

AUTO-POIESIS: THE SELF AND THE PRINCIPLE OF CREATIVITY IN THE PHILOSOPHICAL ANTHROPOLOGY AND PSYCHOANALYSIS OF CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS

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ABSTRACT: The principle of creativity constitutes a central point in the philosophical-anthropological as much as in the psychoanalytic work of the Greek philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis. In Castoriadis's thought the creative praxis of the human being is dependent on the innate imaginary force. The purpose of this article is to elaborate the way that subjectivity and the social field are constituted and interconnected through the unfolding of two fundamental concepts of Castoriadis, the *radical imagination* which applies to the psyche and the *social imaginary significations* which applies to the social. The text aims to point out that Castoriadis's intention was to make thinkable the content of autonomy in psychoanalytic terms of an "exchange" between the conscious and the unconscious that unleashes the creative potentiality of the psyche, and also becomes a precondition of political autonomy.

KEYWORDS: Subject; Creativity; Auto-poiesis; Psyche; Unconscious; Radical imaginary; Autonomy; Social imaginary significations

INTRODUCTION

This article is focused on Castoriadis's fundamental psychoanalytic account of the individual which I correlate with his philosophical-anthropological approach. The main idea in Castoriadis's analysis is the human being as a subjectivity with the ability to constitute its own essential quality. This implies that if the human being is to be seen as characterized by some kind of "essence", this essence should not be understood as a preexistent, solid identity, but instead as an innate principle of creativity which ascribes

to the person the ability of auto-poiesis or self-constitution.¹ This understanding has to be seen in relation to a certain degree of indeterminacy which is fundamental in the Castoriadic ontology.

The present analysis aims to show that Castoriadis's focus on the creative potential of the subjectivity does not overlook the deluded or irrational aspect of the human being, and is not expressed as a romanticized affirmation of positivity, as it has sometimes been maintained.² In comparison to Lacan who stresses the alienating aspect of every social construction and inherent human limitations, Castoriadis aims to bridge the chasm between the individual and the social. His purpose is exactly to create the conceptual conditions for recovering from the dualism that is partly brought about by people's alienation from social creation and partly by their psychological inclinations. However, the connection between the psyche and the social can neither be interpreted in terms of identification or holism. Castoriadis intends to articulate the terms and conditions of a possible exodus of the conditions of heteronomy in a two-fold perspective that applies to the individual *and* the social. Since the imaginative capacity is tightly connected to the innate creative principle of the human being, and it serves as a catalyst for its manifestation, Castoriadis uses two terms to refer respectively to the imaginary forces of the individual and the social, the radical imaginary and the social imaginary. In this article I examine the ways in which these two aspects interact in the development of the individual psyche, and the terms under which they can both be analyzed in respect to the project of autonomy.

My position is that Castoriadis's approach of an inherent principle of creativity does not stem from a naïve idealism. It is rather founded on his interpretation of the psychoanalytic imperative, and I claim that it is in this context that he could possibly be better understood. I suggest that autonomy in psychoanalytic terms for Castoriadis is articulated in terms of a reversal between the unfolding of conscious and unconscious processes and mental activity. Castoriadis's understanding of autonomy as a process of elucidation and praxis which aims to liberate from the unconscious determinism, as well as from the domination of the 'conscious' mind over the unconscious, can be also examined as Castoriadis's critique or reconsideration of the hierarchical psychoanalytic structure which is established by Freud.

¹ C. Castoriadis, *Anthropology, Politics, Philosophy* (Ανθρωπολογία, Πολιτική, Φιλοσοφία), Athens: Ipsilon, 2001, pp. 138-154.

² See Y. Staurakakis, *The Lacanian Left, Psychoanalysis, Theory, Politics*, Edinburgh University Press, Edinburgh, 2007, p. 17.

IN BETWEEN THE RADICAL IMAGINATION AND THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY

The ontological principle of intrinsic creativity on which Castoriadis's anthropology is based on, enables the precept of self-alteration to take place as an actuality empowered by the force of imaginary. Being altered thus signifies not just a possibility for the human being but the necessary process of generating meaning which itself enables the being to *become*, and sustains it in a process of a continuous becoming. The principle of the *poietical* activity that permits the human being to be altered serves as a carrier of meaning and becomes a never ending process that gives shape to the individual as a kind of permanent potentiality.

The above process involves an ability of enclosing otherness into the concept of the self, as Castoriadis puts it. This is the point where psychoanalysis is introduced in this philosophical inquiry. For psychoanalysis serves as a method which leads to the emergence of the internal otherness, and by doing so, it constitutes the precondition of psychic autonomy. The imperative of autonomy could be recognized as Castoriadis's most characteristic and significant contribution in political philosophy. The present analysis aims to expound the particular way in which this idea is implemented in his psychoanalytic approach. Autonomy should therefore be interpreted both in political *and* psychological terms. It is my intention to reflect upon, and expound, how in Castoriadis's philosophy the individual autonomy is connected to social autonomy.

In political philosophy and mostly in macro-politics the emphasis is usually put on the individual's dependence on the social, to the extent that a person is being formed through constitution and social conditions. This is the reason why in political and revolutionary theory it has been stressed so far the necessity of a constitutional change, but so little has been said on the necessity of the subject's transformation in the form of a political imperative. However, it should be noted that the reason for bringing together psychoanalysis and political thought is exactly to demonstrate that politics should not be understood in reference to a unilateral dependence of the individual upon the social. In Castoriadis's thought the subject's singularity is acknowledged as a prerequisite for the social condition of collective *autonomy*. Castoriadis makes clear that the essential progress of the analytical process depends on the attainment of a degree of autonomy. The psychic autonomy appears as a deeply political concept if analyzed in a twofold way: as personal autonomy from the control applied by the unconscious mechanisms, and as autonomy from the imposed social norm and dominion. Autonomy, therefore, concerns the capability of deconstructing - and going beyond - the established social framework which shapes the conditions of *heteronomous bios*, a predetermined and contained form of life.

