BETA

WINDOW ON THE CHAOS

INCLUDING

HOW I DIDN'T BECOME A MUSICIAN

by Cornelius Castoriadis*

translated from the French
and edited anonymously
as a public service

VERSION

*“Cornelius Castoriadis” is here a pseudonym for Paul Cardan.**

**A Paul Cardan (active 1959-1965) was a pseudonym for Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997).

BETA

NOTICE

The present volume is offered to readers as a public service in the hopes of encouraging reflection and action aimed at deepening, and realizing, the project of individual and collective autonomy on a worldwide basis in all its manifestations.

Neither any website that would make the electronic version available nor any other distributor who may come forward in any medium is currently authorized to accept any financial remuneration for this service. “The anonymous Translator/Editor” (T/E) will thus not receive, nor will T/E accept, any monetary payment or other compensation for his labor as a result of this free circulation of ideas.

Anyone who downloads or otherwise makes use of this tome is suggested to make a free-will donation to those who have presented themselves as the legal heirs of Cornelius Castoriadis: Cybèle Castoriadis, Sparta Castoriadis, and Zoé Castoriadis. Either cash or checks in any currency made payable simply to “Castoriadis” may be sent to the following address:

Castoriadis, 1 rue de l’Alboni 75016 Paris FRANCE

A suggested contribution is five (5) dollars (US) or five (5) euros.

The aforesaid legal heirs are totally unaware of this undertaking, and so it will be completely for each individual user to decide, on his or her own responsibility (a word not to be taken lightly), whether or not to make such a contribution—which does not constitute any sort of legal acknowledgment. It is entirely unknown how these heirs will react, nor can it be guessed whether receipt of funds will affect their subsequent legal or moral decisions regarding similar undertakings in the future.[*] Nevertheless, it is recommended that each user contact, by electronic mail or by other means, at least ten (10) persons or organizations, urging them to obtain a copy of the book in this way or offering these persons or organizations gift copies. It is further recommended that each of these persons or organizations in turn make ten (10) additional contacts under the same terms and circumstances, and so on and so forth, for the purpose of furthering this nonhierarchical and disinterested “pyramid scheme” designed to spread Castoriadis’s thought without further hindrance.

---

[*] Much Castoriadis material has gone out of print and much more remains to be translated into English, publication projects in which T/E is currently engaged. So far, in addition to the present volume, five other Castoriadis/Cardan volumes (listed below with the electronic publication dates) have been translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service:

#*The Rising Tide of Insignificancy (The Big Sleep)*. http://www.notbored.org/RTI.pdf. December 4, 2003.
#*Figures of the Thinkable, Including Passion and Knowledge*. http://www.notbored.org/FTPK.pdf. February 2005.
#*A Society Adrift: More Interviews and Discussions on The Rising Tide of Insignificancy, Including Revolutionary Perspectives Today*. http://www.notbored.org/ASA.pdf. October 2010.
#*Postscript on Insignificancy, including More Interviews and Discussions on the Rising Tide of Insignificancy, followed by Five Dialogues, Four Portraits and Two Book Reviews*. http://www.notbored.org/PSRTI.pdf. March 2011.
#*Democracy and Relativism: Discussion with the "MAUSS" Group*. http://www.notbored.org/DR.pdf. January 2013.

plus the Castoriadis outtakes from Chris Marker’s 1989 film *L’Héritage de la chouette* (The Owl’s Legacy):

#Interview with Cornelius Castoriadis (English subtitles). http://www.lsa.umich.edu/modgreek/windowtogreekculture/historybiomemoir. May 2013.

VERSION

CONTENTS

BETA

Notice ii
Books by Cornelius Castoriadis Published in English, with Standard Abbreviations v
Books by Cornelius Castoriadis Published in French, with Standard Abbreviations vii
French Editors' Notice x
David Ames Curtis, "Castoriadis on Culture" (1997, 1998) xii
Foreword xx
On the Translation xxi

PART ONE:

§Social Transformation and Cultural Creation (1979) 3

PART TWO:

§Ugliness and the Affirmative Hatred of the Beautiful (1981) 27
§"Music Abolishes the World" (1982) 32
§The Writer and Democracy (1989) 67
§The Role of Criticism (1991) 85

PART THREE:

§Window on the Chaos (1992) 94

PART FOUR:

§How I Didn't Become a Musician (1996) 124

French Editors' Postface 153
Appendix: Potential Future Translation Projects 162

N.B.: With the exception of interviews and seminar transcriptions, years in parentheses generally indicate, here and in footnotes, the first date of publication *of a text in English or French, whichever occurred first. See each individual publication note for date of composition.*

VERSION

BOOKS BY CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS PUBLISHED IN ENGLISH, WITH STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS:

ASA(RPT)	*A Society Adrift: More Interviews and Discussions on The Rising Tide of Insignificancy, Including Revolutionary Perspectives Today* http://www.notbored.org/ASA.pdf. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: October 2010.
CL	*Crossroads in the Labyrinth*. Trans. Martin H. Ryle and Kate Soper. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and Brighton, England: Harvester Press, 1984. 345pp.
CR	*The Castoriadis Reader*. Ed. David Ames Curtis. Malden, MA and Oxford, England: Basil Blackwell, 1997. 470pp.
DR	*Democracy and Relativism: Discussion with the "MAUSS" Group*. http://www.notbored.org/DR.pdf Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: January 2013. 63pp.
IIS	*The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Trans. Kathleen Blamey. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press and Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1987. 418pp. Paperback edition. Cambridge, England: Polity Press, 1997. Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1998.
FT(P&K)	*Figures of the Thinkable* including *Passion and Knowledge*. http://www.notbored.org/FTPK.pdf. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: February 2005. 428pp.
OPS	*On Plato's Statesman*. Trans. David Ames Curtis. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 2002. 227pp.
PPA	*Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy: Essays in Political Philosophy*. (N.B.: the subtitle is an unauthorized addition made by the publisher.) Ed. David Ames Curtis. New York: Oxford University Press, 1991. 304pp.

BETA VERSION

BETA

PSRTI	*Postscript on Insignificancy, Including More Interviews and Discussions on the Rising Tide of Insignificancy. Followed by Five Dialogues, Four Portraits, and Two Book Reviews.* http://www.notbored.org/PSRTI.pdf. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: March 2011.
PSW1	*Political and Social Writings*. Volume 1: 1946-1955. *From the Critique of Bureaucracy to the Positive Content of Socialism*. Trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. 348pp.
PSW2	*Political and Social Writings*. Volume 2: 1955-1960. *From the Workers' Struggle Against Bureaucracy to Revolution in the Age of Modern Capitalism*. Trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988. 363pp.
PSW3	*Political and Social Writings*. Volume 3: 1961-1979. *Recommencing the Revolution: From Socialism to the Autonomous Society*. Trans. and ed. David Ames Curtis. Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1993. 405pp.
RTI(TBS)	*The Rising Tide of Insignificancy (The Big Sleep). http://www.notbored.org/RTI.pdf*. Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: December 4, 2003.
WIF	*World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination*. Ed. and trans. David Ames Curtis. Stanford, CA: Stanford University Press, 1997. 507pp.
WoC	*Window on the Chaos, Including "How I Didn't Become a Musician."* http://www.notbored.org/WoC.pdf Translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service. Electronic publication date: July 21, 2015.

VERSION

A complete bibliography of writings by and about Cornelius Castoriadis can be found at http://www.agorainternational.org

BOOKS BY CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS PUBLISHED IN FRENCH, WITH STANDARD ABBREVIATIONS:

CFG1	*Ce qui fait la Grèce*. Tome 1. *D'Homère à Héraclite*. Séminaires 1982-1983. *La Création humaine II*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004. 355pp.
CFG2	*Ce qui fait la Grèce*. Tome 2. *La Cité et le lois*. Séminaires 1983-1984. *La Création humaine III*. Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Précédé de "Castoriadis et l'héritage grec" par Philippe Raynaud. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2008. 313pp.
CFG3	*Ce qui fait la Grèce*. Tome 3. *Thucydide, la force et le droit*. Séminaires 1984-1985. *La Création humaine IV*. Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Précédé de "Le germe et le *kratos*: réflexions sur la création politique à Athènes" par Claude Moatti. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2011. 374pp.
CL	*Les Carrefours du labyrinthe*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1978. 318pp.
CMR1	*Capitalisme moderne et révolution*. Tome 1. *L'impérialisme et la guerre*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1979. 443pp.
CMR2	*Capitalisme moderne et révolution*. Tome 2. *Le mouvement révolutionnaire sous le capitalisme moderne*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1979. 318pp.
CS	*Le Contenu du socialisme*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1979. 441pp.
D	*Dialogue*. La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 1998. 112pp.
DEA	*De l'écologie à l'autonomie*. Avec Daniel Cohn-Bendit et le public de Louvain-la-Neuve. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981. 126pp.
DG	*Devant la guerre*. Tome 1: *Les Réalités*. 1e éd. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1981. 285pp. 2e éd. revue et corrigée, 1982. 317pp.
DH	*Domaines de l'homme. Les carrefours du labyrinthe II*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1986. 460pp.
DR	*Démocratie et relativisme: Débats avec le MAUSS*. Édition établie par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas

BETA VERSION

BETA

	et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Mille et une nuits, 2010. 142pp.
EMO1	*L'Expérience du mouvement ouvrier*. Tome 1. *Comment lutter*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1974. 445pp.
EMO2	*L'Expérience du mouvement ouvrier*. Tome 2. *Prolétariat et organisation*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1974. 445pp.
EP1	*Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 1. *La Question du mouvement ouvrier*. Tome 1. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2012. 422pp.
EP2	*Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 2. *La Question du mouvement ouvrier*. Tome 2. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2012. 578pp.
EP3	*Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 3. *Quelle démocratie?* Tome 1. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2013. 694pp.
EP4	*Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 4. *Quelle démocratie?* Tome 2. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2013. 660pp.
EP5	*Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 5. *La Société bureaucratique.* Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2015. 638pp.
FAF	*Fait et à faire. Les carrefours du labyrinthe V*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1997. 284pp.
FC	*Fenêtre sur le chaos*. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2007. 179pp.
FP	*Figures du pensable. Les carrefours du labyrinthe VI.* Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999. 308pp.
HC	*Histoire et création. Textes philosophiques inédits (1945-1967).* Réunis, présentés et annotés par Nicolas

VERSION

BETA

	Poirier. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2009. 307pp.
IIS	*L'Institution imaginaire de la société*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1975. 503pp.
M68	Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort et Jean-Marc Coudray. *Mai 68: la brèche. Premières réflexions sur les événements*. Paris: Librairie Arthème Fayard, 1968. 142pp.
M68/VAA	Edgar Morin, Claude Lefort et Cornelius Castoriadis. *Mai 68: la brèche* suivi de *Vingt Ans après*. Paris: Éditions Complexe, 1988. 212pp.
MI	*La Montée de l'insignifiance. Les carrefours du labyrinthe IV*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1996. 245pp.
MM	*Le Monde morcelé. Les carrefours du labyrinthe III*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990. 281pp.
P-SI	*Post-Scriptum sur l'insignifiance*. Entretiens avec Daniel Mermet (novembre 1996). La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 1998. 37pp.
P-SID	*Post-Scriptum sur l'insignifiance*. Entretiens avec Daniel Mermet suivi de *Dialogue*. La Tour d'Aigues: Éditions de l'Aube, 2007. 51pp.
SB1	*La Société bureaucratique*. Tome 1. *Les rapports de production en Russie*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973. 317pp.
SB2	*La Société bureaucratique*. Tome 2. *La révolution contre la bureaucratie*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1973. 441pp.
SB(n.é.)	*La Société bureaucratique* (nouvelle édition). Paris: Christian Bourgois Éditeur, 1990. 492pp.
SD	*Une société à la dérive. Entretiens et débats 1974-1997*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2005. 307pp.
SF	*La Société française*. Paris: Union Générale d'Éditions, 1979. 315pp.
S. ou B.	*Socialisme ou Barbarie. Organe de Critique et d'orientation révolutionnaire*. Paris. 1949-1965.
SPP	*Sur* Le Politique *de Platon*. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1999. 199pp.
SV	*Sujet et vérité dans le monde social-historique*. Séminaires 1986-1987. *La Création humaine*, 1.

VERSION

Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002. 496pp.

BETA VERSION

A complete bibliography of writings by and about Cornelius Castoriadis can be found at http://www.agorainternational.org

French Editors' Notice[*]

The texts gathered together here were written or delivered orally between 1978 and 1992. Cornelius Castoriadis never dreamed of bringing them together in a volume, and at no moment did he see in these texts the embryos of a more extensive collection. They are heterogeneous by their very nature: a contribution to a social-science review, participation in a round-table discussion, a talk at a colloquium, a radio program, seminars, and so on. If it nonetheless seemed useful to make a book out of themÌ—at the margin of the completed *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* series[1] and the *Human Creation* one, whose publication began in 1999[2]—it is especially because we wanted to give to the text entitled "Social Transformation and Cultural Creation"—which had been added somewhat arbitrarily by the author to the collection he was then preparing[3]—the specific echo it did not have at the time, but which it most certainly merits. We have added to this new publication other texts devoted to related themes: a few pages of a work actually bearing on quite another subject, *Devant la guerre* (Facing war) that Castoriadis had himself subtitled "Ugliness and the Affirmative Hatred of the Beautiful," as well as two texts never before published in book form: "The Writer and Democracy" and "The Role of Criticism." We have also

BETA VERSION

---

[*] Avertisement, in *FC*, pp. 7-8.

[1] Five *Carrefours du labyrinthe* volumes were published during Castoriadis's lifetime (*CL*, *DH*, *MM*, *MI*, and *FAF*) and a sixth (*FP*) was published posthumously. Besides the English edition of *CL*, chapters from other *Carrefours* volumes have appeared in English in *PPA*, *WIF*, *CR*, *RTI(TBS)*, *FT(P&K)*, and *ASA(RPR)*. —T/E

[2] *Sur* Le Politique *de Platon* [now available in English as *OPS* —T/E] (1999), *Sujet et vérité dans le monde social-historique* (2002), *Ce qui fait la Grèce.* Tome 1. *D'Homère à Héraclite* (2004), all three published by Éditions du Seuil. [Two more volumes, *CFG2* and *CFG3*, were published in 2008 and 2011, respectively. —T/E]

[3] *CS*, pp. 413-39. Subsequently translated in *PSW3*.

BETA

added to these texts the transcription of a 1982 radio interview with Philippe Nemo on the France Culture radio network. Finally, the last text is drawn from two seminar sessions Castoriadis gave in January 1992 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales on beauty and the work of art as they relate to signification and meaning. With quite varying degrees of elaboration, these texts make reference to the paradoxical relation that is struck up between the creator and the collectivity down through history and to where that relation stands today.

To close out this volume, one will find a brief Postface that will help orient the reader who might seek some extensions of these reflections in Castoriadis's work. Some cross-references to the texts most relevant in this regard are provided, while a few references to current debates on the crisis of contemporary artistic creativity are also indicated.

We have been vigilant in our preparation of the final form of the radio interview and of the seminar lectures. Our own interventions in this collection have always been indicated by angle brackets <>.

—Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas, and Pascal Vernay

VERSION

Castoriadis on Culture[*]

BETA

Author's Note to the *Free Associations* Expanded Version

"Cultural studies," which is often reliant on the presuppositions, biases, and jargon of what Castoriadis has termed "the French Ideology," has become one of the more popular fads in "left-wing" academic circles. As a recent announcement for a Graduate Student History Conference at New York University put it, "Many intellectual and cultural historians argue that discourse, ideology, and narrativity ought to be privileged categories of social analysis. To what extent has this view challenged or supplanted an older view that society is to be studied as a realm of competing structures, contending classes and groups, and conflicts over material resources?" It would seem that we are being presented with another of the tiresome, false dichotomies so characteristic of academia today. One thinks immediately of the supposed alternative of "communitarianism or liberalism"—as if one could or should make a choice between "the community"and "the individual"! The "humanism versus antihumanism" debate also comes to mind, where one is counseled to reembrace some vague "humanist" values as the appropriate response to Louis Althusser's outrageous "criticism" of a residual "humanism" in Stalinism or to Jacques Derrida's reprehensible claim that a "humanism" deemed still "metaphysical" lies behind Heidegger's Nazi-inspired Rektoratrede.

The present article is based on the entry on Cornelius Castoriadis which appears in the new Dictionary of Cultural Theorists *edited by Ellis Cashmore and Chris Rojek, to be published in January 1999 by Arnold, London. As translator*

---

[*] Originally published as the "Cornelius Castoriadis" entry (written by David Ames Curtis) for the *Dictionary of Cultural Theorists*, ed. Ellis Cashmore and Chris Rojek (London: Edward Arnold and New York: Oxford University Press, 1999), pp. 96-98. An expanded version of this article, with a short Author's Note, was published in *Free Associations*, 43 (1999): 367-73. The *Free Associations* version was reprinted with permission at: http://www.costis.org/x/castoriadis/culture.htm. It has been slightly edited, with references updated, for the present publication.

VERSION

BETA

and frequent presenter of Cornelius Castoriadis in the English-speaking world, my unambitious ambition is, here again, not to offer ready-made conclusions about his work but to establish a few benchmarks, note some relevant references, highlight a number of basic terms, and guide the interested reader where she can go to familiarize herself further with this work so that she herself might extend, elaborate, refine, and, if need be, challenge and go beyond Castoriadis's views. I believe that this approach is in keeping with Castoriadis's own, as well as with his broad and far-reaching conception of the topic under consideration here: culture. *“On the intellectual level,” former Socialisme ou Barbarie member Daniel Blanchard wrote recently apropos of Castoriadis, “to be revolutionary means to try to understand the system of domination as a whole in order to be able to combat it under all its forms and not under this or that particular aspect.”[1] Allow me simply to add that it is not only a negative matter of “combating” the existing system but also of a positive effort to help bring about a vast “reconstruction of society,” to employ a phrase Castoriadis borrowed often from Grace Lee Boggs.[2] Keeping an eye on that whole in order to elucidate it and to advance the project of an autonomous self-transformation of society lies at the heart of Castoriadis's thoughts on culture, as we shall see below.*

Paris, September 1998

---

[1] Daniel Blanchard (known as P. Canjuers in the Socialisme ou Barbarie group), “Castoriadis et ‘Socialisme ou Barbarie,’” *Courant alternatif*, February 1998, p. 30.

[2] Ria Stone (Grace Lee Boggs), “The Reconstruction of Society,” part two of Paul Romano and Ria Stone, *The American Worker* (Detroit: Bewick Editions, 1972; originally published as a pamphlet in 1947 by the Johnson-Forest Tendency of C.L.R. James and Raya Dunayevskaya—which later became the Correspondence group—this book was translated for the first eight issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*). Grace Lee Boggs seems to have had a considerable influence on Castoriadis's positive attitude toward the burgeoning “woman question” in the early Sixties; some of her ideas can also be seen to be expressed in the key 1962 internal Socialisme ou Barbarie documents known as “For a New Orientation” (*PSW3*, pp. 9-26.)

VERSION

BETA

Cornelius Castoriadis offers one of the most thoroughgoing and comprehensive cultural theories extant today. This interest in culture began early. The "collapse of culture" in Stalinist Russia was already a concern in 1946,[3] on a par with political and economic oppression. A first thematic articulation came in "On the Content of Socialism, I" (1955).[4] There he argued that the cultural and sexual functions are as important as the economic one for understanding and transforming society. In *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1964-1965/1975), which marked his definitive break from Marxism, he developed a theoretical basis for this insight by drawing on work by Freud and cultural anthropologists.

Castoriadis's distinctive approach to culture appears in his question concerning the ontological status of society. What makes a society *one*? What makes it capable of change? His basic proposition in accounting for a society's unity and alteration is that, in its simultaneity and succession, the domain he calls *the social-historical* has (is) its own mode of being, a being-for-itself that is irreducible to physical, biological, or psychocorporeal existence. Society is instituted; it institutes itself, instead of being a product of Nature, Reason, God, and so on. It thereby creates its own world—usually unknowingly, by incorporating into its world a religious (heteronomous) occultation of this very creation. Each time, the social world is other and thus arbitrary in relation to another institution of society.

Such an "institution of society" is embodied in its institutions, which are composed of—are—its social imaginary significations. Free creations of the anonymous collective—though internal, external, historical, and intrinsic constraints upon such creations do exist—these significations are social, because shared by all; imaginary, since neither reducible to nor deducible from "real" or "rational" referents ("reality" and "rationality" are their products, instituted

VERSION

---

[3] "The Problem of the USSR and the Possibility of a Third Historical Solution," *PSW1*, p. 52.

[4] *PSW1*, pp. 290-309.

BETA

differently each time); and significations, for they are not just "ideas" or "representations" but the cement of social life, that which holds together ideas, representations, acts, and so on. A society posits its own representations but also its intentions and affects. Things, ideas, subjects; norms, values, orientations, tools; fetishes, gods, God; *polis*, citizen, nation, party; contract, enterprise, wealth; these and myriad other social imaginary significations are unmotivated (their creation is *ex nihilo* though not *cum nihilo* or *in nihilo*), "magmatic" as opposed to ensemblistic-identitary (this "ensidic"—or functional-instrumental—element of the determinate is nevertheless "everywhere dense") and exist in a relation of indefinite referral to a society's other imaginary significations. Such significations must be coherent (even if fragmented or conflictual) and complete for the society concerned. They are, however, beyond logical "classes," "properties," "relations," since they posit—each time otherwise—a society's classes, properties, and relations. Nor are they "hypotheses" about a world in itself (science, too, has socially subjective conditions) or an "interpretation" thereof (hermeneutics is ruled out). While some social imaginary significations may have physical correlates ("automobile" as physical correlate of the invisible signification "commodity"), other ones—God, par excellence—do not. They thus possess an unprecedented, *sui generis* mode of being: effective and "acting" ideality, the immanent unperceivable. Yet, these social significations are not to be confused with psychical meaning. The true opposition, as Castoriadis reiterates time and again, is not "the individual versus society," mediated by "intersubjectivity," but psyche and society as mutually irreducible poles, for the original psychical monad cannot by itself produce social signification. The work of the radical social instituting imaginary is to create, reproduce, and alter itself by instrumenting itself in fabricated social individuals, thereby socializing the radical imagination of the singular psyche via an imposed internalization of the society's imaginary significations.

