratic institutions successfully insulate themselves from politics, due in part to the fact that bureaucracies are integral to the administrative decision-making processes that are central to politics in the modern state. More importantly, the creative role the bureaucracy plays in constructing new forms of language and practice insures that this institution can continue to dominate the political process. Though political leaders still retain the power to make decisions, the bureaucracy shapes the options available to these leaders and influences the deliberative process, thus constraining what political leaders can in fact choose to do.¹⁹ The bureaucratic imaginary, with its emphasis on governance through expertise, tends to curtail policy options, reducing decision-making to what is feasible given the constraints of the established system rather than what is desirable for the society as a whole.²⁰ When bureaucracies play a key role in politics, “governance becomes less a matter of determining the appropriate direction for society than one of adjusting its institutions and policies to the flows of economic and technological development.”²¹ Secrecy, and more importantly, bureaucratic *legein* and *teukhein* further this goal by disconnecting the bureaucracy from the social and political processes that are present in any given society.

The impact of the bureaucracy on society is that the method of organization and the development of bureaucratic language and practice fosters rule by technocratic experts within the bureaucracy itself and, more importantly, in society as a whole. The bureaucratic imaginary reshapes and reconstructs the dominant social imaginary in the sense that the bureaucratic drive for rational planning becomes part of the social imaginary itself. As a result, the autonomy of individuals is further degraded as every relationship between individuals and between the individual and the institution are reduced to utility maximization and the efficient distribution of resources. As a result, the relationship between the bureaucracy and the individual subject exacerbates the atomization prevalent in instituted-modern societies.

The bureaucracy treats every individual with whom it comes into contact as an object, a target for bureaucratic services. No differentiation is made between individuals; the operational methodology of the bureaucracy treats all persons identically. The relationship of every individual with the bureaucracy is identical in the sense that the bureaucracy reduces each person to a mere object, completely subjected to institutional procedures. A person's existence as an autonomous, individual subject is irrelevant and meaningless. For example, at the most fundamental level, the bureaucracy "provides" a person's existence as a living human being. In the eyes of the bureaucratic institution, it is only through one's record with a bureaucracy that one really exists. The bureaucratic apparatus provides a person with a form of identification, such as a driver's license or a social security number. For the bureaucracy, this collection of data is all a person has to prove that he exists. The apocryphal story of a person who is accidentally declared dead by some bureaucratic mishap illustrates the relationship of the bureaucracy to the

individual. It is then never enough for her to present herself to a bureaucrat and say, “I am alive.” Rather, she must undertake an arduous process in order to “prove” to the bureaucracy that she is still a living, breathing individual.

The bureaucracy must treat the individual in this manner in order to justify its institutional legitimacy. By making no distinctions between individuals, the bureaucracy can treat the human subject as a simple a consumer of whatever good or service the bureaucracy is tasked to provide. More importantly, by objectifying every aspect of human life with which it comes into contact, the bureaucratic apparatus fulfills its primary task, namely to rationally and efficiently perform its institutional task. Data can be quantified, categorized, and organized; human beings cannot. As such, the bureaucracy can only function by reducing the irrational, unquantifiable elements of human life to objective data that can be collected and correlated in order to better plan and predict. As a result, anything not reduced to a series of ones and zeros in a computer database is, for all intents and purposes, nonexistent. Anything that lies outside the purview of the bureaucracy’s task is unimportant and meaningless. In this manner, the bureaucratic apparatus simply ignores the creative capacity of the individual and collective subject, thus insuring the bureaucracy’s ubiquity in advanced modern societies, but also reproducing its alienation from the society by positing that whatever is not “rational” or subject to “rational organization” is irrelevant.

Anthony Giddens refers to the relation of individuals with the bureaucracy as a “bargain with modernity.”²² In the absence of face-to-face interaction, modern man must place his faith in people he has never met. Individuals trust and respect the technical knowledge of the bureaucracy because it is pragmatic to do so. The bureaucracy relies on

trust, defined as the “confidence in the reliability of a person or system, regarding a given set of outcomes or events, where that confidence expresses a faith in the probity or love of another, or in the correctness of abstract principles.”²³ This trust is incorporated into routines of daily life and reinforced by the intrinsic circumstances of daily life, but it is based on a tacit acceptance of the bureaucracy in the absence of any alternative.²⁴

The absence of an alternative allows the bureaucracy to concoct an unshakeable justification for its continued existence. The bureaucracy derives its legitimacy from the fact that it is a necessity in a complex society.

The modern individual has no other choice but to rely on bureaucratic institutions to provide the services necessary for the continuous functioning of modern societies. On the one hand, there are benefits to the instauration of bureaucratic institutions. In the pre-modern world, the individual turns to the community to fulfill many of the tasks later taken over by the bureaucracy. If the community is unable to provide the necessary service, the individual has nowhere else to turn. Thus, bureaucracy allows the construction of complex support systems for modern individuals, such as social security, health care, and other “safety net” services that are unavailable in pre-modern societies. Furthermore, bureaucracies distribute these services without regard for an individual’s social position. In the pre-modern world, those of a higher social rank received greater benefits from existing authoritative institutions. In modern bureaucratic societies, all individuals, regardless of social position, are able to take advantage of the services provided by the bureaucracy. If the bureaucracy is able to provide services in an efficient manner, the apparatus fulfills its primary task, thus justifying its own existence. Paradoxically, even if the bureaucracy is unable to efficiently render services, it

legitimizes itself, as it is the only resource for the provision of these services. The bureaucracy exists outside the market system, possessing a monopoly over certain tasks essential to existence in modern society. As the sole distributor of these goods, the bureaucracy insures its existence and legitimacy. The individual is unable to go elsewhere to receive its services and is forced to deal with the bureaucracy, whether it is effective or ineffective. No element of society is able to challenge the fundamental existence of the bureaucratic system. By promulgating the imaginary significations of the instituted-modern, bureaucracies increase alienation and repression by further degrading the possibility of constructing a public sphere where individual citizens can participate in the construction of the institutions that will govern them.

Bureaucratic Capitalism and the Decline of the Public Sphere

The development of the capitalist system coincides with the emergence of the modern state and the bureaucracy. In advanced capitalist societies, a new institutional form is created: the bureaucratic-capitalist institution, encompassing both the capitalist imaginary, in terms of the drive to increase production and reduce the participation of the worker in the production process, and the bureaucratic imaginary, through the implementation of rational planning to the production process. As such, bureaucracies play a critical role in the maintenance of the capitalist system. Modern capitalist economies are not free-markets, but rather are managed through the intervention of bureaucratic institutions at the state level. Given the role bureaucracies play in the economic system, Castoriadis accurately describes advanced modern societies as bureaucratic-capitalist, differentiating between the form this institution takes in the Western world and its form in the Soviet Union and its satellite states.²⁵

In the Soviet Union and its satellite states, a total bureaucratic-capitalist economy existed, wherein all economic decisions are made by the state in a fully planned economy. By contrast, Western economies are fragmented bureaucratic capitalist systems. In such a system, a market continues to exist, but the state intervenes frequently to provide subsidies, tax breaks, and other incentives and assistance to business. Business is thus protected from the chaos of a completely free market, but these firms are still able to profit from participation in the market. Essentially, business in a fragmented bureaucratic system is allowed to profit from goods it produces, but is protected from economic crises by the public at large.²⁶ Furthermore, in a fragmented system, private capitalist firms are managed bureaucratically. The significance of this fact is that the capitalist firm adopts the same goal of the bureaucracy: to institute rational planning. The same bureaucratic drive to rationalize and maximize efficiency governs the capitalist firm, whether the firm is involved in manufacturing or in the service economy.

The transition to bureaucratic-capitalism represents a social-historical transformation, the construction of a completely new institutional apparatus, with processes and goals markedly different from pre-bureaucratic forms of capitalism. As such, the relationship between the institutions and the society in which they exist and between individuals participating in these institutions follows a different set of processes and logics. For example, Castoriadis argues that the Marxist division between bourgeoisie and proletariat no longer applies to bureaucratized capitalism. The distinction between the laborer and the owner of the means of production is no longer valid. The owner of the bureaucratic-capitalist firm plays very little role in the operations of the company; this task is delegated to company executives. Thus, a distinction must

be made between directors – those who give orders – and executants – those who carry out the orders.²⁷ In this manner, Castoriadis accounts for the bureaucratic nature of advanced capitalism. The directors act as bureaucrats, creating standard operating procedures for the rational planning of every element of the work process, whether this process is in manufacturing or in the service economy. The directors in a capitalist firm are managers, not owners. Thus, they gain nothing more than a salary from the production process. However, they carry out the tasks of maximizing efficiency. Every worker is expected to adhere to these processes in order to increase the efficiency of the firm. Furthermore, as capitalism becomes more bureaucratized, the distinction between the director and the executant is blurred. The director-executant division is not a two-level hierarchy, but rather consists of multiple levels, in the sense that, for example, middle management takes orders from higher levels, thus serving in an executant position, but then performs a directorial role as they pass those orders down the hierarchy.²⁸ In this manner, bureaucratic-capitalist firms create a fluid hierarchy, where a single individual may perform multiple roles, depending on the situation. Thus, no single worker can be solely categorized as a “director” or an “executant.”

The construction of this complex hierarchy is intended to serve the bureaucratic-capitalist firm’s institutional goal, which is to develop procedures to maximize the rational planning of the workplace. According to Castoriadis, bureaucratic-capitalism is the first regime to legitimate itself solely through a claim about its own rationality. All other regimes have turned to supra-human sources of authority such as myth or religion for their legitimacy.²⁹ In societies where institutional legitimacy is derived from sources external to the society, questioning the instituted imaginary is almost completely

marginalized. For example, those who questioned religious institutions in the Middle Ages were branded heretics and faced the overwhelming coercive power of the Catholic Church. In such societies, the instituting imaginary is almost completely suppressed, driven underground and out of sight. When it does surge forth, as it inevitably will, the established institutions can more easily crush it by force. With the advent of modernity, the use of force to repress the surging forth of the radical imaginary is no longer possible. The fact that instituted-modern institutions derive their legitimacy from human making/doing creates a multitude of “holes” in the instituted imaginary, each of which represents a path through which individuals living in the particular society can question the legitimacy of established institutions. In order to defend itself and insure its legitimacy, bureaucratic-capitalism strives to eliminate the creative capacity of the individual worker by enmeshing him in a network of rational policies and procedures. In essence, bureaucratic-capitalism seeks to eradicate the radical imaginary, the source of human creativity that is the greatest threat to its institutional legitimacy. If human beings are rational and make decisions in the market based on the calculation of utility, then, since bureaucratic-capitalism is ultimately grounded in human agency, it is possible to apply the same rationality to the production process itself. Thus, production becomes a fully rationalized system based on the calculation of costs and benefits. Labor forms an integral element of the production process and the reproduction of the signification of rationality requires that the same methods used to maximize utility in the production process are applied to the labor force. As a result, capitalism seeks to reduce the worker to a mere automaton.³⁰ The rationalization of production requires the complete

standardization of the individual worker's behavior and labor. In essence, the capitalist imaginary seeks to reduce the worker to another machine in the production process.

The drive to rationalize the production process is not limited to the economic system, but rather it intrudes upon all aspects of human life in instituted-modern societies, particularly the public realm. Bureaucratic-capitalism further reinforces its institutional legitimacy by delegitimizing and degrading the public sphere, where challenges to institutional legitimacy are the most overt and effective as a result of the development of the democratic process. By reproducing the view that human beings are rational utility-maximizers through the socialization of individuals, the bureaucratic-capitalist system constrains the democratic process itself, making it an ineffective, hollow institution that allows for a limited range of decision-making, but cannot seriously endanger the established institutional structure. As a result, though capitalism's legitimacy is derived from human making/doing, by degrading the political the capitalist system successfully closes off a potentially effective avenue of questioning its institutional legitimacy. In this manner, bureaucratic-capitalism becomes an alienated institution and is able to exert a repressive capacity in society. In essence, bureaucratic-capitalism consistently covers over the radical imaginary, preventing meaningful participation in political life, by increasing atomization, uncertainty, and anomie as it drives individuals into the private realm. As such, the consistent degradation of the possibility of constructing a public sphere is the most significant development in advanced modern society, representing the dominance of the instituted-modern imaginary in the form of bureaucratic-capitalism.

The repression that exists in instituted-modern society is not the traditional coercion exercised by a powerful state. Modern repression is unique in that it emerges as a possibility through the instituted-modern concept of freedom. The modern individual believes she is free; however, the choices she makes in her everyday life are limited by the constraints imposed by the instituted-modern institutional structure. “Freedom”, therefore, is narrowly constructed; the actual questioning of institutions in any significant manner is not an option. As a result, the modern individual is both “free”, in the instituted-modern sense, and repressed due to the fact that her freedom cannot be expressed in a society where action is limited and where instability and uncertainty is so prevalent. In order to cope with this instability and uncertainty, the individual flees the remnants of the public realm in favor of the private sphere.

The construction of a public realm where few challenges to the instituted-imaginary can emerge successfully drives the individual into the private sphere. While the individual acts in the private world, instituted-modern institutions are able to expand their domination in a degraded public sphere and increasingly intrude upon the individual’s action within the private realm. The legitimacy of the instituted-modern imaginary depends on individuals remaining within the private sphere. Modern institutions socialize individuals to regard the accumulation of goods in the private realm as the best expression of freedom. Under instituted-modern institutions, the public sphere *must* be devalued if the instituted imaginary is to endure. The emancipatory elements of modernity open a space for the questioning of established institutions, a space that did not exist in pre-modern imaginaries. The instituting, radical imaginary poses a greater threat

to the instituted imaginary in the modern era because there are multiple avenues through which individuals and groups can challenge the instituted imaginary.

The degradation of the public realm and the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary's intrusion into the private realm does not successfully eliminate the role of the radical imaginary in the construction of institutions. Though this is the ultimate goal of bureaucratic-capitalist institutions, these institutions are only capable of covering over the role of the radical imaginary, not eliminating completely. The radical imaginary still poses a threat to the instituted-imaginary. Despite the fact that bureaucratic-capitalist institutions degrade the public realm and attempt to fully rationalize the production process, the radical imaginary cannot be completely eliminated and continues to challenge the instituted-imaginary. Thus, while the public sphere is delegitimized and degraded, challenges to the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary continue to surge forth, particularly in the capitalist work place.

At the core of the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary and its goal to fully rationalize the world lays a serious contradiction that threatens the stability of the system and allows for the surging forth of the radical imaginary to challenge the established institutional apparatus. This contradiction emerges in the space between the bureaucratic-capitalist signification of instrumental rationality and the actual and continuous expression of the radical imaginary both by individuals and by groups. The bureaucratic-capitalist claim concerning human rationality is a narrow view of agency and does not account for the actual range of human behavior that exists in a bureaucratic-capitalist society. Castoriadis argues that, "personne ne fonctionne en essayant constamment de maximiser/minimiser ses 'utilités' et 'desutilités', ses bénéfices et ses coûts, et personne

ne pourrait le faire.”³¹ Choices are made without regard to utility and are instead based on a conglomeration of factors existing in a particular society. Human rationality, even when exercised in a given situation, is, at best, limited, given the fact, for example, that full information is typically not available in the calculation of utility. Furthermore, many choices are non-rational or irrational, based instead on the myriad of other factors that comprise the decision-making process. However, in order for the capitalist system to continue to function, it must promulgate the imaginary signification that human beings act only according to a rational calculation of utility. Since the capitalist system is one of the dominant institutions of the modern era, its imaginary has a strong influence on the socialization and the psychic development of each individual living in that society. As such, the individual is socialized to believe that she should make decisions based on maximizing her utility and will in fact make decisions based on such a calculus. Despite the socialization process, however, human beings will continue to act “irrationally” since the radical imaginary can never be completely eliminated. It is from this space between the socialized and the unsocialized self that the contradiction of the bureaucratic-capitalist system emerges.

According to Castoriadis, the contradiction of capitalism is that while bureaucratic-capitalist institutions seek to eliminate the radical imaginary and the creativity of the worker, they rely on this creativity for the continuous functioning of the system. Bureaucratic-capitalism tries “to convert the producer into a mere cog in their machinery. But in so doing they kill in him what they need most, productivity and creative ability.”³² If capitalist institutions were to succeed in eliminating the radical imaginary, the system would collapse. What is critical to recognize is this: *the*

contradiction at the heart of capitalism will not lead to a crisis or the collapse of the system. Rather, this contradiction sustains the bureaucratic-capitalist system, in the sense that the instituted-imaginary is able to respond and adapt to challenges that emerge from the instituting-radical imaginary. Bureaucratic-capitalism is a dynamic system sustained, in part, by challenges to its instituted-imaginary. Thus, the system is able to pursue its overarching goal of total rational mastery of the society in which it exists, while making particular concessions vis-à-vis any challenges that surge forth from the collective radical imaginary. In essence, bureaucratic-capitalism co-opts worker creativity while it seeks to ignore and eliminate the radical imaginary. If workers have forced a rise in real wages, the lowering of unemployment, or other reforms, the bureaucratic system accepts this and regards it as necessary for its continued existence, not as a mortal threat.³³ It is this relationship which has allowed capitalism to develop from an overtly exploitive system, where the worker was considered disposable to a more diverse system where exploitation still exists, but there are also many worker-owned companies, health care and pension plans, overtime pay, and a plethora of other reforms that the system conceded to worker resistance. Though there have been few significant challenges to the bureaucratic-capitalist system at the level of its instituted-imaginary, this does not imply that worker resistance is meaningless. The dynamism of the bureaucratic-capitalist system and its reliance on the creativity of the worker is what allows the possibility of significant challenges to emerge that question the legitimacy of the instituted-imaginary. Such challenges occur regularly within bureaucratic-capitalist system and *are* significant in the sense that they prevent the system from becoming more exploitive by forcing the

bureaucratic-capitalist institutions to account for the role that worker creativity plays in the maintenance of the system.