Castoriadis's aspiration to bring together political philosophy and psychoanalysis can be seen as corresponding to the emancipating aspirations of thinkers like Herbert Marcuse, one of the pioneers of the Freudo-Marxist movement who belonged to the Frankfurt School of Critical Theory. Marcuse focuses on the contradiction between the two Freudian principles, the pleasure principle and the reality principle, in the capitalist context, and the role of technical rationality in organizing the modern hierarchical society, production, administration and suppressive societal mechanisms³. His analysis of repression within capitalism is mostly associated with Freud's critique of civilization and his criticism is characterized by the radicalization of Hegelian dialectical thinking⁴. However, Marcuse's critique of both Freud and Marx remains still within the Freudo-Marxist perspective. Castoriadis's critique of Marx goes even further leading to radical negation. Castoriadis's break with the Marxist tradition gives rise to the imperative of autonomy in terms of both individual and collective life. Marx's account of history as a linear progressive process and his inability to develop a critique of technique, were two factors that led Castoriadis to overcome Marxism. Although Marx consistently criticized the inhuman conditions of work in capitalist factories, he failed to question the way factories were organized, the implied rationality of such organization and the form of technique, and took them as granted. According to Castoriadis, it was Marx's specific concept of history that inhibited the development of a critique of technique and its pseudo-'rationality', which would be fundamental obstacles in the establishment of an autonomous and self-governing society⁵.

The two types of individual and social autonomy in Castoriadis meet in the twofold meaning of imaginary: the *radical imagination*, on the one side, applies to the imaginary flow of representations of the psyche, and the *social imaginary significations*, on the other side, which applies to the creation of meaning as a collective creation of the socio-historical field. The two dimensions of imaginary are codependent since one is not reducible to the other, but neither one exists without the other.⁶ The imaginary, both collective and individual, is considered as a source of creation for individuals and societies. The world itself comes into being as a creation of the imagined world of signification. Therefore, Castoriadis maintains, it exists as an absolute creation: *creation ex nihilo* for it is a result of the primary social imaginary significations, though not *in*

³ See H. Marcuse, *Eros and Civilization*, Boston: Beacon Press Books, 1974.

⁴ See H. Marcuse, *Reason and Revolution: Hegel and the Rise of Social Theory*, New York: Humanity Books, 1999.

⁵ C. Memos, *Castoriadis and Critical Theory: Crisis, Critique and Radical Alternatives*, New York: Palgrave Macmillan, 2014, p. 85.

⁶ C. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of the Society*, Cambridge: The Polity Press, 1987, p. 274.

nihilo or *cum nihilo*,⁷ that is to say, not within nothing, not in void. In social imaginary there are always restrictions; however, Castoriadis insists in its undetermined character. The whole existence is ascribed with the unmotivated, indeterminate *vis formandi* which manifests to the individual as the *libido formandi*.⁸ Thus, Castoriadis's ontology of creativity is formed as a critical approach of Freud's solidified analysis of the Ego-structured self, and succeeds to transcend the traditional Freudian conceptualization and its limitations.

The psyche is the most dominant aspect of the human being, and in Castoriadian ontology is defined as the radical imaginative quality. Identified with the *radical imagination* itself, psyche is a flux of representations (Castoriadis, 1987, 255) which – similarly to what Freud's analysis revealed in respect to the dominance of the pleasure principle – a priori resists the absolute assimilation into the real. This implies that reality, far from being a prefixed condition, initially manifests to the individual perception as an undetermined creation. On the other hand, a characteristic of psyche is the need for symbolic meaning that is expected to come from the *social imaginative significance*, the perpetual source of meaning for the individual. This form of meaning stems from what Castoriadis calls the *social imaginary* which takes shape as a collective creation. This provision is considered as necessary according to an unexpected anthropological estimation that goes as follows: “human beings are totally degenerative, crazy animals that are fundamentally incapable of surviving if they were left only to themselves” (Castoriadis, 2001, p. 52).⁹ This holdover of “unifying madness” for Castoriadis constitutes a unique characteristic of the human nature which originates from the primal solipsistic psychic core. Even if this incoherent aspect is likely to take the form of the adult's rationality, still to some extent aims to a return to the undifferentiated condition that Freud referred to by the term *oceanic feeling*.

Freud used the term *oceanic* to refer to the sensation of being in unification with the

⁷ Castoriadis's ontology of creative imaginary in respect to social-historical creation *ex nihilo* appears to be in contrast to hermeneutics. However, with the extension of his comprehension of the ontological creation of form into nature as it is presented in the final part of ‘The Imaginary Institution of Society’, Castoriadis appears to expand the traditional phenomenological perspective. See S. Adams, *Castoriadis's Ontology: Being and Creation* (Perspectives in Continental Philosophy), Fordham University Press, 2011.

⁸ On creation as a fundamental ontological category in Castoriadis, see F. Ciaramelli, “The Self-Presupposition of the Origin: Homage to Cornelius Castoriadis”, *Thesis Eleven*, vol. 49, no. 1, 1997, pp. 45-67. And on the Castoriadian notion of creation as a ‘critical’ concept in contrast to the implementation of ‘creation’ by the consumerist capitalistic society, C. De Cock, A. Rehn, D. Berry, “For a Critical Creativity: The Radical Imagination of Cornelius Castoriadis” in *Handbook of Research on Creativity*, K. Thomas, J. Chan (eds.), Cheltenham: Edward Elgar Publishing, 2013, pp. 150-161.

