

## EDITORIAL INTRODUCTION

### CASTORIADIS, GENEALOGY, HISTORY: REMAINING REVOLUTIONARY, REMAINING OPEN

The entirety of Castoriadis' work and life is constituted in the image of his intellectual and political commitment to go beyond any instituted reason. In the field of knowledge all the forms of specialism such as methodological individualism, system theory, gnoseological realism, constructivism and positivism share, according to Castoriadis, a common metaphysical logic: the identitary logic that has defined the statute of philosophy and its hereditary ontological categories. The intellectual journey of Castoriadis has been a constant struggle against this way of thinking by unveiling the intrinsically oppressive character of the project of a society based on these metaphysical categories, a set of categories that are recognised as universally valid. All the narrations and thought traditions, even in the most sophisticated forms, have constantly interpreted the passage from a state of nature to society within an irrepressible rational dialectic of history that corresponded to a transcendental nature of self-referential, abstract and self founded rationality.

This totalizing vision of social and natural universe has prevented us from thinking of multiplicity and difference at an ontological as well as social level. According to Castoriadis this is due to the inability of the traditional forms of thought to conceive the diversity of cultures, institutions and societies and consequently to explain the dialectic between the real and imaginary, which he argues is the way any society constitutes itself. As the critical literature in this field has reminded us, the paradigm behind this model of contemporary thought can be traced back to the dialectic of nature/artificial world that is applied to the whole spectrum of social and natural sciences. On the one side there is a quantity of instincts, desires and urges and on the other side the instrumental rationality that acts through a set of rules in the institutionalized system in order to exercise power over man's needs as legitimated by the instrumental reason.

Given this, Castoriadis has tried to break away from this epistemological model that highlights the attempt of this socio-historical machine to remove all the problems and radical questions that man in his autonomy should ask: What can we think or what do

we have to think of? How do we represent ourselves in relation to the others? And more importantly, the questioning of the *practices* in which man is continuously engaged. It is this issue of practices that became one of the central theses of his *political activity* starting with his role in the journal *Socialisme ou barbarie* (1949-1965). It is in this field of human activity that all the abstract categories have to find a political answer (solution).

Thus it is here that we are exposed to the uncompromising intellectual critique that Castoriadis applies to modern society and where he analyses the two political expressions of it: capitalism and communism. As has been well established, his criticism is directed to the central role assigned to the economy and work in these two political systems, a role that is understood as a unifying moment of an imaginary meaning which considers infinite progress (in Marxist terms the development of productive forces) as its ultimate goal. The overcoming of capitalism therefore, can only happen when the change of the paradigm involves another set of social and historical significations which can question the old meanings by placing them in the middle ('*es meson*' as in the Greek democracy) of the assembly.

Castoriadis remarks therefore, that the primary role of questioning constitutes the first political act that has to go through the creative moment of the production of new existential meanings that take the form of an individual and social imaginary. Instead of replicating what is passed on by tradition, politics has to become the activity which puts into question its constitutive elements by allowing it to release those desiring and imaginative forces that live within any individual and society.

In the light of this fundamental contribution to philosophy, this issue of *Cosmos and History* is dedicated to the work of Castoriadis with the express intention, in line with the mission of the journal, of keeping alive his thought for the future generations of men and women of this world. To this extent this issue is just one small part of a broader effort to keep Castoriadis' work alive, an effort of which this issue has relied. However, this issue would not have been possible without the important annual conferences that every year are held in various universities of Australia. For this reason we are grateful to a number of people including: Suzie Adams who is a key organizer of this project; John Rundell hosting for the 2010 event at Melbourne University; Toulia Nicolacopoulos and George Vassilacopoulos for hosting the 2011 event at La Trobe University; and finally to all the past and future participants who render it possible to discuss and keep alive the thought of Cornelius Castoriadis.