Within this overall view of society and of its institution via the invention of imaginary significations that are proper to each society and that its individuals make their

VERSION

BETA

own as they make themselves, Castoriadis offers an extremely broad, but not unbounded, definition of "culture."

> I take . . . the term "culture" as intermediate between its current sense in French ("*œuvres de l'esprit*" and the individual's access to these works of the spirit) and its meaning in American anthropology (which covers the entirety of the institution of society, everything that differentiates and opposes society, on the one hand, [man's] animal nature and nature [in general] on the other). I intend . . . by "culture" everything, in the institution of society, that goes beyond its ensemblistic-identitary . . . dimension and that the individuals of this society positively cathect as "value" in the largest sense of the term: in short, the Greeks' *paideia*.[5]

His expansive understanding of what is encompassed by the term *culture* is accompanied by an equally extensive effort to revolutionize society: "The revolutionary movement ought to appear as what it really is: a total movement concerned with everything people do and are subject to in society, and above all with their daily life" (1961).[6] In addition to the democratic transformation of work[7] and a revised critical relationship to the "development of technology,"[8] and passing by way of a new questioning of "relations between the sexes or between parents and children in the family," Castoriadis wrote in 1964 apropos of the tendency toward autonomy, "[i]t is equally

---

[5] "Social Transformation and Cultural Creation" (1979), *PSW3*, p. 220. See now below, in Part One of the present volume.

[6] "Modern Capitalism and Revolution," *PSW2*, p. 306.

[7] Given classic form in "On the Content of Socialism, II" (1957), *PSW3*, pp. 90-154.

VERSION

[8] This theme, originally presented in "On the Content of Socialism, II" (see preceding note), was later generalized and contextualized in "From Ecology to Autonomy" (1980), *CR*, pp. 239-52.

BETA

important to show the similar contents that appear in the most radical currents in contemporary culture (tendencies in psychoanalysis, sociology, ethnology, for example)."[9] Paraphrasing Castoriadis, Maurice Merleau-Ponty had already suggested at the end of his Epilogue to *Adventures of the Dialectic* (1955) that the limited, traditional idea of revolution must be replaced with people's "unpredictable ingenuity."[10] Thus do we understand, in this conjunction of psychical and social conditions that constitutes an individual's access to the cultural sphere, Castoriadis's lifelong love of jazz, the admiration"free jazz" composer Ornette Coleman repeatedly expressed for Castoriadis's work,[11] and the "excess of emotion Castoriadis released from himself" during the Hungarian Revolution by playing "long improvisations on the piano."[12] Indeed, improvisatory creation is perhaps one of the best metaphors for describing the type of activity he most admired and tried so passionately to encourage.[13]

Difficult to grasp at first and far from current fads (poststructuralism, deconstructionism, etc.), Castoriadis's radical theoretical renewal offers a wealth of conceptual tools to anyone interested in doing cultural theory with a global political relevance. He does not wade through the detritus of a consumer society to find micro(counter)powers, interpret real social events as (timeless) expressions of a Lacanian Unconscious misrecognized as a "language" (which can only be social), become bogged down in identity politics, or

---

[9] "Recommencing the Revolution," *PSW3*, p. 49; reprinted in *CR*, p. 123.

[10] Trans. Joseph Bien (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 232.

[11] Coleman provided the cover art for the last two Castoriadis books published in English during his lifetime: *CR* and *WIF*.

[12] As reported by Daniel Blanchard, "L'idée de révolution et Castoriadis," *Réfractions*, 2 (Summer 1998).

[13] See my foreword to the first volume of the *Political and Social Writings*, esp. pp. xvii-xx.

VERSION

BETA

succumb to the "generalized conformism" of postmodernism (e.g., of ex-Socialisme ou Barbarie member Jean-François Lyotard). Modernity is understood as a divided whole whose main contending imaginary significations are: the project of autonomy—expressed in revolutions, workers', women's, and students' movements, and liberation movements of racial and cultural minorities, as well as in philosophy, politics, psychoanalysis, and a transformative civic pedagogy—and a capitalist project for the unlimited expansion of (pseudo)rational mastery over nature and humanity. This view of the dual institution of modernity offers a more complex and conflictual cultural account of the West than Jürgen Habermas's communicative rationality theory of an "unfinished project of the Enlightenment."

For Castoriadis, the current, unprecedented crisis of culture is the crisis of our society. Through privatization, depoliticization, and withdrawal, a destruction of meaning in work and an emptying of value, a refusal to want itself as society (as a society that can change itself), contemporary society is rapidly desocializing itself even as it experiences a hypersocialization through ubiquitous mediatization. The basis, history, contours, and countertrends of this overall crisis are delineated in such essays as "The Crisis of Modern Society" (1965),[14] "Social Transformation and Cultural Creation" (1979),[15] "Institution of Society and Religion" (1982),[16] and "The Crisis of Culture and the State" (1986),[17] as well as in the sections of *Devant la guerre* devoted to "The Destruction of Significations and the Ruination of Language" and "Ugliness and the Affirmative Hatred of the Beautiful"[18]

---

[14] *PSW3*, pp. 106-17.

[15] *PSW3*, pp. 300-13, now reprinted as Part One of the present volume.

[16] *WIF*, pp. 311-30.

[17] *PPA*, pp. 219-42.

VERSION

[18] *DG*, pp. 257-68. The second of these sections from *DG*'s fourth chapter now appears below in translation in Part Two of the present volume.

BETA

(1981). In these texts of a decidedly antifoundational bent, he examines the role Chaos (the Abyss, Groundlessness) plays in the institution of society, in its self-occultation via religion—as well as in art, where Being as Chaos can be presented without being covered up. In "Culture in a Democratic Society" (1994),[19] Castoriadis anticipates that "just as the current evolution of culture is not wholly unrelated to the inertia and the social and political passivity characteristic of our world today, so a renaissance of its vitality, should it take place, will be indissociable from a great new social-historical movement which will reactivate democracy and will give it at once the form and the contents the project of autonomy requires."

David Ames Curtis
Winchester, Massachusetts, November 1997
Paris, September 1998

My thanks to Andreas Kalyvas and Warren Breckman for their thoughtful comments and suggestions.

VERSION

---

[19] *CR*, pp. 338-48.

Foreword

BETA

Following upon the publication of five earlier electro-samizdat volumes of texts by Paul Cardan/Cornelius Castoriadis that have been translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service:

> *The Rising Tide of Insignificancy (The Big Sleep)*. http://www.notbored.org/RTI.pdf. December 4, 2003.
>
> *Figures of the Thinkable, Including Passion and Knowledge*. http://www.notbored.org/FTPK.pdf. February 2005.
>
> *A Society Adrift: More Interviews and Discussions on The Rising Tide of Insignificancy, Including Revolutionary Perspectives Today*. http://www.notbored.org/ASA.pdf. October 2010.
>
> *Postscript on Insignificancy, including More Interviews and Discussions on the Rising Tide of Insignificancy, followed by Five Dialogues, Four Portraits and Two Book Reviews*. http://www.notbored.org/PSRTI.pdf. March 2011.
>
> *Democracy and Relativism: Discussion with the "MAUSS" Group*. http://www.notbored.org/DR.pdf. January 2013.

along with the Castoriadis outtakes from Chris Marker's 1989 film *L'Héritage de la chouette* (The Owl's Legacy):

> Interview with Cornelius Castoriadis (English subtitles). http://www.lsa.umich.edu/modgreek/windowtogreekculture/historybiomemoir. May 2013.

the present, nondefinitive "Beta" version is made provisionally available in a downloadable but not printable form in order to solicit constructive suggestions for corrections.[1]

A more substantial Foreword will follow in the definitive version. For now, one may consult, above, David Ames Curtis's "Castoriadis on Culture." July 2015

VERSION

---

[1] As noted below in "On the Translation": David Ames Curtis "may be contacted at curtis@msh-paris.fr. It may be possible to persuade him to publish a list of errata."

BETA

On the Translation

It is greatly fortunate that, under current circumstances, the present volume has been able to benefit from the eye of a professional copy editor, as had also been the case with Castoriadis volumes published by commercial and academic presses. The copy editor is to be thanked for his/her invaluable assistance in copyediting, in proofreading, and in making a considerable number of highly useful editorial suggestions. The reader's indulgence, and her suggestions for improvements in subsequent editions, would nevertheless be most appreciated, as some errors may, of course, still be extant. For questions of terminology, the reader is referred to David Ames Curtis's Appendix I: Glossary in *PSW1* and Appendix C: Glossary in *PSW3*, as well as to his "On the Translation" in *WIF*.[2]

We note here simply the two English-language phrases Castoriadis employed in the original French-language versions: "I have weighed these times, and found them wanting" (at the beginning of "Social Transformation and Cultural Creation") and "The New York Review of Our Friends' Books" (in "The Role of Criticism").

VERSION

---

[2] Curtis may be contacted at curtis@msh-paris.fr. It may be possible to persuade him to publish a list of errata, which could then form the basis for a second edition; the same procedure could be used for *RTI(TBS)*, *FT(P&K)*, *ASA(RPT)*, *PSRTI*, and *DR*.

PART ONE

Social Transformation and Cultural Creation[*]

BETA

I have weighed these times, and found them wanting.

So far as I know, human genes have not suffered any deterioration—not yet, at least. We do know, however, that "cultures," societies, are mortal—a death that is not inevitably, not generally, instantaneous. Its relationship to a new life, of which it may be the condition, is each time a singular enigma. The "decline of the West" is an old theme, and, in the deepest sense, false. This slogan tried to mask the potentialities for a new world the decomposition of the "West" was offering and liberating; in any case, it tried to cover over the question of this world, and to stifle political making/doing [*faire*] with a botanical metaphor. We are not seeking to establish that this flower, like the others, will wither, is withering, or has already withered. We are seeking to comprehend what, in this social-historical world, is dying, how, and, if possible, why. We are seeking, too, to find in it what, perhaps is in the process of being born.

Neither the first nor the second facet of this reflection is gratuitous, neutral, or disinterested. The question of "culture" is envisaged here as a dimension of the political problem, and one can just as well say that the political

---

[*] Originally published as "Transformation sociale et creation culturelle," in *Sociologie et Sociétés*, 11:1 (April 1979), pp. 33-48. Reprinted in *CS*, pp. 413-39. The present translation, slightly edited and updated, originally appeared in *PSW3*, pp. 300-313. This original translation was made publicly available at: http://libcom.org/files/cc_psw_v3.pdf. In *PSW3*, p. 300, translator David Ames Curtis noted:

> In translating this work, I have at times consulted Castoriadis's 1987 article "The Crisis of Culture and the State," which is a substantial revision and elaboration of themes developed in the present text. "The Crisis of Culture and the State," first published as the University of Minnesota's Center for Humanistic Studies' Occasional Paper Number 16, appears as a chapter of *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (New York: Oxford University Press, 1991).

VERSION

BETA

problem is a component of the question of culture in the broadest sense. (By politics, I obviously do not mean either Mr. Nixon's profession or municipal elections. The political problem is the problem of the overall institution of society.) The reflection is as anti-"scientific" as possible. The author has not mobilized an army of research assistants, not spent dozens of computer hours to establish scientifically what everyone already knows in advance: for example, that so-called serious music concerts are frequented only by certain socioprofessional categories of the population. The reflection is also full of traps and risks. We are plunged into this world —and we are trying to comprehend it and even to evaluate it. Obviously, the person talking is the author. By virtue of what? By virtue of the fact that he is an involved party, an individual participating in this world; by the same virtue as that by which he is authorized to express his political opinions, to choose what he will combat and what he will support in the social life of the age.

What is in the process of dying today—in any case, what is being thoroughly called into question—is "Western" culture. Capitalist culture, the culture of capitalist society, which goes far beyond this social-historical regime, for it comprises everything that this regime has been willing and able to take from what preceded it, and quite particularly during the "Greco-Western" segment of universal history. All that is dying as set of norms and of values, as forms of socialization and of cultural life, as social-historical types of individuals, as signification of the collectivity's relation to itself, to those who make it up, to the times, and to its own works.

What is in the process of being born, painfully, fragmentarily, and contradictorily, for two centuries and more, is the project of a new society, the project of social and individual autonomy. This project is a political creation in the deep sense, and its attempts at realization, diverted or aborted, have already made their mark on modern history. (Those who want to draw from these diversions and abortions the conclusion that the project of an autonomous society is unrealizable are being completely illogical. I am unaware that democracy was diverted from its goals under Asiatic

VERSION

BETA

despotism, or that workers' revolutions have degenerated among the Bororos.) Democratic revolutions, workers' struggles, movements of women, youth, "cultural," ethnic, and regional minorities all bear witness to the emergence and the continued vitality of this project of autonomy. The question of their future and of their "outcome"—the question of social transformation in a radical sense—evidently remains open. Also remaining open, however, or rather what also ought to be posed anew, is a question that certainly is in no way original, but is regularly covered over by the inherited modes of thought, even when they claim to be "revolutionary." This is the question of *cultural creation* in the strict sense, the apparent dissociation of the political project of autonomy from a cultural *content*, the consequences but also especially the cultural presuppositions for a radical transformation of society. It is this problematic that the following pages try, partially and fragmentarily, to elucidate.

I take here the term *culture* as intermediate between its current sense in French ("*oeuvres de l'esprit*" and the individual's access to these works of the spirit) and its meaning in American anthropology (which covers the entirety of the institution of society, everything that differentiates and opposes society, on the one hand, {man's} animal nature and nature {in general} on the other). I intend here by *culture* everything, in the institution of a society, that goes beyond its ensemblistic-identitary (functional-instrumental) dimension and that the individuals of this society positively cathect as "value" in the largest sense of the term: in short, the Greeks' *paideia*. As its name indicates, *paideia* also indissociably contains the instituted procedures by means of which the human being, in the course of its social fabrication as individual, is led to recognize and to cathect positively the values of society. These values are not given by an external instance of authority, nor are they discovered by society in natural deposits or in the heaven of Reason. They are, each time, created by the given society as kernels of its institution, ultimate and irreducible bearings for significance, orientation poles for social making/doing and representing. It is therefore impossible to speak of social transformation without confronting the question of culture in this sense—and, in fact,

VERSION

BETA

one confronts it and "responds" to it no matter what one does. (Thus, in Russia, after October 1917, the relative aberrancy of *Proletkult* was crushed by the absolute aberrancy of assimilating capitalist culture—and this has been one of the components for the constitution of total and totalitarian bureaucratic capitalism upon the ruins of the revolution.)

We can explicate in a more specific way the intimate connection between cultural creation and the social and political problematic of our times. We can do so by asking certain questions, and by asking what these interrogations presuppose, imply, or entail—as statements of fact, even if subject to debate, or as articulations of meaning:

1. Does not the project of an autonomous society (as much as the simple idea of an autonomous individual) remain in a sense "formal" or "Kantian," inasmuch as it appears to affirm as value only autonomy itself? To be more precise: Can a society "will" to be autonomous *in order to* be autonomous? Or, to phrase the question another way: Self-government, yes; but *in order to do what?* The traditional response most often is: In order to better satisfy needs. The response to the response is: *What* needs? When there no longer is a danger of dying of hunger, what is it to *live*?

2. Could an autonomous society "better achieve" values—or "achieve other (i.e., better) values"? But which ones? And what are better values? How is one to evaluate values? This interrogation takes on its full meaning when one starts with this other "factual" question: In contemporary society, do values still exist? Can one still speak, as Max Weber did, of a conflict of values, of a "combat of the gods"—or is there not, rather, a gradual collapse of cultural creation, and something that, while it has become a commonplace, is not false, namely, a decomposition of values?

3. Certainly, it would be impossible to say that contemporary society is a "society without values" (or "without culture"). A society without values is simply inconceivable. Quite obviously, there are orientation poles for the social making/doing of individuals and goals [*finalités*] to which the operation of instituted society is subject [*asservi*].

VERSION

BETA

Therefore, there are values in the transhistorically neutral and abstract sense indicated above (in the sense that, in a tribe of headhunters, killing is a value, and without it this tribe would not be what it is). However, theses "values" of instituted society today appear, and actually are, incompatible with or contrary to what the institution of an autonomous society would require. If the making/doing of individuals is oriented essentially toward the antagonistic maximization of consumption, of power, of status, and of prestige (the sole socially relevant objects of investment today); if the functioning of society is enslaved [*asservi*] to the imaginary signification of the unlimited expansion of "rational" mastery (technique, science, production, organization as ends in themselves); if this expansion is at once vain, empty, and intrinsically contradictory, as it manifestly is, and if human beings are compelled to serve this goal of expansion only by means of the application, cultivation, and socially effective utilization of essentially "egotistical" motives through a mode of socialization in which cooperation and community are considered and actually do exist only from the instrumental and utilitarian standpoint; in short, if the only reason we do not kill each other when that would be convenient for us is the fear of judicial punishment, then not only can there be no question of saying that a new society would "better achieve" already established, incontestable values accepted by all, but we really must come to see that its instauration would presuppose the radical *destruction* of contemporary "values" and a new cultural creation concomitant with an immense transformation of the psychical and mental structures of socialized individuals.

***

That the instauration of an autonomous society would require the destruction of the "values" presently orienting individual and social making/doing (consumption, power, status, prestige—unlimited expansion of "rational" mastery) does not even appear to me to require a particular discussion. What would have to be discussed, in this regard, is to what extent the destruction and the wearing down of these "values"

VERSION

BETA

has already advanced, and to what extent the new styles of behavior we are seeing—of course, in a fragmentary and transitory way—among individuals and groups (notably youth) are forerunners of new orientations and new modes of socialization. I will not broach here this capital and immensely difficult problem.

The term "destruction of values" may shock people, and appear inadmissible, were it a question of "culture" in the most specific and narrow sense: "works of the spirit" and their relationship to effectively actual social life. Obviously, I am not proposing that one bomb museums or burn down libraries. My thesis, rather, is that the destruction of culture, in this specific and narrow sense, is already largely underway in contemporary society; that the "works of the spirit" are already mostly transformed into ornaments or funerary monuments; that a radical transformation of society alone will be able to make of the past something other than a cemetery, visited ritually, uselessly, and less and less frequently by a few maniacal and disconsolate parents.

The destruction of existing culture (including the past) is already underway to the exact extent that the cultural creation of instituted society is in the process of collapsing. Where there is no present, there is no more past. Journalists today invent a new genius and a new "revolution" in this or that domain every quarter year. These commercial efforts are effective for keeping the culture industry in operation, but they are incapable of masking the following flagrant fact: contemporary culture is, as a first approximation, nil. When an era has no great men, it invents them. What else is happening at present, in the various domains of the "spirit"? Aided by the ignorance of a supercivilized and neoilliterate public, people claim to be making revolutions when copying from and contriving bad pastiches of the last great creative moments of Western culture, be it what occurred more than half a century ago (between 1900 and 1925-1930). Schönberg, Webern, Berg had created atonal and serial music before 1914. How many of the admirers of abstract painting know the birth dates of Kandinsky (1866) and of Mondrian (1872)? Dada and Surrealism were already around in 1920. Name a novelist one could add to this list: Proust, Kafka, Joyce . . . ?

VERSION

BETA

Paris today, whose provincialism is equaled only by its pretentious arrogance, furiously applauds some audacious directors who are audaciously copying the great innovators of 1920, such as Reinhardt, Meyerhold, Piscator. When one looks at the productions of contemporary architecture, one at least can feel some consolation: if these buildings do not themselves fall into ruin in thirty years, they will in any case be torn down as obsolete. And all commodities are now sold in the name of "modernity"—whereas true modernity is already three-quarters of a century old.

Of course, here and there some intense works still appear. I am speaking, however, of the overall assessment of a half century. Of course, too, there are jazz and cinema. There are—or there was? The grand creation, both popular and a high art [*savante*] that is jazz, seems to have already come to the end of its life cycle toward the beginning of the 1960s. Cinema raises other questions, which I will not broach here.

Arbitrary and subjective judgments. Certainly. I am simply proposing to the reader the following mental experiment: let him imagine posing, eye to eye, to the most famous, to the most celebrated, of contemporary creators, the following question: Do you consider yourself, sincerely, to belong to the same horizon as Bach, Mozart, Beethoven, or Wagner, as Jan van Eyck, Velázquez, Rembrandt, or Picasso, as Brunelleschi, Michelangelo, or Frank Lloyd Wright, as Shakespeare, Rimbaud, Kafka, or Rilke? And let him imagine his reaction if the person questioned answered yes.

Leaving aside Antiquity, the Middle Ages, and non-European cultures, let us pose the question in another way. From 1400 to 1925, in a universe infinitely less populated and much less "civilized" and "literate" than our own (in fact, in hardly a dozen countries of Europe, whose total population, at the beginning of the nineteenth century, was still on the order of one hundred million), one will find a creative genius of the first magnitude every few years. And here, for the past fifty years, a universe of three or four billion human beings, with unprecedented access to what, apparently, could have enriched and provided the tools for the natural aptitudes of individuals—magazines and newspapers, books, radio,

VERSION

BETA

television, etc.—has produced only an infinitesimal number of works that, one could think fifty years hence, will be referred to as major works.