⁹ Translation mine.

universe.¹⁰ A reference to this concept by Freud is found to a letter addressed to Romain Roland. Roland employs this notion to describe the spontaneous religious sentiment of the eternal, which actually is not 'perceived', but directly experienced by the person as a condition of being *it* in a non-dual state. For him it expresses the religious energy that can be found in all religious systems beyond beliefs and ideologies. Freud used this concept to refer to a primitive 'ego-feeling'. He uses this concept to describe the infantile consciousness which has not been differentiated by the external environment. The undifferentiated condition of the self (or better selflessness) lasts, according to Freud, for the period the baby is breast-fed. This primitive ego-feeling precedes the perception of an ego, which arises when the breast is taken away. This is when the ego as a separate feeling of a self arises. Nevertheless, Freud does not deny that the oceanic feeling as a sense of oneness with the world might be preserved during maturation, due to the capacity of memory to preserve early experience in adulthood.¹¹ However, Castoriadis's approach of the *oceanic* does not conform to the Freudian, but could be said that is in a sense compatible with Marcuse's vision. If the societally imposed principle of arranging the psyche is the principle of *difference*, what is jeopardized and occasioned by the acceptance of this fact is a new adjustment which tends toward the longing for the primal unity that Freud describes as *oceanic feeling* by the elimination of *difference* but also of repression (Castoriadis, 1987, 298-300). Nevertheless, although this is not a matter of concern within the context of the present topic, I am not sure if, within their psychoanalytic perspective, not only Freud but even Castoriadis recognized to its actual extent the dynamic psychic aspect that the primordial oceanic feeling entails. This dynamic aspect manifests through the unfolding of the mysterious and largely unexplored psychic powers and their connection to the expansion of consciousness as it is apparent in the realizations embedded in the doctrines of early ancient religions and schools of philosophy.¹²

Returning to the statement of the "unifying madness", this statement should be probably perceived as indicating a middle way in between optimistic views of inherent sociability and pessimistic views of inherent unsociability. Castoriadis founds the being's ability for *ex nihilo* creation upon an ontology that is contrasted to the Aristotelian a priori sociability, and the Socratic ideal of the soul as expressed by Plato.

¹⁰ S. Freud, *Civilization and Its Discontents*, New York: W. W. Norton & Company, 1989.

¹¹ W. B. Parsons, "The Freud-Roland Correspondence", in *The Enigma of the Oceanic Feeling: Revisioning the Psychoanalytic Theory of Mysticism*, New York, Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1999, pp. 19-88.

¹² On the approach of the oceanic feeling as the source of the ancient spiritual experience: M. J. Masson, *The Oceanic Feeling: The Origins of Religious Sentiment in Ancient India*, Dordrecht, Holland: D. Reidel Publishing Company, 1980.

However, it can be noticed that even for the ancients, beauty and the manifestation of the grace of soul in the physical realm is not ensured without some prerequisites such as systematic exercise, self-examination and self-discipline; and that is something of course that pertains also to the cultivation of individuals by means of the polis or the community. For Aristotle virtue is elective *habitus* (ἔξις προαιρετικῆ).¹³ While in Plato's dualistic description of the soul in *Phaedo*, the irrational aspect appears to be the bipolar of the rational, and the latter is considered as that which enables self-government.¹⁴ On the other hand, Castoriadis's negative ontological statement does neither resemble the pessimistic Hobbesian view of the unsocial human being, nor does it lead to conservative political suggestions. In either case, many could be said on what is carried along by a human being when it comes to life (contrasting views relevant to the platonic concepts of memory or others of intrinsic divinity could take place), and this may be a good topic to be discussed elsewhere beyond the Castoriadian psychoanalytic context.

According to Castoriadis's aforementioned statement, there is no such thing as an a priori of logos. The emphasis of Castoriadis on a primal irrationality, on the power of imaginary, and the human capacity to transcend the irrational state through imaginary significations juxtaposes Castoriadis to the idealistic tradition of an inherent rationality and sociability that is usually taken for granted. The human being is not seen as logical by nature, but is seen as taking birth in the form of an irrational creature which 'becomes', it is becoming humane through the interference of the 'social'. Moreover, the human is not born with an intrinsic ability of coexistence.¹⁵ By means of institution, "this writhing little monster will either end up in psychotic autism, fortunately in rare cases, or it will become a social being."¹⁶ Therefore, occasioned by this thesis of primal imperfection or even insanity, the being in the Castoriadian anthropology is heading towards fulfilment, and the acquisition of some kind of rationality which, actually, can never be taken for granted. The difference between the aforementioned view of Castoriadis, and thinkers who defend the human 'immaturity' hypothesis, is that for the former this view does not serve as a pretext for political sovereignty and

¹³ Aristotle, *The Nicomachean Ethics*, trans. H. Rackham, (The Loeb Classical Library), Cambridge/ Mass./ London: Harvard University Press/ W. Heinemann, 1926.

¹⁴ Plato, *Phaedo*, trans. David Galop, (Oxford World's Classics), Oxford: Oxford University Press, 1996.

¹⁵ Even if there cannot be found an innate sociability in the Castoriadian thought like in Aristotle, yet when Castoriadis advocates that the human being is not 'born' but rather 'becomes', his perspective could be defined as Aristotelian, taking into account that nature in Aristotle is not exhausted in birth but is defined by the vocation, that is the end (telos/ τέλος), which is identified with the "form".

¹⁶ C., Castoriadis, *Lectures in Greece* (Οι ομιλίες στην Ελλάδα), Athens: Ipsilon, 2000, p. 56. Translation mine.

psychological paternalism. For Castoriadis this kind of human condition is always to be transcended, as during the process of maturation the human being develops the capacity of liberation. Therefore, it can be said that this ‘autistic’ insanity is not ‘nature’ in the sense of an unsurpassable obstacle or a permanent mental state; since the human being has been also endowed with the ability of *alloiosis* that is self-alteration and self-invention.

SUBLIMATION IN A SOCIAL AND POLITICAL CONTEXT

The basic precondition of self-alteration is the process of sublimation as the particular psychic process of humanization of the being. This process is taken not to be coming to an end with adulthood but to be unfolding over the whole span of a person’s life. Therefore, sublimation is considered as the psychic process which enables socialization. As such, it is also related to politics, as well as to the project of autonomy as introduced by Castoriadis. Sublimation can be acknowledged as the meeting point of nature and civilization, or nature and culture. The automatic function of desire is constituted through sublimatory investment by the phantasmatic or representational pleasure. Thus, human sexuality appears not as functional neither as abstract spiritualization but instead as a matter of pleasure of phantasy. Therefore, the instinctual self is transformed, and human imagination grows as independent of the drive, while this transition becomes “functional” in another sense;¹⁷ ensuring the survival and the progress of the subject, which otherwise would have been obstructed by the prevalence of the absolute character of the nature of drives.