One important example of this tension between the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary and the radical, instituting imaginary is the contestability of time in the work place. Castoriadis argues that the very concept of time becomes a critical ground for the struggle between management and labor.³⁴ The bureaucratic-capitalist firm attempts to rationally plan each and every minute of the workday in order to maximize production efficiency, imposing this time clock on every worker. The purpose of the rational time clock is to plan and account for every action the worker is to perform during a particular period of time. Within one hour, for example, the worker is expected to perform a certain number of tasks. In this manner, the bureaucratic-capitalist firm attempts to exert its control over the workplace by seeking to eliminate the initiative and creativity of the worker. Management in any bureaucratic-capitalist firm will seek to regiment the entire work day, parsing the hour into discrete minutes of work, in order to assert maximum control over what the workers are doing while in the workplace. Since the worker is considered another machine in the production process, every minute of the day should be accounted for, and the worker should be working for every minute of the workday.

The contestability of time is one of Castoriadis' most significant contributions to the critique of bureaucratic-capitalism, a critique that was neglected by Karl Marx. Castoriadis argues that not recognizing the contestability of time is one of Marx's greatest mistakes.³⁵ In his labor theory of value, Marx takes for granted the fact that a worker can be paid a particular price for a certain "unit" of labor. Through this line of reasoning, Marx accepts the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary's claim that "labor" can be

reduced to, and compensated according to, an economic calculation.³⁶ However, according to Castoriadis, time is one of the most important points of struggle between management and labor, in the sense that it opens a space for the expression of the radical imaginary as a challenge to the instituted-imaginary. More importantly, it exposes the absurdity of the bureaucratic-capitalist goal of rational mastery. The worker fights against the bureaucratically regimented schedule, asserting his individuality and creativity by refusing to be reduced to another machine in the production process. The absurdity of the bureaucratic-capitalist system is exposed by the fact that if this struggle over the time clock did not occur, and if each worker acted solely according to the bureaucratic schedule, the system would not function. Castoriadis points out the absurdity of management schedules by arguing that “work to the rule” strikes are some of the most effective tactics in the workers’ struggle.³⁷ In such a strike, workers do their jobs exactly according to management dictates, with the result of decreasing production efficiency in the workplace.

The efficacy of “work to the rule” tactics points to the second absurdity in the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary. Castoriadis argues that the workers themselves are more knowledgeable about the capitalist production process than the managerial class could ever be, given the fact that workers are in closer contact to the process itself.³⁸ The directors really know nothing about the production process; the workers themselves are the ones who are the most knowledgeable, and they tend to keep this information from the managerial stratum. Because of this fact, the managerial bureaucracy constrains the workers and stifles the creativity that keeps the system going, rather than actually organizing the production process in any efficient manner.³⁹ For the worker, the idea of

rational planning is ridiculous, as the dictates of the managerial class more often impede the production process rather than streamline it. Castoriadis illustrates this point through an examination of the introduction of new managerial dictates in a machine shop. In order to more “rationally” control the workday in the shop, management promulgated a new set of rules regarding the distribution of tools. Previously, workers had checked out tools in advance and left them at their workstation, which allowed each worker to control the amount of time he would spend on a particular task. The easy availability of his tools allowed him to switch from task to task as he saw fit. The managerial bureaucracy, however, viewed this as unacceptable, since it amounted to a usurpation of time by the workers. As a result, management created a series of rules, demanding that workers only take the tools they needed for the particular task assigned to them by management and return those tools once they were finished. The results of this “rational” planning were long lines at the “tool crib”, increased work for the tool managers, and a general inefficiency in the production process. The workers responded by wholly ignoring and subverting management directives.⁴⁰

The example of the management-worker relationship in the machine shop above reveals the critical role the worker plays in supporting and reproducing the very institutions that oppress him. In the case of the machine shop that Castoriadis describes, the workers take action in order to be allowed to do their jobs better. They only revolt against the absurd mandates passed down from management, and do not explicitly call the bureaucratic-capitalist system into question. Such situations reveal the repressive capacity of the instituted-imaginary and the depth of the system’s influence over the socialization process. Having been born and socialized into a bureaucratic-capitalist

society, those living in such a society will tend to defend capitalism as an institution, regardless of their position in the hierarchy of the division of labor. Those in management positions, either in capitalist firms or within the bureaucracy, will defend the system most vociferously, since they benefit the most from the established institutional framework. The worker, on the other hand, challenges management, but the limited forms of resistance serve to sustain and reproduce the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary. Thus, the worker is caught in a bind: his resistance to the system is necessary in order to prevent the bureaucratic-capitalist firm from reducing him to an automaton, but this same resistance, emerging from his own initiative and creativity, allows the system to continue to function. Thus, despite the fact that capitalism has evolved into a less exploitive system as a direct result of worker resistance, the underlying bureaucratic-capitalist goal of eliminating the radical imaginary has not changed. While capitalist firms are no longer characterized by low wages and poor working conditions, the bureaucratic capitalist project seeks the creation of a totally alienated, planned, hierarchically organized, and continuously expanding society wherein the alienation of the worker is compensated by a rising standard of living, and where all initiative is taken from the workers and given over to the bureaucratic organizers. This project thwarts the revolt of the workers by involving them and harnessing them to the race for rising living standards.⁴¹ As a result, the worker becomes more compliant in the face of the capitalist system's attempt to reduce her to an automaton. This only serves to increase the repression the individual suffers in instituted-modern society.

The Crisis of Meaning in Advanced Modern Societies

The real crisis that faces those living in advanced capitalist societies is a crisis of meaning. Capitalism cannot offer a meaning to the world beyond the drive for the accumulation of more and more goods. In the past, values, whether right or wrong, provided clear and cohesive answers to social problems.⁴² This is not the case in advanced bureaucratic-capitalist societies. Individuals must confront the existing instituted-modern institutional structure on their own, because this institutional structure seeks to break down the community of individuals, both in civil society and in the public sphere. As bureaucratic-capitalist institutions dictate the manner in which society should be organized, the public sphere is further degraded, forcing individuals to retreat into the one area where they continue to maintain a modicum of control, the private sphere. However, as bureaucratic institutions expand, the private sphere itself no longer serves as a refuge for the individual. The public sphere is degraded to such an extent that political decision-making is severely constrained; challenges to the instituted-modern imaginary are marginalized. In civil society and in the private sphere, bureaucratic-capitalism intrudes to the extent that relationships between individuals become instrumentalized, thus exacerbating the problem of atomistic individualism. Castoriadis argues that bureaucratic-capitalist societies are constrained in constructing new imaginary significations, leading to a situation where he characterizes late modern societies as “dilapidated” or “adrift.”⁴³

“Human life is paradoxical at its core, while modern reason, penetrating into new corners of life, strives to eliminate every paradox it encounters. This is a dangerous combination, with repressive potentialities.”⁴⁴ The danger for modern societies is that

rationalization is not confined to capitalist production. The same logic pervades throughout the whole of society, from politics, to culture, to interpersonal relationships. All these facets of life are subjected to a calculus of efficiency and maximization of utility. As a result, capitalist societies become dilapidated; those living in such societies are less able to create new significations to challenge the existing institutional framework or to respond to new challenges faced by the society. Such societies rely on the same scripts of efficiency and rationalization to meet every challenge, regardless of whether such scripts are appropriate. Rationalization and dehumanization go hand in hand; as the first moves forward, so does the second. The rationalization of production requires crushing the needs, habits, and desires of the population insofar as they interfere or oppose the logic of production efficiency.⁴⁵ It is in this “flattening out” of the complexity of human life that bureaucratic-capitalism exerts its most repressive capabilities.

As the rationalization of society progresses, existing institutions are less able to answer the questions posed to them by those living in society. Institutions provide meaning and certainty for the society in which they exist. Instituted-modern institutions are less able to provide the meaning that individuals living in advanced modern societies crave. Because modern imaginary significations are ultimately centered on human beings, there is no way to provide the transcendent certainty that religion supplied in pre-modern times. This, however, does not mean that modern institutions do not claim to provide the same degree of certainty; the problem is that science and rationality routinely fail, creating a constant potential for crisis in modern institutions. One of the paradoxes of modern society is that on the one hand, technology gives human beings tremendous power over their physical environments while on the other hand, there is a tremendous

sense of impotence and chaos pervading modern society.⁴⁶ Because the modern imaginary posits no authority higher than human beings, all sources of legitimacy and all institutions are constructed by the individuals living within a particular society. Human beings, however, are fallible and mortal therefore, the institutional sources of authority that exist in instituted-modern society, such as reason and science, are unstable and unable to definitively answer the questions posed to them by the collective. In the pre-modern world, people were more completely alienated from the social institutions that governed them. These social institutions were completely beyond the control of the collective they governed. However, pre-modern alienation also led to a stronger sense of certainty and stability. Pre-modern institutions were able to create certainty by placing everything in the hands of a supra-human heteronomous authority. The actions of such an authority were mysterious and unknowable, but the accepted assumption was that this authority had some greater plan for all human beings. For example, the death of a child is more easily understood if a parent accepts that it is God's will that the child died. Science, on the other hand, can tell a parent how that child is dying and the physical processes that are occurring within that child's body that will lead to his death. However, science can never answer the more profound, existential question "why?" As a result, the modern individual is provided with a greater understanding of the world in which he exists. However, he sacrifices the certainty of the heteronomous society in order to obtain this knowledge.

Modern social science has promised certitude and self-knowledge as the result of a rationalist quest for meaning. It has not kept this promise. Where there is certitude, there is no self-knowledge, and where there is self-knowledge, there is no certainty.⁴⁷

Individuals in instituted-modern societies face a world where science claims to provide a comprehensive understanding of the world. Instituted-modern institutions claim that this understanding can be translated into meaning for an individual's life. However, the meaning that science provides serves to reproduce the bureaucratic-capitalist drive towards the full rationalization of the society. Thus, meaning in instituted-modern society does not provide self-knowledge, but rather serves the imperatives of the existing instituted imaginary. Instituted-modern science does not seek to increase the individual's ability to know her own self. Rather, the practice of science is governed by bureaucratic organizational methods. A bureaucracy is imposed over scientific research, leading to irrational organization. Also, it demands efficiency and the rapid production of results. Furthermore, a bias is created that favors already existent methods and fields of research that have proven efficient. As a result, potentially fruitful research programs that lie outside this scope will be blocked.⁴⁸ Thus, the individual cannot turn to science for self-knowledge.

Self-knowledge requires self-reflection, both on an individual and on a collective level. Knowing that we create the institutions that govern us leads to the political responsibility that we also commit ourselves to reflecting upon these institutions, in order to insure that they remain connected to the collective and do not become alienated. This is a difficult state to achieve, and one that is not guaranteed by the emancipatory potential of the modern imaginary. When modern institutions are alienated, uncertainty is a more powerful force, in the sense that there is no authority beyond the human being to which the modern individual can turn. As a result, modern individuals make a bargain with the institutions they have created: they sacrifice the emancipatory potential of the modern

imaginary for the certainty of alienation, allowing instituted-modern institutions to depoliticize the public realm while the individual confines herself to the private sphere.

The instituted-modern imaginary responds to the crisis of meaning in advanced capitalist societies by offering the ability for each individual to consume without limits. Today, the only value in bureaucratic-capitalist society is consumption and it is unable to provide any answers to the myriad of social problems affecting Western societies. Consumption is an open-ended process that perpetuates and refutes itself, and one can never have enough to fulfill this value.⁴⁹ The individual in modern Western society is driven to consume, even though he can never accumulate enough to satisfy this desire. Since his life is governed primarily by this drive to consume, other avenues for the construction of meaning are closed off to him. In essence, the individual's life becomes hollow and devoid of any meaning beyond that which he can buy. Consumption in instituted-modern societies is reinforced by the development of a culture industry that convinces the individual to construct his identity according to material accumulation. The culture industry constructs needs in advanced capitalist societies, which can only be fulfilled through consumption.⁵⁰ These needs become an integral element to the instituted-modern imaginary, playing a significant influence in the construction of the individual living in advanced capitalist societies. The culture industry in modern society creates needs for the consumer and these needs are strictly delimited. According to the logic of the instituted-modern imaginary, the consumer must be shown that the deceptions the culture industry offers leads to satisfaction and also that the consumer must accept whatever the industry offers him.⁵¹ Furthermore, the development of the culture industry exacerbates the depoliticization and atomization of the individual. The

construction of needs by the culture industry successfully distracts the individual from any form of meaningful political participation by convincing him that public action consists solely of consuming in the economic market. “Both the department stores of yesteryear and the megastores of today usher individuals into a peculiar version of public space, assuming their willingness to receive an illusion of communal experience while happily steeping themselves in the commercial whirlwind.”⁵² Thus, the culture industry succeeds in redefining public participation, which in fact serves to push the individual further into private life and away from the creative political possibilities that exist within modern society. As a result, the established institutions are able to exert a greater level of repression on those living in these particular societies. The existing institutional apparatus can continue to delegitimize the radical imaginary, without resistance from the collective over which it governs. As a result, the feelings of alienation and powerlessness become more pervasive among those living in instituted-modern societies, and these individuals are less able to create alternative meanings to the dominant value of consumption.

The dominance of consumption and the depoliticization of the public domain also creates a situation where individuals are unable to connect with one another, with the world, or with the institutions that govern them. The fact that modern individuals must place their trust in alienated institutions guarantees unrestrained bureaucratic power over the individual’s life. In the absence of any alternative, individuals must place their trust in the expertise of bureaucrats, who strive to remain disconnected from society in order to insulate themselves questioning and criticism. As a result, the instituted-modern imaginary empties all forms of collective identity of any meaningful content. The

individual, disconnected from other individuals, develops an identity according to the dictates of bureaucratic-capitalist organizational methods. Thus, within the workplace, the individual is placed within a specific hierarchy, which shapes his identity.

Coupled with the deracination that results of the development of modern society, every individual living in instituted-modern societies comes into contact with bureaucratic-capitalist institutions to which they are unable to connect in any meaningful way. The repressive power of the instituted-modern imaginary emerges from this relationship of individual to the institutions. Individuals in instituted-modern societies are socialized into a hierarchical society, which is reinforced on a daily basis in the workplace to the extent that each individual constructs his identity around his position within this hierarchy. The concept of hierarchy is so ingrained in the psyche of modern man that he is unable to represent himself to himself without reference to his position in some hierarchy. This is the only means by which a person can reaffirm that he is someone in a bureaucratic-capitalist society. All other definitions have been emptied of their content.⁵³ For example, national identity once served as a meaningful identity for those living in modern societies. Today, however, national identity is completely reactive, serving the needs of the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary. On the one hand, national identity is tied to the value of consumption. Thus, it is an individual's patriotic duty to consume in the capitalist marketplace. After September 11, 2001, for example, the Bush administration stated, "the primary responsibility of the average citizen for the duration of the emergency remained what it had been in more peaceful times: to be an engine of consumption."⁵⁴ The other purpose of national identity is to defend the instituted-modern imaginary against the attack by other imaginaries. The nationalist

imaginary serves the bureaucratic-capitalist apparatus by mobilizing the society around a particular conception of the national identity. For example, the Cold War introduced a permanent, militarist mobilization into American nationalism, where confrontation with enemies was the driving force behind American national identity. This was tied to the military-industrial complex and academic allies.⁵⁵ Nationalism is not concerned with constructing solidarity or community among the citizenry or providing an identity beyond the individual. Rather, it serves the production process itself and the bureaucratic-capitalist institutional structure. Questioning this vision of the national identity becomes marginalized; “in the domestic arena, it is extremely difficult to suggest that any aspects of the American system are worse than those of other countries, or that America could learn from other countries. To do so would attract charges of lack of national pride and of ‘apologizing for America.’”⁵⁶ In addition, national identity is constructed in Other-directed terms; “nationalism thrives on irrational hatreds and on the portrayal of other nations or ethnoreligious groups as congenitally, irredeemably wicked and hostile.”⁵⁷ Thus, for example, the Muslim world is not modern; they hate our freedom and seek to destroy our way of life. What is being threatened is not a commitment to democratic values or autonomy, but rather the Other represents an attack on late modern bureaucratic-capitalism. This instituted-modern form of nationalism only serves to reproduce the instituted bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary and exacerbates the crisis of meaning that exists in late modern societies.

Ejected from the public sphere and unable to develop forms of identity that are independent of the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary, individuals in the private sphere are socialized to view one another as objects, entwined in the rational calculation of utility.

As a result, the private sphere, once the refuge of the individual from the public domain, becomes subject to the same bureaucratic-capitalist rationality that dominates the individual's life in the work place. Zygmunt Bauman argues that individuals respond to this intrusion by retreating from the private sphere into the physical self, the only apparent refuge remaining. However, the physical self as a refuge from the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary is illusory. The individual, socialized by a dilapidated instituted-modern society, carries the dominant imaginary significations into his relationship with his physical body. Bauman argues, the health craze of the 1980's and 1990's (and which continues to this day) is indicative of the privatization of modern life. The alienation and disorientation that people feel living in modern society leads them to assert control over the only possible avenue, namely the physical body. People are able to fully control what they eat and how often they work out. However, even in this situation, alienation is rampant. The mass media creates an image of the perfect body that is impossible to attain. Despite this, individuals continually strive to have the most toned muscles and the perfect figure.⁵⁸ The significance of this privatization of modern life is that individuals become concerned solely with the self, allowing the public realm to be dominated by the existing bureaucratic institutions. As such, these institutions are able to endure and reproduce themselves without questioning from the collective. Those living in modern society play a significant role in allowing these institutions to persist, as their inactivity only reinforces the modern significations that serve as the foundation for the institutions that govern them.