This fact would certainly be unacceptable to the times. Not only does it invent fictive geniuses, but it has innovated in another domain: it has destroyed the role of criticism [*la fonction critique*].[1] What presents itself as criticism in the world today is commercial promotion—which is quite justified, given the nature of the productions to be sold. In the domain of industrial production proper, consumers have begun, finally, to react; here, product quality is, one way or another, objectifiable and measurable. But how could there be a Ralph Nader of literature, of painting, or of the products of the French Ideology?[2] Promotional criticism, the only kind remaining, continues indeed to perform a function of discrimination. It praises to the skies the silly things produced in this season's style; for the remainder, it does not disapprove of them, it merely keeps quiet, burying them under a deafening silence. As the critic has been raised in the creed of the "avant-garde"; as he believes he has learned that the great works have, almost always, started out by being incomprehensible and unacceptable; as his principal professional qualification consists in the absence of personal judgment, he never dares to criticize. What presents itself to the critic falls immediately under one or another of two categories; either the incomprehensible is already accepted and adulated—in which case it will be praised—or else it is newly incomprehensible—in which case the critic will remain silent about it, for fear of somehow or other being mistaken about it. The critic's trade today is identical to that of the stock broker, defined so well by Keynes: guessing what those with average opinions think those with average opinions will

---

[1] See "The Role of Criticism" (1991), below in the present volume. —T/E

[2] Besides this present mention of "the French Ideology" Castoriadis also uses this term in "The Movements of the Sixties" (1986), *WIF*, p. 51; in the latter essay, a critical review of a book by Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, he refers the reader, apropos of this "French Ideology," to "Psychoanalysis: Project and Elucidation" (1977), in *CL*. —T/E)

VERSION

BETA

think.[3]

***

These questions arise not only with respect to “art”; they concern as well intellectual creation in the narrow sense. It is hardly possible here to do more than scratch the surface of the subject, posing a few question marks. Scientifico-technical development undeniably continues; perhaps it is even accelerating in a certain sense. Yet, does it really go beyond what can be called the application and elaboration of the ramifications of the great ideas that have already been established? There have been physicists who have judged that the great creative era of modern physics is behind us—between the years 1900 and 1930. Could it not be said that, in this domain, too, we find, *mutatis mutandis*, the same opposition as exists in the whole of contemporary civilization, that is to say, between the broader and broader deployment of *production* in the sense of repetition (taken strictly or broadly), of manufacture, of application, of elaboration, of the expanded deduction of *consequences*—and the involution of *creation*, the exhaustion of the emergence of grand new imaginary-representational schemata (such as were the germinal intuitions of Planck, Einstein, and Heisenberg) that had permitted the world to be grasped in other and different ways?

And as for thinking proper, is it not legitimate to ask why, in any case after Heidegger but already with him, thinking more and more becomes *interpretation*, and why interpretation, moreover, seems to degenerate into commentary and commentary upon commentary? It is not just that one talks on and on of Freud, Nietzsche, and Marx; one talks less and less about them, one talks about what has been said about them, one compares “readings” and readings of readings.

VERSION

---

[3] “Anticipating what average opinion thinks average opinion to be” (John Maynard Keynes, *The General Theory of Employment, Interest, and Money* [New York: Harcourt Brace & World, 1936], p. 156). —T/E

BETA

***

What is dying today?

First, the humus of values from which the cultural work is able to spring and which it nourishes and deepens in return. The relationships here are more than multidimensional; they are indescribable. One feature, however, is clear. Can creation of works occur in a society that does not believe in anything, that does not truly and unconditionally value anything? All the great works we know have been created in a "positive" relation to "positive" values. This is not some moralizing or edifying function of the work—quite the contrary. "Socialist Realism" claims to be edifying—which is why what it has produced is nil. I am not even speaking simply about Aristotelian *katharsis.* From the *Iliad* to *The Castle,* passing by way of *Macbeth,* Mozart's *Requiem* or *Tristan und Isolde*, the work maintains with the values of society the following strange, more than paradoxical relationship: it affirms them at the same time that it revokes them, casting them into doubt and calling them into question. The free choice of virtue and glory at the price of death leads Achilles to the discovery that it is better to be the slave of a poor peasant on Earth than to reign over all the dead of Hades. Supposedly audacious and free action brings Macbeth to see that we are all but poor actors strutting about on stage. The full love, fully lived by Tristan and Isolde, can be achieved only in and through death. The shock the work provokes is an awakening. Its intensity and its grandeur are indissociable from this shaking up, this vacillation of established meaning. There can be such a shakeup, such a vacillation, if and only if this meaning is well established, if the values are strongly held and lived as such. The ultimate absurdity of our destiny and of our efforts, the blindness of our clairvoyance, did not crush but "uplifted" the public of *Oedipus Rex* or *Hamlet*—and those among us who, by singularity, affinity, or education, continue to belong to this public—insofar as it still lived in a world where life was at the same time (and I dare add: rightly) highly cathected and valued. This same sense of absurdity, the preferred theme of the best of contemporary literature and theater, no longer can

VERSION

BETA

have the same signification, nor can the revelation of absurdity have shock value, quite simply because it no longer truly is absurdity, there is no pole of nonabsurdity to which it might by opposition be revealed strongly as absurdity. It is black painted over black. From its coarsest to its finest forms, from *Death of a Salesman* to *Endgame*, contemporary literature does nothing but say, with a greater or lesser intensity, what we live daily.

Also dying—and this is another side of the same thing—is the essential relationship of the work and of its author to his public. The genius of Aeschylus and of Sophocles is inseparable from the genius of the Athenian *dēmos*, as the genius of Shakespeare is inseparable from the genius of the Elizabethan people. Genetic privileges? No; rather, a manner in which social-historical collectivities live, institute themselves, make and do things, and make themselves—and, more particularly, a manner of integrating the individual and the work into collective life. Nor does this essential relationship imply an idyllic situation, the absence of friction, the immediate recognition of the creative individual by the collectivity. The bourgeois of Leipzig hired Bach only in desperation after they were unable to obtain the services of Telemann. Nevertheless, they did hire Bach, and Telemann was a first-caliber musician. Let us also avoid another misunderstanding: I am not saying that previous societies were “culturally undifferentiated,” that in all cases the “public” coincided with society as a whole. The tenants in Lancashire did not frequent the Globe Theatre, and Bach did not play for the serfs of Pomerania. What matters for me is the co-belonging of the author and of a public that forms a “concrete” collectivity, this relationship that, while social, is not highly “anonymous,” is not mere juxtaposition. Here is not the place to make even a rough sketch of the evolution of this relationship in “historical” societies. It suffices to note that with the triumph of the capitalist bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century a new situation arose. At the same time that the “cultural undifferentiatedness” of society is formally proclaimed (and soon carried forth by specifically designated institutions, in particular by general education), a complete separation, a scission, is established between a “cultivated

VERSION

BETA

public," to which a "learned" art, an *art savant*, is addressed, and a "people" who, in the cities, are reduced to being fed a few crumbs fallen from the cultural table of the bourgeoisie, and whose traditional forms of expression and creation everywhere, in the city as well as in the countryside, rapidly disintegrate and are destroyed. In this context, once again for some time there persists—even if a misunderstanding begins to slip in—between the creative individual and a determinate social/cultural setting a community of guidelines [*points de repère*], of references, of the horizon of meaning. This public nourishes the creator—not only in the material sense—and also is nourished by him. Scission, however, soon turns to pulverization. Why? An enormous question, to which one cannot respond by Marxist tautologies (the bourgeoisie becomes reactionary after attaining power, etc.), and which I can only leave open. One can simply note that, coming after six centuries of "bourgeois" cultural creation of an unprecedented richness (strange man, Marx! In his hatred of the bourgeoisie, *and* his enslavement to its ultimate values, he praises the bourgeoisie for having developed the forces of production, not stopping an instant to see that *all* Western culture, since the twelfth century, is to be attributed to it), this pulverization coincides with the moment at which the values of the bourgeoisie, progressively emptied from within, are finally stripped naked to reveal their vapidity. From the last third of the nineteenth century onward, the dilemma is clear. If he continues to share these values, the artist, no matter how "sincere," shares as well this vapidity; if vapidity is impossible for him, he cannot help but defy these values and oppose them. Paul Bourget or Rimbaud, Georges Ohnet or Lautréamont, Édouard Detaille or Édouard Manet. What I claim is that this type of opposition was not to be found in previous history. Bach is not the Schönberg to a Saint-Saëns of his time.

Thus appears the *artiste maudit*, the misunderstood genius condemned by necessity and not by accident to work for a potentially universal but effectively nonexistent and essentially posthumous public. And soon, the phenomenon expands (relatively speaking) and becomes generalized: the entity called *avant-garde art* is constituted—and it calls forth

VERSION

BETA

the existence of a new "public." Authentically so, for the work of the avant-garde artist finds an echo among a number of individuals; inauthentically so, for it will not take long to notice that the monstrosities of yesterday become the masterpieces of today. A strange public, originating in a social apostasy—the individuals making it up come almost exclusively from the bourgeoisie and from nearby strata—and able to live its relationship to the art it supports only through duplicity, if not bad faith. This public tags behind the artist, instead of accompanying him; it each time has to be violated by the work instead of recognizing itself therein; as numerous as it may be, it always remains pulverized, molecular; and, ultimately, the sole point of reference it shares with the artist is negative: the only value is the "new," sought after for its own sake; a work of art has to be more "advanced" than previous ones.

But "advanced" in relation to what? Is Beethoven more "advanced" than Bach? Was Velázquez retrograde in relation to Giotto? Transgressions of certain academic pseudorules (the rules, for example, of classical harmony, which the great composers, beginning with Bach himself, have often "violated"; or those of "naturalistic" representation in painting, which in the end no great painter ever respected) are valued for their own sake—in complete misunderstanding of the deep-seated relations that always tie together, in a great work, the form of expression and what is expressed, to the extent that such a distinction can even be made. Was Cezanne a retard, who painted apples more and more cubically, because he wanted to make them look more and more like the originals and more and more round? Is it *because* they are atonal that certain atonal works are truly musical? I know of only one work in the entire universe of literary prose that is an absolute creation, the demiurge of *another* world; this work, which in appearance takes all its materials from the world around us and, imposing an imperceptible and ever elusive alteration in their ordering and in their "logic," makes a universe from them that resembles no other and thanks to which we discover, in amazement and in fright, that we have, perhaps, always inhabited it in secret, is *The Castle,* a novel in classical, in fact banal form. Most men of letters today,

VERSION

BETA

however, go into contortions to invent new forms when they have nothing to say, neither new nor old; when their public applauds them, we must understand that it is applauding the exploits of contortionists.

This "avant-garde public," thus constituted, acts on artists through aftershock (and in synergy with the spirit of the times). The public and the artists are bound together by their joint reference to a pseudomodernism, a mere negation capable only of nourishing the obsession with innovation at any price and for its own sake. There is no reference against which to judge and to appreciate the new. How then could there be anything truly new if there is no true tradition, no living tradition? And how could art have as sole reference art itself, without immediately becoming mere ornament, or a game in the most banal sense of the term? As creation of meaning, of a nondiscursive meaning, not only is art by its essence and not by accident inexpressible in everyday language, but it brings into existence a mode of being inaccessible and inconceivable for that language; and with it, we are confronted with an extreme paradox. Totally autarchic, sufficient unto itself, serving no purpose, it also exists only as referral to the world and to worlds, as revelation of this world as a perpetual and inexhaustible to-be [*à-être*] through the emergence of what, until then, was neither possible nor impossible: of the other. Not: presentation in representation of the discursively unrepresentable Ideas of Reason, as Kant would have it; but rather creation of a meaning that is neither Idea nor Reason, that is organized without being "logical" and that creates its own referent as more "real" than anything "real" that could be "re-presented."

We are not saying that this meaning is "indissociable" from a form; rather, we say that it *is* form (*eidos*), it exists only in and through form (which has nothing to do with the adoration of an empty form for its own sake, characteristic of the inverted academicism that is "modernism" today). Now, what also is dying today are the forms themselves, and, perhaps, the inherited categories (genres) of creation. Cannot it legitimately be asked whether the novel form, the framed-painting form, the theatrical-play form are not outliving themselves? Independent of its concrete realization (as framed

VERSION

BETA

painting, fresco, etc.), is painting still alive? One should not become too easily irritated by these questions. Epic poetry has been quite dead for centuries, if not millennia. After the Renaissance, has there been great sculpture, with a few recent exceptions (Rodin, Maillol, Archipenko, Giacometti . . .)? The framed painting, like the novel, like the theatrical play, implies totally the society within which it arises. What, for example, is the novel today? From the internal wearing down of language to the crisis of the written word, from the distractions, entertaining diversions, and the way the modern individual lives or rather does not live time to the hours spent in front of the television set, does not everything conspire toward the same result? Could someone who spent his childhood and adolescence looking at television forty hours a week read *The Idiot,* or an updated version of *The Idiot?* Could he gain access to novelistic life and time, could he adopt the posture of receptiveness/freedom necessary to allow himself to become absorbed in a great novel while at the same time making something of it for himself?

Perhaps what we have learned to call the *cultural work* itself is also in the process of dying: the enduring "object," destined in principle to a temporally indefinite, individualizable existence, and assigned at least in principle to an author, to a social setting, to a precise date. There are fewer and fewer works, and more and more *products,* which, like the other products of the era, have undergone the same change in the determination of their temporality: destined not to endure, but to not endure. They also have undergone the same change in the determination of their origin: there no longer is anything essential about their relation to a definite author. Finally, they have undergone the same change in the status of their existence: they no longer are singular or singularizable, but rather indefinitely reproducible examples of the same type. *Macbeth* is certainly an instance of the category "tragedy," but it is above all a singular totality: *Macbeth* (the play) is a *singular individual*—as the cathedrals of Reims or of Cologne are singular individuals. A piece of aleatoric music, the office towers I see on the other side of the Seine are not singular individuals except in the "numerical" sense, as the philosophers say.

VERSION

BETA

I am trying to describe changes. Perhaps I am mistaken, but in any case I am *not* speaking from feelings of nostalgia for an era when a genius designated by name created singular works through which he achieved full recognition from the (often very badly labeled "organic") community of which he was a part. This mode of existence for an author, for a work, for its form, and for its public is, obviously, itself a social-historical creation that can be roughly dated and localized. It appears in "historical" societies in the narrow sense, undoubtedly already in those of "oriental despotism," certainly since Greece (Homer and those who follow), and it culminates in the Greco-Western world. It is not the sole mode, and certainly not—even from the narrowest "cultural" point of view—the sole valid one. Neo-Greek demotic poetry is in broad terms as valid as Homer, as flamenco or gamelan is worth as much as any other great music, African or Balinese dances are far superior to Western ballet, and primitive statuary yields nothing to any other kind. Moreover, popular creation is not limited to "prehistory." It has long continued, in parallel with "learned" creation, beneath the latter, undoubtedly nourishing it most of the time. The contemporary era is in the process of destroying both high and low art.

Where is one to situate the difference between a popular art and what is done today? Not in the individuality nominally assigned at the work's origin—a practice unknown in popular art. Nor in the singularity of the work—which is not valued there as such. Popular creation, whether "primitive" or subsequent, certainly permits and even makes actively possible an indefinite variety of realizations, just as it makes room for the performer to achieve a particular excellence, the performer never being mere performer but rather creative through modulation: singer, bard, dancer, potter, or embroiderer. What characterizes it above all, however, is the type of relation it maintains with time. Even when it is not made explicitly *in order to* endure, it in fact endures anyhow. Its durability is incorporated into its mode of being, into its mode of transmission, into its mode of transmitting the "subjective capacities" that carry it along, into the mode of being of the collectivity itself. It thereby is

VERSION

BETA

situated at the extreme opposite end of contemporary production.

Now, the idea of the durable is not capitalist, nor is it Greco-Western. Altamira, Lascaux, prehistorical statuettes bear witness to this fact. But why then must there be durability? Why must there be works in that sense? When one lands for the first time in black Africa, the "prehistorical" character of the continent before colonization is staring one in the eyes: no solid [*en dur*] constructions, except those made by the Whites or after them. And why, then, would one have to have at all costs solid constructions? African culture has proved to be as durable as any other, if not more so: to this day, the continual efforts of Westerners to destroy it have not been completely successful. It endures in another fashion, by means of other instrumentations, and especially by means of another condition; it is in destroying this condition that the invasion of the West is in the process of creating a monstrous situation, whereby the continent is deculturating without acculturating. It endures, where it does, by means of the continued cathecting of values and social imaginary significations proper to the different ethnic groups, which continue to orient their social making/doing and representing.

Now—and this is the other side of the "negative" statements formulated earlier about the era's official and learned culture—it really seems not only that a certain number of conditions for a new cultural creation are today being brought together, but also that such a culture, of a "popular" kind, is in the process of emerging. Innumerable groups of young people, with a few instruments, produce music that in no respect—except due to the vagaries of commercial promotion—differs from that of the Stones or Jefferson Airplane. Any individual with a minimum of taste, who has looked at paintings and photographs, can produce photographs as beautiful as the most beautiful. And, since we were speaking of solid constructions, nothing prevents one from imagining inflatable materials that would allow everyone to build his house, and change its form, if he wishes, every week. (I am told that, using plastic materials, these possibilities have already been experimented with in the United States.) I pass over the promises, known, discussed,

VERSION

BETA

and already in the process of being materialized, of inexpensive home computers: to each his own aleatoric music —or not. It will not be difficult to program the computer to compose and play a pastiche of Xenakis's *Nomos* or even a Bach fugue (the going would be more difficult with Chopin).

Nevertheless, it would be cheating to try to counterbalance the emptiness of present-day learned culture with what is trying to be born as a popular and diffuse culture. It is not only that this extraordinary broadening of possibilities and of savoir faire also and especially nourishes commercial "cultural" production (from the strict standpoint of film "shots," the shabbiest Claude Lelouch film is not worse than those he copies); it is that we cannot get around the mystery of originality and repetition. For forty years, the following question has been bugging me: Why would the *same* piece, let us say Beethoven's Sonata No. 33, written by someone today, be considered a mere amusement, but an imperishable masterpiece if it were suddenly discovered in some Viennese attic? (Clearly, the series ending with Opus 111 far from exhausts the possibilities of what Beethoven "could have discovered" at the end of his life—though it has had no sequel in musical history.) I have seen no one reflect seriously on the question posed by the discovery, a few years ago, of the series of "fake Vermeers" that had long fooled all the experts. Well, what was "false" in these paintings, apart from the signature, which is of interest only to dealers and lawyers? In what sense does a signature partake in the pictorial work?

I do not know the answer to this question. Perhaps the experts were fooled because they very correctly judged the Vermeer "style," but had not the eyes for the flame. And perhaps this flame is related to what makes us believe that, without there being for it any "reason inherent in the conditions of life on this earth," we are "ourselves obliged to do good, to be fastidious, to be polite even," and that the "atheist artist" believes himself "obliged to begin over again a score of times a piece of work the admiration aroused by which will matter little to his body devoured by worms, like the patch of yellow wall painted with so much knowledge and skill by an artist who must for ever remain unknown and is

VERSION

BETA

barely identified under the name Vermeer."[4] Proust, borrowing almost literally an argument from Plato, thought he had found here the sign of a before- and an afterlife of the soul. I see here simply the proof that we truly become individuals only by *dedication* to something other than our individual existence. And if this other thing exists only for us, or for no one—which is the same thing—we have not left mere individual existence, we are simply mad. Vermeer painted in order to paint—and that means, in order to bring into being something *for* someone or some ones for whom this thing would be painting. In being strictly interested only in his canvas, he established in a position of absolute value both his immediate public and indefinite and enigmatic future generations.

"Official," "learned" culture today is torn between what it salvages of the idea of the enduring work and its reality, which it cannot fully accept: mass production of consumable, perishable items. For this reason, its life is lived as objectively hypocritical, with a bad conscience, thereby making it even more sterile. It has to act as if it is creating immortal works, *and* at the same time it must proclaim "revolutions" with accelerated frequency (forgetting that every well-conceived revolution begins by the practical demonstration of the mortality of the representatives of the Ancien Regime). It knows perfectly well that the buildings it constructs almost never have as much value (either aesthetically, or functionally) as an igloo or a Balinese house—but it would feel lost to admit it.

When, after the battle at Salamis, the Athenians returned home to their city, they found that the Hekatompedon and the other temples on the Acropolis had been burned and destroyed by the Persians. They did not set out to restore them. They used the remains to flatten the surface of the hilltop and to fill in the foundations for the Parthenon and the new temples. If Notre Dame were destroyed by a bombardment, it is impossible to imagine for

VERSION

---

[4] Marcel Proust, *The Captive*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff (New York, 1929). —T/E

BETA

an instant the French doing anything else with the debris than piously sweeping it up and attempting a restoration or leaving the ruins in state. *And they would be right.* For, better some minuscule debris from Notre Dame than ten Pompidou towers.

The whole of contemporary culture, too, is torn between repetition of a necessarily empty and academic kind, since it is separated from what formerly assured the continuation/variation of a living tradition substantially tied to society's substantive values, and a pseudoinnovation that is archacademic in its programmed and repetitive "antiacademicism," the faithful reflection, for once, of the collapse of inherited substantive values. And this relationship, or absence of relationship, to substantive values is also one of the question marks weighing on neopopular modern culture.

***

No one can say what the values of a new society will be. No one can create them in its stead. We must look, however, "with sober senses"[5] at what really is; we must hunt down illusions, saying loudly what we want; we must exit from the channels for the manufacture and distribution of tranquilizers, while waiting for the change enabling us to break these circuits.

"Culture" is decomposing. How could it be otherwise when, for the first time in history, society cannot think or say anything about itself, about what it is and what it wants, about what for it is valid and not valid—and first of all, about the question whether it wants itself *as* society, and as *which* society? Today there is the question of socialization, of the mode of socialization and of what this mode implies as to substantive sociality. Now, the "external" modes of socialization are tending more and more to be modes of "internal" desocialization. Fifty million families, each isolated

VERSION

---

[5] The phrase appears in Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, "The Communist Manifesto," Karl Marx and Frederick Engels, *Selected Works In One Volume* (New York: International Publishers, 1968), p. 38. —T/E

BETA

in its home and watching the television set, represent both “external” socialization pushed to a hitherto unknown degree and the most extreme sort of “internal” desocialization, privatization. It would be fallacious to say that it is the technical nature of the media that, as such, is responsible for the situation. Certainly, *this sort of* television fits *this sort of* society like a glove, and it would be absurd to believe that something in it could be changed if one were to change the “content” of the broadcasts. Technique and its utilization are inseparable from that of which they are the vectors. What is at issue is the inability/impossibility of present-day society not only and not so much to imagine, invent, and instaurate another usage of television, but to transform televisual technique in such a way as to enable individuals to communicate and to participate in a network of exchanges—instead of clustering them passively around a few broadcasting transmitters. And why? Because, for a long time already, the crisis has been gnawing away at positive sociality itself as substantive value.