Nevertheless, to the extent that sublimation in psychoanalytic terms represents the idiogenetic process of socialization, it also adopts an ontological status which consists in the process of creation of the self, in the sense that it constitutes a species, a particular form of being. This ontological creation, for Castoriadis, does not merely correspond to the material form of the being as constituted by molecules etc. But even in this level of “material” formation – since what is material is not yet after all ultimately defined – it can be suggested that being is in a process of a never ending becoming. The human being is not born as a static identity, but it ‘becomes’ through interaction with the institutional agency and cultural factors, until the end of its life. Therefore, the primal psychic energy is in multiple ways reshaped and formulated by the social. The latter subdues the natural tendency for omnipotence. Through the psychic separation which emerges from connecting with others, socialization emerges as a violent rupture which restrains the rampant imaginative force. The feeling of

¹⁷ S. Gourgouris, “On Self-Alteration”, *Parhesia*, vol. 9, 2010, pp. 1-17.

omnipotence on the part of the subject is sacrificed in favor of the pleasure of community; it is exchanged for the sake of security of the Ego and constitution of meaning (Castoriadis, 1987, 302). From this twofold aspect of sublimation, therefore, stems on the one hand, the critique of civilization as repressive of the human drives and the deeper needs of the psyche in favor of the goals of productivity and maximization, resulting to an unsatisfactory psychic life, while, on the other hand, sublimation appears to be the fundamental precondition of the greatest manifestations of human intelligence, the most attractive forms of aesthetic and mental creation. Both aspects were initially expressed as such by Freud.

Freud's difficulty in finding a resolution to the contradiction between the phylogenetic and socio-historical nature of the human being, has often lead to the perception of sublimation by psychoanalysts and theoreticians as a pathological condition which renders the human being pathological by nature. When encountering the dichotomy between libidinal repression and progress of civilization, Freud comprehends libidinal potential as something that has to be abandoned for the sake of the progress of civilization.¹⁸ Freud's noted pessimism leads him to acknowledge repression as a necessary condition for the growth of the civilized society. Therefore, he cannot avoid the politically conservative consequences of his position and the skepticism toward any emancipating imperative. It is a significant predicament of the Freudian psychology of the personality that the (supposed healthy) Ego, assigned to govern the unconscious desire, takes over the decisive role to dominate the unconscious as well as the Superego with the latter representing society's conscious agency within the individual. This hierarchical organization of internal principles or aspects of the personality entails a dual repression, upon the Id, as well as upon the Superego. Hence, in Freud's later work, as Castoriadis points out, a shift from the Superego to the Ego as the locus of society's conscious agency can be noticed. The heteronomous ego becomes the locus of a heteronomous sublimation in a broader social-cultural context.¹⁹ In this respect, Castoriadis, contrasting himself to Freud, elaborates a resolution, taking sublimation not as a proto-formative process but as a practico-poietical activity and designating it not merely as of psychoanalytic importance but as fundamentally engaging in politics.

¹⁸ For a political critique of Freud's solution to the problem of drives, and the civilizational repression from the perspective of the Critical Theory, H. Marcuse, 1974 and J. V. O'Casey, "Eroticizing Marx, Revolutionizing Freud: Marcuse's Psychoanalytic Turn", *Kritike*, vol. 3, no. 1, June 2009, pp. 10-23.

¹⁹ See S. Freud, *Beyond the Pleasure Principle*, New York – London: W. W. Norton & Company, 1961, and *The Ego and the Id: and Other Works*, Standard ed., London: Hogarth Press and the Institute of Psychoanalysis, 1961.

Since the human survival and socialization would be prevented by the insatiable nature of human desire, sublimation is rendered an intrinsic feature and basic element of humanization, a prerequisite for survival and socialization. Therefore, sublimation does not necessarily constitute “civilization” in the context of an internalization of the superego type precepts within the person; it rather constitutes an autopoietic quality. From the perspective of the primal psychic core that, urged by the pleasure principle, rejects the nature of reality, and resists the abandonment of omnipotence, sublimation would appear as a heteronomous rule or as an external principle, which imposes itself by force. Whereas from the perspective of psyche’s imaginative ability, that depends on the imaginative flux of representations, sublimation appears as psyche’s cultural capacity. Therefore, it seems that the capacity for interpreting society’s significations into psychic terms, which is activated by sublimation, is an inherent attribute of the psyche that may provide the psyche with an amount of pleasure, which in turn is able to counterbalance the feeling of lack caused by separation. Thereby, the innate imaginative capacity of the psyche renders possible the human historical and cultural creation (Castoriadis, 1987, 2000).

Thus, with Castoriadis’s attempt to clarify the conditions under which sublimation activates an altered, distinctive way of connecting to reality, to the extent that it is not restricted to sole passive internalization of societal imaginative significances, sublimation is turned from a psychoanalytic problem to a political one. This is so because psychoanalysis may partly reveal the conditions which enable the rationalization that is presupposed for sublimation, but cannot define the object due to which the shift of the drive (*trieb*) occurs, the roots of sublimation are socio-historical. This means that the cause for the emergence of sublimation is found in the social-historical field.²⁰ The psychoanalytic topic proves to be profoundly political, since it is related to the formation of subjectivity and power relations. In the following sections, it will be defined the way in which subjectivity is related to power through psychoanalysis. It will also be explicated, how Castoriadis comprehends liberation from psychic heteronomy, and in what way this understanding is connected to social autonomy. However, it is important to remain for a while in Castoriadis’s ontology, and analyze the psyche as constituted by the radical imaginary that is, according to his analysis, deeply embedded within the human being.

²⁰ C. Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, MIT Press, 1984, p. 38.