Bureaucracy and Totalitarianism

While fragmented bureaucratic-capitalist systems seek to completely eliminate the creativity and independent initiative of the worker, the individual's radical imaginary can never be completely subjected to rational planning. The radical imaginary always surges forth, whether in a revolutionary movement at one extreme, or in the individual's refusal to fully comply with regulations in the workplace, particularly when these regulations prevent the individual worker from doing her job. The goal of rational planning is ultimately impossible as the worker always asserts his creativity against the dictates of the managerial bureaucracy. Fragmented bureaucratic-capitalist systems rely on this fact in order to continue functioning. This, however, does not mitigate the problem of dilapidation, where new imaginary significations are not created and individuals living in these societies are less able to pose new challenges to the existing instituted-imaginary. Furthermore, the bureaucratic-capitalist structure continues to attempt the complete rationalization of the society. The bureaucracy will operate *as if* it can subject the whole of human existence to rational planning and control. What emerges from this bureaucratic project and from the instituted-modern imaginary is a totalitarian potential. Totalitarianism, therefore, is not a direct product of the modern imaginary in any deterministic sense, but a particular creative instauration of aspects of the instituted-modern. Totalitarianism does not represent an anti-modern institution or an aberration in the modern project. Rather, it is one possible path that follows the logic of the modern imaginary. The totalitarian project represents the instauration of the most alienating elements of instituted-modernity through the creation of an unrestricted bureaucracy. The totalitarian potential of the bureaucratic imaginary is evident in the former Soviet

Union, where the bureaucracy ascended to the position of the ruling class.⁵⁹ For Castoriadis, the central issue of contemporary capitalism is not who owns the means of production, but rather who controls them.

In fragmented bureaucratic capitalist systems, the economic market is only partially managed by the bureaucratic apparatus. As such, the bureaucracy is unable to achieve its task of fully organizing its world under the aegis of rational planning. Since the capitalist relies on the radical imaginary for its continued existence, the bureaucracy tolerates expressions of creativity, so long as they are restricted to the reproduction of the existing institutions. In total bureaucratic systems, the means of production are fully controlled by the bureaucracy. There is no economic market to maintain, as production is completely managed by the bureaucratic apparatus. As a result, the bureaucracy is able to more fully extend its reach into society in general, creating a situation where every aspect of human life falls under the purview of bureaucratic planning. Worker disconnect is suppressed, either through direct repression or the destruction of independent worker organizations such as unions. In essence, totalitarianism represents an attempt by a government to completely eradicate the radical imaginary.

Recognizing the role of the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary is Castoriadis' most important contribution to the theory of totalitarianism. Essentially, Castoriadis agrees with the theories of totalitarianism presented by Raymond Aron, Hannah Arendt, and Claude Lefort.⁶⁰ For example, Castoriadis argues that one important contribution that Hannah Arendt makes to the theory of totalitarianism is her recognition that in addition to creating meaning, human beings can also create the meaningless, represented by the totalitarian regimes in Hitler's Germany and the Soviet Union under Stalin.⁶¹ However,

he argues that these theorists, by failing to recognize the role the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary, provide an incomplete picture of the totalitarian phenomenon. Thus, Castoriadis' conception of the totalitarian project fills in an important lacuna present in the work of Aron, Arendt, and Lefort. By examining bureaucratization as a factor, one can conclude that totalitarianism does not represent an anti-modern project. Rather, its roots lie within the modern imaginary itself, specifically the instituted-modern imaginary's drive to expand rational mastery of the world without limitation. This drive for complete rational mastery exists within fragmented bureaucratic-capitalist societies, but achieves its greatest expression in totalitarian regimes.

Totalitarianism does not "emerge" or "evolve" from a set of pre-existing social and political conditions, but rather represents the intentional and creative instauration of a new political form. The revolutionary party seeks to completely transform the society according to its ideological goals.⁶² Lefort further argues that one intention of the revolutionary party is to "solve" the "problem" of democracy. Unlike non-democratic forms of government, where the king or leader embodies the power of the body politic, in a democratic system, the locus of power is empty.⁶³ Democracy, with no permanent leader, also has no figure to embody power. Power in a democracy exists in an empty void. It is exercised, not held by any single individual.⁶⁴ As such, in democratic societies, the citizenry must accept a certain level of uncertainty about the future; they cannot rely on the dictates of a person in power to determine the future for them. They are ultimately responsible for the course the society takes. Totalitarianism as a political creation seeks to eliminate the uncertainty present in a democracy by imposing a unified conception of identity, the purpose of the state, and the proper functions of civil society.

In essence, it seeks to create an organic totality in society where previously, under a democracy, there had been none.⁶⁵

Lefort is correct in his conclusion that the unpredictability of democratic power is one of the sources of totalitarianism, in the sense that human beings crave certainty and predictability in their lives, in response to the dread they face vis-à-vis the radical imaginary. However, the uncertainty that exists in instituted-modern society is less the product of democratic institutions and more a result of the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary and its reliance on the persistence of uncertainty to insure its domination. Uncertainty is more than a political phenomenon; it is economic, social, cultural, and, at the most profound level, an uncertainty about the markers of meaning and certainty in the society. This pervasive uncertainty, created by the bureaucratic-capitalist institutional structure, is what totalitarian movements are able to exploit in their rise to power. Totalitarianism is the end extreme of the project of pseudo-rational domination that is one of the central significations of bureaucracy and capitalism.⁶⁶ Totalitarian movements claim to provide answers for all the problems that emerge in instituted-modern societies, providing a plan for the resolution of all uncertainties in a particular society.

Totalitarian states construct a political domain that absorbs all other non-political spheres of human life. Lefort argues that one of the characteristics of liberal regimes is the existence of a rule of law that dictates what one cannot do, rather than what one can do. As such, a great portion of human action is ignored by the law. This is not the case in totalitarian societies; all aspects of life are susceptible to the “rule of law.”⁶⁷ In addition to this expansive concept of “law”, Aron argues that totalitarian societies can be further characterized by the arbitrary nature of the “rule of law.” The totalitarian regime

institutes laws that allow the state to perform acts that would be considered criminal in non-totalitarian regimes.⁶⁸ In essence, “law” only exists to dominate the individual, destroy any possibility of political participation in the public domain, and expand the reach of the state into the private sphere. Arendt argues that totalitarian government destroys the public sphere by isolated human beings from one another and furthermore “is new in that it is not content with this isolation and destroys private life as well.”⁶⁹ The state’s ability to extend into the private domain is strengthened by the bureaucracy’s drive to dominate and subject the whole of society to rational planning. As a result, in totalitarian societies, there is no private domain; the individual is unable to escape the reach of the state. This serves to further atomize the society, making it impossible for individuals to resist the totalitarian state through any form of collective action. The individual has a one-sided relationship with the state itself, in the sense that the state dictates and determines how each individual will live his life; individuals have no significant relationship with other individuals.

While totalitarian movements claim the ability to provide certainty to individual, once in power, the totalitarian imaginary relies on fear and uncertainty to remain in power. Arendt, for example, argues that totalitarian governments are fluid and dynamic, where the locus of power shifts from department to department and where no department, once deprived of its power, is dissolved.⁷⁰ The purpose of this fluidity is to exacerbate uncertainty in the society. No individual is able to predict the actions of his government, nor is he able to determine which department in the government is an ascendant power. As a result, the possibility of questioning the government is eliminated; no one can determine what part of the totalitarian institutional apparatus should be criticized.

Totalitarian states also insure uncertainty and fear through the use of terror against the population. Terrorism succeeds in completely atomizing the society; no individual can trust another, because any person might be an agent of the state.⁷¹ The use of terror by the totalitarian regime appears random and arbitrary, directed against “enemies of the state”, real, imagined, or manufactured. As such, an individual living under such a regime can never be certain whether the regime will consider her a criminal at some future time. The shifting repertoire of “crimes” that can be committed against the state forces the individual to take no action of any kind, to the extent that any independent activity by individual could easily be classified as criminal. Thus, a paralysis endures in totalitarian societies, where the individual must carefully insure that he does not commit some offense against the system, even if he is uncertain about what type of actions would constitute such an offense. The arbitrary use of terror by the totalitarian regime “negates human freedom more efficiently than any tyranny ever could. One had at least to be an enemy of tyranny in order to be punished by it.”⁷² This is not true under totalitarianism; any act can be considered a crime against the state and any individual, regardless of what he has or has not done, can be classified an enemy.

The novelty of the totalitarian imaginary is that it actively seeks to completely eradicate the radical imaginary. This differs from the fragmented bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary in the sense in a fragmented capitalist society the radical imaginary is allowed to emerge in a limited capacity, so long as it serves to reproduce bureaucratic-capitalist institutions. The totalitarian imaginary, by contrast, engages in a political program to eliminate all vestiges of human creativity. As such, totalitarian regimes represent the most complete fulfillment of the bureaucratic-capitalist drive towards total rational

mastery over the world. “Men insofar as they are more than animal reaction and fulfillment of function are entirely superfluous to totalitarian regimes.”⁷³ The totalitarian system actively seeks to reduce the individual to an automaton, not only in the workplace, as in fragmented bureaucratic-systems, but in society as a whole. The expansive goal of the totalitarian system in this regard marks it as a unique social-historical creation. The ideological agenda of the totalitarian party can only be achieved in a technologically advanced, modern society. As such, totalitarianism represents a “perfect” bureaucratic-capitalist system, where the spontaneous creativity of the individual can be completely destroyed, insuring that those living under totalitarian regimes will serve the state without challenge. However, totalitarian regimes are ultimately incapable of achieving this goal over a sustained period of time.

Like Hannah Arendt, who argues for a very limited definition of totalitarianism, applying it only to the Soviet Union under Stalin and Hitler’s Germany, Castoriadis considers the death of Stalin as the end of the Soviet version of “pure” totalitarianism. The Third Reich could not survive World War II and the Soviet totalitarian system could not survive beyond the death of Stalin. However, after Stalin’s death, a new political form was created that represented the continuation of an institutional apparatus based on the total bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary. When the system began to stagnate after the death of Stalin, the goals of the totalitarian apparatus changed. The regime, for example, no longer sought to pursue delirious aims, abandoned the total disregard for efficiency in the production process, and the party ideology decomposed into incoherence.⁷⁴ Furthermore, instead of seeking to actually transform the populace, the later Soviet system only concerned itself with apparent behavior; so long as one did not overtly

challenge the system, one was safe.⁷⁵ The late Soviet system is described by Castoriadis as a “stratocracy.” Essentially, two economic systems exist within the society. The first is the military economy, which receives the majority of resources from the state, and, according to Castoriadis, was competitive with Western military production.⁷⁶ The second system, the civilian economy, is neglected and allowed to stagnate and fall into crisis. Few resources are devoted to producing consumer goods, and whatever is produced is poor quality.⁷⁷ This sector of the economy is concerned solely with feeding a workforce that can service the primary tier of the economy. So long as the workers keep producing in the military factories, this “soft” totalitarian system can continue to function. In essence, the late Soviet model “solved” the problem of human creativity by simply disregarding the existence of its population. However, the construction of this two-tiered economy guaranteed the eventual collapse of the Soviet system. Once the active eradication of the radical imaginary was abandoned as a political goal, a space opened within the Soviet economy for worker resistance. Through malingering on the job, for example, the Soviet worker was more able to resist the dictates of the managerial bureaucracy, eventually leading to situation where the Soviet system became unreformable, leading the Soviet Union to eventually collapse under its own weight.

In the end totalitarian systems are unsustainable. Despite its best efforts, the bureaucracy can never completely eliminate the radical imaginary from the individual or from the collective. A totalitarian dictatorship can stifle and suppress dissent, but it can never stop workers from realizing the misery of their own situation and cannot prevent sabotage in the form of refusal to cooperate in the system of production on the part of the workers.⁷⁸ The totalitarian system seeks to completely reshape human nature and

transform the world according to its ideology. When it inevitably fails to accomplish this task, the regime lashes out against the population, destroying whatever it cannot transform. In Castoriadian terms, violence is a political tool employed by the totalitarian regime in its attempt to fully socialize and eradicate the radical imaginary. The radical imaginary exists as a persistent challenge to any institutional apparatus. The fragmented bureaucratic-capitalist system can absorb, to some extent, the product of spontaneous creativity and adapt to the demands of the population. The total bureaucratic-capitalist system cannot do this, because its ideology demands complete rationalization and a total mastery of the world. As such, it must eradicate the radical imaginary in order to exist. Since this is impossible, the regime turns to violence, destroying everything that cannot be controlled. This is where the social imperative lies for the society to resist any move towards totalitarianism. If a society does not resist this move, it will descend into barbarism.

While the situation in instituted-modern societies appears hopeless, Castoriadis argues that resistance to the established capitalist system still exists and is necessary. The dominance of consumption as a value, and the co-optation of the worker, whether industrial or service sector, does not delegitimize the importance of resistance to the fundamental drive of the capitalist system, nor does it delegitimize resistance in society in general. Castoriadis argues, “le capitalisme a pu fonctionner non pas *malgré* les luttes ouvrières, mais *grâce* **B**celles-ci. Mais, on ne peut pas s’arr**Le B**cette constatation; sans ces luttes, nous ne vivrions pas dans la société ou nous vivons, mais dans une société fondée sur le travail d’esclaves industriels.”⁷⁹ Without resistance, the situation can deteriorate; it is not a matter of allowing the status quo to continue, but rather resisting

the capitalist drive to eliminate creativity and the radical imaginary. If no one were to resist the established institutional order, the given society would degenerate into a more repressive system than currently exists. In Castoriadis' estimation, it is the struggle against the instituted imaginary itself that matters first and foremost, though it is a difficult task to convince the average individual of the importance of this struggle. Because human beings are socialized by the institutions of the society in which they are born, they believe that these institutions are good for themselves and for those around them. At worst, they may view these institutions as oppressive, but are resigned to the fact that there is little they can do to change them. The question, therefore, is not whether to resist and question existing institutions. The questioning of institutions is a product of the fact that every individual retains an unsocialized and unsocializable radical imaginary. As such, people will always resist existing institutions to some degree, though this type of resistance may be individualized and politically ineffective. The real question is how this resistance should be expressed collectively and what goal the society should attempt to achieve.

¹ Castoriadis refers here to the Cold War division between the United States and the Soviet Union. Castoriadis, "Socialism or Barbarism," Political and Social Writings, Vol 1, 86.

² *ibid.* 86.

³ *ibid.* 87.

⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Des guerres en Europe," Une Société a la dérive, eds. Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas, et Pascal Vernay (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005) 125.

⁵ C.B. MacPherson, The Political Theory of Possessive Individualism (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1962) 51-54.

⁶ C.B MacPherson, "Democratic Theory: Ontology and Technology," Democratic Theory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) 28.

⁷ Thomas Hobbes, Leviathan, (London: Penguin Books, 1985) 232.

⁸ *ibid.* 294-300.

⁹ C.B MacPherson, "A Political Theory of Property," Democratic Theory (Oxford: Clarendon Press, 1973) 120.