There is, next, the question of historicity. The heteronomy of a society—as of an individual—expresses itself and becomes instrumented as well in the relationship it instaurates with its history and with history. Society can become stuck in its past, can repeat it—believe that it is repeating it—interminably, this being the case with archaic societies or with most “traditional” societies. But there is another mode of heteronomy, one born before our very eyes: the supposed tabula rasa of the past, which is in truth—because there never really is a tabula rasa—the loss by society of its living memory, at the very moment its dead memory (museums, libraries, historical sites, data banks, etc.) is hypertrophying; the loss of a substantive and nonservile relation to its past, to its history, to history—which amounts to saying: its self-loss. This phenomenon is only one aspect of the crisis of the historical consciousness of the West, coming after a historicism-progressivism pushed to absurd lengths (under its {classical} Liberal or Marxist form). Living memory of the past and projects for a valued future are disappearing together. The question of the relation between the cultural creation of the present and the works of the past

VERSION

BETA

is, in the most profound sense, the same as that of the relation between the creative self-instituting activity of an autonomous society and what is already given in history, which could never be conceived of as mere resistance, inertia, or servitude. We have to oppose to false modernity as well as to fake subversion (whether these find expression in supermarkets or in the discourses of certain stray Leftists) a resumption and a re-creation of our historicity, of our mode of historicization. There will be radical social transformation, a new society, autonomous society, only in and through a new historical consciousness, which implies both a restoration of the value of tradition and another attitude toward this tradition, another articulation between this tradition and the tasks of the present/future.

A break with enslavement to the past qua past; a break with the stupidities of the "tabula rasa";[6] a break, too, with the mythology of "development,"[7] the phantasms of organic growth, the illusions of acquisitive cumulation. These negations are only the other side of a position: the affirmation of substantive sociality and historicity as values of an autonomous society. Just as we have to recognize in individuals, groups, and ethnic minorities their genuine alterity (which does not imply that we have to conform to this alterity, for that would be another way of misrecognizing or abolishing it) and to organize on the basis of such recognition genuine coexistence, so the past of our society and of other societies invites us to recognize in it, to the (uncertain and inexhaustible) extent to which we can know it, something other than a model or a foil. This choice is indissociable from the one that makes us want a just and autonomous society, in which free and equal autonomous individuals live in mutual recognition. Such recognition is not merely a mental operation, but also and especially an *affect.*

---

[6] The fifth line of the French version of *L'Internationale* is: "Du passé faisons table rase" (Let us make a tabula rasa—a clean slate—of the past). *Tabula rasa* is also associated with John Locke's epistemology. —T/E

VERSION

[7] See "Reflections on 'Rationality' and 'Development'" (1977), now in *PPA*. —T/E

BETA

And here, let us renew our own link with tradition:

> It seems that cities are held together by *philia,* and that legislators care more about it than justice. . . . Justice is not necessary for *philoi,* but the just have need of *philia* and the highest form of justice participates in *philia*. . . . The aforesaid [i.e., true] *philiai* exist in equality. . . . To the extent that there is communion/community, to that same extent there is *philiai* and also, justice. And the proverb, “everything is common for *philoi*” is correct, for *philia* is in the communion/community.[8]

Aristotle’s *philia* is not the “friendship” of translators and moralists. It is the genus, of which friendship, love, parental or filial affection, etc. are the species. *Philia* is the tie that binds mutual affection and valuing. And in its supreme form it can exist only in equality—which, in political society, implies freedom, or what we have called autonomy.

December 1978

VERSION

---

[8] <*Nichomachean Ethics* 8: 1154b, 1158b, 1159b.>

PART TWO

BETA

VERSION

Ugliness and the Affirmative Hatred of the Beautiful[*]

BETA

There is, if possible, something still more significant, still weightier, something that touches still deeper strata of the human being than what we call *explicit thought*.

Ugliness is the infallible mark of all the {Russian} regime's products, from official "works of art" up to and including the "style" of its leaders and managers [*ses dirigeants*], an infinitely clearer mark, a sign infinitively more demonstrative than any economic statistic or any sociological analysis of the regime's character, of its *novelty*—of what, historically, is at stake there. One has already known of human societies whose injustice and cruelty are almost unlimited. One has known of hardly any that have not produced beautiful things. One has known of none that have produced only positive Ugliness. One knows now of one such society, thanks to bureaucratic Russia.[1]

---

[*] "La Laideur et la haine affirmative du beau," *Devant la guerre* (Paris: Fayard, 1981), pp. 238-43 [pp. 265-68 of the 2nd rev. ed. of *DG*. This section of Castoriadis's work ("Facing war"), along with the previous section—"La destruction des significations et la ruine du langage" (The destruction of significations and the ruination of language)—were originally translated by David Ames Curtis for Wlad Godzich's magazine *Glyph*, but the translation was never published, to the disappointment of both Castoriadis and Curtis. —T/E]

[1] May one not hasten to say that I am forgetting such and such a work or neglecting some other one. The sap of the Revolution, so strong was it, continued to nourish artistic creation for some time still after the beginning of period of Stalinist glaciation (*Chapaev* dates from the early 1930s). But Stalin finally sorted things out. Since then, empty Ugliness has reigned supreme. There are three exceptions thereto. The first, which is not one, obviously concerns clandestine, dissident, "oppositional" creation—Osip Mandelstam, Mikhail Bulgakov, Anna Akhmatova, Boris Pasternak, and so on; it matters little whether some of its representative figures, like the last two, were able to escape death or the penal colony or had a semipublic life with ups and downs. The second set of exceptions (exemplified by Sergei Prokofiev or Sergei Eisenstein) concerns creative people who voluntarily emasculated themselves in order to survive within the regime (compare Prokofiev's *Scythian Suite* to his later works, done upon his return to Russia, or the first great films of Eisenstein to the fecal pulp of *Ivan the Terrible*). The third (exemplified by Andrei Tarkovsky) relates

VERSION

BETA

It would be impossible for me to enlarge upon this question—which, in a sense, is the most important of all—beyond making a few notations. There certainly is a partial “sociological explanation” for the massive production of positive Ugliness in Russia since Stalin. It is clear, for example, that the mediocre bureaucrats from the Union of Writers could not put up with a true talent. But it is also clear that their power is limited and that they are, themselves and the role they play, a product and result of a situation rather than a cause. It is certainly toward the total nature of the regime that one has to turn in order to try to understand. Still, one must grasp what is truly at stake. It is insufficient—and it is beside the true question—to affirm contentedly that the absence of freedom stifles creativity or that there can be no commissioned work of genius. Actually, such assertions are false: they are projections of what we have come to consider to be normal and going without saying. Almost everywhere, and almost always, the artist has “worked to commission” (commissions from the Church, from the faithful, from the king, from the *polis*, from the commune of burghers of Leipzig or Haarlem, etc.). And almost always, he has worked in an imposed and obligatory style (in relation to *our* criteria of artistic “creative freedom”). In all of Asia, in Greece, in the Christian West, among the Mayas or the Aztecs, he created in order to serve—or in thinking that he was serving—instituted beliefs. But *he believed in them himself*—and, in his society, *one could believe in them*. The nullity, the cretinism, and the *pompier* style of official Russian “art” demonstrates, simply and irrefutably, the contradictories of those two statements: the “artist” *does not believe in them himself*—and *one could*

---

to original artists who succeed somehow or other in surviving within the interstices of the official world but who are clearly hated by the regime and subject to all sorts of harassment. Of course, what I am saying concerns creation properly speaking, not performance. Still, it would have to be asked whether the reasons why great Russian musical performers are emigrating more and more are merely “private” or even merely “political.” And, once again, I am speaking of the regime, of what it does or induces one to do, of what depends on it. That it has not yet been able to destroy the genius for beauty in the people that begat Modest Mussorgsky or Fyodor Dostoyevsky is in no way surprising.

VERSION

BETA

not believe in them. If, among so many tens of thousands, not a single one is to be found who might have believed in them—as all these cardboard "works" show—that is because believing in them is impossible. The official Russian pseudoartist is, like every other bureaucrat, a cynic with some subaltern sort of know-how or someone who has chosen to stifle his talent and kill his spirit in order to make a career for himself.

In order to make a career for himself, he must accept the regime's explicit or implicit "directives." At the core of those directives lies the treatment of art as a mere instrument of power. As in the case of language,[2] here, too, but in a much swifter, more brutal, and more radical manner, the attempt to instrumentalize art boils down to the pure and simple destruction of art. Yet that still does not account for the depth of the phenomenon under discussion. That does not account for the *affirmative hatred of the beautiful* that characterizes the Russian regime (as well as the Communist parties of other countries). Having under its heel several army corps of docile "artists," why cannot the regime tolerate, at its margin, some different works in apparently "inoffensive" domains?[3] That it would fear that they might compete with the vehicles of its own propaganda is not very likely. In his time, Stéphane Mallarmé was never serious competition for François Coppée. That it does not accept that the uniformity of "its" rule might be challenged is certain, but that does not suffice. Not only has such uniformity gradually, over twenty-five centuries, been abandoned in most domains that do not directly touch society, history, politics, and philosophy, but, after all and above all, it itself has fabricated this rule and maintained it as it is. Why does this uniform rule have to be, briefly speaking, Ugliness?

That is because the regime feels "instinctively"—certainly without "knowing" it—that the genuine work of art

---

[2] See the previous section of *DG* (pp. 257-63): "La destruction des significations et la ruine du langage." —T/E

VERSION

[3] See the recent interventions by the KGB to disperse open-air "exhibitions" organized in Moscow by independent painters.

BETA VERSION

represents for it a mortal danger, a radical questioning of it, the proof of its emptiness, and of its inanity. The regime has flattened everything out, instrumentalized everything, reduced everything to a functionality that is bankrupt even as functionality. The work of art exists only by suppressing the functional and the everyday, by unveiling an Underside [*Envers*] that removes [*destitue*] the usual Right Side Up [l'*Endroit habituel*], creating a tear through which we glimpse the Abyss, the Groundlessness over which we constantly live while constantly endeavoring to forget it. Art is—as much as and more than and in another fashion than thought and before and after thought: it has spoken before thought speaks and it is speaking still when thought can no longer be but silent—presentation/presentification of the Abyss, the Groundless, the Chaos. One goes into raptures about the Form that is art's own, but this Form is that which allows it to show, and to make be for us, that which is beyond Form and the Formless. It is, of course, this possibility that makes art similar to religion, which "explains" that, until scarcely a short time ago, the main bulk of great art had been religious. Yet this is also what distinguishes it therefrom. Instituted religion, a compromise formation, is always presentation/presentification of the Abyss. The sacred is the instituted simulacrum of the Abyss. Yet for art, the simulacrum is the face of the Truth; there is here the unique miracle that presents without hiding anything. This is the astounding wonder [*Prodige*] of the shown object that does not dissimulate but still shows what is behind it. Art presents without occultation. When the tragedy ends, nothing remains hidden, everything is naked, the spectators themselves are naked, without modesty and without shame. And it is insofar as it achieves this presentation of the Abyss that the works of other times and of other places can speak to us and awaken us. It is not the "form" as such that confers upon the work of art its "timelessness" but, rather, the form as passage and opening toward the Abyss. And it is insofar as religion has always dealt with the Abyss—even if it does so in order to establish its impossible compromise and in order, ultimately, to occult it—that the great artist, even when he might not believe in *this-here* religion, will be able, without damage, to create

BETA

within religion.[4]

If—whether this be under their religious form or under another form—the imaginary significations upon which society is instituted refer society back to the Abyss over which it lives (and that it is, itself, for itself), art will be able to exist as great art and as social art (addressing itself to a living collectivity, not to isolated art lovers [*amateurs isolés*]). But if society is instituted upon the fierce denial of all that is not functional and instrumental, upon the attempt to destroy significations and signification, upon the endless platitude of a pseudo-“scientific” worldview that is a sham and of some “material progress” that is a lie, not only will it render the great work of art impossible (this is what is already in the process of happening in the West)—but it will also sense such a work as an obscure threat, challenging its very foundations, and it will instinctively set itself fiercely against that work.

Here, too, I am speaking of the regime’s own tendency, of the imminent logic of its institution. Here, too, the regime happens to be faced with a society that does not yet completely give in. And it is caught in a contradiction that forbids it from fully achieving its logic. It has to limit its hatred of creation and its horror of the beautiful in the contemporary era. Its claim to be the heir “of the best of past culture” and of Russian history, with a few designs upon achieving international respectability, prevents it from giving itself over to the physical destruction or banning of works from the past. But the relationship to those works, which it tries to impose on society, takes on the extreme form of what it is also tending to become in the West: a museum-oriented relationship, mummification. And, for the works that require representation or performance, there is the banality of an obligatory conservatism that tends to make of theatrical works embalmed museum plays or conventional amusements and that limits the risks of their revitalization that an updated performance would run.

VERSION

---

[4] See “Social Transformation and Cultural Creation” (1979), reprinted above in Part One the present volume; “Unending Interrogation” (1979), in *RTI(TBS)*; “Institution of Society and Religion” (1982), now in *WIF*.

“Music Abolishes the World”[*]

BETA

<Music: Robert Schumann’s Symphony No. 4
End of the Third Movement/Beginning of the Finale
http://t.co/GJE1QeZc8Y 00:00:00 - 00:00:19>

PHILIPPE NEMO: We are here this evening with Cornelius Castoriadis, for a long conversation on the topic of his work, and a little bit about his life, which is out of the ordinary. And this extraordinary path culminates in an extremely difficult philosophy, or one that is not easy to broach, not easy to read, and which could perhaps be described, though I’m taking a risk, as a philosophy of creation—or in any case a philosophy of self-creation, or of autonomy. And here philosophy tallies with some of the data coming from the most contemporary scientific work, and also certain data of the natural philosophy that accompanies this scientific work. In this radio show, we have attempted several times to account for such data, and just as recently as two weeks ago, with our show on self-organization, where, moreover, Castoriadis was one of the invited guests. But today, we are devoting this program entirely to him and his work. What this involves is a philosophy of creation—I was going to say, of pure creation—and we have begun this program with some music not only to illustrate this, but in order to show, Cornelius, that this music, music in general and that piece in particular, is a good paradigm for what you mean by creation.

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS: Quite right. And this part of the fourth and last symphony by Robert Schumann, which is the transition from the third part toward the Finale and also the beginning of the Finale, admirably illustrates for me what has increasingly become one of the objects, of the themes of my thought: what is presented here—neither symbolized nor allegorized, but presented “in person”—is the Chaos, the Abyss, the Bottomless [*le Sans-fond*]. And from this Chaos, from this Abyss arises [*surgit*] inexplicably, but

VERSION

---

[*] 1982 France Culture radio interview with Philippe Nemo. Transcription first published as “La musique abolit le monde . . . ,” in *FC*, pp. 51-96.

BETA

with total *self-evidence*, a perfect form, the triumphal melody that dominates the fourth movement, where the record was stopped.

P.N.: And so, for you, this form existed nowhere else before surging forth [*surgir*] from this silence, or from this sort of slower and more confused melody that preceded this outpouring [*jaillissement*].

C.C.: Yes. Of course, a philosophical position can be taken, which was, moreover, philosophy's classical position, wherein creation is ruled out, based on the idea that, if something is created, that means that it was possible; but as all possibilities ideally preexist since forever in eternity, in a kind of timelessness, consequently what happens simply realizes, exemplifies a possibility that was always given in advance—whether that be in divine Reason or simply in a world of Ideas, it doesn't matter which. Now, I believe that this argument is completely empty; it is purely nominal, as one says in philosophy. I profoundly think that, in history in particular, in the history of humanity—for, there it is the most obvious—we have this sudden appearance [*surgissement*] of forms, this creation, this positing of new determinations, of new laws, of new forms of lawfulness [*légalités*]; and this begins quite simply with the self-creation of human society in general.

P.N.: What we therefore have just indicated quite quickly concerning an artistic creation that passes, whether rightly or not, for an individual creation, well one by an individual creative genius, in this instance Schumann, for you that is true, too, perhaps even more so, for society itself. And this philosophy of the creation of forms, about which we are going to speak this evening, gives us a new legibility for history itself, since at bottom history is nothing other than this discontinuous succession of new figures or new forms through which a society structures itself, without these forms being in any way predetermined in a law of history. And we are of course going to see this in the very order in which these themes have appeared. . . . But, as a matter of fact, you began your life by adhering to a doctrine that, it seems, highly differs from this one, and perhaps is even its opposite, which is Marxism. You were born in 1922; you therefore were

VERSION

BETA

around twenty at the time of World War II; you were Greek; and at that moment you joined the Greek Communist Party. In reading what you have published, and in thinking specifically about this transition from political activism to the most abstract theoretical philosophy, I said to myself that this, too, perhaps represents a creation within your own life, and something you yourself were not expecting when you were a young man and you were a militant among the Communists.

C.C.: Yes, it is quite difficult to speak of one's own life. That should be the thing one most understands in the world, and it is perhaps the thing one understands the least in the world when one inspects it, as the years pass. In addition, that isn't very interesting, except inasmuch as this delimits things, as it yields the lines of a path of work and thought. But, OK, so as not to have to come back to it later on, I will nevertheless say one or two things. First of all, it is not quite right to say that I began with politics and that I came to philosophy; it's rather the opposite: as an adolescent, I was awakened to philosophy at a ridiculously precocious age, and it was this preoccupation with philosophy that led me to encounter Marx—and Marxism. And there, I thought that I had found at the time—in a sense, I did indeed find—what since then has always preoccupied me. That is to say, all at once a search for the truth, a claim for the truth, and then also and especially a concern for the fate of men in society—at the time, we were living in Greece under the Metaxas dictatorship. And that turned me at the time into a Marxist, I'd dare say in the good sense of the term, and it's what made me, under the Metaxas dictatorship (I was barely fifteen), join the Communist Youth.

P.N.: And at fifteen, you were also a high-school student, I imagine. . . . What did one study? In what did secondary-school education consist at that time in Athens?

C.C.: Oh, I don't know if that's worth talking about. It was bad, though less bad than today (*laughter*), of course. But anyway, I had the chance, through high-school classes, to find each year at least *one* teacher who attracted my attention, one in whom I found something. Afterward, when the Occupation came, I did not join the Communist Party; I tried, with some comrades, to form a tendency that was half in the

VERSION

BETA

Communist Party and half outside it, with a desire to reform the Party's policy and its structure. That policy appeared to us and truly was incredibly chauvinistic and no longer had anything to do with proletarian internationalism: *The only good Germans were dead Germans*. And then there was its structure, which already appeared to be completely bureaucratic. We had the illusion that all that represented a local deviation—until the day when we were able to begin picking up Radio Moscow programs. And it then was seen that this was very much the line of Stalinism on a world scale. And at that moment, we dissolved this group.

P.N.: How could Stalinism be chauvinistic on a world scale?

C.C.: But it was! *Except* in Germany, in Italy, and in Japan, of course. For the rest . . .

P.N.: It was a politics of opposing blocs . . .

C.C.: That was Stalinist policy during the War. And moreover, in a sense, it hasn't changed: Communist parties claim, for example in France or in Greece, that *true* patriotism cannot be well served except through what they call *the alliance with the Soviet Union*. Not only did that flourish but it seemed, of course, to be grounded in reality during the War, since Greece was occupied by the Germans, by the Nazis. Therefore, at that moment I broke totally with the Party and I joined one of the Trotskyist organizations, the most leftist one at the time in Greece—this was in 1942. There, I came to know someone, Spiros Stinas, who was for me the very example of what a revolutionary militant is, and indeed he's still alive. Starting at that moment, I began to reflect in a critical way about the phenomenon of Stalinism. And quite quickly I arrived at the idea that the Trotskyist critique of the phenomenon of Stalinism was wholly insufficient and superficial.

P.N.: We are going to return to this Trotskyist critique of Stalinism. But beforehand, a question of principle: What do you think of this back-and-forth between politics and philosophy? Is it necessary to politics? And is it necessary to philosophy? Is it fatal to one or the other?

VERSION

C.C.: Fatal, certainly not. I believe that everything depends on how philosophy is, if I may put it this way, *lived*

BETA

and practiced, and also how politics is lived and practiced, of course. If the latter is lived and practiced in the usual, vulgar sense of the term—that is to say, ultimately as a mere art of manipulation, in order to climb up a party or state apparatus—it can, of course, have no relation to philosophy. If politics is a kind of action that is intended to be radical—*radical* doesn't mean *murderous*, doesn't mean: *Leave not a single building standing*, but means, rather, that in the institution of society no presupposition is accepted as *going without saying*—well, then, at that moment it quite naturally meets up with philosophy, whose vocation is also not to accept any presupposition as going without saying. And to come to a theme that is dear to me, and about which we will no doubt speak again this evening if we have the time, it is obviously not by accident that philosophy and genuine politics were both born in Greece within the same movement of a radicalization of attitudes in relation to what is simply *inherited*: in relation to the inherited representation of the world, the simply mythical, traditional representation, which philosophy challenges, or in relation to the already established political institution of society, for example monarchies, or rather aristocracies, as they existed in the eighth to seventh centuries B.C.E.

P.N.: If politics is the capacity to make history and if history has for its rhythm the creation of forms, it is clear that politics cannot simply be left unthought; there really have to be people who, if they do not create forms, at least draw the outlines thereof. And it is maybe not they who create them, mind you.

C.C.: Indeed, with politics, we encounter of course an essential difference as compared to philosophy. You were just talking about Schumann; you were asking to what extent this is an individual creation. . . . Music is obviously an individual creation and a social creation. Schumann receives a musical tradition, an orchestra, instruments, and so on. And the same holds, *mutatis mutandis*, for philosophy. But the philosopher, in principle, works alone. Now, the politician, by definition, cannot work alone, and political work can never be the work of an individual, at least if what is meant by *politics*, as I understand it, is an activity that aims at a change of

VERSION

BETA

institutions.

P.N.: So, you joined this Trotskyist organization—a communist movement that didn't depend on the Communist International, that, too, is an institution; it had to be created—and you began to develop a critique of Stalinism. Well, what about that? True, our program is not a political one, but it is very much in this political critique of a political doctrine that, little by little, you brought about the emergence of the very forms of your philosophy of institution and creation.