THE “PRAXIS” OF REFLECTION AND VOLITIONAL ACTIVITY: THE RISE OF CONSCIOUSNESS

The dialectic of psyche and society in Castoriadis is a basic element upon which he founds the ontological premises of autonomy. As stated above, in the Castoriadian approach, psyche and society are related dialectically. Their connection is structured upon the ancient dialectic of *physis* (φύσις) and *nomos* (νόμος). Castoriadis uses this scheme as a resolution to the tension between phylogenetic and socio-historical human nature, or the biological and the humane which in Freud remains unresolved (see Castoriadis, 2001). The basic concept that applies to the human psyche is the *radical imagination*. This concept expresses the innate and independent character of the psyche. Nevertheless, for Castoriadis an absolute *physis* without *nomos* is inconceivable.²¹

The psyche is defined, on the one hand, by the process of socialization, and, on the other hand, by multiplicity. By the latter it is implied that the psyche is energised by more than one, and often contradictory, factors; provided that the psyche does not respond to the function of a determined system or a specified logic, but it rather corresponds with what Castoriadis calls a *magma* (Castoriadis, 1987, 321). This means that it always involves indeterminacy, and in fact this attributes to the psyche a great level of independence. This ability of psychic independence enables a kind of ‘resistance’ to social assimilation. This occurs by maintaining the internal schism that produces the difference, and gives rise to the internal *otherness*, which is dependent on the creation of the *radical imaginary* (Gourgouris, 2010). This arising could lead to pathological effects but may as well be the source of a relatively autonomous organisation of personality which succeeds in integrating multiplicity in a creative fashion. It is the psyche’s need for symbolic meaning that constitutes the dialectic interaction of psyche and society. Therefore, the subject is formed in a socio-historical context with the contribution of significations offered by societal institution. But just as a subject would appear as ‘empty’ without the socio-historical context and significance, the social imaginary significations can be meaningless, without a subject to constitute them. This relation is interdependent and appears to consist in alterity. And this alteration does not appear once but frequently in one’s lifetime. The social imaginary institution is invested by the subject in order to live as a social being. However, the subject is not and will never be reducible to a whole set of instituted significations (Gourgouris, 2010). This thesis brings on the focus of the psychoanalytic process the objective of the construction of an – as much as possible – conscious relation with one’s

²¹ On the ancient Greek problematic of *physis* and *nomos* in respect to the distinction of anthropic self-institution and natural norm in Castoriadis’s thought, S. Adams, “Castoriadis’ Long Journey through Nomos: Institution, Creation, Interpretation”, *Tijdschrift voor Filosofie* vol. 70, 2008, pp. 269-295.

inner multidimensional reality. In this respect, there is not an a priori unification of the subject, but also, for Castoriadis an absolute unification in terms of erasing difference can never be totally successful. The subject is in this context perceived dynamically, as a being-in-formation, in position to receive some forms of meaning on the condition of developing a view of one's self in a willing and reflective way.

Psychoanalysis presupposes the recognition that an essential transformation of the subject *is* attainable, and this is the most significant statement as far as this anthropology is concerned. This position entails that the specific activity of self-alteration is not fulfilled with the activity of the analytical process as such, but it rather complies with another objective, which does not preexist, and cannot be actualized only by the mediation of 'nature'. The human subjectivity in this case becomes the means as well as the goal of self-alteration. Human volition, stemming from desire, is the basic agency that can succeed in putting into effect the Freudian transformation consisting in "Where there was *It*, it is *I* that has to become". This alteration does not concern a cognitive shift but a praxis (*πράξις*) and *poiesis* (*ποιεῖν*). The particular idea follows the traditional Aristotelian precept, and aims at a transformation of what *is* (*εἶναι*) towards what one can *become* (*δύνασθαι-εἶναι*) (Castoriadis, 1984, 13-14). This premise sets in the core essence of Castoriadis's anthropology two attributes of the human subjectivity as such: the *reflective contemplation* and the *volitional activity*, which are defined as the essential potential of the human being.²² In Castoriadis's understanding of the psychoanalytic process as well as in his philosophico-anthropological thinking, the reflective activity holds a central role, not exactly one that can absolutely attain reality in a scientific manner constituting an objective condition as such, but as an endless questioning and imperative which resists absolute identifications and attachment to prefixed ideas and constructions; it is, therefore, presented as an imperative and a profound philosophical activity which forms what Castoriadis defines as the "thinking process".²³ Even so, thinking is understood as never exempted from unconscious. It is rather a mixture of conscious and unconscious elements (Castoriadis, 1997).

Nevertheless, when it comes to questioning the deeper motives of an action, in spite of the difficulty which is involved in rendering it an object of contemplation by the

²² C. Castoriadis, "The State of the Subject Today", *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination*, Stanford University Press, 1997, pp. 137-171.

²³ The conscious mind in Castoriadis is not restricted to the simple process of computing or rational process of thought as Hobbes had put it, nor is narrowed to the process of the conscious self to calculate, adjust and compromise among the various psychic principles, like Freud tended to comprehend it. It is more related to what can be called a mindful condition and a lucid state of mind.

conscious mind, this cannot be acknowledged only as a philosopher's capacity, but it constitutes the minimum capacity required by the analyzed person: one has to be able, by means of her or his representative capacity, to discriminate that something is what it is, and is not something else. At the same time, this process cannot be merely dependent on noetic function or institutional factors, but is instead to an extent a semi-intuitional ability and presupposes spontaneity. A condition of the categorical ability of contemplative reflection is imaginative force or *phantasia* (*φαντασία*), which by its boundless extension permits the subject to see one's own self as such and simultaneously as "somebody else" (Castoriadis, 1997).²⁴

In a fundamental gnosis-theoretical level, perception is creation, restricted, however, by the fact that this process is usually an unconscious creation. This inherent imaginative principle is responsible for both distortion of reality and false perception as well as for art and various unique ways of being of singularities. From the intrinsic creative imagination stems also the intentional ability to transform the phenomenal reality or to change the actual 'reality' principle. However, the change of perception of our representation of the world precedes. According to Castoriadis, when someone is able to imagine something different than what-there-is, this person is able to change the object of desire. To desire something else than what-there-is liberates the imagination (Castoriadis, 1997). One may put it as opening and expanding of the *virtual* in the constitution of the *actual* (although these would be Deleuzian terms which do not apply as such in Castoriadis.)²⁵ Nevertheless, one needs to be cautious while examining this position, for there is a thin but concrete line that diverges this process of alteration of reality according to the principle of imagination from the neurotic inability to accept reality as such which leads to fictitious gateways. The clear difference among the two will be defined in what follows; but what can be said in brief is that the type of perception which is discussed here entails praxis, and hence finally escapes the contradiction with 'reality'. For the latter is transformed though 'praxis' as well as through alteration of the actual modality of the way of being within 'reality'. The being thus reveals itself as infinite potentiality.