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- ¹⁰ Max Weber, "Bureaucracy," From Max Weber, eds. and trans. H.H. Gerth and C. Wright Mills (New York: Oxford University Press, 1958) 196.
- ¹¹ *ibid.* 198-199.
- ¹² *ibid.* 200.
- ¹³ *ibid.* 216.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.* 228.
- ¹⁵ Castoriadis, "General Introduction," Political and Social Writings, Vol 1, 23.
- ¹⁶ Weber, "Bureaucracy" From Max Weber, 233.
- ¹⁷ Claude Lefort, "What is Bureaucracy?" The Political Forms of Modern Society, ed. John B. Thompson (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1986) 113.
- ¹⁸ Frank Fischer, Technocracy and the Politics of Expertise (Newbury Park, CA: Sage, 1990) 24.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.* 20.
- ²⁰ *ibid.* 15.
- ²¹ *ibid.* 16.
- ²² Giddens, Consequences of Modernity, 90.
- ²³ *ibid.* 34.
- ²⁴ *ibid.* 90.
- ²⁵ Castoriadis, "Transition," Domaines de l'Homme, 23.
- ²⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Modern Capitalism and Revolution," Political and Social Writings, Vol 2, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 270.
- ²⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Recommencing the Revolution," Political and Social Writings, vol 3, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 31-32.
- ²⁸ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Hierarchy of Wages and Income," Political and Social Writings, vol 3, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 211.
- ²⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, "La 'rationalité' du capitalisme," Figures du Pensable (Paris: Seuil, 1997) 66.
- ³⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Social Regime in Russia," Castoriadis Reader, ed. David Ames Curtis (Oxford: Blackwell, 1997) 223.
- ³¹ "No one functions by constantly attempting to maximize/minimize his utilities and disutilities, his benefits and costs, and no one could act this way." Castoriadis, "La 'rationalité' du capitalisme," Figures du Pensable 78. Translation mine.
- ³² Castoriadis, "Socialism or Barbarism," Political and Social Writings, Vol 1, 101.
- ³³ Castoriadis, "General Introduction," Political and Social Writings, Vol 1, 23.
- ³⁴ Cornelius Castoriadis, "On the Content of Socialism III" Political and Social Writings, Vol 2, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 159-161.
- ³⁵ Castoriadis, "Pourquoi je ne suis plus marxiste," Une Société à la dérive, 43.
- ³⁶ *ibid.* 43.
- ³⁷ Cornelius Castoriadis, "S'il est possible de créer une nouvelle forme de société," Une Société à la Dérive, eds. Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas, et Pascal Vernay (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005) 138

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- ³⁸ Castoriadis, "Hierarchy of Wages and Income," Political and Social Writings, vol 3, 210.
- ³⁹ Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Proletarian Revolution Against the Bureaucracy," Political and Social Writings, Vol 2, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 63.
- ⁴⁰ Castoriadis, "On the Content of Socialism III," Political and Social Writings, Vol 2, 184-188.
- ⁴¹ Castoriadis, "Modern Capitalism and Revolution," Political and Social Writings, Vol 2, 229.
- ⁴² Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Crisis of Modern Society," Political and Social Writings, vol 3, ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993) 107.
- ⁴³ Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Dilapidation of the West," Thesis Eleven 41 (1995).
- ⁴⁴ William Connolly, Political Theory and Modernity (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1988) 139.
- ⁴⁵ Castoriadis, "On the Content of Socialism III," Political and Social Writings, vol 2, 158.
- ⁴⁶ Castoriadis, "The Crisis of Modern Society," Political and Social Writings, vol 3, 106.
- ⁴⁷ Agnes Heller, Can Modernity Survive? (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1990) 40.
- ⁴⁸ Castoriadis, "Modern Science and Philosophical Interrogation," Crossroads in the Labyrinth 222.
- ⁴⁹ Castoriadis, "The Crisis of Modern Society," Political and Social Writings, vol 3, 109.
- ⁵⁰ Marcuse, One-Dimensional Man, 5.
- ⁵¹ Horkheimer and Adorno, The Dialectic of Enlightenment, 142.
- ⁵² Delbejak, Reluctant Modernity, 97.
- ⁵³ Castoriadis, "Hierarchy of Wages and Income," Political and Social Writings, vol 3, 214.
- ⁵⁴ Andrew J Bacevich, American Empire (Cambridge, MA: Harvard UP, 2002) 237. Quoted in Anatol Lieven, America Right or Wrong (Oxford: Oxford UP 2004) 24
- ⁵⁵ *ibid.* 157.
- ⁵⁶ *ibid.* v.
- ⁵⁷ *ibid.* 30.
- ⁵⁸ Zygmunt Bauman, Liquid Modernity (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2000) 86.
- ⁵⁹ Castoriadis, "On the Regime and against the Defense of the USSR," Political and Social Writings, Vol 1, 40.
- ⁶⁰ See also Abbot Gleason, Totalitarianism (New York: Oxford University Press, 1995) and Carl J. Friedrich, Michael Curtis, and Benjamin Barber, Totalitarianism in Perspective (New York: Praeger, 1969).
- ⁶¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, "The Destinies of Totalitarianism," Salmagundi 60 (Spring/Summer 1983) 108.
- ⁶² Raymond Aron, Democracy and Totalitarianism, trans. Valence Ionescu (New York: Frederick A. Praeger, 1968) 195.
- ⁶³ Claude Lefort, "The Question of Democracy," Democracy and Political Theory, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988) 17.

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- ⁶⁴ *ibid.* 18.
- ⁶⁵ *ibid.* 20.
- ⁶⁶ Castoriadis, “La Montée de l’Insignifiance,” La Montée de l’Insignifiance, 90.
- ⁶⁷ Claude Lefort, La Complication (Paris: Fayard, 1999) 221.
- ⁶⁸ Aron, Democracy and Totalitarianism, 186.
- ⁶⁹ Hannah Arendt, The Origins of Totalitarianism (San Diego: Harcourt Brace and Co., 1975) 475.
- ⁷⁰ *ibid.* 400.
- ⁷¹ *ibid.* 431.
- ⁷² *ibid.* 433.
- ⁷³ *ibid.* 457.
- ⁷⁴ Castoriadis, “The Destinies of Totalitarianism,” 110.
- ⁷⁵ *ibid.* 111.
- ⁷⁶ Castoriadis, Devant la guerre, 23.
- ⁷⁷ *ibid.* 25.
- ⁷⁸ Castoriadis, “The Proletarian Revolution Against the Bureaucracy”, Political and Social Writings, vol 2, 76.
- ⁷⁹ “Capitalism can function not despite the workers’ struggles but thanks to them. But, one cannot stop with this observation: without these struggles, we would not live in the society in which we live, but in a society founded on the toil of industrial slaves.” Cornelius Castoriadis, “Une Interrogation Sans Fin,” Domaines de l’Homme (Paris: Seuil, 1977) 248. Translation mine.

Democracy on the Edge of the Abyss

Democratic theory must develop some limitation to democratic participation in order to insure that the democratic system itself is not destroyed by the emerging of political ideas hostile to the system itself. However, the imposition of absolute restraints on participation, while it may protect the individual, does not adequately address the dangers of the democratic system. Anti-democratic doctrines must be engaged in some manner, if only to refute and discredit them. Theories of democratic discourse, which emphasize more robust participation, are more successful in constructing the limitations necessary to prevent the self-destruction of democratic systems.

Jeffrey Isaac argues that one of the central problems of democratic theory today is that it has too narrow a vision, and is unable to conceive of anything beyond a strict model of liberal, representative democracy.¹ Democratic theory today posits a model of democracy that ignores civil society, promotes representative forms of government, provides for election of officials through universal suffrage, possesses a liberal conception of rights, and creates a competitive system wherein officials are forced to appeal to the public.² The emphasis that democratic theory places on individual rights and the procedural elements of democracy neglects the role that the collective of citizens, through the radical imaginary, plays in the construction of meaning in any particular society. Every society must construct an institutional framework through which it comes to understand the world around it and the society's place in that world. Furthermore, each existing institution is constantly challenged by the collective and individual radical imaginary. Those living in a particular society challenge the existing institutional

structure, demanding that the instituted imaginary provide meaning for new social-historical circumstances. The relationship of the individual to the radical imaginary is a confrontation with an inexplicable and irreducible Abyss, leading the individual to feel a sense of dread when faced with the potentially dark desires that emerge from the radical imaginary. As a result, individuals seek to create meaning for the world around them that will provide a stable anchor for themselves and for the societies in which they live. Institutions must be able to address and provide meaning for new social-historical circumstances in order to continue to provide this stable anchor for the individual and for groups in the society. When existing institutions cannot provide this meaning, the individuals in a particular society seek to construct new institutions that are better able to give meaning to the world.

Modern democratic institutions are particularly susceptible to challenges that emerge from the collective radical imaginary. The possibility of broad political participation opens the door for individuals and groups to pose a myriad of challenges to the existing institutional structure. It is this possibility for political participation that makes democracy a potentially dangerous system of government, in the sense that without some limit on the content and form of public discourse, the democratic system itself can be threatened by new significations that emerge from the collective radical imaginary. Claude Lefort recognizes this danger in his discussion of the emergence of totalitarianism, arguing that in democratic systems, the locus of power is empty.³ The potential for totalitarianism emerges when groups seek to definitively and permanently occupy the locus of power, turning the state towards the fulfillment of the group's particular ideology. Short of the emergence of a fully totalitarian system, the empty locus

of power always remains the focal point for competition between groups in the democratic society. When a democratic society exists without limits to participation, the potential arises for the emergence of ideologies and ideas that are inimical to the democratic system itself. These ideologies seek to occupy the empty locus of power and turn the power of the state towards the fulfillment of ideological goals, even at the expense of the democratic system itself. Given the fact that the radical imaginary plays a constitutive role in the development of these ideologies, the possibility arises for the occupation of the empty locus of democratic power by doctrines that are destructive to other groups in the society. Democracy without limits allows for the most destructive human impulses and instincts to play out in the political domain. As a result, in a democratic system without limits, democratic rights and values can easily be eroded or destroyed. Carl Schmitt's vision of agonistic competition between political doctrines defined in terms of friend and enemy illustrates the destructive possibilities of democratic participation. Schmitt argues that politics and war are essentially synonymous, in the sense that all political doctrines must be defined in terms of friend and enemy and the conflict between these two factions. Schmitt argues that "the friend, enemy, and combat concepts receive their real meaning precisely because they refer to the real possibility of physical killing."⁴ While Schmitt argues that the "the enemy in the political sense need not be hated personally"⁵, he conceives of no limitation to the definition of political doctrines, arguing that such doctrines can draw their energy from various human endeavors, including religion, economics, and morality.⁶ The individual adherent to a political doctrine must be willing to die, and to kill, in the furtherance of his beliefs. Furthermore, the friend/enemy distinction is closely linked to the power of the state. The

sovereign power of the state is exercised by defining who is a friend of the state and who constitutes an enemy, and then demanding that the citizen be willing to kill and die for this “us” versus “them” dichotomy.⁷ Schmitt’s conception of the political represents the destructive possibilities of democratic participation. In essence, Schmitt advocates the unrestrained and unlimited intrusion of the Abyss of the radical imaginary into the political sphere, with no realm of mediation or limitation. The worst human desires and instincts can become political, occupy the empty locus of power, and then turn the power of the state against its enemies, whether these enemies are present in the international sphere or internally. As a result, a particular instituted imaginary can be imposed, in the name of democracy, through brute force or some other method of coercion. As such, the Schmittian conception of political conflict is precisely what must be avoided within a democratic system. Democratic theory must posit some form of limits in order to insure that political conflict does not lead to the degeneration or destruction of the democratic system.

The crisis of meaning in instituted-modern societies and the dilapidation of the Western imaginary exacerbate the danger of political conflict leading to attacks on the democratic process itself. Instituted-modern institutions attribute their legitimacy to human subjectivity and autonomy. However, the public sphere in instituted-modern societies is degraded to the extent that individual turn to the private sphere for meaning and for the construction of their personal and collective identities. In ancient Greece, according to Hannah Arendt, the household was the realm of necessity and servility. Slaves and women were confined to the private sphere, unable to participate in public life. The point for the Greeks was to escape the *oikos* in order to participate in the public

realm, because only through public life could a man achieve excellence in the eyes of his peers. The public realm was where an individual's deeds could be observed and judged by others. Other individuals were necessary for the Greek concept of excellence; only through one's public deeds throughout one's life could one be considered a good citizen and an excellent man.⁸ However, with the advent of industrial capitalism, the average person was forced to concern himself primarily with provided the bare necessities of life for himself and his dependents.⁹ As such, what Arendt describes as the realm of work took on a new importance, as the individual had to attempt to find some measure of certainty, specifically, insuring that he and his family could eat and have a roof over their heads in an increasingly uncertain economic, social, and political world.

Hannah Arendt argues that freedom, the citizens' ability to publicly participate in politics, and necessity, the dictates of bare life, are incompatible. The modern era introduces the social question, the question of poverty, want, and deprivation, into the public sphere to the detriment of the political domain. Arendt argues that beginning with the French Revolution, revolutionaries have sought to solve the social question. As a result, freedom and political change, the goal of revolution, becomes subordinate to the material happiness of the people.¹⁰ According to Arendt, the introduction of the social question to the public domain is the doom of political revolution¹¹ and poisonous to the public sphere. Arendt argues that the social question, the question of providing the necessities of life, has no place in the public realm. These concerns should be restricted to private life, lest they degrade and corrupt the public sphere. The social question concerns immutable and incontestable necessities that only serve to degrade and eliminate political discourse, making it impossible for a society to decide on political

questions. When society is too concerned with solely addressing private concerns, democratic decision-making is impossible. One cannot make compromises regarding the social question. As such, it has no place in political decision-making, and must remain restricted to the private realm.

By distinguishing between political issues and the social question, Arendt creates a possibility for instaurating the political. She is correct in arguing that there are some issues that should remain restricted to the private sphere. Castoriadis agrees with this position, stating, “‘Everything is political’ either means nothing, or it means: everything ought to be political, ought to flow from an explicit decision of the sovereign.”¹² The latter position eliminates the possibility of democratic decision-making; in such a situation, all aspects of life fall under the administrative power of politics. However, Arendt does not conceive of a method through which a society can choose which issues should be raised in the public sphere. Her demarcation of the political and the social is too rigid, in the sense that many of the concerns of the so-called “social question” are central issues of late modern societies. Castoriadis argues that Arendt fails to recognize the social-historical context of the French Revolution, wherein the social question was inextricably intertwined with the political order.¹³ The *ancien regime* in France was a total social structure; as such, it was not possible for the revolutionaries to impose a political order over an existing inegalitarian social structure. According to Castoriadis, the social question in such a social-historical context is always a political one; one must attack the social order to rebuild the political domain.¹⁴ Furthermore, the problem Arendt faces is that she does not take into account the social-historical context of late modernity, where work and labor have already become political questions. A society cannot simply

banish work and labor issues to the private sphere in order to construct a political domain that emphasizes action. Therefore, what Arendt's political theory lacks is a process through which questions of the public versus the private can be contested politically and democratically.

When private concerns and personal, non-political identities dominate in a democratic society, the possible emergence of threats to the democratic regime itself increases. Seeking to make sense of the world around them, citizens carry these private issues into a degraded public sphere, demanding that the government and existing institutions respond to these personal interests, which have very little relevance to political matters. As a result, the personal becomes political. In and of itself, this does not necessarily represent a threat to democratic regimes, though it does degrade public discourse and creates a situation where the public sphere becomes a domain of competing, incommensurable claims. When no limits are placed on these competing claims, the democratic system itself can be threatened; nothing prevents the expression of the basest instincts that might emerge from the individual or collective radical imaginary, even those that actively seek to destroy democratic institutions. The rise of Nazism and the popular support it found in a Germany reeling from effects of the World War I is example of how democratic systems can be destroyed through the participation of the citizenry.

The tendency for the emergence of destructive political imaginaries leads liberals to emphasize the protection of individual rights, both in terms of preventing abuses by the state and also to prevent other individuals from infringing the rights of each human subject. However, liberals sacrifice expansive and robust political participation in order

to achieve this guarantee of individual rights. In order to guard against the intrusion of repressive and destructive social imaginary significations into the public realm, liberals limit political participation by means of their emphasis on the private sphere as the primacy domain of individual activity. However, this limitation is insufficient, particularly given the intrusiveness of bureaucratic-capitalist institutions into the private sphere. What is required instead is a democratic theory that can incorporate the liberal concern for individual rights, but also create the possibility for robust participation by a community of citizens who are actively engaged in the construction of the institutions that govern them. Such a democratic theory requires the recognition of the role the radical imaginary plays in the construction of social and political institutions. Second, democracy must be considered comprehensively, in the sense that democratic governance is not simply a matter of procedure, but that it entails a social regime that includes the democratic political process, but also a conception of democratic culture and democratic identity. Finally, democracy can only be legitimized through the active making/doing of the collective through participation in the political domain. This requires recognition of the fact that democracy can be dangerous, as it institutes uncertainty in favor of the possibility of collective and individual self-reflection and autonomy.

Liberalism: The Defense of Individual Rights

In order to protect against the tyranny of the majority or the abuse of power by the state itself, liberals emphasize a set of individual rights. These rights protect the individual both from other individuals in the society and from the power of the state itself. However, what the liberal focus on individual rights does not guard against are the non-political forms of power that exists in instituted-modern societies. Overall, the

liberal conception of individual rights has sufficiently protected the individual from abuses by government. In most Western, democratic societies, the individual citizen can safely presume that the government will not egregiously violate her political and civil rights. However, the more significant powers in Western societies are those of bureaucratic-capitalist institutions, with which each individual must come into contact on a daily basis, primarily in the workplace. These instituted-modern institutions erode the autonomy of the individual through a constant effort to eliminate her creativity and spontaneity, in order to insure that each individual can be a reliable part of the capitalist production process. This is where the liberal defense of democracy is unable to adequately defend the rights of the individual.

Liberal democracy is closely linked to the bureaucratic-capitalist institutional structure that dominates instituted-modern society. As such, liberal democratic institutions reproduce and legitimize the dominant significations of the instituted-modern imaginary. “Liberal democracy in both its visionary and practical versions is an attempt to keep the political state effective in its role as the guardian of peace and the mediator between group or individual interests, while keeping the groups free to form and the individuals free to assert themselves and to choose the form of life they wish to pursue.”¹⁵ In order to insure the rights of the individual, liberalism demands a sharp separation between the public and private spheres, where the individual is able to participate in political activity in the public realm if she chooses, but is protected from both the intrusive power of government institutions and other individuals in the private sphere. However, this liberal conception of the public and private worlds reinforces the atomistic individualism upon which modern repression relies. In instituted-modern society, the

possibility of instaurating the political is covered over; political participation in a liberal democracy is limited to participation in politics. Politics in instituted-modern society is constructed according to the dictates of the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary, in the sense that the public realm is constructed along the lines of the private marketplace. Political participation arises as a necessity in capitalist society in order to guarantee property rights. The public realm exists as an appendage of the private, rather than a separate, independent domain. Because the public realm exists to serve the needs of bureaucratic-capitalist institutions, decision-making can never rise above politics, that is to say, playing an administrative role in the defense of the instituted-imaginary. As such, democratic participation is limited to the selection of representatives who will carry out the administrative tasks of governance. With these constraints in place, whether or not to participate in politics becomes a *choice* for the individual citizen. The same rational calculus that underlies the bureaucratic-capitalist system governs politics; democratic participation is subjected to economic rationality. For example, the choice between candidates in any election becomes a choice between which candidate can better serve the interests of the voting individual within the constraints of the existing institutional apparatus. Choices in the political sphere are reduced to a rational ordering of preferences, where individual utility is the primary motivation in decision-making. A candidate who questions the instituted-imaginary is quickly marginalized, while those who provide the greatest utility to the greatest number are elected. As such, the choice between two candidates becomes very similar to the choice between Coke and Pepsi. Superficial differences are emphasized, but each candidate fully accepts the existing instituted imaginary and never calls its legitimacy into question. A politics constructed in

this manner insures that the typical individual will have very little interest in participating in the public realm, thus guaranteeing that the instituted-imaginary cannot be challenged effectively. Thus, “the best-case scenario for liberal democracy is a continuation of what the ancient Greeks called stasis, a persistent and noxious immobilism characterized by insecurity, meanness, and a deterioration of anything remotely resembling a genuinely democratic political culture or civic equality.”¹⁶ Liberal democracy reproduces this constrained vision of political participation, accepting the limitations of politics as a trade-off for the supposed protection of the rights of the individual and the restrictions on those in power. In this manner, liberal democracy contributes to the dominance of the instituted-modern as the prevalent imaginary in the Western world. As such, it contributes to the reproduction of the existing institutional apparatus of bureaucratic-capitalism, and therefore the reproduction of institutional forms that are alienated from those living in advanced modern societies. The paradox of democracy today is that freedom of thought is at its highest point, but there is little use for this freedom and there is little chance at reforging freedom from constraint into freedom to act.¹⁷

In A Theory of Justice and Political Liberalism, John Rawls presents the strongest contemporary defense of liberal democracy, correcting many of the problems that are present in classical liberalism. Rawls seeks to expand the possibility of political participation in democratic societies by constructing a conception of justice that can limit the intrusion of the destructive aspects of the radical imaginary while at the same time allowing a dynamic interplay of ideas. Rawls’ conception of justice both protects the individual from the intrusion of government institutions and other individual and allows for a community of equal individuals living and acting collectively through ties of love

and friendship. However, the limitations of liberal democracy and the way in which it reproduces the dominant significations of the instituted-modern are also evident Rawls' work. As such, Rawls does little to address the problems of contemporary instituted-modern society and the prevalence and predominance of the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary and this imaginary's impact on the societies in which it dominates.