C.C.: Yes, but first one had to see what was really involved in the adventure of what is called *the USSR*—a fourfold lie in these four letters, right?—and which I still call *Russia*, and which I was already calling *Russia* at the time. Was it still a degenerated Workers' State, as Trotsky and the Trotskyists believed—a degenerated, very degenerated, terribly degenerated, and so on Workers' State? Or had its evolution already tipped this society toward a new form, a form characterized by a new dominant, exploiting class—the bureaucracy? Trotsky spoke of bureaucracy, but he spoke of it solely as a parasitic stratum; he thought that it was fragile and tottering. He thought, as he wrote, that World War II would witness the fall of the bureaucracy—or else humanity's entrance into barbarism.[1] . . . All that seemed terribly superficial to me. It also must be said that, at the time, practically nothing on these subjects was to be found in Greece. There had been Metaxas in 1936; the books had been burned, and it was with the greatest luck that I was able to read Trotsky's *The Revolution Betrayed* and Boris Souvarine's *Stalin*—which really got me to thinking—and then Ante Ciliga's wonderful book *Au pays du mensonge déconcertant* {*The Russian Enigma* in English}. And I pretty quickly came to the conclusion that, ultimately, this regime retained nothing of its 1917 origins; it had been completely transformed. But, if I might put it this way, the light finally went off in my head during the Greek Communist Party's attempt in December 1944, when I was still in Greece, to

VERSION

---

[1] Leon Trotsky, *In Defense of Marxism* (New York: Pathfinder Press, 1973). —T/E

BETA

seize power. For, it was absolutely obvious—and I saw the thing, if I may put it this way, I saw what was not yet there—that, had the Communist Party been victorious, had it seized power for itself, it would have installed an absolutely similar society.

P.N.: . . . similar to that of all the regimes in the East with which we are familiar.

C.C.: And with which people weren't familiar at the time, since the Russian Army had not yet arrived at the German border, right? But to me it seemed obvious, as it also seemed obvious that this Party was capable of mobilizing the masses. Since, in fact, the masses were there, but they absolutely were not struggling for a proletarian revolution; they were struggling to put power in this party's hands, caught up as they were in what can be called *revolutionary illusions*. All this really did harm to the whole Trotskyist schema—and already, a bit, potentially to the whole Marxist schema. So, right away I drew my conclusions in relation to the Trotskyist schema, and when I came to France, a year later, {and} began to participate in the French {Trotskyist} Party, I rapidly developed within the Party, and even outside of it, some theses on the class nature of the USSR. At the same time, it was there—how to put it?—like when you pull a cherry out of a basket and other cherries start to come out with it. The critique of Trotskyism led right away to the question: But if *that's* not socialism, what then is socialism? And that led me almost immediately to the idea of self-management, which is already be found in the texts from 1948-1949.[2]

P.N.: What Trotskyism reproached Stalinism for was having given power—which ought to have belonged to the proletariat—to a bureaucracy. But what you were reproaching, at least after a certain point in time, was Trotskyism itself. It was that—and this was a sentence I noted:

> If the productive forces develop, it is thanks to nationalization and planning [meaning, in Russia]; if they develop less rapidly and less well than they

VERSION

---

[2] See now, in English, the 1948 and 1949 texts translated in *PSW1*. —T/E

BETA

> should have, it is on account of bureaucracy. Here is the substance of what Trotsky and the Trotskyists have to say about the Russian economy.[3]

So, the Trotskyists reproach the Stalinists for setting up a bureaucracy; they do not reproach them for nationalization and planning.

C.C.: Let's say that there's much more than that. Nationalization and planning as such are, if I dare say so, completely empty forms. Take "nationalization." But what's the nation? To whom does political power belong? And "planning": in order to do what? In what way is this planning oriented? And who defines it, who controls this planning? That's the problem. Moreover, Trotskyism never abandoned the key idea of Lenin, of Bolshevism, which is the core of the totalitarian situation, that is to say, the party's political monopoly: it was only at the end of his life that Trotsky said that it would be necessary to return to the democracy of soviet parties, and so on and so forth. Furthermore, Trotsky never saw that a political power in a society of this type cannot exist if it does not go hand in hand with effectively actual power over the economy and production. Behind what Trotsky says, or behind what, on paper, Lenin says, there is the idea of workers who are slaves six days a week in production—wherein they have nothing to say, because there, it's rationality and technical issues that prevail—and who enjoy Sundays of soviet liberties. Now, that's an absurdity in every regard, and even, naturally, from the standpoint of Marxism when well understood.

P.N.: Marx shows in effect that surplus value is extorted from the workers by the capitalists. Now, once power has been taken away from the capitalists, the question is whether the surplus value is going to be given back to the workers or whether it's the State that is going to keep it for itself, right?

C.C.: I would not say that the question, "Who corners surplus value?" would be secondary; it is quite important. But

VERSION

---

[3] See Castoriadis's 1972 General Introduction, in *PSW1*, p. 8. —T/E

BETA

there is another problem. And here, too, the cherry that was pulled out led to a whole bunch in the basket. There is also a problem in relation to Marx. For Marx, the way existing factories are organized may perhaps be too cruel, capitalism pushes people too far, etc., but at bottom no criticisms can be made. It is irreproachable, for capitalist techniques are irreproachable. Here, Marx is Hegelian: the World Spirit is embodied in the forces of production. Capitalist techniques are the embodied rationality of our epoch.

P.N.: And therefore there's no question of going backward in relation to that.

C.C.: There's no question of going backward, and, moreover, I am not proposing to go backward. But not for a single second did Marx see that a genuine socialist transformation, a transformation that would return to the producers the power over their production, that is to say, over their life, was *incompatible* with capitalist technology, both as productive technology and as determination of the consumer objects produced; that, therefore, one of the first tasks of the collective of producers ought to be the conscious changing of technology in order to put it in the service of men. An assembly-line socialism is a square circle, an absurdity in the very terms in which it is formulated. Let it be said parenthetically that these fine Marxists, who are constantly quoting Marx and revel in the statement about the hand-mill corresponding to feudal society and the steam-mill corresponding to capitalist society,[4] never explain how the same assembly lines and the same manufacturing lines, in Russia and the United States, can correspond in one case to capitalism, in the other to socialism. . . .

P.N.: So, in contrast to that, you just mentioned the phrase *self-management.*

C.C.: Yes, for the question of the human being's emancipation in a society like contemporary society, which has entered into this productivist and economistic frenzy,

VERSION

---

[4] "The hand-mill gives you society with the feudal lord; the steam-mill society with the industrial capitalist" (in Chapter Two of Karl Marx, *The Poverty of Philosophy* [1847]). —T/E

BETA

cannot be—how to put it?—a narrowly political question. Such emancipation implies profound changes in the world of production, in work life. This implies that those who produce decide about everything that is decidable by them in the domain of production and that they might be able to transform production methods in order to exit from what, as a matter of fact, has been called *alienation* in work. Without that, the rest rapidly becomes a mockery and can lead only to the reconstitution of some kind of social division. What I mean is that the present way in which the business enterprise is organized implies the existence of a hierarchy and a bureaucracy, which in one way or another dominate the collectivity of laboring people.

P.N.: We won't be able to develop here those themes, which, once again, you yourself have been developing during the entire first half of, let's say, your presence, your work in France, where you then founded the review *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The alternative to barbarism still being socialism, socialism as you yourself conceive it, in these texts that have been reprinted in the "10/18" collection {and partially translated in the three volumes of *Political and Social Writings*}. But that's not the center of your reflections this evening. What can be retained then, from a formal standpoint and from a philosophical standpoint in this transition, in this drift [*dérive*], in a sense, from Stalinist Marxism to Trotskyist Marxism and from there to self-managerial socialism—I'd put several quotation marks there, for this should undoubtedly not be confused with certain real movements. . . .

C.C.: Thank you.[5]

---

[5] In the abovementioned General Introduction, Castoriadis wrote:

> Expressed in a positive way, this is nothing other than *workers' management* of production, namely, the complete exercise of power over production and over the entirety of social activities by autonomous organs of workers' collectives. This also can be called self-management [*autogestion*], provided that we do not forget that this term implies not the refurbishing but rather the destruction of the existing order, and quite particularly the abolition of a State apparatus separated from society and of parties as organs of management and direction; provided also,

VERSION

BETA

P.N.: Yes, under this name there are indeed several families of thought. . . . You then ended up with a this-time purely philosophical, very formal, in a sense even very abstract kind of work—your philosophical oeuvre is very conceptual. That's normal for a philosophical oeuvre, of course, but I mean that it is particularly so, for you reflect there on forms, and we shall hear right away a series of texts that are drawn from one of your two main works, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* (the other one being *The Imaginary Institution of Society*). The first of them is going, as a matter of fact, to put us in touch with the emergence of the philosophical question, and of the question of form itself.

<Reading>[6]

> In everyday life, it is possible to ask, and we find ourselves asking: Why . . . ?, or: What is . . . ? The answer is often uncertain. What is that white thing, over there? It is Cleon's son, says Aristotle—"the white thing which we really perceive happens to be Cleon's son."[7] But we do not ask what Aristotle

---

therefore, that self-management is not confused with the mystifications that for some years now have been circulating under this name or with Marshal Tito's efforts to extract more production from Yugoslavian workers by means of a salary based upon collective output and by taking advantage of their capacity to organize their work themselves.. . . Let us note that the "self-management" types [*"autogestionnaires"*] who, for the past few years, curiously have been mushrooming up at all levels of the social hierarchy, keep silent on this question ["There will be no socialist revolution unless from the first day it instaurates absolute equality of wages and incomes of all sorts"] (*PSW1*, pp. 10 and 20).

—T/E]

[6] These lines constitute the first section of the Preface to *CL*, pp. ix-x of the English-language translation. Minor modifications and improvements have been introduced, and the footnotes have been restored and updated. —T/E

[7] Aristotle *De Anima* 3.1425a 26-27.

VERSION

BETA

asks: What is it to see, what is it *that* one sees, what is the *one who* sees? Still less: what of that question itself, and what of questioning?

As soon as we ask that, the country changes. We are no longer in the world of everyday life, that stable landscape where all was at rest even when subject to the most violent movement, and which our sight could inspect according to a well-ordered before and after. The light which fell across the plain has disappeared, the bordering mountains are lost, the innumerable ripplings [*rire*] of the Greek sea can be heard no more. Things are no longer simply juxtaposed: the nearest is the furthest, and the forks in the road, instead of succeeding one another, have become simultaneous, mutually intersecting. The entrance to the Labyrinth is at once one of its centers—or, rather, we no longer know whether there is a center, what a center is. Obscure galleries lead away on every side, entangled with others coming from we know not where, going, perhaps, nowhere. We should never have crossed this threshold, we should have stayed outside. But we are no longer even certain that we had not always crossed it already, that those asphodels, whose white and yellow radiance returns at times to disconcert us, ever bloomed anywhere but on the insides of our eyelids. The only choice we still keep is to follow this gallery rather than that other into the darkness, without knowing where we shall be led, or whether we shall not be brought back eternally to this same crossroads—or to another exactly like it.

To think is not to get out of the cave; it is not to replace the uncertainty of shadows by the clear-cut outlines of things themselves, the flame's flickering glow by the light of the true Sun. To think is to enter the Labyrinth; more exactly, it is to make be and appear a Labyrinth when we might have stayed "lying

VERSION

BETA

> among the flowers, facing the sky."[8] It is to lose oneself amid galleries which exist only because we never tire of digging them; to turn round and round at the end of a cul-de-sac whose entrance has been shut off behind us—until, inexplicably, this spinning round opens up in the surrounding walls cracks which offer passage.
>
> There can be no doubt that the myth was saying something important when it made the Labyrinth the work of Daedelus, a man.

P.N.: We spoke a moment ago about self-management, therefore about the idea of man's mastery over his own life, of the idea that man creates his own life. And we have, in this Preface from *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, a formulation as well as a precise indication thereof. For you, creation begins in the very act of thinking.

C.C.: No, let's say, rather, that it begins in many things, and, in a sense, in the very act of *making/doing* [*faire*] things, because the human being never makes/does things through mere reflex or through mere necessity, and because, in the simplest human making/doing, there is already what in my view is this absolutely central dimension, the imaginary dimension: the capacity to form a world and to give a meaning, a signification to this world and to oneself, to what one makes/does. Explicit thought, or what we call thought as an unending search, begins much later. Creation is already there . . . for example, when paleolithic men *invented* sepulchers. What an absurd idea! Why must the dead be buried? Animals don't bury the dead. Which means, already, that a corpse is not simply a corpse, a mere material object, and that death already has the depth of signification—and of nonsignification, moreover; we'll come back to this in musical terms, I think—we are aware that it has. But I also want to take up again a word in what you said about self-management: you spoke of *mastery*; well, for me self-management, and more generally the self-governance of

VERSION

---

[8] From Rainer Maria Rilke's 1914 poem *Immer Wieder*.

BETA

society, that’s not mastery in the usual sense of the term. “Mastery” is capitalism’s programmatic term. Autonomy, self-government is the control of what can be controlled, collective decision, the act of extricating oneself from some power whose legitimacy one does not recognize, of recognizing that it’s society itself that creates its laws, that we have to decide about what we have to do—yet while knowing, as a matter of fact, that we are living over the Chaos, over the Abyss, and that, we are, moreover, ourselves Chaos and Abyss, and that, as a consequence, mastery is an illusion. If one remains at the idea of mastery, one ends up with “the good society” defined once and for all by a philosopher—that is to say, this culminates in heteronomy.

P.N.: So, actually, in order to extricate oneself from heteronomy, in order to extricate oneself from the idea that society depends on something other than itself, be that on a master—or a tyrant—be that on a god or gods, be that, more subtly perhaps, on a nature that would be said to be fixed and eternal and to which society would have to conform. . . .

C.C.: . . . or on historical laws.

P.N.: Yes, or on historical laws, which is a variant of the previous case.

C.C.: Absolutely.

P.N.: . . . since history in itself can be considered as having laws—natural ones, in any case in the sense that they are imposed from outside on society—so, in order to do all that, in order to extricate yourself from that idea, you must found a new—I don’t know if it should be called a new ontology, a new theory of being, or a new theory of knowledge, perhaps both of these. And that’s what we heard in the first text, where you say that to think—I’m rereading this passage—“is to enter the Labyrinth; more exactly, it is to make be and appear a Labyrinth when we might have stayed ‘lying among the flowers, facing the sky.’” So, one could’ve remained “lying among the flowers, facing the sky.”

C.C.: That’s the translation of a line from Rilke.

P.N.: Yes, of course, it’s in quotation marks. We shall hear a poem by Rilke in a moment. And instead of that, someone one day, instead of simply asking, “What is this white object over there that I see when I’m lying in the sun?”

VERSION

BETA

someone asked in addition, "What is it that I am seeing?" And: "What is it to see?" Therefore, he posed a question beyond what he simply saw, and therefore he imagined something.

C.C.: Of course.

P.N.: And thenceforth he's entered into the labyrinth.

C.C.: Yes, questions, one suspects, human beings have posed them to themselves as soon as they existed. But they pose them to themselves as instrumental questions. *Is there still some game in the forest?* Paleolithic people no doubt asked themselves similar questions. But they certainly didn't pose for themselves the questions Aristotle asked himself: What is *white*? It's an attribute of this object. But what does *an attribute* mean? In what way is it opposed to substance? What is *a substance*? What makes a thing? Or, as the Megarians put it: *How is it that I am able to say that a thing is white if other things also are white?* All that can appear to someone who doesn't want to put himself out as useless subtleties, and they are indeed useless, of course, since one can eat and digest without asking oneself such questions, but they are truly what *thought* is. Now, such questioning in this interrogative form is incontestably an act of creation.

P.N.: "To think is not to get out of the cave": naturally, one thinks here of the myth of the cave in Plato's *Republic*, where men are likened to prisoners at the bottom of a cave who don't see the objects that are outside but only their shadows projected on the background. And obviously, for Plato, to think is to be capable of delivering oneself from this situation, which is that of the prisoners, and then of arriving at realities themselves . . .

C.C.: . . . at the true Sun.

P.N.: . . . and at the true objects lit by the Sun, and *that* would be, properly speaking, what it is to think. And, in this sense, we would obviously be dealing—this is, moreover, Plato's explicit intention—with an Absolute, since in ordinary times we deal only with shadows, which are all relative, which can change aspect without the object of which they are shadows changing, or vice versa, right? Therefore, if one can climb back out of the cave and see the real objects, at that moment one is going to lay one's hand on the truth, on the

VERSION

BETA

"true" truth. And *you* are saying, on the contrary: To think is not to get out of the cave but to enter into the labyrinth. So, can you be more explicit about this idea?

C.C.: It's hardly easy without being too abstract. . . . I tried just a moment before, when I was saying that, instead of quietly using objects, one asks oneself: What does it mean that an object would have properties, or that there are causal relationships; what does it mean that I am familiar with objects; how is it that I know them, to what extent do I know them, up to what point does this knowledge say something about the object, and up to what point is such knowledge not simply a projection of what I am, as a singular person, as a singular individual, but also of the schemas of, let us say, my social group, my society, my epoch, and so on? Then, starting from the moment when one poses to oneself all these questions, there effectively begins a kind of journey, or a promenade, which is sometimes sublime, sometimes nightmarish, and which, indeed, goes on endlessly. And each time, one believes that one has found a door, one is actually opening a passageway; passageways open—inexplicably, moreover; that's no doubt the role of the imagination in thought. But, if one does not have the illusion of Absolute Knowledge, of definitive truth, and so on, one cannot *not* have, in one way or another, an awareness of the fact that this is never but one aspect of being that one has been able to see, or to construct, or to create in adequate fashion; and that, if one could live almost a thousand years, like Methuselah, the evolution of one's own thought would continue, undoubtedly with some upheavals, etc.

P.N.: But then, having hardly just entered into this labyrinth, one no longer knows where the center is and where the periphery is, and above all one no longer can get back out. One was in a serene, calm position, facing the world, and then a moment of doubt calls this being in the world into question; and one might believe that, when one has had enough of doubting, one can quietly settle down in front of the world. But that's it! It's too late, once the critical movement has been launched; one is truly in the labyrinth, that is to say, one can no longer exit from it. And one is pulled into a sort of . . . skepticism?

VERSION

BETA

C.C.: Skepticism? No, that's certainly not the fitting word.

P.N.: We are going to come back to that, actually; I threw out this word in a somewhat provocative way. And now we are going to read another passage, a few pages further on in *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, where you say that this creative movement of thought, this gesture that consists in posing questions that no one had posed before, was done not by just anyone and not just anywhere, but by the first Greek philosophers. And since then, by the entire West.

<Reading>[9]

> In history, in *our* history, truth has emerged as an aim; as have liberty, equality, justice. These are indissociable. They possess us—or at least, some of us—with a force that is not to be escaped. But there is no question of "founding" them; it is impossible to see what such a phrase might mean. The aim of truth, of liberty, cannot be founded. We can refute this or that particular statement; but skepticism and sneering cannot be refuted. We can refute this or that political incoherence; but Auschwitz or the Gulag are not to be refuted, they are to be combated. We cannot do without reason—even though we know its insufficiency, its limitations. And, exploring these, we are again within reason—while of reason itself we can give neither account nor reasons. We are not, for all that, blind or lost. We are able to elucidate what we think, what we are. Having created our labyrinth, we survey it, bit by bit [*par morceaux*].

P.N.: But if neither truth nor liberty is grounded or can be grounded in reason, how is one to avoid what I just called *skepticism*?

VERSION

---

[9] Penultimate paragraph of the *CL* Preface, p. xxvii of the English-language translation, with some minor modifications and improvements. —T/E

BETA

C.C.: The problem of skepticism—as well as, moreover, that of one’s attitude toward things like Auschwitz and the Gulag—is a very old problem. You undoubtedly know that, despite what bad philosophers have constantly claimed, skepticism is irrefutable, like the true Sophist. There is a quite lovely dialogue by Plato, which is called *Euthydemus*, and in it there is ultimately no refutation of the most appalling sophisms. . . . The great philosophers knew that, ultimately, the quest for truth cannot be grounded, because grounding means to have adopted already a rational attitude in the best sense of the term. So, starting from the moment when the author, for example, willingly contradicts himself, there is no possible refutation. Nor starting from the moment when the other responds to my discourse—you know the quote—by reaching for his revolver;[10] for, to refute some guy who reaches for his revolver is both laughable on a pragmatic level and, even, logically absurd. Why? Because in the end there is indeed a choice. An individual choice, but also a historical choice: there are traditions, and our tradition, for example, which, first in Greece and then in Western Europe, has opted for limitless interrogation, has opted *more or less* up till now for liberty, equality, and justice. Rather less than more, but, well, the ideas are there; they work on this society. And then there are other societies that have opted for something else and that are there, next to us, right?

P.N.: That would be the opposition between, let us say, religious societies, which have in a way an answer behind them, indeed an answer in the form of an origins tale, and a society that has opted for the critical spirit or that at least values critique as such. Except that, to value critique as such is, here again, to impugn all traditions except the tradition of critique. . . .

C.C.: In the end, that’s absolutely obvious. Well, you have there one more of those pretty paradoxes: someone who,

---

[10] “The famous line [‘when I hear the word culture, I reach for my gun’] is regularly misattributed, sometimes to Hermann Göring and sometimes to Heinrich Himmler”; it actually comes Hanns Johst’s “play *Schlageter*, an expression of Nazi ideology performed on Hitler's 44th birthday, 20 April 1933.” http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Hanns_Johst —T/E

VERSION

BETA

with *reasonable* arguments, tries to show that the Greco-Western tradition has no value *is* within the Greco-Western tradition, and he is demonstrating that he belongs to it. You see what I mean? It is true that elsewhere there are societies, cultures, that, for example, are based on Revelation. It matters little what is really happening in Iran today, but in one's discourse at least, it's the voice of the Prophet that one is trying to fulfill. Or, you have societies that claim—that's the ideological discourse of the Russian stratocracy—to be based on a theory that is the ultimate truth about human history and society, that is to say, their alleged Marxism, in relation to which, in fact, no discussion is accepted.[11] You call our tradition *critical*, and it is, of course, but that's only one aspect of the question; I believe that the key feature within the historical stream within which we are located is the aim of autonomy, on the individual level as well as on the social level. And critique is one of the expressions of such autonomy.

> <Reading>[12]
>
> Apart from mathematics, where the terms of the question are different, and pure description, where the question does not arise, all scientific truth is deferred error. And yet it is something more than that. What is it, then? What is it that we search for in knowledge? Must we say that, like every desire, this one, too, is condemned to be perpetually mistaken about its object, to be ignorant of it and thus to miss it? Must this love suffer the same fate as the other one, of watching helplessly as its acquisitions trickle

---

[11] Castoriadis's thesis in *DG* (1981) was that Russia, no longer a classically totalitarian country by the later Brezhnev years, had come to develop a *stratocracy* (literally, "power of the army" or, in his view, of the Russian military-industrial complex) with expansionist ends. —T/E

[12] From "Modern Science and Philosophical Interrogation" (1973), in *CL*, pp. 146-47 of the English-language translation, with some minor modifications and improvements. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

> away between its fingers? But how can we think that the object of such eminently rational activity is essentially imaginary? If it were, would we not be irredeemably trapped in a vicious circle? How could we ever release its hold on us except by means of that same rational activity, which, on this very hypothesis, it would continue to overdetermine? If the idea that knowledge can appropriate nature is itself a phantasy, then so too must be the idea that knowledge can appropriate knowledge. It is only in another dream, that of an absolute subject and a pure reflexivity, that one could escape this circle; and this dream—incoherent for daylight logic, and governed, as we should expect, only by the logic of desire—is the common, and unconscious, dream of both absolute spiritualism and totalitarian scientism.