To return to the previous point, according to Castoriadis, there is already a

²⁴ By this it is meant that self-reference characterises the human being as in the way also of a specific comprehension of one's own condition which enables the reflective contemplation.

²⁵ In Deleuze the 'virtual' is not opposed to the 'real' but to the 'actual'; on the other hand, 'real' is opposed to 'possible'. The virtual in Deleuze has a two-fold significance. It can be the phenomenal effect which emerges by causal factors interacting in the material level, whereas the second aspect is of a generative nature. Although not material as in the previous aspect, it can however be realized in the actual level. The virtual for Deleuze is understood as a continuous multiplicity with a particular duration - a notion that he derives from Bergson. See, G. Deleuze, *Bergsonism*, New York: Zone Books, 1991.

volitional activity when mind is concentrated into a single point in systematic and coherent way, and a reflection of the representation is what could be rendered the object of volitional activity. Volitional activity is not the simple “act” but the reflective perspective of what we are as imaginative beings beyond the scope of self-reference for the sake of self-preservation (Castoriadis, 1997). The *contemplative reflection* and the ability of *volitional activity* enable a different arrangement of the way conscious and unconscious self relate to each other. Hence the way in which this relation is formed constitutes in psychoanalytic terms the content of the human autonomy (Castoriadis, 1997). In other words, this relation refers to the possibility of freeing oneself from the influence of fixed preconceptions and the conformity of human experience.

SOCIAL CONSTITUTION AS CONSCIOUS CREATION OF AUTONOMY

What counts in the aforementioned context is the ability of questioning, clarifying or putting into our representative activity the motives or the causes of the act and the act itself, as a basic form of accountability of the person towards her or his self. But this activity would be pointless for Castoriadis without the ability of reflection beyond the limits set by the established societal system that is currently on power. This suggestion is related to the idea that an ethics of accountability which does not deviate from the norm, would probably point to an ethics imposed by external conditions, very likely to be linked to the Superego consciousness and intertwined with unconscious factors. However, this condition of liberating activity is dependent on the societal constitution as a *historical creation*,²⁶ and must in some way be activated by it. Great historical paradigms of this type are autonomous societies which have appeared throughout history as expressions of people’s creativity and will, aiming to constitute a common field of free action and participation.²⁷ *Autonomous* can be called a society that is able to demonstrate a kind of collective awareness concerning the fact that society itself is the source of its own existence and formation, that is the society holds the awareness of

²⁶ See H. Joas, R. Meyer, “Review Essay: Institutionalisation as a Creative Process: The Sociological Importance of Cornelius Castoriadis’s Political Philosophy”, *American Journal of Sociology*, vol. 94, no. 5, Mar.1989, pp. 1184-1199.

²⁷ For Castoriadis a model of this kind is ancient Greek democracy. However, he emphasizes that this is a paradigm to be taken into account, but not one to be blindly imitated. Another example comes from the autonomous communities of the late medieval period in the western world. Nevertheless, no matter how important the tradition of autonomy was, finally, modernity took a totally different form as it was dominated by two contrasting and intertwining imaginative significations: autonomy and sovereignty in the context of instrumental rationality. C. Castoriadis, *The Ancient Greek Democracy and its Relevance for Us Today* (Η Αρχαία Ελληνική Δημοκρατία και η Σημασία της για Μας Σήμερα), Ipsilon/ Vivlia, Athens, 1999, and “The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy”, *Graduate Faculty Philosophy Journal*, vol. 9 no. 2, Fall 1983, pp. 79-185.

being self-constituting and, therefore, as a socio-historical domain it creates its own significances, values, norms, laws etc. This occurs not because all these are imposed by a sovereign, but because the inherited social significances have come under open questioning and discussion, so that society allows the rise of new forms (of life, being, art, thought, politics, and in general, creation). In that case, one may speak of a shift from the *instituted* to the *instituting* which appears whenever an era of philosophical questioning combined with democratic politics has taken place.²⁸ Hence, Castoriadis sets with his philosophy the Politics of Autonomy as a social condition of an instituting “openness” in position to bring about the rupture of the current “closeness” of the instituted significances.

In the very opposite case of non-autonomous societies, what is present is perceived as if it has always been there, as if given from God. The society’s members are alienated by societal institutions, which cannot be easily “touched”, and which actually function as the primeval form of taboo of primitive society. The citizens, unaware of their capacity to change the inherited social order which was once constituted by another society, and which may have served its needs but does not anymore, become separated from customs, meanings and institutions that paradoxically continue to serve and participate in a meaningless ghostly way. Institutions could be changed and become a subject of active creation and alive participation, if they could be realized as people’s own possible creation. While by not realizing this possibility, the citizens of a heteronomous society abdicate their creative capacity and power, feeding into inequality and injustice. Castoriadis himself could acknowledge this inability in his contemporary society. He used thus to call the western democracies of our times “*democratic oligarchies*” (Castoriadis, 2000, 119), because the citizen in the context of political mechanisms in liberal democracies is deprived of accessibility to political decision-making. This development has taken place in the contradictory scene within which the liberal democracies have taken shape: liberty and control. That is under the liberal outlook of “absolute freedom of choice”, the capitalistic ideology inspires conformism, passivity and control, determining since modernity, through the intertwining of politics and economic interests, the forms of life to dominate and those to be marginalized. Michel Foucault has analyzed in depth this aspect of liberal and neoliberal societies, and has shown how controls are exercised by mechanisms of