Rawls' defense of liberal democracy can be summed up in his dictum "justice as fairness." "In justice as fairness, one does not take men's propensities and inclinations as given, whatever they are, and then seek the best way to fulfill them. Rather, their desires and aspirations are restricted from the outset by the principles of justice which specify the boundaries that men's systems of ends must respect."¹⁸ As such, liberal democracy does not simply respond to human nature and construct institutions accordingly, but rather liberalism sets forth principles according to which individuals should develop their life plans and adhere in their interactions with others. According to Rawls, justice as fairness is comprised of two foundational principles. First, "each person is to have an equal right to the most extensive basic liberty compatible with a similar liberty for others."¹⁹ This first principle corresponds to the traditional liberal concern for the rights of the individual. By asserting this principle, Rawls seeks to insure that the rights of every individual are protected from abuses by governmental power and against intrusions by others individuals living in the society. The protections afforded by the first principle further insure that each rational individual is able to develop their own conception of the good and live his life according to the plan he develops to further the pursuit of this good. As such, Rawls seeks to maximize each individual's capacity to live according to his own rational life plan without interference from others, so long as this life plan does not

interfere with the liberty of other individuals. The second principle states: “social and economic inequalities are to be arranged so that they are both (a) reasonably expected to be to everyone’s advantage, and (b) attached to positions and offices open to all.”²⁰

Rawls in no way advocates the equal distribution of wealth throughout society; he is not interested in insuring equality of outcome. Inequality is acceptable only insofar as existing inequality benefits those who are the lowest in the economic hierarchy. The poorest in the society must benefit from the unequal distribution of economic wealth.²¹

Thus, for example, if the total wealth of the society, unequally distributed, allows the possibility of a social safety net that benefits the least advantaged, inequality is acceptable. Furthermore, if the least advantaged are not permanently bound to their current social status and have an equal opportunity to better their status, existing inequality is acceptable.²² This aspect of Rawls’ theory of justice is important because it recognizes the problem that a capitalist economic system poses for the protection of the rights of the individual. By including the second principle of equality, Rawls seeks to insure that the rights of the individual are not trampled by the drive for material accumulation. As such, Rawls asserts that a defense of individual rights must be coupled with some basic defense of equality in order to insure that each individual is actually capable of defending his rights against others and against economic institutions.

Furthermore, Rawls’ conception of liberty and equality insures that the individual can actually exercise his rights by guaranteeing that no individual will find himself a position of servility vis-à-vis others in the society. However, it is important to recognize that the two principle Rawls envisions are not equal principles. For Rawls, the first principle of liberty, and the types of institutions required to guarantee it, always supersedes the

second principle of equality. Therefore, no individual's liberty can be impinged upon in the name of insuring a greater level of equality in the society.

These two principles form the cornerstone of the political conception of justice. According to Rawls, a well-ordered, pluralistic society where multiple comprehensive moral doctrines exist requires an independent, freestanding ideal of justice that every citizen in the society can accept.²³ In the private sphere, individuals define themselves according to comprehensive moral doctrines, which, in most cases, are religious or cultural. What characterizes each of these moral doctrines is its incompatibility with other moral doctrines that exist within the society.²⁴ For example, the tenets of one moral doctrine might reject beliefs or behavior espoused by another doctrine. In democratic societies, the problem that emerges is this: if there are no restrictions on what is considered "political", citizens will carry these incompatible comprehensive moral doctrines into the political arena and make political decisions based on these beliefs. This can easily lead to the infringement of the political rights of those who adhere to less politically powerful moral doctrines by a dominant group. In order for incompatible doctrines to coexist within a society, and in order to insure that the principles of justice as fairness are respected, an overlapping consensus concerning the political conception of justice must exist. The presence of the overlapping consensus means that every citizen, regardless of the comprehensive moral beliefs he holds, will agree upon the basic principles of justice as fairness and adhere to these principles in his interactions with others in the society, regardless of the moral beliefs that these other individuals hold.²⁵ The political conception of justice is independent of all other comprehensive moral doctrines and exists as a public and political agreement on the fundamental principles of a

democratic society. Accepting the overlapping consensus is not an act of altruism, but rather relies on reciprocity. Each individual will accept the political conception of justice so long as all others in the society accept it as well and treat the individual citizen accordingly.²⁶ However, according to Rawls, the political conception of justice does not rely on instrumental rationality; rather, each citizen will in fact adhere to this conception of justice even at the cost of his own interests, provided that others in the society do so as well.²⁷ When such an overlapping consensus exists, democracy in a pluralistic society, even when comprehensive doctrines are in competition with one another, can exist, if each citizen accepts a basic set of foundational principles and tolerates the difference of the other.

The adherence to the political conception of justice is the means through which a democratic society can legitimately limit the participation of individuals in the public domain. According to Rawls, an ideal of public reason, based on the overlapping consensus, must govern political participation. When questions concerning governmental structure are introduced for deliberation by a democratic citizenry, “reasons given explicitly in terms of comprehensive doctrines are never to be introduced into public reason.”²⁸ The only possible exception to this rule is if a reason founded in a comprehensive moral doctrine in fact strengthens the idea of public reason and the limits of the political conception of justice.²⁹ As a result, political claims founded in religious or cultural doctrines, which could result in the infringement on the rights of others in the society, are excluded from the public decision-making process. All political decisions within a society guided by the overlapping consensus will be limited according to the principles set forth in the “justice as fairness” doctrine.

The overlapping consensus is the means through which Rawls accounts for the dangerous possibilities of democratic participation. In essence, comprehensive moral doctrines emerge from the radical imaginary as the means through which individuals come to understand the world around them and their relationship to other individuals in the society. These moral doctrines can be unlimited and unrestrained in terms of the development of their doctrinal content. While these doctrines develop within the social-historical and institutional context of a democratic society, which will shape the manner in which they are constructed and the content of the doctrine, the creative role of the radical imaginary allows the possibility for the development of beliefs that oppose or wholly reject the existing instituted imaginary. In order to prevent such comprehensive doctrines from destroying the democratic system, Rawls argues that participation in the public sphere must be limited to those doctrines that are willing to accept the political conception of justice and extend the protections of “justice as fairness” to all other persons in the society, regardless of the moral beliefs these other individuals hold.³⁰ However, Rawls’ definition and justification of the overlapping consensus is problematic, leading to a conception of political participation that is too restrictive and neglects to address the social-historical context of instituted-modern society.

While the limitations set forth by the overlapping consensus protect the individual both from the power of the state and from other individuals within the society, a problem emerges in terms of the nature of the comprehensive moral doctrines that exist within a democratic society. The conditions of the well-ordered pluralistic society that Rawls develops in Political Liberalism are, in Rawls own terms, ideal, in the sense that the comprehensive moral doctrines that are present are reasonable ones.³¹ The key to Rawls’

argument is that comprehensive moral doctrines are in fact reasonable, defined as the capacity for the individual to extend fair terms of cooperation to all others in the society, regardless of the moral beliefs to which these others adhere, with the expectation that others will also abide by these terms.³² What Rawls does not account for is the role the radical imaginary plays in the development of these comprehensive moral doctrines, which leads to the possibility that comprehensive moral doctrines will be unreasonable and reject the idea of extending fair terms of cooperation to others. The incompatibility of moral doctrines, rather than the possibility of an overlapping consensus concerning a political conception of justice, is the far more relevant issue. Habermas argues that one cannot separate the political conception of justice from comprehensive moral doctrines in the manner that Rawls advocates.³³ There is a strong connection between moral doctrines and the possibility of the overlapping consensus; a comprehensive moral doctrine must develop in a particular manner in order to lead to the acceptance of the political conception of justice. Comprehensive moral doctrines are embedded in the prevailing social-historical circumstances in a particular society and are influenced by the predominant instituted-imaginary, to the extent that in the construction of meaning, a comprehensive moral doctrine will account for the existing conditions within a particular society. Thus, a moral doctrine will embed itself in a relationship with the instituted imaginary, defining, for example, the existing institutional structure as legitimate or illegitimate. Furthermore, moral doctrines, as sets of social imaginary significations, are dynamic belief systems, changing and altering over time. Rogers Smith, for example, describes the changing “stories of personhood” that define communities according to identity. Such identities can exist in an adversarial relationship to other forms of

association. “I define a group as a *political* people or community when it is a potential adversary of other forms of human association, *because* its proponents are generally understood to assert that its obligations legitimately trump many of the demands made on its members in the name of other associations.”³⁴ In certain cases, such associations based on political peoplehood can claim to override all other associations, including the political conception of justice.³⁵ Furthermore, an oppressed group, for example, will develop a very different set of moral beliefs than a group in power, to the extent that the moral doctrines are completely incommensurable and the possibility of compromising on a political conception of justice becomes impossible.

In addition to the construction of comprehensive moral doctrines that reject the political conception of justice, existing moral doctrines can change according to new social-historical conditions, particularly in relation to increasing or decreasing power. Rawls seeks to create a system wherein the power differentials between comprehensive doctrines will not affect the relationship between these doctrines, arguing that competing moral doctrines will accept the political conception of justice in order to insure that the democratic society remains a well-ordered, pluralistic one. What Rawls expects is that the adherents to a particular moral doctrine will not abuse an increase in power, basing this on the foresight of these individuals.³⁶ In essence, adherents to an ascendant moral doctrine will recognize that they will not be in a position of power forever and will therefore respect the overlapping consensus. Rogers Smith illustrates the potential effect of power differentials on the construction of group identity by arguing that the construction of peoplehood as a political project. Identities are forms of imagined communities that emerge within society itself; there is nothing natural or primordial

about political peoplehood. Rather, such stories emerge through the interactions of persons living in a society and as an explicit project by those in positions of power who seek to mobilize a population. It is therefore the result of asymmetric power relationships in any given society.³⁷ The rise of Christian fundamentalism in the United States illustrates Smith's point concerning asymmetric power relationships and the construction of comprehensive moral doctrines. The rising power of the Christian right in American politics coincides with the increasing tendency for the religious right to reject the political conception of justice by casting political issues in explicitly religious terms, violating Rawls' rules concerning public reason. On the extremes of the religious right, Christian dispensationalists, dominionists, and reconstructionists, overtly reject democratic institutions, calling for the institution of a legal and political system founded on a literal reading of the Bible, rejecting the democratic idea that laws are founded in the will and participation of the people. Pat Robertson, for example, has declared that government must be run by "godly men", guided by Biblical law.³⁸ On the extremes of the religious right, activists call for the murder of homosexuals, while the position of more mainstream politicians, such as Gary Bauer, take a more "moderate" position calling for the imprisonment of gays.³⁹ In addition, Christian fundamentalists seek to deny rights to religious minorities through the erosion of the first amendment separation of church and state in favor of overt and distinctly evangelical expressions of Christian belief within the public sphere. One cannot dismiss these ideas as those of the lunatic fringe. A study in 2003 found that upwards of forty percent of Americans believe in Biblical end-times prophecies⁴⁰, one of the important motivating doctrines of the ascendant religious Right. What is emerging as a result of this intrusion of a comprehensive moral doctrine into the

political domain is a degradation of the democratic system into a Schmittian conflict between friend and enemy. The religious right and right-wing Republicans in general, particularly after September 11, 2001, speak in terms of a war between “us” (a narrowly defined vision of Christian Republicanism) and “them” (all those who oppose this vision, both internationally and domestically). As a result, the political pronouncements of the American right express an ominous, eliminationist tone, where “liberals” are “traitors”, those who oppose Christian fundamentalism are evil and undeserving of civil protections or rights, and the rest of the world seeks to undermine the United States.

Rawls’ vision of the political conception of justice cannot adequately address the problem of a comprehensive moral doctrine that actively seeks to actively violate the rules of public reason and participate in the political system in order to undermine and destroy the idea of “justice as fairness”. This intrusion of comprehensive moral doctrines into the public sphere in opposition to the political conception of justice is, in part, the product of the crisis of meaning that pervades instituted-modern societies. Political Liberalism is incapable of adequately addressing this problem due to the fact that the construction of “justice as fairness” draws from a particular social-historical experience of liberal democracy and capitalism. The principles of “justice as fairness”, particularly the second principle, which seeks to insure equality of opportunity, contribute to the reproduction of the bureaucratic-capitalist instituted-imaginary. In practical terms, this principle defends the capitalist economic system, under the assumption that the general welfare of the least advantaged is higher than it would be if the productive capacity of the capitalist system were hindered in some manner. Rawls argues that any injustice that emerges as a result of inequality will be corrected by those living in the society, given

that they are tied to one another through bonds of love, trust, and friendship.⁴¹ However, Rawls does not present any consistent criteria for what constitutes such an infringement. Clearly, those living in society will correct the most egregious violations of the first or second principle. However, these are the easy questions; Rawls does not address the real problems that exist in instituted-modern society, such as the fact that instituted-modern societies are unable to provide any meaning beyond the consumption of material goods. In response to the dilapidation of instituted-modern societies, individuals turn to other sources, comprehensive moral doctrines, to create personal, individualized meaning for the world around them. What Rawls does not recognize is that these meanings will inevitably be carried into the public sphere.

In addition to the practical inadequacy of creating an overlapping consensus to limit the intrusion of destructive ideas into the democratic public sphere, the weakness of the overlapping consensus and the political conception of justice presented in Political Liberalism is a result of the fact that Rawls bases the validity of these two concepts on the idea of the “original position” that he constructs in A Theory of Justice. In the original position, Rawls argues, the individual, choosing principles from behind a veil of ignorance whereby each individual is unaware of the social, economic, and political conditions of the society and is also unaware of his own attributes or position in the society, will choose the principles of “justice as fairness” in order to maximize his own opportunity and potential in the society.⁴² Habermas argues that the first flaw with the original position is that it focuses on the individual, rather than on a discursive community. The original position, according to Habermas, is inadequate as a foundation for democracy because it does not transcend the perspective of the individual in order to

address the intersubjective relationships that exist within a community.⁴³ These intersubjective relationships are significant in that they are the source of political claims that individuals present in the public sphere. In addition, Rawls argues that the original position represents a non-historical point; it is an abstract, analytical foundation for the legitimacy and validity of the principles at the heart of the political conception of justice. However, what Rawls' reliance on the original position to provide "fall-back" validity for the political conception of justice reveals is Rawls' lack of faith in his own vision of the overlapping consensus. When reasonable comprehensive moral doctrines exist within a pluralistic society, they can come to an agreement on the political conception of justice. What this reveals, according to Habermas, is that the public justification of the political conception of justice requires that individuals already accept this conception of justice and participate in the overlapping consensus.⁴⁴ What happens, however, when unreasonable comprehensive moral doctrines that reject "justice as fairness" seek to assert power in the public sphere? Habermas answers this question by arguing that the overlapping consensus can only exist practically when it is imposed by the state to insure the protection of minorities.⁴⁵ This represents Rawls' "fall-back" position when the overlapping consensus, as he describes it, fails. In this situation, the overlapping consensus must be enforced through the imposition of sharp constitutional restrictions on political participation. In order to preserve the political conception of justice, only those who agree to the overlapping consensus, and to the principle of justice as fairness, can participate in democratic decision-making. All other "unreasonable" moral doctrines must be excluded from the democratic process. As such, any group that seeks to deny rights to others cannot participate in the democratic process. This restriction is *a priori*

and heteronomous; only groups and individuals that promise to “behave” can be allowed to participate. The problem, however, is this: such doctrines do not simply disappear as a result of their exclusion from the political process. They still exist at the margins of the society and will often turn to extra-political and extra-judicial means to advance their moral and political beliefs. Furthermore, as illustrated by the rise of the religious right in the United States, an “unreasonable” moral doctrine can feign adherence to the political conception of justice and once in a position of power, act to undermine it. In essence, Rawls restricts political participation to those who already agree with liberal capitalist democracy.