P.N.: The only two positions by which one can imagine that one might get out of the labyrinth after having entered into it are, you say, absolute spiritualism and totalitarian scientism. . . .

C.C.: Which boil down to the same thing, because it is absolutely clear, when one reads the alleged materialists, and again now—see the otherwise informative book by Jean-Pierre Changeux, *L'homme neuronal*[13]—that this claim to sure, and totalizable if not already totalized, positive knowledge rests on the idea that, de jure and in an ultimate way, matter is entirely transparent for Reason. And that matter would be entirely transparent for Reason is, in a sense, nothing other than the position of absolute spiritualism. You asked me a moment ago the question: But what then is this labyrinth of thought? That's what this passage perhaps illustrates a bit. For, starting from the moment when I know that there is no *guarantee* in itself for my knowledge, starting from the moment when I know that human knowledge is itself

---

VERSION

[13] This 1983 book was translated two years later by Laurence Garey as *Neuronal Man: The Biology of Mind* (New York: Pantheon Books). A new edition was published by Princeton University Press in 1997. —T/E

BETA

also an imaginary creation . . .

P.N.: That is to say that you are going very far; you are saying that, ultimately—as we shall see shortly in another passage—there is no reality.

C.C.: No! I am not saying that there is no reality. . . . I don't know whether that will be seen shortly. So let's not scare our listeners. I might as well say right away what I think about it. That will also allow us to illustrate this idea of the labyrinth. When one speaks of knowledge, the opposing theses in the end boil to two. On the one hand, there's: Our knowledge corresponds to reality; ultimately, it's a pure reflection thereof. That's a quite well-known thesis, thanks, among other things, to the Marxist vulgate. And another thesis states: No, our knowledge, it's the knowing subject, and whether it be a matter of consciousness or, indeed, of a society or an epoch, it doesn't matter which. . . .

P.N.: . . . or an *epistēmē*.

C.C.: . . . or an *epistēmē*, to talk like someone else, that constructs it; and beyond that, there's nothing. Now, both theses are obviously untenable, because, for there to be knowledge, one must nonetheless have a structure, a minimum organization of what is and of she who knows. Even a mirror has an organization, and it suffices to take a spherical mirror to get another image—true, there the laws of transformation are regular and trivial, but that matters little: this means that a mirror itself also has a structure. And on the other hand, if one takes absolute constructivism, such as it is, moreover, in a sense already more or less in Kant's work—well, in a certain manner—the question is posed straight off: Why the devil aren't all these constructions equivalent? How can we prefer one construction to another? And the answers, pragmatic or otherwise—but this isn't the moment to be discussing them—prove to be totally beside the question. And one arrives at the following conclusion, that, in *every* product of our knowledge, in everything that we succeed in knowing, there is a dimension that comes from us in the largest sense of the term, and which is what I call *fundamental imaginary schemata*, which structure the world and knowledge—but that there is also, nonetheless, something, when it comes to knowledge, that is the referent of this knowledge, and that this

VERSION

BETA

referent, in one manner or another, is always there, that is to say, our knowledge tries to adjust itself to this referent.

P.N.: We therefore must underscore the stakes involved in this whole discussion between, let’s say, realism and idealism, since the very idea of a philosophy of creation implies that one would have a position with regard to this reality. If there is something real, if there is a nature, and if knowledge is knowledge of this reality, of this nature, well, there is no creation; there can be a progression in one’s knowledge of reality on account of the leaps forward made by knowledge, but ultimately knowledge does not create its object, it finds it. Whereas you, you stand on the crest between two extremes, or between these two abysses, perhaps. . . .

C.C.: Yes, because I believe that knowledge finds something, yet it can find that only by creating; it can find that only by imagining things: by positing new *great images*—whose difference in relation to the bad images, or small images, is that these images, well, they touch something. To take an example I give quite frequently, there is a great imaginary schema in the Newtonian theory of the world, in the theory of gravitation. And this imaginary theory, this image, if you will, of Newton’s—tides, apples, and stars that all obey the same rules, and this way of visualizing the universe, though visualizing it intellectually, this intellectual intuition, like the bits of matter that attract each other and all the rest, in a homogeneous space, etc. is a great imaginary schema—*it happens that*, and I insist on this Aristotelean term,[14] this schema covers a huge part of natural phenomena. Now, we know today that, contrary to what progressivist scientists tell us and what nine-tenths of physicists believe, Newtonian theory is purely and simply *false*—if the term has a meaning. That is to say that the Theory of Relativity is not a better approximation; it is *ispo facto* a refutation of Newtonian theory in its claim to represent reality. And yet, there is a whole stratum of reality to which the Newtonian schema corresponds: you have to need to do some very subtle

VERSION

---

[14] The Greek is *sumbainei*; see, e.g., *WIF*, p. 349, and *OPS*, p. 25. —T/E

BETA

things to leave aside Newtonian equations and take up the equations of General Relativity.

P.N.: And therefore, in this sense, there is an objectivity. . . .

C.C.: There is a certain objectivity in this domain of exact science; be careful.

P.N.: In fact, some attentive listeners will have noted that you begin the passage we read with a very important little phrase: “Apart from mathematics, where the terms of the question are different, and pure description, where the question does not arise, all scientific truth is deferred error.” *Apart from mathematics and description*.

C.C.: Yes, *in description*, for—here again, one could quibble, but, well, if one passes over some second-order difficulties concerning the language in which one is giving the description, and so on—the act of saying that, at such and such a moment, the Sun was eclipsed by the Moon in countries between this and that latitude is a pure and simple description, and it presupposes only an agreement on the terms one is using.

P.N.: And it presupposes them anyhow.

C.C.: It presupposes this agreement. And this language itself, of course, is worked over by imaginary schemata. That’s evident.

P.N.: So, in order to get out, in a sense, from the labyrinth, for this problem is not hopeless, we are going to—and the listeners themselves are soon going to understand why—listen once again to some music.

<Music: “Arietta” from Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 32, opus 111 http://t.co/GJE1QeZc8Y 00:53:31-00:00:55:19>

P.N.: Beethoven’s Piano Sonata No. 32, opus 111. A magnificent sonata for piano. And if we’re listening to music, it’s because in the case of music, as in the case of art, and as in certain other cases that we shall examine later on, but it’s particularly clear and easy to understand starting from an artistic example, there is creation, without anything before. And nevertheless, there is no negativity because everything we have said until now on the subject of the labyrinth, on the

VERSION

BETA

subject of skepticism, and on the subject of sophistry is what Plato himself said on the subject of the Sophists, namely, that, if man is the measure of all things and if everything is relative, well, all is nothingness. Whereas, in the case of artistic creation, everything is relative, indeed, nothing is grounded in reason, and nevertheless what is created has a full positivity, that of being. And, in the music we have heard, there is a form that emerges, that has no reason to be other than itself, and that nevertheless is fully positive.

C.C.: Yes, that is fully, that exists fully. I could reexamine the terms. But I have chosen this opening of the "Arietta" from Opus 111 because this paradoxically provides an illustration, too, of musical creativity from an angle not often thought of: it's that music also creates silence. There is this old phrase from Hector Berlioz, who says, but here it's easily understood, that of course in a musical work the pauses are just as important as the notes, the blank moments where nothing is heard. But I believe that the "Arietta" from Opus 111—as, furthermore (I wavered between the two examples), the final, unfinished piece from *The Art of the Fugue*—what one sees is not only the creation of music in the positive sense, if I may put it that way, as succession and, in a certain way, as synchrony, too. One also sees that this form makes nothingness, silence exist around it and for it to exist itself. And—one can push this idea much further—it has no negativity, but at the same time it can be said that it abolishes the world. The rare moments when we can listen to music as—how to put it?—not as one has to listen to it but as one wishes to and as one can listen to it, the world really ceases to exist. There is nothing else. There is a *nothingness* that is created as background by this musical figure in order to make it exist, in order that it might exist. And this nothingness is created as nothingness without violence; it isn't some kind of destruction: it is pushed back as a background that no longer exists.

P.N.: And if the world ceases to exist, and if the only thing that exists is the form created by art, it is not far-fetched to say that art creates a world, that each work creates a new world.

C.C.: Of course, each artwork, each great work of art

VERSION

BETA

. . . Think about what Kant said in this connection: that the fine arts are the arts of genius, a phrase that, alas, does not seem to have particularly penetrated the consciousness of people in 1791, if one sees what sometimes was done . . .

P.N.: Apart from there being some great works of art that have opened up since then . . .

C.C.: There are great works of art, certainly; that's not the question. But there are not only those. And as for me, I've never understood that one might resign oneself to writing second-order music, or to doing little paintings, or to writing little novels. I'll be told that no one knows in advance. . . . Let's say no more; that's not the problem. The work of art does effectively make a world exist that is its own proper world, and at the same time—at least, this is what I've always believed—in introducing itself [*en se présentant elle-même*], it presents being, it presents the Chaos, the Abyss, the Groundless [*le Sans-fond*]. The work of art presents it without symbolization and without allegorism.

P.N.: Indeed, to the extent that it doesn't worry about that, to the extent that the work presents it in an original way, it is even already an exaggeration to say that, each time, a work of art presents the Chaos, for at bottom it's not each time the same. That's you as a philosopher saying that. . . .

C.C.: Yes, perhaps though . . . But I ask myself whether the question is not simply nominal. For, asking oneself whether the Chaos is the same or is not the same each time, or whether it is one or many, perhaps is meaningless. For me, the Chaos, qua matricial gangue, qua formless-forming matrix of all that can be, is beyond the one and the many.

P.N.: And if a great work of music creates a world, other great artistic works also create one, too. . . . An architectural style creates a world. A literary work, all the more so. We all have at home some bookshelves with books of which we see only the spines. We haven't read them all, not all at the same time. Yet each of us knows that, when one enters into a book, when one makes that effort, after a few dozen pages one is truly in a world where one had not been before. And one can always say that *that* world is in the other world, in the encompassing world. Nevertheless, it's abstract

VERSION

BETA

to say that, since, when one reads, one truly discovers a world that wasn't known before. A moment ago, we spoke, I believe, of ontology; and there is an idea toward which we've been making our way in this whole discussion of a philosophy of form and of creation. It's the idea that each new form creates a new being, and that ontology is multiple, or that one must conceive a multiple ontology.

C.C.: Yes, of course. But allow me to take back up a term you used, which is quite correct but which runs the risk of creating misunderstandings: "philosophy of form." In people's minds, form is opposed to substance [*fond*], is opposed to content. Of course, you are using it in a philosophical sense; as for me, I often take care to add thereto the Platonic term *eidos*: a form is not the outside [*l'extérieur*]; it's not what is to be opposed to substance. It's the coexistence of what are commonly called a *matter* and a *form*. And when I say that history is creation of forms, that certainly doesn't mean that it is creation of exteriority, of coverings for things. History is creation . . . of, I don't know, of whatever you like: the Parthenon, Notre Dame Cathedral, Mozart's *Requiem*, Kafka's *The Castle*; those are forms. Which does not mean that I'm attached simply to the alleged formal virtues of those works. Franz Kafka's *The Castle* is a form in the sense, if this is not to—how to put it?—trivialize art too much, in the sense that a spiral galaxy is a form.

<Reading>[15]

> When men create music, they produce nothing, and it would not be enough to say that they create another *eidos* which simply comes to accommodate itself to and insert itself within that which is already. They create a level of being which is a world within this world and which is not, if we reflect attentively, truly *within* it at all.

VERSION

---

[15] From the Preface to *CL*, p. xxvi of the English-language translation. The Rilke translation is again by the English-language translators. —T/E

BETA

> (And then a tree rose up. O pure uprising!
> Orpheus singing, a tall tree in our ears!
> And everything fell silent. But in that silence
> A new beginning came [*s’accomplit*], a sign, a transformation.)
> (Rilke, *Sonnets to Orpheus*, 1.1)

C.C.: Yes, I believe that there one sees in what sense the great poet is worth more than the philosopher, because, everything we were just saying, Rilke said it too, and infinitely better of course, in this first *Sonnet to Orpheus*: when music appears everything falls silent, and it is *in that silence* that something that is beginning, sign, and transformation [*changement*] comes about [*s’accomplit*] for the first time. And one can say *comes about*, *too*, *forever*, because, apart from material contingencies, it no longer is abolished, it no longer can be abolished, or it can be abolished only in an empirical sense: you burn all musical scores, you break all the records. . . . Qua philosopher, I’ll say: In itself, it is no longer abolished; it has been, it is, and it will be.

<Reading>[16]

> Like the curtains of the room, like the thick night air, Albertine expresses herself as she sleeps; every night of the world is expressed in this air, every peach on earth in the down of her cheeks, every restless love in the look kissing them, and the silence sustaining it; and all this finds expression in *À la recherche du temps perdu*, just as do the sea green from the terrace of the Raspelière and Vinteuil’s septet, which will henceforth count in the world more than others actually composed. But Albertine wakes up and speaks. She says: “I have been asleep.” “Confused and annoying situation of a being who is

VERSION

---

[16] From “The Sayable and the Unsayable” (1971), in CL, pp. 142-43 of the English-language translation, with some minor modifications and improvements. —T/E

BETA

> what he is talking about."[17] Proust wakes up, and speaks of his sleep in the room at Doncières; he speaks of his subjective "lived experiences," thereby recording them on a second and bigger page of the register. He speaks of what was when he was not yet. Just as he is seeing-visible, he is speaking-spoken, speaking multiply and multiply spoken. A situation that is multiply annoying and confusing, the situation of a being who can become what he will have been only in speaking of it.

<Music: Opening of Franz Schubert's *Impromptu*, opus 90, no. 3 http://t.co/GJE1QeZc8Y 01:05:46-01:07:22>

P.N.: You wanted to make an association between the statements we heard previously, about Proust and about Albertine, and which are excerpted from *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, and this music by Schubert, this *Impromptu*, opus 90, no. 3. You therefore saw between these two worlds, about which we have said that, in principle, they were each time new and incommunicable, you have seen some correspondences . . .

C.C.: There, obviously, one's subjectivity plays a part. I believe that, in this *Impromptu*, one of the infinite strata of its musical signification, one of its clumsy translations into simply human signification is also this unspeakable nostalgia for a fleeting love—and here, at the same time, this smoothness of Albertine's cheeks of which Proust speaks, and this forever bygone view of the blueness of the sea from the terrace of the Raspelière . . . That's why I say in another passage that we always listen to music in an impure way, that we cannot *not* make associations.

P.N.: Yes, one would have to be silent, or each piece of music would have to allow us to be silent, even about the

---

[17] Unlike *CL* in both the French original and the English-language translation, the French Editors fail to note here that this sentence, now restored within quotation marks, comes from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's posthumous work *The Prose of the World*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. John O'Neill (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, 1973), p. 15. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

correspondences. . . .

C.C.: There you have it. But how could we be silent about what we are, that is to say, our flux of representations, which, as a matter of fact—and luckily—we do not master, this being at once our damnation and our blessing?

P.N.: Yes, it's therein that these reflections on creation are not a reflection about mastery. Creation, as a matter of fact, cannot be mastered.

C.C.: No, of course not. That's something the philosophers have always known. Plato already . . .

P.N.: It's called inspiration. . . .

C.C.: . . . yes, he called it "divine madness," in the *Ion*, a dialogue on poetry. And when Kant wonderfully states that genius creates the masterpiece "like a nature," that is to say, works as nature works, and also says that it *cannot* account for why it did this rather than that. Perhaps, the thing is even more complicated, right? . . . Of course, it cannot "account for"; yet at the same time, what is produced, what happens during artistic labor, during the labor of creation—and this is also true, though it is very different, in the labor of thought—the astonishing thing is that one creates and that, *at the same time*, there is an emergent lawfulness of what one creates. And it's really for that reason that it has so often been said that the poem produces the poet. One creates; it's totally arbitrary. And at the same time, of course, nothing's arbitrary there. It's arbitrary in relation to all extrinsic considerations; it's arbitrary in relation to the forces of production, to the psychoanalysis of the creator, to the Absolute Spirit, to the movements of electrons: in relation to all that the work of art is another level of being, and perfectly arbitrary. But it is not arbitrary in relation to itself, since, in effective actuality, what is produced is the self-positing of a new form, or a new lawfulness.

P.N.: That is to say, it's arbitrary in one sense, but it's in no sense subjective.

C.C.: I don't know. Here, language fails us, don't you think? And I believe that, in a sense, we are still trapped, because language has been forged, most of the time, in order to tell of material things, of instrumental attitudes, etc., in order to contrast the possible and the necessary. And here we

VERSION

BETA

are in domains that are beyond those categories.

P.N.: So we have spoken at length of art, for this was, once again, a good example or a paradigm for reflecting on self-creation, or on creation itself. But your thesis is much vaster. I recall, indeed, the title of the other book about which we spoke: *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. You are interested in man's capacity to create forms, therefore to create discontinuities in history or even to create histories, and we aren't speaking of the individual level. Not that you would be impugning this individual level, and how could you, given the place you grant, as a matter of fact, to art, which is always created by artists? But you think that history itself is a work [*oeuvre*], in a sense, if one calls *work* that which is created. So, capitalism, Marxism, Communism, or . . .

C.C.: . . . Hebraic society, Greek society, Rome, Florence are *creations*. These are not works, since in history we do not have this apparent closure of the work of art, this self-sufficiency, this delimitation, even if this delimitation opens upon the indefinite and upon the whole. In history, obviously, we don't have that. But we have, of course, the creation of forms. And here again, one can understand what I intend by *form*. Hebraic society—I am speaking of the society to which the Old Testament refers—is a form, that is to say, a collectivity that has given itself some laws, without knowing it moreover; it claims that these laws have been given to it by God. Such laws regulate one's life; there are customs, habits, particular works that are made therein, writings starting at a certain moment, and so on. What is the subject of this creation? Here again, language betrays us: the subject is in a sense the Hebrew people, but this Hebrew people is not a subject in just any usual canonical sense of this term. It's an anonymous, indefinite collective, which always has an upstream and always has a downstream. . . .

P.N.: How do you explain, within that framework, the fact of tradition? Because, tradition, traditions, that's really the perpetuation of a form; it's not the continuous creation of a form; it's not a discontinuity, as a matter of fact. . . . According to your view of things, tradition would be a bit *anticreation*, the desperate attempt of a society not to allow discontinuities to crop up in relation to itself in the form of

VERSION

BETA

inventions produced by its members.

C.C.: What's certain is that a society that is traditionalist in a—if I may put it this way—programmatic and explicit fashion is obviously a society that is trying to reject its alteration, its self-alteration, its own creativity. In fact, it never succeeds in that. Let's, if you will, leave aside what is now called *ethnohistory*, the study of those archaic societies that people dared in the past to call *societies without history*—though we know that that's not true, that alteration is still there. Let's take societies that have an explicit history and an explicit tradition, like the societies in this segment of universal history with which we are familiar, the Near East and Europe. What do we see? Of course, tradition is still there, including among us now, and we see also, at the same time, that in fact each epoch *makes* of this tradition something different, that is to say, it *reinterprets* its tradition. It is, moreover, quite interesting to see, from this standpoint, the opposition—it's quite illustrative—between the ancient Greeks and the Jews. The ancient Greeks, who quite obviously have a very important relation to their tradition, are nonetheless a people among whom, starting at a certain moment, creation really explodes, and the self-alteration of society, of forms of thought, and so on happens at a really frenetic pace, when one thinks of what happened between the seventh and the fourth century. . . . And they do not hesitate to call themselves into question. When the Jews, in a relatively later phase, and no doubt under the influence of Greek culture after Alexander's conquest, Hellenism, etc., can no longer stick purely and simply to the letter of the Old Testament . . .

P.N.: . . . they begin interpreting.

C.C.: There you are. They begin to *create*, they begin to change, but they are obliged to disguise this creation by presenting it as the interminable interpretation of a sacred text that, itself, cannot and should not vary. But they themselves, they alter it.

P.N.: Yes, but, well, the first interpreters of the Torah, of the first part of the Bible, are the prophets themselves, at a date rather prior to the Hellenization of the Mediterranean world.

VERSION

BETA

C.C.: Of course, and there is nothing astonishing about that: the Old Testament itself expresses an evolution; it does not refer to a frozen society, and something begins already with the prophets.

P.N.: OK. But, more profoundly, would not your friends who are theorists of self-organization say to you that you have to have a certain dose of redundancy, as they say, that is to say, of repetition, of transmission of old forms in order that new forms might gush forth? Because, at bottom, you are going so far as to . . . your philosophy is a theory of creation *ex nihilo*, ultimately. We have spoken of silence shortly beforehand. Mustn’t there be some ingredients in order to create?

C.C.: Of course. But the question is: What ingredients? And what is the relation of the new to what already existed? Every truth can be transformed into an absurdity if it is given—how to put it?—an extremist, absolute, etc. form. I speak of *ex nihilo* creation. Why? In order to show that when something is created, what is created cannot be derived or produced on the basis of what was already there. You can’t bring the opus 111 *Sonata* out of Haydn. It’s something else. You cannot bring the birth of philosophy or of democracy in Greece out of something that was there. But, of course, everything that is produced happens in some being that is already there.

P.N.: Yes. . . . Is there not a *first matter* [*une matière première*] for you, to speak like the ancient philosophers?

C.C.: This being that is already there furnishes a few limit conditions, as could be said if one used a physicists’ and mathematicians’ language; it furnishes a first matter. But that’s not the important thing, because, ultimately, what really matters to us in creation is signification, and the same raw materials [*les mêmes matières premières*], as one sees in history, take on, as a matter of fact, different significations, in accordance with the creations involved.

P.N.: Yes, but it’s nonetheless one world.

C.C.: Of course, it’s one world.