²⁸ Castoriadis has been criticized for his Greco-western centrality with the argument that he underestimates or excludes the potentialities of other kinds of societies all over the world which throughout history might have achieved equivalent accomplishments. For this critique, see J.P. Arnason, “Culture and Imaginary Significations”, *Thesis Eleven* vol. 22, 1989, pp. 25-45, and S. Adams, “Arnason and Castoriadis’ Unfinished Dialogue: Articulating the World”, *European Journal of Social Theory*, vol. 14, no. 1, 2011, pp. 71-88.

subjection and, progressively, by mechanisms of biopolitical concern.²⁹

The above analysis by Castoriadis follows a thin balance that resembles to an extent the Foucauldian approach which, without rejecting sovereignty's effects and power's ability to direct society in a macro-scale analysis, attributes the foundations of the preservation of political power also to the perception and customs of the micro-scale factor of the subjectivity.³⁰ There is a difference however between the two in the method for resolution and emancipation. While Castoriadis traces the means of liberation in a radical understanding of psychoanalysis, Foucault goes back to ancient Greek philosophy as a way of life and stresses the necessity for revival of spiritual ways of constituting the subjectivity under contemporary terms and conditions. For Castoriadis, to the extent that people are not aware of their power, society as much as individuals are bound to perpetuate the unconscious chain of repression. This heteronomous state could be ruptured only by means of some kind of a *revolutionary action*, - an act of freedom, or an act of creating this freedom, and also the *praxis* that can take place under the conditions of the freedom which has already been created - while later a broader understanding on the part of Castoriadis upon this notion would set it as *creative collective political action*.³¹ This rupture may emerge on condition that the singularity of the personal creative imagination is able to transcend the socially featured model, and become itself the beginning for the vitiation of an institution or its reformation. Such an action could obviously not emanate from agents who place society's laws and institutions beyond question.

THE ACTUAL CONTENT OF SELF-ALTERATION AS AUTO-POIESIS: THE RISE OF THE UNCONSCIOUS

The term *sublimation* was implemented by Freud aiming to reflect on the content of a healthy – that is with less implications of contradiction and suppression – as possible – socialization, and this content should not be confused or identified with *metathesis*. Yet what Castoriadis means, when he refers to *sublimation*, implies an internal *metamorphosis* which raises two questions: the first on the *final cause* and the second on the *way* or the means of succeeding it. Concerning the first, to point to the social demands as projections of what the subject should be formed into in order to fit into the social norms, would be totally discrepant from the ends of psychoanalysis, as Castoriadis

²⁹ See respectively, M. Foucault, *Discipline and Punish: The Birth of the Prison*, New York: Vintage Books, 1995, and *The Birth of Biopolitics*, New York & Hampshire: Palgrave Macmillan, 2008.

³⁰ See M. Foucault, "The Ethics of the Concern for the Self as a Practice of Freedom", *Ethics: Subjectivity and Truth I*, New York: The New Press, 1997, pp. 281-301.

³¹ H. Joas, *The Creativity of action*, Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1996, p. 115.

defines them. Inconsistent with his understanding of the means of succeeding the personal transformation would be also to conceive technique, in the strict sense of the term, as a means for this goal. The technical approach would have a meaning, in case we could speak of “laws of function of the psychic mechanism” (which unsuccessfully Freud aimed to discover). But as Castoriadis puts it, and as probably Jung would, the subject of psychoanalysis resists stylization. There is something elusive about the psyche, its boundless and abyssal nature that renders it indeterminate. The subject of psychoanalysis, psyche, is for Castoriadis, “radical imagination, indeterminate creativity, is a possible object of thought, of elucidation – but not of ‘science’” (Castoriadis, 1984, 97). The term ‘science’ here refers to the conventional positivistic content of the term. The previous statement does not direct toward an “unscientific” approach, but it is rather an expression of objection to the nineteenth and twentieth century’s positivism, as it was applied in psychoanalysis, and as Freud himself expressed it. Conformism and technique are rejected because of corresponding, according to Castoriadis, to an aspect of the psychoanalytic School that fully complies with the features of the given socio-historical world, forcing thus the individuals to fit into these features as they are taken for health and balance indicators.³²

Moreover, the content of the final cause is of great significance. Castoriadis ascribes to Freud’s suggestion that the Id has to become an I, two perspectives or alternatives. The Ego will either have to be led to a social norm, namely to a compromise between the instinctive desires and the social demands, or it would have to be transformed into a philosophical self. Generally, it is more likely that the first scenario will prevail. In that case, psychoanalysis is a tool which assists the subject, by trying to relieve the most irritating symptoms of psychological imbalances, to adapt to the society *as such*. This trend is met in a tenuous aspect of psychoanalysis, while, psychoanalysis can be also characterized as a movement which critically questions the manifestations of the social world (see Castoriadis, 1984). These ‘manifestations’ are actually creations characterized by collective archetypes of control, oppression and solidification transferred through covered manufactured meanings that appear to the individual consciousness as a naturalized reality, as ‘physis’.

Consequently, speaking of transformation within the psychoanalytic process as a *practico-poietical activity* (*ποιεῖν-πράττειν*), and referring to an end of the process, does not imply an end, according to which the subject leads her or his conscious mind in dominion over the unconscious. What is more, this process is not based on the imposition of the supposed authority of an analyst, who, even though present, never

³² And again here can be seen a parallel with Foucault’s critique of psychiatry and its mechanisms, and also the movement of Anti-Psychiatry.

expresses himself upon a “patient” or a “client”, the latter being considered passive as well.³³ Self-alteration as a creative self-deformation or *autoalloiosis* (*αυτο-αλλοίωση*) emerges as an imperative within the intersubjective connection of the analyst with the person who is analysed. As far as concerns the intentions of the analyst, the supposed “scientific neutrality” is abandoned. The process is invested in the creative capacity of the analysed person, to co-activate with the analyst, and proceed to, the poetical creation of the self. The creative self-deformation in this process is reciprocal and is activated for both of them. Therefore, the analyst without taking the position of an indifferent leading expert, ought to accompany the analysed person to a reinvention and recreation of the self, aiming at his autonomy in terms of psychological determination, so that one would attain the unfolding of his creative powers and an opening to the “capability of love”³⁴ (Castoriadis, 1984).