Constructing Limits through Discourse

The construction of the instituted-modern imaginary and its corresponding institutional apparatus results in a degradation of the public realm and a retreat to the private sphere by individuals living in instituted-modern society. Theories of discursive democracy seek to address this problem by constructing a public sphere wherein citizens can actively participate in political governance. These theorists understand that the distinction between public and private worlds is a blurred one; individuals can and do carry private issues into the political world, particularly in instituted-modern societies where the construction of meaning occurs primarily in the private sphere, given the fact that the public domain has become bureaucratized and alienated. As such, discourse democracy seeks to construct a framework for political action that allows for a multiplicity of interests and claims to be advanced in the public sphere by a wide diversity of individuals and groups, thus allowing for robust participation by the citizens of a particular society. At the same time, one requirement of such a theory is the

construction of limits with regard to the types of claims that can be advanced in the public domain. These limits seek to account for the emergence of political claims that seek to erode or destroy the democratic decision-making process itself. However, unlike Rawls' concept of the overlapping consensus, the limits in the public domain are malleable and dynamic, subject to discursive analysis and critique by the participants in the democratic process. The task that theorists such as Jurgen Habermas, Chantal Mouffe, and Cornelius Castoriadis posit is the construction of a theoretical institutional framework that allows for the critique of the existing instituted-imaginary, but also sets discursive boundaries to account for the Abyss of the radical imaginary and the potential danger it poses for the democratic process.

Jurgen Habermas conceives of the public sphere as occupying a space between the state as a mechanism of power and domination and the private domain of the life-world. The solution to the degradation of the public sphere in instituted-modern societies is to recover the emancipatory possibilities of modernity through the reconstruction of a public sphere based on communicative rationality, a form of objective reason that allows the possibility for constructing the political.⁴⁶ Communicative rationality is a particular form of rationality through which human subjects publicly assert normative claims and construct a discursive method for judging the validity of each other's claims. According to Habermas, in everyday life, people assert moral claims vis-à-vis others in the society, demanding certain behaviors from others and also for ourselves. At this first level of moral utterances, individuals discursively construct moral obligations "that lay down for a community *in a convincing manner* what actors are obliged to do and what they can expect from one another."⁴⁷ This resembles Rawls' overlapping consensus, in the sense

that it asserts limits to public and private behavior, but it does not rely on a heteronomous source of authority, in the form of an “original position”. The limits are constructed discursively through the intersubjective communication between participants. The construction of such boundaries allows individuals to draw upon these intersubjectively constructed norms in conflict resolution, eliminating the necessity of resorting to force.⁴⁸ Habermas argues that individuals are capable of expressing their needs rationally within an intersubjective context, wherein the rationality of each individual can be judged based on whether the individual is able to provide reasons for their linguistic expressions.⁴⁹ “In contexts of communicative action, we call someone rational not only if he is able to put forward an assertion and, when criticized, to provide grounds for it by pointing to appropriate evidence, but also if he is following an established norm and is able, when criticized, to justify his action by explicating the given situation in light of legitimate expectations.”⁵⁰ Therefore, according to Habermas, the construction of the public sphere requires the discursive development of a rational framework through which others can evaluate the normative claims put forward by each individual. As such, no claim can be based on pure self-interest; rather, each individual must be able to assert her normative claim in such a way that others in the society will accept it as valid in accordance with the existing framework of the public sphere. “Every social interaction that comes about without the exercise of manifest violence can be understood as a solution to the problem of how the action plans of several actors can be coordinated with each other in such a way that one party’s actions ‘link up’ with those of others.”⁵¹ The general purpose of public discourse, therefore, is to allow each individual an equal opportunity to present her normative claims within the public domain, which are then subject to the judgment of

other participants, according to a mutually agreed upon framework for evaluating such claims.

Habermas presents a vision of the public sphere that allows broad and meaningful participation in political decision-making. The advantage of this concept of the public sphere is that it constructs limits to the types of moral and political claims that can be advanced in the public domain, without relying on a universal, *a priori* standard for the types of claims that can be introduced. Participants in the public sphere are capable of constructing their own rational limits on public claims, while simultaneously retaining the capacity for questioning and altering these limits through discourse. The rational limits are conceived in broad terms such that “the equal respect for everyone else demanded by a moral universalism sensitive to difference ... takes the form of a *nonleveling* and *nonappropriating* inclusion of the other *in his otherness*.”⁵² As such, an individual need not agree to a specific set of limits before entering the public sphere, thus insuring the possibility of expressing difference in the public realm, while constructing limits to protect the democratic procedure itself. By constructing rational limits that account for difference, Habermas constructs a public sphere that encourages political participation but is not fully dependent on a collectively active citizenry. What is most important for Habermas is the institutionalization of procedures through which individuals can participate within rationally agreed-upon limits.⁵³ For Habermas, democratic will-formation through the public sphere serves as “the most important sluices for the discursive rationalization of the decisions of a government and an administration bound by law and statute.”⁵⁴ Habermas’ public sphere allows citizens to actively question the existing instituted-imaginary due to the fact that institutional legitimacy relies on the

discourse between diverse constituents. As such, institutional legitimacy depends on the making/doing of individuals living with a particular society, rather than on a preconceived, heteronomous source of authority.

This vision of the public sphere closely approximates Castoriadis' conception of the project of autonomy. However, Habermas and Castoriadis disagree on several fundamental points, to the extent that while their general ends are similar, the means through which a discursive participatory public can be constructed differ significantly. The main point of disagreement between Castoriadis and Habermas centers on Habermas' idea of discursively constructed rational limits governing participation in the public sphere. Habermas argues that the possibility of discursive constructed rational limits depends upon the nature of language, asserting that language is an inherent human capability.⁵⁵ As such, *speech* precedes any particular social context in which the individual subject *speaks*. The potential for communicative rationality exists within every society; the question, therefore, becomes within which institutional framework can individual subjects exercise this form of speech? Communication, in one form or another, occurs in all domains of human life. Autonomous public spheres rely on the human capacity to speak and communicate needs to one another, as these public spheres draw their strength from communicative structures that exist within the life-world.⁵⁶ Through their participation in particular life-worlds, individuals are able to develop modes of communicating with other individuals, which leads to the possibility of making rational claims regarding normative values in an intersubjective context.

The capacity to speak and articulate and advance normative claims combines with a second source, the transition to modernity that introduces a particular mode of

communication. Modernity introduces rational inquiry by individual human subjects, which allows the individual to examine and evaluate the world around him. This mode of inquiry can be applied to the examination and evaluation of intersubjective relationships and to the relationships between individuals and institutions. As a result, individuals are able to develop rational modes of communication in order to interact with one another and debate the validity of normative claims within a public domain governed by consensually constructed rules. The purpose of public discourse is to create legitimate social norms that will structure intersubjective relationships in the society. “Valid norms must be capable in principle of meeting with the rationally motivated approval of everyone affected under conditions that neutralize all motives except that of cooperatively seeking the truth.”⁵⁷ For Habermas, the normative justification of democratic institutions emerges through public discourse, where the central question is, “which institutions would individuals engaged in discourse accept as legitimate?”⁵⁸ Within this discourse model, each individual must have an equal chance to initiate and participate in dialogue and be able to thematize power relations that in an ordinary context would act as a constraint.⁵⁹ Furthermore, norms within agreed upon through public discourse do not represent final principles for the society. All rationally agreed upon norms remain criticizable and contestable within the public sphere.⁶⁰

Castoriadis rejects the *a priori* of language and, as a result, the intersubjective nature of relationships between individuals. In contrast to Habermas, Castoriadis argues that a theory of discourse democracy must account for the *a priori* of the radical imaginary and the constructed nature of subjectivity.⁶¹ Castoriadis does not dispute the capacity of human beings to speak, but rather argues that language is a product of the

socialization process. The infant learns to speak through its interaction with its parents, and, more importantly, learns a particular language that reflects the dominant instituted imaginary of the society into which the infant is born.⁶² The language used within a particular society will reflect the meaning that society has constructed in order to understand the world and the society's place in that world. By positing that language is *a priori*, Habermas neglects the particularities of speaking in favor of the universality of speech. His position reflects a commitment to an Enlightenment concept of reason and progress, but this position ultimately weakens his argument in favor of a public sphere of discursive deliberation. Habermas essentially asserts that communicative rationality is universal, given the fact that language is *a priori*, and that this form of speech can be a reliable ground on which to found the public sphere. What Habermas neglects, and what Castoriadis reveals through his claim concerning the *a priori* of the radical imaginary, is that communicative rationality is in fact a particular mode of discourse that is constructed within a particular social-historical context and is only possible within a particular instituted-imaginary, namely, the modern imaginary. Rational communication can only occur in a society where rationality as a social imaginary signification exists. Habermas takes for granted that human beings will "know" how to communicate and achieve a rational consensus.

The dispute over the nature of language leads to the second major point of contention between Castoriadis and Habermas. According to Habermas, an intersubjective discourse occurs within the public sphere, where individual subjects advance normative claims and defend them vis-à-vis other subjects participating in the discourse. If language is *a priori*, as Habermas contends, individuals participate in the

public sphere as discrete, independent subjects. Dick Howard criticizes this position, arguing that Habermas is too attached to individualism, which limits the possibilities of communicative rationality. If discourse occurs between individuals, social change can only emerge through face-to-face interactions between individuals.⁶³ Late modern societies can be characterized by the decline of face-to-face interaction, particularly as a result of the development of communications technologies. Constructing a public realm around a concept of face-to-face intersubjectivity serves to limit the possibility for freedom, rather than expand it, which is Habermas' intention. Castoriadis criticizes Habermas on this point as well.⁶⁴ In addition, Castoriadis attacks the very concept of intersubjectivity, arguing that discourse is not intersubjective, but rather occurs between malleable and dynamic subjects whose subjectivity is influenced by the discursive practices themselves. According to Castoriadis, since subjectivity is partially constructed by the existing instituted imaginary, discourse in the public sphere plays a constitutive and productive role vis-à-vis the individual subjects. Habermas fails to recognize that subjects are not fully independent of one another. Castoriadis' objection to intersubjectivity is linked to his challenge that discourse does not occur between rational beings. The radical imaginary plays a critical role in the relationship between individuals living in a particular society. As such, while individuals might act rationally toward one another, it is a mistake to ground the public sphere in this specific definition of rationality. In doing so, Habermas neglects the possibilities of non-rational discourse and covers over the radical, instituting imaginary.

The final point of contention between Habermas and Castoriadis is Habermas' position that that any conception of discursive democracy must include *rational* limits.

The construction of these rational limits leads Habermas to assert the possibility of developing the ideal-speech situations. According to Habermas, “progress in social rationality could be achieved through ‘undistorted communication’ based on a willingness to engage in rational discourse on topics of controversy, to allow free and equal access to all participants, to attempt to understand the issues and arguments, to yield to the force of the better argument, and to accept a rational consensus.”⁶⁵ The ideal-speech situation posits the possibility of achieving a rational consensus among the individuals participating. Such a rational consensus represents “undistorted communication”, opposed to “distorted communication”, where coercive force is used by some institutions to impose a “consensus” on the participants.⁶⁶ Habermas argues that participants in the public sphere are capable, as rational beings, to construct a consensus concerning the rational limits of discourse. According to Habermas,

We can say that actions regulated by norms, expressive self-presentations, and also evaluative expressions, supplement constative speech acts in constituting a communicative practice which, against the background of a lifeworld is oriented to achieving, sustaining, and renewing consensus – and indeed a consensus that rests of the intersubjective recognition of criticizable validity claims.⁶⁷

Castoriadis, in Habermas’ estimation, provides no foundation for the public sphere, relying solely on the will of those living in society for its existence.⁶⁸ For Habermas, this is insufficient; a public sphere that is based solely on the subjective will of the individual living in a society will collapse under the weight of private claims that will inevitably intrude upon, and erode, the public domain.⁶⁹ As such, Habermas argues that some standard, in this case the construction of rational limits, must be constructed in order to

insure the continued existence of a democratic public sphere. However, Habermas mischaracterizes Castoriadis' position. While Castoriadis does assert that subjective will plays a role in the construction of the political, this is not his only defense of the public sphere. This dispute over the possibility of grounding the public sphere reveals a fundamental incommensurability between Habermas and Castoriadis. Habermas is concerned with what makes a particular social order possible, leading him to answer this question with his theory of discursive democracy. Castoriadis, on the other hand, examines the origins of order and the conditions under which such an order can *emerge*, leading him to the conclusion that order emerges through the competition between collectivities for form-giving power.⁷⁰ What Habermas neglects in his vision of undistorted communication is precisely this element of competition for power that exists within democratic societies. Habermas assumes that through the construction of consensus regarding the rational limits of the public domain, power differentials between groups can be nullified through communicative rationality.

Habermas' argument that the ideal-speech situation is the result of the communicative achievement of a rational consensus among the members of the society is highly problematic, in the sense that it restricts the possibilities of public discourse. Agnes Heller, for example, argues that Habermas confuses sociopolitical norms with moral norms. The former can and should, according to Heller, be rationally grounded. These sociopolitical norms concern the discursive relationship between individuals, such as the rights to free and equal participation in the discourse process. Moral norms, however, need not be grounded rationally. According to Heller, the moral universe is pluralistic, as moral norms are related to values, which differ between individuals.⁷¹

These ungrounded and unjustified moral norms can coexist with rationally agreed upon sociopolitical norms without endangering rational discourse. No individual can claim universality for his moral norms. He has no basis to do so, and claiming such universality can be dangerous.⁷² Furthermore, the idea that a society can arrive at such a consensus rationally fails to address normative claims that challenge the framework of the ideal-speech situation itself. Habermas argues that such claims can be simply excluded from communicative discourse. However, excluding such discourses presents a serious problem for democratic societies. If such claims cannot be legitimately advanced in the public sphere, they will be advanced elsewhere, undermining the democratic system itself. As a result, Habermas' idea that a rational consensus can be achieved is highly problematic. Habermas essentially grounds the legitimacy of the ideal-speech situation in communicative rationality. As such, it represents an alienated source of legitimacy that is partially removed from the making/doing of the collective. While the ideal-speech situation is constructed by the society itself, Habermas asserts that the framework it establishes for the introduction and contestation of normative claims is the starting point for political action within the public sphere. Thus, communicative actors will take the ideal-speech situation as a given and advance their claims with this fact in mind. As a result, the institutional structure of the ideal-speech situation becomes disconnected from the making/doing of the collective; it would not be rational to question the structure of the ideal-speech situation because this would represent an attack on the very institutional structure that makes public action possible. However, the ideal-speech situation serves to constrain public action and discourse, by the very fact that its institutional framework is established in this manner. The very real danger here is that

non-rational discourses will be excluded from the public sphere, where they will fester outside the system and threaten the existence of democracy itself.

According to Chantal Mouffe, the political sphere is not about reaching consensus or compromise between competing claims, but rather exists and thrives as a result of agonistic competition. Mouffe concurs with Castoriadis distinction between the political and politics, stating that, “by ‘the political’ I mean the dimension of antagonism which I take to be constitutive of human societies, while by ‘politics’ I mean the set of practices and institutions through which an order is created, organizing human coexistence in the context of conflictuality provided by the political.”⁷³ The task of democratic theorists is not to construct impartial procedures through which consensus can be achieved, but rather to construct an “agonistic” sphere of contention.⁷⁴ Mouffe argues that the agonistic competition within the political sphere must be framed according to definitions of friends and enemies. In this manner, Mouffe attempts to reintroduce the work of Carl Schmitt and apply it to contemporary democratic theory. The friend/enemy dichotomy guarantees agonistic competition between competing political positions. Such a conception of the political sphere asserts that there cannot be a rational solution to political conflict, as Habermas envisions. Political competition, according to Mouffe, concerns hegemony; each political claim within the public sphere seeks to assert its hegemonic power over the society as a whole. Agonistic competition is a hegemonic struggle between conflicting viewpoints where the stakes are the configuration of power relations within a particular society.⁷⁵ Because of this, compromise and negotiation are not possible within the political. Each political actor, seeking to assert hegemonic power over the society, must view his opponents as enemies who threaten the actor’s ability to achieve his political

goals. No political claim, according to Mouffe, will settle for less than hegemonic power over the society. When the stakes involve hegemonic power, it is impossible to negotiate or compromise with one's opponents. However, the hegemonic aspirations of political claims insure that the political will remain an active and contested domain of competition.

While Mouffe is correct in recognizing the competitive nature of the political sphere, she is mistaken in attempting to apply Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction, with its undertones of violence and absolutism, to her conception of agonistic democracy. Mouffe argues that in order to insure that the political remains agonistic, the friend/enemy distinction must be a limited one in the sense that the goal of political competition is not to eradicate the enemy. The limited distinction between friend and enemy allows the recognition of one's opponent as a legitimate participant in agonistic competition.⁷⁶ In order to guarantee the legitimacy of each participant in the political sphere, it becomes necessary to limit the terms of political discourse in order to insure the continued existence of democratic institutions. Mouffe argues that in order to prevent such a situation, certain demands must be excluded from the political sphere. Any claims that oppose or threaten the democratic system itself must be excluded from the political sphere. Such positions are unacceptable because they reject the limitations of agonistic competition and seek power solely in order to overthrow the system itself.⁷⁷

Mouffe, however, does not construct any criteria according to which political claims can be excluded from the public sphere and her reliance on Schmitt's friend/enemy distinction to define her agonistic public sphere exacerbates this problem. Mouffe argues that it is possible to construct a friend-enemy distinction that is "civil" in

the sense that politics need not be about the eradication of one's enemies. If the friend/enemy distinction allows for the eradication of one's opponent, the political association itself will be threatened. In such a situation, agonistic competition becomes a fight to the death, which will threaten the very existence of democratic institutions, since the participants will stop at nothing to insure victory. Mouffe argues that hegemonic power, the ability to shape the power relations that exist within a society, are the spoils of agonistic competition. These are life or death stakes in many social-historical circumstances. The fact that the participants will stop at nothing to insure hegemony in an often life or death struggle is precisely the type of conflict that Schmitt envisions. Schmitt argues that the "enemy" is constructed by a sovereign power seeking to assert hegemony through the manipulation of peoples' fears and anxieties.⁷⁸ Bernstein argues that there is a deep contradiction in Schmitt's thought. On the one hand, Schmitt condemns a universalistic morality that seeks to eliminate or annihilate the "foe", but on the other hand, he relies on the manipulation of fear and anxiety for the construction of the political "enemy".⁷⁹ Thus, while Mouffe seeks to criticize Habermas' ideal-speech situation, she ends up constructing an ideal agonistic situation. Some political claims obviously seek to overthrow democracy. Fascism is one such example, but this is an easy case. The harder questions are the ones that are the main concerns of everyday politics. Does the debate over abortion threaten the political association? What about anti-capitalism? What about a vision of democracy different from the existing agonistic conception? Mouffe provides no basis for addressing the validity of such political claims. Furthermore, what Mouffe does not recognize is that politics in instituted-modern societies already incorporates the moral dimension of "good" and "evil". The

uncertainty and anomie engendered by bureaucratic-capitalism drives individuals to identify with stark moral positions in the limited political sphere that exists within instituted-modern societies. This social-historical context of advanced modern societies cannot be disregarded in favor of a political sphere that suddenly removes all such political positions from consideration. Mouffe provides no vision of how an agonistic political sphere that does not include such moral demands can be constructed. Given the social-historical circumstances that exist in instituted-modern societies, Mouffe's use of the friend/enemy distinction will inevitably lead to eliminationist competition, rather than "civil" agonism.