P.N.: I mean, it’s a reality; there is an exteriority, as it happens; that’s the first matter. There would not be any creation if there were no matter. And consequently one can

VERSION

BETA

ask who created matter, or how it was made.

C.C.: But, you know, there is marble—I'm taking you literally—in Greece, on the island of Paros or on Mount Pentelicus, and there is even more beautiful marble in Italy. The Greeks made temples. And the Romans, later, badly and sadly imitated Greek temples. But, when the fifteenth century came around, Michelangelo, with this marble, did something else. That's the relation to matter.

P.N.: You go quite far with this idea of the creation *ex nihilo* of forms and of signification, since forms alone yield significations. You say, and it's even the page on which you end your book *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, that significations, values are created; they are not objective; they are not . . .[18]

C.C.: . . . transcendent, let us say.

P.N.: Yes, they do not belong to a nature that some science or some specialists could work out. Consequently, you say, an idea such as equality, or liberty—we saw it shortly beforehand, but we're going to see why I am again speaking of equality—it is not in the things, it is not in nature. And you are saying that it is therefore a creation, for example, of Marxism qua . . .

C.C.: But equality is not a creation of Marxism!

P.N.: No, right, but, well, taken back up by . . .

C.C.: Oh, no. Far from it, even . . .

P.N.: OK. But you are going so far as to say that you—here, you are speaking, it seems, in your own name, personally—you would be for the equality of all incomes. Can you explain this idea, which is a bit . . . paradoxical? Is one to think that you do not feel tied by naturalistic considerations, which would tell us, for example, that absolute equality is impossible? You say that, if one wanted absolute equality, one could achieve it. . . .

C.C.: No, it's not absolute equality. There are so many misunderstandings here. . . . For me, the key point is equality of participation in political power.

VERSION

---

[18] See the end of the chapter entitled "Value, Equality, Justice, Politics: From Marx to Aristotle and from Aristotle to Us" (1975), in *CL*. —T/E

BETA

P.N.: Oh, it's that. . . . And economic equality . . . ?

C.C.: Equality of participation in political power, if it is not effectively to remain formal, signifies as well the equalization of the conditions in which people can actively participate in this political power. For me, democracy is the active participation of the whole community in political affairs; and not delegation or representation. There you have it. So, economic equality, in *that* sense, is in my view justified; I would not say that it is deduced, but it is part of the same choice, and this for two reasons. The first is, let us say, traditional and relatively secondary; as soon as there are economic inequalities, unless they are wholly secondary and trivial, equality of participation in political power becomes a delusion. But above all, as I have explained at length elsewhere, the essential thing for there to be political renewal, for there truly to be a new step toward an autonomous society, is the *destruction* of the economist mentality.[19] And the economist mentality, which is the dominant mentality in the contemporary world, in the capitalist world, obviously is instrumented mainly in the psychology of individuals via the inequality of incomes: *I have more than you; I'll endeavor to have even more*, etc.

P.N.: Therefore, just as democracy is, literally speaking, a miracle, it's the "Greek miracle,"[20] which could very well not have taken place and which very well could disappear, since the equality of participation of all in power is not in things. . . .

C.C.: Of course . . .

P.N.: . . . and is not in a nature of some sort.

---

[19] See ibid. —T/E

[20] Castoriadis himself expressed reservations regarding the thesis of a "Greek miracle" (a phrase originated by French historian Ernest Renan and taken up by others since then). See the last page of the published transcription of his 1996 oral presentation, "L'Anthropogonie chez Eschyle et chez Sophocle," in *La Grèce pour penser l'avenir*, intro. Jean-Pierre Vernant (Paris: L'Harmattan, 2000): 151-71. The published French translation in *FP* as well as the *FT(P&K)* English translation, "Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Man," did not include those final oral remarks. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

C.C.: It’s a human creation.

P.N.: . . . Yes, and if there had to be some kind of a nature therein, it would be rather a nature of an inegalitarian sort, it seems. In any case, this is not an objectivity. . . . In the same way, I’d say, this miracle of challenging this economist mentality would be able to take place if society decided so. Still, that society would have to be free, and this leads us to conclude on a very extraordinary idea that you developed in your latest book, *Devant la guerre*, in which you describe a historical creation too, the Soviet Union—one no longer knows whether one should say *Communism* or something else, for it seems that it would be again something specific—and you define it (that’s what’s original) as the first regime in history, or as the sole regime, or the regime in which this is particularly true, that does not admit art. Everything we have said about art, it does not grant that, and you say that all other societies with which we are most familiar, even archaic societies, religious societies, however totalitarian or authoritarian they might have been, they allow that, they are compatible with the emergence of the arts. But not the Soviet Union. Can you say a quick word about that?

C.C.: Yes. I am not saying that in Russia “one does not admit” art: on the contrary, one even pretends, outwardly, to encourage it and so on. What I am saying is that the regime—the regime as such, which must be distinguished from the Russian people—not only has produced nothing of beauty, and in that it is a historical first, if I may say, but is characterized by what I call a *positive hatred*, an affirmative hatred of the beautiful, that is to say of what art gives. And I believe that that is deeply connected up with the nature of the regime *and* the nature of beauty. Because the beautiful *brings* the human being *out* of the instituted world such as it is.

<Music: Opening of Mozart’s *Requiem* http://t.co/GJE1QeZc8Y 01:22:50-01:24:05>

VERSION

The Writer and Democracy[*]

BETA

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS: “I began writing, the most silent of operations, in order to counter the noise from the disputes and battles of our century. I wrote, and I continue to write, because I conceive literature as a dialogue with the world, with the reader, and with myself—and this dialogue is quite the opposite of the noise that implies our negation and of the silence that ignores us. I have always thought that the poet is not only he who speaks, but he who listens.”

In these lines from his acceptance speech for the Peace Prize of the German Book Trade in Frankfurt am Main (October 1983),[1] coming after the reminder that he was “born in the fateful year 1914,” Octavio Paz places us straightaway at the heart of our topic: the writer and democracy. I would like to isolate therein three distinct and linked themes.

By writing, “the most silent of operations,” Paz means to “counter the noise from the disputes and battles of our century.” This noise is not metaphorical, and it is not mere noise. It’s suffering, destruction, and death—among other things, though not exclusively, the ten million dead from World War I and the seventy million from World War II, those of the Gulag, those of Auschwitz. The writer is opposed in an apparently derisory manner, through his art, to the massacres and the collective folly, to the noise that accompanies and accomplishes death.

But this noise, whether it takes an extreme form in war or a trivial and apparently innocuous form, the noise of congested and polluted cities, soccer stadiums, and television, is also to be combated, because it destroys what is essential, “dialogue with the world, with the reader, and with myself.” The poet is not only he who speaks; he is also he who listens.

---

[*] Meeting and discussion with Cornelius Castoriadis, Octavio Paz, Jorge Semprun, and Carlos Barral during the Aix-en-Provence Book Festival (June 4, 1988), published in the special Octavio Paz issue of *Détours d’écriture*, 13/14 (Spring/Summer 1989): 119-29. Reprinted as “L’écrivain et la démocratie” in *FC*, pp. 97-119.

[1] The correct date is a year later: October 7, 1984. The speech is available here in Spanish and German. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

He is seized by the exigency of dialogue: a dialogue with the reader, most often anonymous and collective, but sometimes, like these days here, a reader in flesh and bone. This exigency of dialogue, of speaking and letting speak, of listening and letting listen, is also what defines, at another level but without any shift in meaning, the vital medium of democracy.

Finally, dialogue is also a "dialogue with the world" and "with oneself." The writer writes, speaks, listens, and thereby enters into dialogue with himself, which may seem simple but is in no way so. He enters also into dialogue with the world, for such is the miracle of poetry, of writing, of art in general, and of thought, too. What hitherto seemed and was mute, the world in the broadest and deepest sense, starts to speak and to speak to us.

This is no play of metaphors, here. I haven't experienced poetic creation and writing. But my experience in the field of reflection leads me to say that, when one thinks, reflects, or writes, one listens. One listens to the thing and often one hears it say "No"; other times, one hears it almost say "Yes," or one sees it make a sign or even smile, and this sign, this smile, is the joy, the sole joy, of he who thinks.

We spend our lives, most of the time, on the surface, caught up in preoccupations, trivialities, amusements. But we know, or ought to know, that we live over a twofold abyss, or chaos, or bottomlessness [*sans-fond*]. I am talking about the abyss we are ourselves, in ourselves and for ourselves; the abyss behind fragile appearances, the brittle veil of the organized world and even of the world allegedly explained by science. Abyss: our own body as soon as it's gone the slightest bit out of order (the rest of the time, too, but we don't think about that); our Unconscious and our obscure desires; the gaze of the other; voluptuous pleasure, tenaciously acute and perpetually elusive; death; time, about which, after twenty-five centuries of philosophical reflection, we still aren't able to say anything; space, too, that incomprehensible necessity for all that it is to be confined in a here or elsewhere; more generally, the perpetual creation/destruction that is being itself, creation/destruction not only of particular things but of forms themselves and of the laws of things; abyss, finally, as the meaninglessness [*a*-

VERSION

BETA

sens] behind all meaning, the ruination of the significations with which we try to clothe being, as well as their ceaseless emergence.

Of this abyss, of this chaos, humanity has always had an at-once acute and confused perception. Humanity has always felt its at-once intolerable and insurmountable character, and it has responded thereto though social institutions and, especially, through that one which, almost everywhere, almost always, has been its core component: religion. Humanity recognizes it by calling it *transcendence*, by speaking of man's *finitude*. Humanity covers it back over and occults it by masking it beneath precise forms and figures—figures of gods, sites, words, and sacred books intended to capture it, to domesticate it somehow or other, to render it commensurable to what, for us, can make sense [*faire sens*]. It is in this respect that religion is, to use a psychoanalytic term, a huge *compromise formation*. The materialization—the notarized document—of this compromise is the Sacred. The Sacred presents itself as, and claims to be, the manifestation and the precise and circumscribed realization of the abyss in the world of appearances: God in the church, or God in the piece of bread—the "real presence." There are perhaps few more striking examples of the pervasive duplicity of this compromise than the Christian Mass for the dead: there, at the same time, the nothingness of human existence—*pulvis, cinis et nihil*—is recognized and the certainty of eternal happiness within the bosom of an infinitely good Father is affirmed.

What does all that have to do with the writer and democracy?

The writer, in a certain type of society, precisely the one in which democracy begins to germinate, like the artist in general or, in another manner, the thinker or the philosopher rejects this occultation of the abyss. He enters into dialogue with the world and with others, as Paz says, not in order to attenuate, conceal, console, or edify but in order to unveil, to punch holes in the veils of our instituted and constituted existence, to make the chaos appear. And, paradoxically, he does that by giving to the chaos a form other than the one that, institutionally, covers it up, a form that achieves this marvel

VERSION

BETA

of presenting without occulting. The artistic form is at once form of the chaos and form that gives, directly, onto the chaos. It is this giving form to chaos that constitutes the *katharsis* of art.

Here we must introduce a distinction of capital importance. We are speaking of the writer and democracy. The writer is he who writes. What is the relation of the writer of the *Bhagavad Gita* to democracy? Of the writer of the *Book of Job* to democracy? People were writing for a long time before there was democracy: and people were writing, or composing, orally, in an admirable way. But, without wanting or being able to establish an overly absolute break, the writer such as we intend him begins to exist when society's tie with religion is either broken or fundamentally modified. This break, or modification, is the break with instituted heteronomy, the beginning of the calling into question of society by itself and of individuals by themselves. So, Isaiah and Jeremiah, as admirable and important as they might be in other connections—as, moreover, the authors of the Gospels, or Paul—are not writers in the sense we intend, and in the sense implied by the lines from Paz I was quoting shortly before. Isaiah or Paul is not in dialogue. They have nothing to listen to and hear that comes from other men. They have to transmit messages and injunctions, which are to be taken or left, since they are *revealed*. But the genuine writer is not the scribe of Revelation. No more than entertainment writing does the writing of sacred books pertain to dialogue with the world and with others.

Yet if we consider the lineage of writers we must really call *lay* (from *laos*: people), and which begins for us with the Greeks, we notice something else entirely. The writer—poet, philosopher, or even historian—shakes up instituted certitudes, calls into question the world in and through which society has created a niche for itself; she unveils the abyss even as she gives it a form and by the very fact that she gives it a form. In doing that, the writer participates in an essential way in the instauration of democracy—without which, moreover, she is herself impossible and inconceivable.

A few examples will illustrate what I mean.

VERSION

BETA

Around 700 B.C.E., Archilochus, the first lyric and satirical poet, appears. (Let us note the impossibility of satirical poetry among the Hebrews, for example.) He recounts, in a few lines that have been handed down to us, how he threw down his shield during a battle in order to save himself by fleeing, and how he didn't worry much about it since he could always buy another one. He becomes the admired poet of a society of warrior-citizens, for whom virtue also and especially meant bravery, and throwing down one's shield was the supreme infamy (*rhipsaspis*, "one who has thrown away his shield," is in ancient Greek a decisive insult).

The central axis of Aeschylus' *Prometheus* is a passionate discussion of the issue of power, of Zeus' tyranny, and of the tyranny of all instituted power, of its intrinsic and necessary brutality and of its intrinsic and necessary injustice, as well as the insistent reminder of the transient character of all power. It must be remembered that Aeschylus—who, it is said, was, in other respects, deeply pious—is not speaking of the power of a *stratēgos* of the city but of the power of the master of the gods and of the world, Zeus.

In Sophocles' *Antigone* (ca. 440), which was presented to—and crowned with a laurel wreath by—a society that was very pious but had also invented a unique way of keeping the gods and religion at a distance from human affairs, one finds the much-talked-about lines about which so many platitudes have been spoken: "Many things are awesome, but nothing is more awesome (*deinon*) than man."[2] Do we take the poets seriously? I don't think so. No one seems to have noted the outrageousness of the poet's affirmation, which will be chalked up, even without saying so, to poetic hyperbole. Yet Sophocles knows what he is saying. He says clearly, before a public audience of pious citizens, that nothing is more awesome than man. Of all beings, man is most awesome (*deinos* comes from *deos*, terror, frightening, dreadful). How is that possible? Would he be

VERSION

---

[2] As elsewhere, Castoriadis uses *terrible* in French here to translate the Greek *deinos*. On *deinos*, see two posthumously published Castoriadis texts, "Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Man" and "Notes on A Few Poetic Means," in *FT(P&K)*. —T/E

BETA

more awesome than the gods themselves? Certainly, and the lines that follow show the meaning the poet gives to this assertion—a profound and true meaning, whatever one thinks of the gods. The gods are terribly powerful, incommensurably more powerful than men—but they are not awesome, terrible, *deinoi*. Why? Because they are what they are, and they have the powers they have, from birth and by nature. Athena does not make *herself* wise. She *is* wise; she is wisdom. Hephaestus does not invent manufacturing. He does not invent *himself* as manufacturer; he *is* manufacturing. But men *make themselves*—they invent, create, institute, and in that respect and for that reason they are awesome, dreadful, tremendous, unforeseeable. Sophocles' thought—profoundly democratic thought—is the self-creation of man and the self-institution of man. Sophocles concludes his *stasimon* by saying that man brings around everything and will bring around everything to his powers through his creations. Only two things will he never be able to master: death, of course, and his own radical split, his cleft nature, that sometimes carries him toward good, sometimes toward evil.

When, after the long night of the fourth to the twelfth century, the historical emancipatory movement reemerged in Western Europe, critical writers also appeared anew, forcefully culminating in Cervantes, Rabelais, Montaigne, and Francis Bacon. Yet we must pause a moment for Shakespeare, undoubtedly the greatest poet of modern Europe, in order to see in what sense the great writer calls into doubt the established institution of society. The political importance of Shakespeare lies not only, and not so much, in his "tragedies of power" (Jan Kott's "Grand Mechanism").[3] It consists in this: that his oeuvre, created during an era of intense religious preoccupations, is radically a-religious, not to say *pagan*. Shakespeare's world is not unfamiliar with the supernatural, but it is purely and simply unaware of the Christian God. God isn't there. He has left without giving a forwarding address. And, at the same time, at this moment around 1600, a moment when European man had already set out, full of confidence in

VERSION

---

[3] <See Jan Kott, *Shakespeare, Our Contemporary* (1964).>

BETA

himself, to conquer all worlds and all powers, Shakespeare grabs him by the collar and, on several occasions, but especially in *Macbeth*, obliges him to hear the following unsurpassable truth: "Man is a poor player strutting on the stage. . . . Life is a tale told by an idiot, full of sound and fury, signifying nothing."[4] I ask, here again: Do we dare take the poets seriously? Do we dare hear this ultimate challenge to all established signification?

Later, the examples become too numerous for one to be able to dream of mentioning them. What Paz writes for the second half of the twentieth century holds for this entire period: " . . . criticism of the West was the work of the poets, novelists, and philosophers." I shall mention only one case, because it is close to us, close to Octavio's heart, and also close to mine: that of André Breton and Surrealism. Beyond the specific and temporary political commitment expressed by the title *Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution*,[5] the critical importance of Surrealism is to be found in the enormous effort aimed at the reform of human understanding; the reform of the human being; the reform of man's apprehension of the world; the destruction of the rigid network of established significations that conceal things from us and conceal us from ourselves; the fluidification of meaning.

---

[4] This is a brief, remembered spoken paraphrase on Castoriadis's part. In Scene 5 of Act 5 of *Macbeth*, Shakespeare has Macbeth say:

> Life's but a walking shadow, a poor player
> That struts and frets his hour upon the stage
> And then is heard no more: it is a tale
> Told by an idiot, full of sound and fury,
> Signifying nothing.

See "Notes on A Few Poetic Means," in *FT(P&K)*, pp. 55ff. —T/E

[5] "*Le Surréalisme au service de la révolution* (Surrealism in the service of the revolution) was a periodical issued by the Surrealist Group in Paris between 1930 and 1933. It was the successor of *La Révolution surréaliste* (published 1924-29) and proceeded the primarily surrealist publication *Minotaure* (1933 to 1939)." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Le_Surrealisme_au_service_de_la_revolution —T/E

VERSION

BETA

What does all that signify, if not that the writer maintains a twofold and profound relation to democracy?

On the one hand, he is one of the most important authors and actors for calling oneself into question, for the self-reflection that is the essence of democracy. On the other hand, in a society that no longer can live on the soil of religion, he is, with the artist and the philosopher, he who reminds men that they are living over the abyss; he doesn't try to mask it with vain hopes and false promises.

Paz said this morning that "the role of the poet is to give to the world his presence." I am not speaking, and I do not believe that he is speaking, of salvation through art. I am speaking of the sole salvation possible, which presupposes the destruction of the very idea of salvation. If the poet saves, it is by listening to what is and by making what is speak, without masking it; there's the difference with the prophet or the religious figure. Can such poets still spring up within the context of the contemporary nihilism Paz describes so well?—that's a question I cannot but leave open.

A few words, to finish, about the term *democracy*. In speaking this evening, what I mean thereby, as I always do, is something that has never been, in Greece as in the modern West, but a rough sketch or a seed [*germe*]. The democratic *project* is the effort, as yet uncompleted, to embody in institutions, as much as possible, individual and social autonomy. In other terms, it goes hand in hand with the emergence and the affirmation of society's capacity to call its institutions into question and to change them. In philosophical terms, democracy is the regime of reflectiveness. That means, too, that democracy presupposes that there is no revelation any more than there is any absolute knowledge, any political *epistēmē,* as Plato and, in his wake, so many others believed. Democracy is the regime of *doxa*, of opinion that is thought out [*réfléchie*] and that aims at *phronēsis*, concrete wisdom. (And it is because democracy is the regime of *doxa* that it has to have recourse to voting and has to accept the opinion of the majority—a solution that can never be "philosophically grounded," but which is imperative for pragmatic *phronēsis*.) It is therefore also necessarily the regime of criticism, of discussion and dialogue, which brings us back to the lines by

VERSION

BETA

Paz I quoted at the start, but also to another aspect of the role of the writer in democracy: his temporal or time-specific [*conjoncturel*] role. One cannot ask the writer to be a political militant, but one has the right to expect that he be in his time, that he listen to history-in-the-making and his contemporaries, and that he speak to them about what concerns them and what is challenging in the most serious issues. This is what Octavio Paz has been able to do in such an astonishingly sound way on so many occasions.

JORGE SEMPRUN: I would like to offer a minor reflection about Castoriadis's talk, using a quotation from a recent text by Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe titled *La Fiction du politique*:

> But who . . . in this century, in the face of the unprecedented world-historical transformations that have taken place, whether of "right" or "left" of the various revolutionary projects, has not been duped? And in the name of what? "In the name of democracy, perhaps?" Such things can be left, I think, to Raymond Aron, to the official philosophy of capital.[6]

I believe that this text summarizes exactly the opposite of what Castoriadis is saying based on what Paz has said. Of course, we can do a philosophical critique of this little text and say: Why only Raymond Aron? Why not Orwell? Octavio Paz? So many others, around this idea of democracy. I believe that Paz has already himself had this experience, perhaps not as direct but comparable, of being criticized as spokesman for Capital since he speaks in Latin America in the name of democracy and while defending democracy. But I would like to go a bit further and pose as a question, all the way, this conception of democracy that is expressed rapidly, because it's firmly rooted, in Lacoue-Labarthe's text. It is true that in the twentieth century there was, among intellectuals, a

VERSION

---

[6] Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe, *Heidegger, Art, and Politics: The Fiction of the Political* (1987), trans. Chris Turner (Oxford, UK and Cambridge, MA: B. Blackwell, 1990), p. 21. —T/E.