Furthermore, the psychoanalytic process can be also perceived as an inner process of self-analysis and reflection in an attempt to *elucidate* one’s psychic condition and motivation, without entailing necessarily in this process the presence of another person. However, in respect to the above analysis, it is important to keep in mind the difference between *elucidation* and theorization. Castoriadis defines thinking as *clarifying* not theorizing. The aim of the analysis in this context is to establish an alternative way of relating to the self, not in terms of a split but in terms of sustaining clarity. The aim of the analysis is also to establish a different mode of relating to the self *and* the “Other”. This premise is applied in a twofold direction: the intention is to direct the unconscious self to expression of one’s own truth, which would enable a more profound understanding of the internal otherness, and also to direct the conscious self not to “authority” or “sovereignty” but to lucidity, and to the activity that *opens up* to the possibility of decision and truthfulness. Priority of psychoanalytic process should be liberation from the bonds of repression - not understood in an absolute manner but as a moment to moment process, and by no means in terms of dominion upon the

³³ Castoriadis’s approach on psychoanalysis as a process of self-creation and as potential self-transformation with the reciprocal shift of the person who is being analysed and the analyst, is developed as a critique of the Lacanian school of psychoanalysis which, for Castoriadis, establishes the analyst in position of a passive authority (see Castoriadis, 1984, 3-118). Castoriadis has conducted an acidulous critique on Lacan, starting from the understanding of imaginary which in Castoriadis is broader as related to representation. A. Elliott, “Social Theory, Psychoanalysis and the Politics of Post-modernity. Anthony Elliott talks with Sean Homer” in *Social Theory since Freud: Traversing Social Imaginaries*, Abington: Routledge, pp. 158-171. For a brief critique on Castoriadis from the Lacanian angle see: C. Strauss, “The Imaginary”, *Anthropological Theory* vol. 6, no. 3, 2006, pp. 322-344, and Y. Stavrakakis, “Creativity and its Limits: Encounters with Social Constructionism and the Political in Castoriadis and Lacan”, *Constellations* vol. 9 no. 4, Dec. 2002, pp. 522-539.

³⁴ Freud considered the inability to love an essential factor in neurosis and he related it to repression.

unconscious. For Castoriadis complete transparency of the self or absolute guiding power of reason (*ratio*) cannot be successful. Therefore, the Freudian imperative “where there was *Id*, is *I* that has to become”, should be complemented by the imperative, “where *I (Ego)* am (*is*), that (*Id*) should also emerge” (Castoriadis, 2000, 88-89).³⁵

According to this perspective, the Ego is not any more the sole “administrator” of personality, as a substitute of the Superego that depends solely in social-imaginary institution in order to derive meaning. It becomes the locus which features the creative and destructive forces of the unconscious as a liberating field that permits those forces to emerge and manifest, instead of being repressed as in one way or another the traditional psychoanalysis would suggest. The particular content of autonomy in this case consists in the imperative to transform the overpowering reason of the I into the reason of the *Other*, in order to stop it from dominating as an absolute principle which subdues the unconscious realm, the realm of instinct, feeling, dream and desire. The obviation of the alienation from psychic life itself, and the empowerment of consciousness in a much broader sense of the term, gives rise to the expression of autonomy at a personal level. This transmutation implies the shift in the way sublimation takes place, and, furthermore entails the alteration of the subject’s actual history as perpetual continuum of the human thought and praxis.

CONCLUSION

The reference to an “ending” of the psychoanalytic process (which, as mentioned, for Castoriadis can never be considered as absolute and final) points to an enunciation and affirmation of the condition of human autonomy. The ability of a conscious alteration of the way the individual relates to the world as well as to the societal constitution itself, depends on the possible capacity for transmutation of the energy of the psyche and mind.³⁶ According to Castoriadis, the human being is *chaos*, is *abyss*, but it is also characterized by a revolutionary potential for creativity. This potentiality could lead to liberation from the slavery of mimesis and the unconscious action, the mechanical reproduction of the unconscious urges and the inherited tradition, to the extent that the latter leads to passivity, and is internalized without conscious participation. The

³⁵ Translation mine.

³⁶ The subject’s capacity to think on this law, and to critically examine it by rejecting an ideology of adjustment to what there is, emerges partly from the realisation of the eventuality of the historical contingency (which, nonetheless tends to be perceived as a social necessity), and it is dependent as well on the fundamental difference between a sublimation that leads to an imaginary social object, and a sublimation that transcends it (Castoriadis, 1984, 39).

Castoriadian anthropology opposes itself to the schools of science and philosophy which are obstructed by the concept of human nature, when it comes to formulating positions concerning the possibility of an institutional change of society. Castoriadis was in fact trying to articulate the terms and preconditions - in a psychological and ontological as well as in a socio-political context - of the institutional constitution of the society towards autonomy, solidarity and direct democracy. In his perception, societal institution and history itself reveal themselves as creations of the *collective imaginary*. And in this respect, the emancipating imperative of psychoanalysis corresponds to the quest for political autonomy. With the hypothesis of an “end” of the psychoanalytic process, the aspiration for emancipation of internal and external alienation and a release from conditions of control and passivity arise. Castoriadis’s fundamental concept of human existence directs us towards a dynamic perception of self-reflective and capable for decision making human beings, who by means of their creative imaginary power are possibly in position of undertaking the project of autonomy. That is to constitute new forms of subjectivities, alternative models of coexistence and experimental forms of collectives.

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