In order to insure the competitiveness of public, democratic discourse, and to create the possibility of excluding private claims from the public sphere, a third sphere, a public-private domain is necessary. According to Castoriadis, democracy requires this public-private sphere that lies between the private realm of the household and the political domain of decision-making. Under conditions of instituted-modernity, the private and public spheres have been increasingly separated. In late modernity, the bridges between the two do not exist and the skills needed to translate private concerns into public action are no longer practiced.⁸⁰ In order to address this problem, a public-private sphere, which Castoriadis calls the *agora* is necessary. The *agora*, like the marketplace of the Athenian *polis* is a space wherein private troubles meet and from which ideas about a common good can arise.⁸¹ The *agora* is meeting place for citizens who gather, discuss ideas, and exchange goods.⁸² Furthermore, it represents a sphere of discourse where private concerns can be discussed and debated and where decisions can be made about whether or not such concerns have a place in the public realm. Given the

fact that new social imaginary significations must find points of support with the individual's psyche in order to allow such significations to become part of the social imaginary rather than individual fantasy, the existence of the *agora* permits the discussion of such new significations. New ideas that serve only the private self-interest of an individual can be restricted to the private sphere. Possible challenges to the existing instituted imaginary can be discussed and debated within the *agora*. Furthermore, citizens who participate in this public-private sphere develop habits of democratic participation, which reinforce the democratic imaginary in the particular society. Furthermore, through the construction of the *agora*, Castoriadis accounts for changing social-historical circumstances in a particular society. It is critical to recognize that what was once a "private" concern can become a "public" one given a certain set of social-historical circumstances. One cannot prescribe once and for all what constitutes political and private issues. In order to insure that democratic institutions remain autonomous, in that they are subjected to the constant and continuous questioning of the collective, a public-private sphere is required. As such, Castoriadis rejects the possibility of grounding the social order, arguing that Habermas' concept of rational limits ultimately undermining a democratic system's indeterminate, open-ended, and uncertain nature.⁸³ For Castoriadis, therefore, "the question is not which politics is legitimated by a certain epistemology, but which epistemology is legitimated by a certain democratic politics."⁸⁴

The Project of Autonomy: Reconciling Democracy and the Radical Imaginary

Theories of discourse democracy propose the necessity of constructing limits to political participation in order to insure that the democratic system itself is not torn apart by competing political claims in the public domain. However, models of discourse

democracy also seek to provide for the most inclusive form of political participation. Castoriadis agrees with the fundamental goal of discourse democratic theory, in the sense that the construction of limits to participation is crucial to guard against destructive doctrines that can emerge from the radical imaginary. What must also be addressed, according to Castoriadis, is the concept of democracy as a political, social, and economic regime. An emphasis on the procedural aspects of democratic discourse is insufficient, because it requires some form of relatively stable grounding. Habermas' solution is to ground the limits on public participation in communicatively rationality. Castoriadis' proposal emphasizes the construction of social and economic institutions that can buttress the democratic political regime. As such, in addition to a democratic public sphere, Castoriadis espouses the need to construct an egalitarian economic regime and social institutions that socialize individuals into a democratic culture and a democratic identity that emphasize self-limitation. In this manner, new significations can be constructed through the collective radical imaginary that challenge the existing instituted imaginary, preventing its alienation from the collective, while at the same time constructing limits on political claims that seek to completely destroy democracy.

According to Castoriadis, the project of autonomy emerges from the advent of the modern imaginary and its great break with the heteronomy of the medieval period. Though the instituted-modern imaginary, and its alienated sources of legitimacy, represents the dominant social imaginary in late modern societies, the project of autonomy has existed as an undercurrent throughout Western history since the advent of the modern imaginary. Autonomy has manifested itself in two ways. First, the project of autonomy has surged forth through explicit emancipatory demands during revolutionary

situations throughout modern history such as the Paris Commune, the February revolution in Russia, and the student strikes in Paris in 1968. These brief upsurges have quickly been suppressed. Second, the everyday resistance of individuals confronting the bureaucratic-capitalist apparatus represents the real possibility for constructing an autonomous society. This everyday resistance, and the impact it has on the existing instituted-imaginary, illustrates the role the radical imaginary plays in the continuous construction and alteration of established institutions. What is required, according to Castoriadis, is a democratic theory that begins with the recognition of the radical imaginary and the role it plays in the construction of social institutions. In every society, the radical imaginary plays a crucial role in the construction and alteration of social institution. However, throughout most of human history, the role of the radical imaginary has been covered over, ignored, or suppressed by the instituted-imaginary.

The sporadic surging forth of the project of autonomy throughout modern history resembles Sheldon Wolin's vision of "fugitive democracy." Wolin argues that the administrative efficiency of the modern state is hindered by democratic participation. As such, one of the primary functions of the state is to impose restrictions on the possibility of participation in order to guarantee that the state apparatus can fulfill its functions without restriction. For example, Wolin argues that constitutions represent the construction of boundaries to democracy, arguing that "constitutional democracy is democracy fitted to a constitution. It is not democratic or democratized constitutionalism because it is democracy without the demos as actor."⁸⁵ Constitutions seek to regularize politics, guarding against the power of the demos in favor of protecting the interests of the dominant groups in power.⁸⁶ Castoriadis would agree with this assessment, although

his focus would emphasize the bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary. In order to reproduce the instituted-modern imaginary and insure the functioning of bureaucratic-capitalism, human spontaneity and creativity, the source of demands for autonomy, must be eliminated. The state participates in the suppression of autonomy through the construction of a restricted public sphere. However, Wolin argues that periodically a society will assert its democratic will against the state and force a change in the system. In essence, demotic power overflows the boundaries imposed by the constitution and the existing institutional apparatus.⁸⁷ From this perspective, democracy is an act of revolutionary transgression against existing institutions. In American history, examples such as the abolitionist movement and the civil rights movement illustrate Wolin's point concerning the democratic moment as a transgressive act against the existing system. Neither of these issues could have been resolved within the existing system, but required the democratic intervention of the people in order to force a change in the instituted-imaginary. As such, Wolin conceives of democracy as a moment and a movement, rather than as a form of government. Once demotic power overflows the boundaries imposed on it, the system begins to construct new boundaries. Thus, while the intervention of democracy fundamentally alters the system, a new set of boundaries are constructed to contain the demos.⁸⁸ This is where Castoriadis partially disagrees with Wolin. In alienated societies, the surging forth of the project of autonomy can effect change in the existing instituted imaginary. On a smaller scale, the factory floor, for example, the daily resistance of the worker alters the relationship between the management bureaucracy and the workers. These are changes in the existing institutional apparatus that do not threaten the system as a whole; in fact, as discussed previously, bureaucratic-capitalism relies on

the periodic resistance of the worker, and the subsequent alteration of the bureaucratic-capitalist system, to continue functioning. In essence, the surging forth of the project of autonomy and the changes it can create in the instituted imaginary parallels Wolin's conception of demotic power overflowing boundaries to effect change, which then leads to the inscription of new boundaries. However, Castoriadis disagrees with Wolin's assessment that democracy is limited to intermittent expressions of demotic power. While instituted-modern societies suppress and cover over the project of autonomy, one need not accept the fact that democracy can only emerge as an intermittent challenge to the instituted-imaginary. Particularly in modern societies, the possibility always exists for the surging forth of the project of autonomy. Castoriadis' model of the democratic regime seeks to sustain "fugitive democracy" and instaurate institutions that rely on the continuous participation of citizens in challenging the instituted imaginary. Such a society must always be open to the questioning of the collective, but Castoriadis argues that it is in fact possible to conceive of democracy as a regime, rather than simply as a sporadic moment of resistance.

Many critics have argued that Castoriadis' vision of the autonomous society is a utopian one. Castoriadis' broad vision of an autonomous society includes direct democratic institutions, the possibility of a stateless society, and the active participation of citizens in the questioning and construction of social institutions in the political sphere. For example, Castoriadis rejects the idea of representative democracy, arguing that representatives are given an irrevocable mandate by the electorate and then, once in office, the representative behaves in such a way as to insure his re-election.⁸⁹ In representative democracies, decisions are made behind closed doors, concealed from the

majority of society, thus constructing a private domain of elite decision-making.⁹⁰ Furthermore, Castoriadis characterizes representative elections as an exercise in magic, where the collective will of the people is liquefied, placed drop by drop in a ballot box, and then reformed to provide a “mandate.”⁹¹ According to Castoriadis, representatives are too easily bought off by special interests and political parties simply mirror the bureaucratic apparatus that exists within bureaucratic-capitalist society.⁹² As such, Castoriadis argues that representative democracy does not represent the collective will. Furthermore, no representative system can address the real problems of advanced capitalist society, such as the ubiquity of bureaucratic-capitalist institutions and the crisis of meaning and the subsequent dilapidation of late modernity. To some degree, however, Castoriadis’ critics are correct, in the sense that direct democratic institutions in modern world are impractical, given the large scale institutional structure that would be required. As such, Castoriadis’ specific vision for a democratic society, particularly his rejection of representative democracy, is a less significant contribution to democratic theory, for the simple reason that it is impractical.

Despite the criticisms leveled against him over the issue of direct democracy, Castoriadis insists that the project of autonomy is not “utopian”, arguing that this term indicates impossibility, a dream that can never be fulfilled, and a hope for a future that we can strive towards but will never actually come.⁹³ According to Castoriadis, the realization of the project of autonomy is possible. “Sa realization ne depend que de l’activité lucide des individus et des peuples, de leur comprehension, de leur volonté, de leur imagination.”⁹⁴ As such, Castoriadis criticizes the work of Habermas, who conceives of the ideal-speech situation in these terms.⁹⁵ In Castoriadis’ estimation, such

dreams are not practical, and allow us to be irresponsible. If utopia will never come, why bother to try to achieve it? Here Castoriadis reveals his continuing commitment to the emancipatory potential of the Marxian revolutionary project. Though Castoriadis rejected the theoretical implications of Marxism, he never abandoned the hope for political and social change that Marx advocated. For Castoriadis, the struggle for democracy against existing bureaucratic-capitalist institutions is always significant, in the sense that abandoning this struggle would result in a system of total servility.

Furthermore, Castoriadis rejects the term “utopian” because it represents an end point, a *telos*. For Castoriadis, democracy is not a *telos*, but rather it is a constant process of contestation and decision-making that never ends. In order to be autonomous, the process, the democratic regime, and the democratic institutions must always be subject to questioning and alteration. In autonomous society, one never says, “we have achieved the highest political point possible.” Instead, citizens ask, “what can we do to improve these institutions, given the changing social-historical conditions in our society?” The continuous asking of this type of question is a real possibility, even in a representative democracy. As such, subjecting the existing instituted-imaginary to consistent and continuous criticism represents the real potential of Castoriadis’ vision of democracy.

The instauration of an autonomous society is a difficult task, to say the least. Furthermore, even if one accepts that it is impossible to achieve the direct democratic institutional structure that Castoriadis advocates, incorporating the radical imaginary into democratic theory and democratic decision-making represents an equally daunting task. The construction of an open-ended democratic decision-making process that recognizes the role of human creativity requires first a different relationship with the radical

imaginary.⁹⁶ The persistence of heteronomy in human societies is the result of the fact that people want to ignore the radical imaginary and completely cover over the Abyss with which it confronts us. Individuals seeking certainty will sacrifice their autonomy in favor of heteronomy and alienation. This is particularly problematic in instituted-modern societies, where individuals sacrifice their autonomy in favor of an institutional structure that does not provide the certainty that human beings crave. As a result, in instituted-modern societies, individuals pay a high price for the illusory certainty of alienation and gain very little in return. For Castoriadis, this situation makes the instauration of an autonomous society a very real possibility. The contemporary individual is aware of her contingency, but is unhappy in this awareness. A person aware of her contingency can try to transform this into her destiny. This is a path that remains open in the modern era.⁹⁷ Castoriadis's concern with psychoanalysis is based on the necessity of constructing a new relationship between the individual and the radical imaginary, where the human subject is capable of recognizing that he is the source of norms and values.⁹⁸ The radical imaginary will always be an Abyss from whence our dark desires emerge. However, it is also the source of our creativity. The political purpose of psychoanalysis, therefore, is to help the individual become autonomous, and therefore more active and responsible in society.⁹⁹ In Castoriadis's estimation, human beings can posit a new relationship with the radical imaginary where we accept both these elements of our psyches and account for, and become capable of guarding against, the Abyss. As a society, we can be aware of human desire and counteract it through democratic processes. In such a society, the fantasy of one man can be counteracted by the discursive practices of the whole society. As such, a safeguard exists against the instauration of destructive institutions or practices.

However, at the same time, there are no guarantees that such safeguards will work. Castoriadis's conception of autonomy requires an acceptance of persistent uncertainty and self-limitation, which is clearly a difficult task to accomplish.¹⁰⁰ A wager is built into an autonomous society, namely a wager on an uncertain future. Making such a wager, and accepting an uncertain future, allows the individual to live freely and furthermore allows the society to construct its future. "An individual has transformed his or her contingency into his or her destiny if this person has arrived at the consciousness of having made the *best* out of his or her practically infinite possibilities. A society has transformed its contingency into its destiny if the members of this society arrive at the awareness that they would prefer to live at no other place and at not other time than the here and now."¹⁰¹ In autonomous society, uncertainty is a way of life, as the radical imaginary provides no guarantees of success. However, this form of uncertainty is more acceptable because it is on the collective's terms. The community wagers on a future of its own making, and, as such, is more able to deal with the consequences of uncertainty.

Because an autonomous society requires the acceptance of uncertainty, democratic institutions require the active and lucid participation of citizens in the political sphere. "The political is the way in which a society and its members come to understand themselves as *this* society rather than an accidental coexistence of random particular movements that have temporarily congealed under the pressure of outside and accidental forces."¹⁰² A democratic citizenry must be actively engaged in the construction of the institutions that govern it and furthermore must be willing to question and criticize the existing institutional structure. No institution can be conceived in final terms. Autonomous institutions rely on the participation of a citizenry for their continuing

existence *qua* autonomous institutions. Such institutions must remain open, subject to questioning by the people, and furthermore, subject to alteration. If these conditions do not exist, the institution becomes alienated from the people who created it, and thus relies on a heteronomous justification for its continued existence. For example, the new social, political, and economic institutions created during the modern era derived their legitimacy from human subjects and therefore had the potential to remain autonomous, had they justified themselves on the continuous participation of, and interrogation by, those who had created them. With the construction of the instituted-modern imaginary, however, this possibility was covered over and alienation ensued.

In addition to the active participation of citizens in the questioning of the instituted-imaginary, democracy must be self-limiting. “Democratic society is instituted as a society without a body, as a society which undermines the representation of an organic totality.”¹⁰³ Democracy is an affirmative response to the problematization of final markers. Unlike totalitarianism, democracy responds to the disappearance of final markers as a condition for freedom and self-formation.¹⁰⁴ In such a society, people experience indeterminacy as to the basis of power, law, and knowledge and as to the basis of the relationship between the self and the Other. Furthermore, in a democracy, the process of questioning is central to social life, where no answers are permanent or certain.¹⁰⁵ It is in this uncertainty where the temptation of totalitarianism resides. As such, a democratic citizenry must accept that there are limited possibilities to what the democratic system can accomplish. These limits are imposed by the need for consistent, active, and lucid participation.¹⁰⁶ Thus, for example, a self-limiting democratic system cannot posit an institutional structure that will exist beyond the life of the collective itself.

Such an institutional structure would represent *hubris*, in the sense that the contemporary democratic citizenry is convinced that its existing instituted-imaginary transcends the social-historical and can be valid now and for all time. In autonomous society, such imaginaries must be rejected in favor of the insuring that the political remains as a space for the active participation of democratic citizens. The construction of a self-limiting democracy, according to Castoriadis, requires a transformation of the way in which individuals living in instituted-modern societies view the world around them. The bureaucratic-capitalist imaginary posits the possibility of the total rational mastery of both the natural and the social worlds. If an autonomous democratic society is to exist, this signification must be rejected in favor of auto-limitation. “Nous devons denoncer l’hubris en nous et autour de nous, accéder à un éthos d’autolimitation et de prudence, accepter cette mortalité radicale pour devenir enfin, tant que faire se peut, libres.”¹⁰⁷

In order to construct a self-limiting democratic system and to resist the temptation to construct alienated institutions, a democratic system must be conceived as a regime, rather than as a simple set of procedures. Democracy is a form of society, not merely a set of institutions. Where in a monarchy, power is condensed in the person of the king, in a democracy the locus of power is an empty place. This prevents the government from fully appropriating power for its own ends and insures that the exercise of power is the result of a controlled contest with permanent rules.¹⁰⁸ The distinction between the political and politics creates a space in which democracy can flourish, but which also requires a democratic culture, a daunting task in itself. There is a constant temptation to reduce the political to politics or to overcome this distinction by an appeal to a higher unity. Conceiving of democracy as solely as set of procedures exacerbates the temptation

to reduce democracy to these procedural structures, leading to a situation where only the sporadic participation of the citizenry is required. Procedural democracy can be reduced to politics; the political as a separate domain of active participation and decision-making is unnecessary, as the citizens are able to cede authority to elected representatives and need not question the existing instituted-imaginary. Castoriadis argues that the procedural aspect is only one part of a democratic regime. What is also required is that these procedures be democratic in spirit and be part of an active democratic educational process that cultivates a democratic culture and identity.¹⁰⁹

Connected to the concept of democracy as a regime, Castoriadis argues that an autonomous democratic society must also construct a democratic culture and a democratic identity. With the construction of democratic social institutions, the democratic regime is reinforced by the fact these institutions will play a significant role in the socialization process. Democratic habits will be instilled in the individual from the moment he is born, strengthening that individual's ability to participate in the democratic process and also serving as a guard against the development of destructive doctrines that reject the democratic process. According to Castoriadis, it is through the development of democratic culture and identity that individual rights can be defended. Castoriadis argues that individual rights are laudable, universal values.¹¹⁰ However, he argues that the majority of states in the world do not respect these rights, and the liberal idea that they will spread spontaneously is untenable.¹¹¹ According to Castoriadis, rights cannot be founded in any extra-social or pre-social source of authority. Thus, for example, Rawls' concept of the overlapping consensus and the original position as the legitimating force behind the political conception of justice will ultimately fail under particular political

conditions. One must recognize that regimes that abuse the rights of the individual are constructed by human beings. The function of a discourse concerning the “rights of man” is to flee from historical and political responsibility. Any defense of individual rights must be founded on the construction of institutions, specifically a democratic culture and identity, wherein *we* assert that we reject the abuse of individual rights, both at home and abroad.¹¹² As such the defense of individual rights must be conceived in terms of a principle of autonomy, whereby the collective of citizens asserts that each individual should be treated as an independent autonomous being. These rights must be asserted and defended publicly. Finally, individual rights cannot be conceived as absolute injunctions; they are a political institution, subject to questioning and criticism by the collective of citizens. However, when a democratic culture and identity exist as social institutions, even when questioned, these rights, as an institution, can reproduce themselves through the fact that they are asserted, defended, and practiced on a daily basis. Of course, the socialization process is never complete, in that social institutions do not create democratic automata who will automatically participate in the public sphere. The radical imaginary always remains as the Abyss confronting each individual. However, these institutions will habituate the individual into a democratic language and practice, a set of rules that prescribe norms of conduct in seeking self-chosen satisfactions and in performing self-chosen actions. Such a language creates a political identity between people otherwise engaged in diverse enterprises.¹¹³ In this way citizenship is more than a legal status and becomes a political identity.¹¹⁴

The role of the *agora* is particularly important in the construction of a democratic culture and identity. Within this public-private sphere, citizens participate in discourse

on a daily basis, allowing them to cultivate the habits of responsible, democratic participation. Furthermore, the existence of the *agora* promotes a democratic educational process, where citizens are steeped in a pedagogical experience throughout their life. Castoriadis' advocacy of such institutions and processes reflects his argument that the individual is constructed by the instituted-imaginary of the society in which he lives. If institutions are autonomous and are subject to the questioning of the individuals living in that society, citizens will be socialized to participate in democratic decision-making and to question the existing instituted-imaginary. As such, democratic education becomes crucial in an autonomous society. In order to insure that the democratic regime continues to exist, it is imperative that citizens be educated in such a way as to socialize them into the system of participatory democracy.

Furthermore, the construction of a democratic culture that will successfully tie citizens to participation in the political domain requires some method of economic equality, in order to insure that each citizen has the ability to participate in the public realm free of dependency on other citizens. "A significant reduction in economic inequality is surely crucial to a robust democracy. But such a project must be pursued in ways that do not undermine either existing cultural pluralism or future possibilities of democratic pluralization: equality must be viewed not simply as an end in itself but also as a condition of democratic pluralization"¹¹⁵ Connolly elaborates two goals that should be incorporated into any future model of a participatory democracy. First, to establish a floor beneath which no citizen is allowed to fall, thus allowing every individual the means to participate in politics if they so desire. Second, a glass ceiling that is difficult to break through should be established in order to prevent the upper class from withdrawing

completely from political life, a situation that would allow the wealthy to escape the collective conditions affecting the rest of society.¹¹⁶ Castoriadis agrees with Connolly's advocacy of economic equality, arguing that an individual cannot be autonomous unless he is fully enabled to participate in the public sphere.¹¹⁷ Economic inequality as it exists in bureaucratic-capitalist societies thwarts the ability of each individual to equally participate in the public sphere. The worker, for example, is dependent upon his employer for his economic well-being, reducing the worker's capacity to participate in democratic decision-making. In such a situation, the worker is beholden to his employer, who can easily influence the workers' decision through intimidation and coercion. As such, an autonomous democratic society must instaurate some form of income redistribution in order to guarantee that each individual is able to participate freely in the democratic process.

What then becomes the content of the revolutionary project? Obviously, it can be neither the absurdity of a society without institutions nor one of good institutions given once and for all, since every set of institutions, once established, necessarily tends to become autonomous and to enslave society anew to its underlying imaginary significations. The content of the revolutionary project can only be the aim of a society that has become capable of perpetual renewal of its institutions. Post-revolutionary society will not be simply a self-managed society; it will be a society that self-institutes itself explicitly, not once and for all, but continuously.¹¹⁸

Benjamin Barber argues that "strong democracy requires unmediated self-government by an engaged citizenry. It requires institutions that will involve individuals at both the

neighborhood and the national level in common talk, common decision-making and political judgment, and common action.”¹¹⁹ Pursuant to this goal, Barber outlines a series of reforms that would be necessary to achieve this type of democratic system. Some of these reforms include, for example, a national system of neighborhood assemblies, the use of telecommunications technology to enable the dissemination of information and participatory voting, public support for workplace democracy, and an initiative and referendum procedure that would allow more direct popular participation.¹²⁰ These are the types of institutions that would be necessary to construct the democratic regime that Castoriadis advocates. Such reforms would enable the construction of a democratic culture and identity and allow the active participation of individuals in democratic decision-making. In addition to these institutional reforms, Castoriadis would insist that these institutions remain open to the questioning of the collective itself, allowing the citizenry to alter these institutions depending on the emergence of new social-historical conditions.

The instauration of a democratic regime requires an act of will on the part of individuals and the collective of citizens and a wager on an uncertain future. The fundamentalist Christian, for example, can resign himself to the notion that everything is the result of a divine plan and live happily in the certainty that he is not in control of the world around him, nor is he in control of the future. Thus, he lives a life of blissful alienation to the total heteronomy of an externally-imposed authority. However, this also requires a rejection of the modern imaginary; one cannot believe that God has authored a plan for the world and also accept the humanist notion that we control our own destiny and the destiny of the societies we live in. This is an act of political resignation, a total

retreat into private life and a rejection of the world around us. If we accept the emancipatory potential of the modern imaginary, we must also choose to accept the uncertainty of the radical imaginary and the dangers it presents both to our psyches and to our society. The wager an autonomous society makes on an uncertain future is not a wager against impossible odds. The democratic regime, as the totality of political, economic, and social institutions, reinforces the capacity for reconciliation between the rights of the individual and an expansive vision of public participation. It is imperative that a democratic citizen actively participate in the questioning of institutions and the construction of meaning in the world around us. The alternative is the dilapidated society of the advanced capitalist world. Such a world is worse than heteronomy where the source of authority is external to us. In dilapidated late modern societies, we have created the institutions that repress us, and we are complicit in our own repression. Thus, we can live in this state, or seek to change it through our own act of will. This is the source of the project of autonomy. If we seek to live in real freedom, we must choose to do so and act politically and responsibly in a democratic government.

¹ Jeffrey C. Isaac, "The Return of the Repressed; or the Limits of 'Democratic Theory'," Democracy in Dark Times (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 25.

² *ibid.* 29-30.

³ Lefort, "The Question of Democracy," Democracy and Political Theory, 17.

⁴ Carl Schmitt, The Concept of the Political, trans. George Schwab (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996) 33.

⁵ *ibid.* 29.

⁶ *ibid.* 38.

⁷ *ibid.* 46.

⁸ Arendt, The Human Condition, 30.

⁹ *ibid.* 41.

¹⁰ Arendt, On Revolution, 61.

¹¹ *ibid.* 60.

¹² Castoriadis, "Power, Politics, Autonomy," Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy 158.

¹³ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Does the Idea of Revolution Still Make Sense?" Thesis Eleven

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- 26 (1990) 125.
- ¹⁴ *ibid.* 125.
- ¹⁵ Bauman, In Search of Politics 154.
- ¹⁶ Jeffrey C. Isaac, "Introduction," Democracy in Dark Times (Ithaca: Cornell University Press, 1998) 3.
- ¹⁷ Bauman, In Search of Politics 172.
- ¹⁸ John Rawls, A Theory of Justice (Cambridge: Belknap Press, 1971) 31.
- ¹⁹ *ibid.* 60.
- ²⁰ *ibid.* 60.
- ²¹ *ibid.* 14.
- ²² *ibid.* 302.
- ²³ John Rawls, Political Liberalism, Expanded ed. (New York: Columbia University Press, 2005) 134.
- ²⁴ *ibid.* xlii.
- ²⁵ *ibid.* 134.
- ²⁶ *ibid.* 16.
- ²⁷ *ibid.* xlii.
- ²⁸ *ibid.* 247.
- ²⁹ *ibid.* 247.
- ³⁰ *ibid.* 247.
- ³¹ *ibid.* 12-13.
- ³² *ibid.* 49.
- ³³ Jurgen Habermas, "'Reasonable' versus 'True', or the Morality of Worldviews," The Inclusion of the Other, eds. Ciarin Cronin and Pablo de Greiff (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 77.
- ³⁴ Rogers Smith, Stories of Peoplehood, (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2003) 20.
- ³⁵ *ibid.* 22.
- ³⁶ Rawls, Political Liberalism, 226.
- ³⁷ Smith, Stories of Peoplehood, 43.
- ³⁸ Kevin Phillips, American Theocracy (New York: Viking, 2006) 215.
- ³⁹ *ibid.* 369.
- ⁴⁰ *ibid.* 253.
- ⁴¹ Rawls, A Theory of Justice, 491.
- ⁴² Rawls, Political Liberalism, 22-28.
- ⁴³ Jurgen Habermas, "Reconciliation through the Public Use of Reason," The Inclusion of the Other, eds. Ciarin Cronin and Pablo de Greiff (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 57.
- ⁴⁴ Habermas, "'Reasonable' versus 'True', or the Morality of Worldviews," The Inclusion of the Other 84.
- ⁴⁵ *ibid.* 93.
- ⁴⁶ Best and Kellner, Postmodern Theory, 235.
- ⁴⁷ Jurgen Habermas, "A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality," The Inclusion of the Other, eds. Ciarin Cronin and Pablo de Greiff (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 3.
- ⁴⁸ *ibid.* 4.

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- ⁴⁹ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action Vol 1, 17.
- ⁵⁰ *ibid.* 15.
- ⁵¹ Jurgen Habermas, Between Facts and Norms (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 17.
- ⁵² Habermas, "A Genealogical Analysis of the Cognitive Content of Morality," The Inclusion of the Other 40.
- ⁵³ Jurgen Habermas, "Three Normative Models of Democracy," The Inclusion of the Other, eds. Ciarin Cronin and Pablo de Greiff (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1998) 248.
- ⁵⁴ *ibid.* 250.
- ⁵⁵ Joel Whitebook, Perversion and Utopia (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1995) 179.
- ⁵⁶ Gerald Delanty, Modernity and Postmodernity (London: Sage 2000) 96.
- ⁵⁷ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action Vol 1, 19.
- ⁵⁸ Seyla Benhabib, "Liberal Dialogue Versus a Critical Theory of Discursive Legitimation," Liberalism and the Moral Life, ed. Nancy L. Rosenblum (Cambridge: Harvard University Press, 1989) 144.
- ⁵⁹ *ibid.* 150.
- ⁶⁰ Jurgen Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, vol 2, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Boston: Beacon Press, 1987) 125.
- ⁶¹ Whitebook Perversion and Utopia, 178.
- ⁶² Castoriadis, The Imaginary Institution of Society, 304.
- ⁶³ Dick Howard, The Marxian Legacy, 145.
- ⁶⁴ Castoriadis, "Power, Politics, Autonomy," Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy 144.
- ⁶⁵ Best and Kellner, Postmodern Theory, 237.
- ⁶⁶ David Held, Introduction to Critical Theory, (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1980) 256.
- ⁶⁷ Habermas, The Theory of Communicative Action, vol 1, 17.
- ⁶⁸ Jurgen Habermas, The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity, trans. Frederick G. Lawrence (Cambridge: MIT Press, 1993) 318.
- ⁶⁹ *ibid.* 330.
- ⁷⁰ Andreas Kalvyas, "The Politics of Autonomy and the Challenge of Deliberation," Thesis Eleven 64 (Feb 2001) 11-12.
- ⁷¹ Agnes Heller, "The Discourse Ethic of Habermas," Grandeur and Twilight of Radical Universalism (New Brunswick: Transaction, 1991) 482.
- ⁷² *ibid.* 482.
- ⁷³ Chantal Mouffe, On the Political (New York: Routledge, 2005) 9.
- ⁷⁴ *ibid.* 3.
- ⁷⁵ *ibid.* 21.
- ⁷⁶ *ibid.* 20.
- ⁷⁷ *ibid.* 120-121.
- ⁷⁸ Richard Bernstein, The Abuse of Evil (Malden, MA: Polity Press, 2005) 92.
- ⁷⁹ *ibid.* 93.
- ⁸⁰ Bauman, In Search of Politics 3.
- ⁸¹ *ibid.* 3.
- ⁸² Castoriadis, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime," 7.
- ⁸³ *ibid.* 6.
- ⁸⁴ Benjamin Barber, "Foundationalism and Democracy," A Passion for Democracy

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- (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1998) 21.
- ⁸⁵ Sheldon Wolin, "Fugitive Democracy," Constellations 1:1 (1994) 13.
- ⁸⁶ *ibid.* 14.
- ⁸⁷ *ibid.* 17.
- ⁸⁸ *ibid.* 19.
- ⁸⁹ Castoriadis, "Quelle Démocratie," Figures du Pensable, 157.
- ⁹⁰ *ibid.* 152.
- ⁹¹ *ibid.* 157.
- ⁹² *ibid.* 158.
- ⁹³ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Le Project d'autonomie n'est pas une utopie," Une société à la dérive, eds. Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas, et Pascal Vernay (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005) 17.
- ⁹⁴ "Its realization depends on the lucid activity of individuals and peoples, on their comprehension, their will, and their imagination." *ibid.* 17. Translation mine.
- ⁹⁵ *ibid.* 17.
- ⁹⁶ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Psychoanalyse et Société," Domaines de l'Homme (Paris: Seuil, 1977) 38.
- ⁹⁷ Heller, Can Modernity Survive? 40.
- ⁹⁸ Castoriadis, "Psychoanalyse et Société," Domaines de l'Homme, 38.
- ⁹⁹ *ibid.* 40.
- ¹⁰⁰ Cornelius Castoriadis, "Psyché et education," Domaines de l'Homme (Paris: Seuil, 1977) 217.
- ¹⁰¹ Heller, Can Modernity Survive? 41.
- ¹⁰² Dick Howard, "The Politicization of Politics," Political Judgments (Lanham, MD: Rowman and Littlefield, 1996) 4.
- ¹⁰³ Lefort, "The Question of Democracy," Democracy and Political Theory 18.
- ¹⁰⁴ William Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1995) 154.
- ¹⁰⁵ Lefort, "The Question of Democracy," Democracy and Political Theory 19.
- ¹⁰⁶ Castoriadis, "Quelle Démocratie?" Domaines de l'Homme 150.
- ¹⁰⁷ "We must reject hubris in ourselves and around us, achieve an ethos of self-limitation and prudence, accept this radical mortality in order to become at last as free as possible." *ibid.* 186. Translation mine.
- ¹⁰⁸ Lefort, "The Question of Democracy," Democracy and Political Theory 17.
- ¹⁰⁹ Castoriadis, "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime," 111.
- ¹¹⁰ Castoriadis, "Le Projet d'Autonomie n'est pas une utopie," Une Société a la dérive, 24.
- ¹¹¹ *ibid.* 24.
- ¹¹² Cornelius Castoriadis, "Tiers Monde, Tiers-mondisme, Démocratie," Domaines de l'Homme (Paris: Seuil, 1997) 106.
- ¹¹³ Chantal Mouffe, "Democratic Citizenship and Political Community," The Return of the Political (London: Verso, 1993) 67.
- ¹¹⁴ *ibid.* 69.
- ¹¹⁵ Connolly, The Ethos of Pluralization 80.
- ¹¹⁶ *ibid.* 81.

¹¹⁷ Castoriadis, “Quelle Démocratie?” Domaines de l’Homme 151.

¹¹⁸ Castoriadis, “General Introduction,” Political and Social Writings, Vol 1, 31.

¹¹⁹ Benjamin Barber, Strong Democracy (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984) 261.

¹²⁰ *ibid.* 307.

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