BETA

permanent critique of democracy, with the adjective "parliamentary," with the adjective "formal," etc. And it's true that this critique was from the Right as well as from the Left. But I believe that one must immediately differentiate between them on account of the fact that both failed in practice to build up totalitarian systems. For the left-wing critique of "formal," "bourgeois," etc. democracy always had as its initial theoretical intention the enlargement of democracy, the illusion of a more direct, more social democracy, the democratic taste for critique. Whereas, the right-wing critique never proposed such an enlargement. This right-wing and left-wing critique has been one of the permanent elements of our lives, and it rises back up and will rise back up in all upcoming debates. Here, we get to another aspect that brings in and is articulated around the debate over modernity, over art, for there is a portion of truth in this Lacoue-Labarthe aberration; it's that no solution has been found until now to the problem of going beyond democracy through the abolition of the market. Not only the art market but markets in general. We have this paradox of twentieth-century societies that, in those of the East, since Lenin, one has tried to reintroduce the market in order to make things function, and that, in our societies, we are obliged to limit the market for things to function, too, and for justice to have some meaning. So, I ask myself whether this question of the market is not at the center of a whole series of current questions and reflections. I ask it after Paz's reference to Charles Baudelaire. Baudelaire is precisely one of the poets in the nineteenth century who, contradictorily, posed in the clearest and sharpest fashion the question of modernity. He posed it sometimes in a kind of antimodern pastorale, sometimes in a kind of pastorale of modernism, sometimes with a kind of negative reaction, and sometimes with a very apt and fitting vision of urban modernity or of modernity in general. Baudelaire, almost in the same way as Marx, in a certain number of texts, speaks of the disappearance of the *aura* of the writer and of the poet. A century later, Walter Benjamin, in looking into the question of art in the age of its technical reproducibility, also poses the question of the disappearance of the *aura*. We have here a continuity of

VERSION

BETA

reflection on the fact that the market and the laws of the market, after having removed the sacred aura of institutions, after having secularized political and social life, are taking on that last enclave of the Sacred, which is Art.

OCTAVIO PAZ: It is difficult to add something to Castoriadis's luminous talk. Indeed, the relationship of the writer to the Sacred, in democratic societies, is singular: he is the transmitter and the transgressor; he unveils the abyss, the "groundlessness" that is our foundation, and, at the same, he rids this revelation of its religious authority. Castoriadis ended his speech with a question: Can that still hold in the face of contemporary nihilism? I'd say more: In a world where all ideas have become equally legitimate opinions, is there still a place for the word of the poetÌ—this word that is, at once, sacrament and blasphemy without ceasing to be man's word? For his part, Jorge Semprun has been able, with perspicacity, to tie the problem of nihilism to the question of the market. I find myself once again in agreement with him. There is a sort of correspondence, in the developed societies of the West, between the circulation of commodities and that of ideas and artworks. It's the same system that governs the circulation of commodities and that of books and pictures. We have liberated ourselves from the censorship of the bishop and the commissar so as to fall into the impersonal dictatorship of the market. Perhaps, nihilism consists in this leveling of commodities and values. We have the book industry and art has become a branch of the world financial market. No Renaissance prince or pope was more generous than today's dealers are with their artists. But they are blind princes who reduce the value of art to its price. I understand the reasons of the market's defenders: if there is no market, we will witness the imposition of an economic dictatorship that produces, as in the totalitarian countries, corruption and shortages. But the extension of the laws of the market to the domain of culture exposes peoples to terrible dangers of a spiritual, moral, and political order, as one sees in the capitalist countries of the West. I have no answer to this question, at least in the world's present situation. The revolutionary remedy has revealed itself to be more murderous than the malady. Yet I sense that it is there that the source of the illness gnawing away at and

VERSION

BETA

corrupting our societies is to be found.

C.C.: The big issue can be formulated as follows: What grounded the cohesion of the societies with which we are familiar in history were common beliefs in substantive truths, shared by all because they were absorbed with the education of each, often legally sanctioned, as in the Christian West by the all-powerful Church, etc. Starting from the moment when modern democracy attempted to instaurate itself, such truths shared by all also appeared, in two different species (though, at bottom, it's the same thing): on the one hand, Liberalism {in the Continental sense} with the imaginary of indefinite progress; on the other hand, Marxism proclaiming the inevitability of a revolution that would instaurate a society in which man would be able to master rationally his relations with his fellow men and with nature. The two projects have collapsed, for they are intrinsically absurd; both express the imaginary of a rational mastery and domination over nature and over society; both explicitly rely on the phantasm of the omnipotence of technique. For both, it was the "satisfaction of material needs" that was at the center of the interests of humanity. It's useless to discuss this idea for its own sake; one sees where it's at today. Three-quarters of humanity cannot satisfy, even elementarily, these needs, and the fourth quarter is working away, like a squirrel on its wheel, at pursuing the satisfaction of new "needs" that are being manufactured day after day right in front of our eyes. There also was the idea, especially in Marx, that growth in the forces of production would allow a reduction in working time and that man would be able to blossom in the time thus left free. Here again, we know where that's at. The men and women in the rich countries have indeed had some free time—and what have they done with it?

It is striking to note that, after the experience of Marxism's drift toward totalitarianism, after the collapse of traditional religious values, and in the face of modern society's incapacity to give rise to objects that might cement social cohesion and mobilize people, one takes refuge in a tepid attempt to resuscitate traditional Liberalism, economic as much as political Liberalism. What one intends by *market*, and by *free market*, must be clarified. Western societies are

VERSION

BETA VERSION

not free-market societies. There, economies are dominated by monopolistic and oligopolistic groups, a domination that is combined with massive state intervention. Let us note, first of all, the hypocritical use presently made of free-trade discourse, whether it be done by the United States or by the European Community. Free trade is good when it comes to exporting one's own commodities and bad when it comes to importing others' commodities. Let us look next at what happens in reality in domestic markets, and for example price structure. If you draw up the list of products you are buying, you will note that it is only in a minority of cases—perhaps 15% or 20%—that price formation occurs through what an economist would call *market processes*. In all other cases, prices are set by monopolies, oligopolies, and whatever other combines controlled or subsidized by the State, weighed down by enormous advertising expenses, etc. That does not keep this pseudomarket from continuing to prove infinitely less inefficient than the bureaucratic dictatorship over production and consumption. That's obvious. But a true market requires consumer sovereignty and the abolition of monopolistic and oligopolistic powers. Finally, all that has enormous political implications. For, the existence of huge economic inequalities in contemporary society is not just unpleasant from a sentimental or philanthropic standpoint; it is expressed through an exorbitant difference in political powers. Contemporary Liberalism {in the Continental sense} would have us believe that Monsieur Bouygues, for example, participates in political power to the same extent as a municipal street sweeper here in Aix-en-Provence. Monsieur Bouyges's power stems from nothing other than his place at the head of an economic and financial empire. The acquisition of a television network by Monsieur Bouyges is the palpable translation of economic power into political power.[7] And the

---

[7] The French industrialist Francis Bouygues, a favorite example for Castoriadis (see *RTI(TBS)*, p. 205, *PSRTI*, p. 91, and *DR*. p. 39), was the founder of a postwar Paris-area construction company that has diversified into a large and powerful multinational corporation. The previous year (1987), the Bouygues Group purchased the recently privatized French flagship television network TF1. —T/E

BETA

"free" market constantly secretes this power, as it secretes, in the midst of general nihilism, the sole objective to be pursued in life: the accumulation of "goods" and the extension of "leisure activities" that are not real leisure activities. There we have some of the true problems we have to face.

O.P.: The problems of relativism and of the plurality of opinions have led us to the critique of nihilism and to the critique of the market. The modern Western market is indeed the mask for monopoly. In an ideal society, the market could perhaps operate without that impediment. Yet one would have to define how a genuine market of producers and consumers could operate. The problem of the market, in my opinion, is tied to a problem of a political and moral order. The incapacity of modern societies to create a genuine market in the sense of consumer freedom and not of rivalry among monopolies is one aspect of a general problem. The other aspect is the incapacity of Western societies—whence their political weakness in the face of the totalitarian despotism of the East—to create ideas of a common character that wake the people up and do away with the "privatization" of life. A society incapable of mobilizing opinion for great causes in a country is a sick society. Here, once again, is a question I address to everyone and to myself. How can one exit from Western nihilism?

J.S.: We are quite capable today of criticizing and of going very deep and going into the most precise critique of our societies, but we are in the process of asking ourselves: What is to be done? Since there is nothing foreseeable beyond these societies and since the unsurpassable horizon of our time is not Marxism, what must be done? One must seek and find within our societies. And on this point I am less pessimistic than Octavio Paz and perhaps even Castoriadis about present-day society. I am less pessimistic about men and women's incapacity to resist the emptiness of leisure activities and the imperatives of television, thus privatized in the economic sense. There are examples that prove this. That said, the basic problem remains this one: we are confronted with the necessity of transforming our societies without having a replacement model. In the depths of the crisis, there is that. Democracy is the unsurpassable horizon of our time.

VERSION

BETA

C.C.: Certainly, society reacts; there are attempts to find and to do something else. We are not living in a dead society. The genuine issue is not the absence of models: models have not been lacking and, it's not an accident that they have collapsed. A model is a recipe. What, in my view, characterizes the age is the absence of a project, of a push in a direction taken up by the collectivity. The essence of the West has been the reemergence of the project of autonomy of individuals and of collectivities, the two going hand in hand. That project is at once political and spiritual. It is this project that seems to have entered into a phase of evanescence. Genuine political conflicts have disappeared (see the page on the May-June French elections).[8] The total void in the political domain is accompanied by a glaring crisis of creations of the spirit. This is a striking conjunction of two absences that mark the present phase of history—let's hope it's a short one. One does not know why societies enter into phases of creation, of invention, of expansion of their world. But still less, perhaps, does one know why they enter into phases of decadence. In Greek civilization, some very great poets, at the crest of universal creativity, appeared until 400 B.C.E. After Athens' defeat in the Peloponnesian War, there were hardly any more—barely any of the same intensity and splendor. There certainly were Theocritus and Apollonius, but who would put them alongside Pindar or Aeschylus? Paz said quite rightly that democracy is plurality; I'll add that it is also the capacity to distinguish the true from the false, the sublime from the passable. Why were there no longer any great Greek poets starting in the fourth century? I don't know, but that's the way it was. (Certainly, and fortunately, we still have poets, writers, painters, and so on, but it seems obvious to me that, if one compares the present era to, for example, what can be called the *great phase of modernity*—from Baudelaire to 1930—the density isn't, and by far, of the same order.) Don't we have to relate this fact to the vanishing [*évanescence*] of

---

[8] French President François Mitterrand was reelected May 8, 1988, defeating Jacques Chirac, the other winner of the first round vote, April 24. The first round of the ensuing legislative elections was to take place June 5, the day following this round-table discussion.—T/E

VERSION

BETA

political and social projects, to the glorification of nihilism, narcissism, hedonism, and doing just anything? It is impossible to dismiss the idea of the connection between this spiritual lifelessness and an exhaustion of what were the great imaginary significations of the West. The sole collective objectives this society seems capable of giving itself are marginal and philanthropic: the "*Un bateau pour le Vietnam*" operation to save the Vietnamese boat people, Doctors Without Borders, etc. And here again, it is impossible to dismiss the idea that these are compensating for feelings of remorse on the part of Western man, who is sated and comfortable, about the fate of the rest of humanity.

We must also combat the myth of an individual who falls from the sky or sprouts from the earth fully formed. Genuine individuals—individuated individuals—appear in effective actuality on a significant scale only with societies in which the democratic movement has appeared and those ones that succeed them or derive from them. If one has just a little knowledge of Greek, it is impossible to confuse a line of Aeschylus with a line from Sophocles: the two poets are absolutely individualized. They are individualized because they belong to a society in which human beings are not manufactured en masse by institutions. The same thing is true for Modern Times. When one reads the excellent book by one of the rare contemporary Russian scholars who have written important things about history, Aron Gurevich with his *Categories of Medieval Culture*,[9] one sees clearly that the idea of individuality is absent in the Middle Ages, despite the stories one tells about Christianity and the individual soul. When a medieval author wanted to put forward a new idea, he had to cheat and attribute it to an ancient author: the term *novatio* was a disparaging and accusatory term. Let's go forward a few centuries—and it becomes impossible to confuse Botticelli with another painter. This liberation, this genuine individuation of the individual, is itself a social-

VERSION

---

[9] A. J. Gurevich, *Categories of Medieval Culture* (1972), trans. from the Russian by G. L. Campbell (London and Boston, MA: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1985).

BETA

political phenomenon, and each feeds the other. Individuals who want to liberate themselves create freer institutions; these freer institutions are the ones that allow individuals to truly liberate themselves. To think that one can be free just anytime and just anywhere is a total illusion. Descartes believed that he was reconstructing the world and that he was thinking freely, forgetting quite simply that he had behind him twenty-two centuries of inquisitive thought with which he was quite familiar, and four or five centuries of shaking up the medieval Christian universe. That's what allows him to say: I can doubt everything. In the eighth century, he would have doubted nothing.

J.S.: I am in agreement with Castoriadis when he says that one knows not why or when a society's decline begins. That's obvious. And therefore that, today, prognosticating about our societies, knowing whether we are in a phase of decline or not, is a question to be bracketed, for we cannot elucidate it. But I believe, on the other hand, that we are in a period of profound crisis for society which obviously has some disconcerting aspects, some distressing features, but also some very positive aspects. I believe that a relatively long course of treatment in not having an overall social project is quite necessary for us. I am today less worried than Paz and Castoriadis on account of this absence of a project, while recognizing that a society does not truly function without a certain number of collective and communitarian projects. We have so suffered from hegemony, we are so traumatized by the failure of this overall project of a happy society and a radiant future that a general course of treatment—even one of privatization and withdrawal—is not at all useless. It must be recalled how that operates. It must be known that this crisis is part of our way of getting ourselves out of it. We are right when we criticize the limited aspects of our liberal oligarchies, but it must nonetheless be said that we are living through a period when, despite the absence of a grand collective project, important things are happening. For example, for the first time there are beginning to be some seeds of democracy in Latin America. For the first time, we are also witnessing a sort of publicness with *perestroika* and *glasnost*, that is to say, the idea that that system can be

VERSION

BETA

democratized. I believe that it must nonetheless be recognized that, despite our limitations, democracy isn't in such poor shape.

CARLOS BARRAL: Without going back to the quite archaic, Aristotelean principle that "Nature abhors a vacuum," I would be suspicious of Semprun's idea that a major course of treatment involving a retreat from ideologies is fitting for us, for I find that, in present-day French society, there is nonetheless some ideology in the air. And it's an ideology that to me seems bestial. I cannot close my eyes to all that, by telling myself that I have to do a detoxification treatment, when I see some simpleminded and antidemocratic ideologies regaining strength. I'd really like the Communist Party to collapse, but I don't find it particularly gladdening that certain working-class neighborhoods are witnessing a rise of the far-right French National Front. I cannot call that a course of treatment of breaking with ideologies. < . . . > And, in relation to Castoriadis's question, "What project can we have?", I really want for people to go seek the furthest possible. But it's still the case that we have some democratic values that in the end have to be chosen by us. We have to posit them as value choices that, to a certain extent, we set up as absolute. That's not some kind of absolute knowledge, but they are value choices we set up as absolute. That project, with democratic values and, under certain conditions, the Declaration of the Rights of Man, is still to be taken up and given life again in our societies that obviously are worked over by all sorts of inertial forces. Faced with all these forces of inertia, the first element—perhaps a bit too classical, but genuine—that seems to me to offer an answer is to revitalize the democratic project itself, to go back to the deep sources of our democratic values in the face of what constantly threatens them.

VERSION

The Role of Criticism[*]

BETA

We are faced here with a huge subject, which is very closely connected to all aspects of culture and of contemporary society. Literary criticism proper is not my field. But in the sectors that concern me, philosophy and the social-historical disciplines, one notes a number of phenomena, a rapid inspection of which shows that they affect all sectors of written production or creativity, and not only *written,* since one could speak under the same heading and in the same spirit of music, the pictorial arts, or architecture. I have spoken of this situation for quite a long time, protesting against "the shameful degradation of the critical function [*la fonction critique*] in today's France."[1] I shall begin with a brief mention, not of what is, but of what should be, starting *de lege ferenda* {from future law, or from law as it ought to be} and not *de lege lata* {from current or existing law}.

I'm not talking about drawing up a list of comparisons with a bygone golden age of criticism, an always fictive golden age. I'm talking about the requirements of a democratic society in the true sense of the term. In such a society, the critical role [*la fonction critique*] is vital, at the cultural level as well as at all other levels. For, perhaps the best definition that might be furnished for democracy is that of a regime of collective self-reflectiveness. In a democracy, the collectivity and the diverse groups that make it up belong to what formerly was called the *agora,* and which I define as the public/private space: a public space, for it is open to all; a private space, for it is not subject to the decisions of the public political power. Now, such a space can exist as a democratic space only to the extent that radical reflectiveness is practiced there, namely, mutual criticism that recognizes no

---

[*] Text of the lecture given by Castoriadis to a Paris colloquium on "The Ethics of Writing" organized by the Solidarité, Culture, Lien social, Emploi (SOCLE; Solidarity, Culture, Social Cohesion, Employment) Association in 1991. First published as "Fonction de la critique" in *FC,* pp. 121-29.

VERSION

[1] "The Vacuum Industry" (1979), in *RTI(TBS)*; see: p. 4.

BETA

taboo and no limit, and that is shielded, as far as possible, from the influence of interests that are foreign to the substance of the things in question. In such a democracy—which is not a regulative idea situated on an infinite horizon but a project whose effectively actual realization is possible and constitutes the sole political imperative to which we are to submit ourselves—this critical role ought to be able to be exercised by all. For, it is obviously in the *agora*, in the public/private space, that citizens can constantly exercise their reflection and their judgment—without such reflection and judgment, the public space properly speaking, the *ekklēsia*, would quickly fall under the influence of clever people and demagogues.

Critique, from the Greek verb *krinō*, signifying to separate, to distinguish—the wheat from the chaff—and then to judge. Critical faculty: the faculty of separating, of distinguishing, of judging. Not the abstract faculty of judging in general but rather the effectively actual and applied faculty of judging, which presupposes a capacity to bring judgment to bear on *what*, concretely, turns up [*se présente*]. While this faculty, in its abstract philosophical acceptation, presupposes nothing and is necessarily present everywhere there is a subject, in its concrete and correct exercise it presupposes precisely its *exercise*; it develops as a function of some training [*une formation*], an education, a *paideia*. By *education* I do not intend what happens in schools but the whole set of formative influences to which the individual is exposed, which begin with birth and end with death.

The problem of criticism is the problem of a triangle, formed by the author, the critic, and the public. None of these three entities can play a role, whether beneficial or harmful, without the synergy, the complicity of the two others. The social institution acts in such a way that this synergy is almost always assured; it works together. Just as a people has the government it deserves, so a literary public has the critics it deserves, and vice versa, with certainly a few exceptions.

Let us now approach the real situation, today in France. As concerns the training of the public, let us begin with what is most easily identifiable, formal formation, education in the narrow sense—in the sense of the "Ministry

VERSION

BETA

of Education," that is to say, school. One could, under several headings and justifiably, criticize the "traditional" French school, let's say of forty years ago {in the Fifties}. But these criticisms bear no relation to the series of catastrophic "reforms" of which the schools have since then been the object. An example that is apparently outside our field of interest: the new "pedagogical" instructions of the French Minister of Education enjoin mathematics teachers henceforth to teach students only the statements of theorems, without proof, and to make them do only math exercises. That's wholly characteristic and completely within the logic of the present-day system. In a correctly conceived educational program, one teaches mathematics to students not in order to teach them this or that theorem, and still less in order to teach them to resolve math problems; one teaches mathematics in order that students might learn and understand, at least once in their life, what a rigorous proof is. But in the mind of the Minister, "mathematics" clearly serves only to let one tinker about [*bricoler*]—and to tinker about, a rigorous demonstration isn't useful; it is even, rather, a nuisance. One could continue on, moreover, about this: what students must be taught is, as Aristotle would say, to know how to distinguish cases in which a rigorous proof is required and those cases in which verisimilitude suffices.

Let us leave school for the social world in general, that of permanent *paideia*. It can be affirmed, without fear of contradiction, that it is another *paideia* to which individuals are subject, through the effect of the built urban environment alone, when living in Sienna or in La Courneuve.[2] Another

---

[2] La Courneuve is a Parisian suburb that was subjected to rapid urbanization through the creation of low-income public housing. In an article written by Castoriadis's wife, Zoé Castoriadis ("Rationalité et conception des espaces publics dans deux villes nouvelles," *Les Annales de la recherche urbaine*, 32 [octobre 1986]: 95-100), a visual contrast is created (p. 97) between photographs of the Piazza del Campo in Sienna and the Place de la Commune de Paris in Marne-la-Vallée, a new town (planned community) near Paris. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

effect is exerted by Saint-Germain l'Auxerrois,[3] and again another exerted by the new Bastille Opera. In the present age, criteria are everywhere disfigured and demolished: by architectural horrors, by televised spectacles, and so on.

There you have it for the public in general. Let us now come to the critics. Theirs is a very difficult trade, a terribly weighty and even dangerous role, which, it certainly seems to me, the great majority of contemporary critics carry out with an ever-so-slight degree of conscientiousness. Obviously, for the critic it's not a matter of substituting herself for the public in order to judge but to furnish it a part of the means and, in particular, the information necessary for judging. It's not a matter of "scientific" criticism or Althusserian asininities about the science of literary production; it's a matter of the elementary duty of criticism, which is to be informative and argumentative, of allowing the public to form for themselves a provisional, well-argued judgment about the quality of the works under discussion, of encouraging the public to go look into things more closely—or, if need be, to dissuade the public from doing so. This role has become much more important, and much more dangerous, in an age when each month thousands of books are published, almost all of which disappear from bookstores after a few weeks. I say *dangerous* because obviously there are not, and never could be, a guarantee that criticism will indicate only what is worthwhile and will eliminate only what is "bad." Every human trade includes risks; these risks must be taken on, but taken on with responsibility, and such responsibility is becoming an increasingly rare commodity.

Finally, though I can only glide over this, there is the responsibility of authors themselves. Every author is, or ought to be, his own critic, and one would normally expect that such self-criticism is exercised constantly and automatically. If ideas come to you and you begin to write, it is theoretically, so to speak, impossible that such activity is not accompanied,

VERSION

---

[3] The Church of Saint-Germain-l'Auxerrois, located opposite the Louvre Museum (formerly the Louvre Palace), dates from the 7th century and includes Roman, Gothic, and Renaissance elements. —T/E

BETA

be it subsequently, by a judgment about what one is doing, by a voice that says to you: *No, this doesn't work*; or: *That could be stated much better*, etc. Writing is a creative activity; it suddenly rises up from a free imagination. But the latter's products have to be subjected to a reflective, critical instance of authority [*instance*] internal to the author. It is this internal critical instance of authority that tends to weaken along with the general climate of the era and, more specifically, along with commercial, advertising, and other such considerations.

The entire set of these phenomena fits within a general social-historical evolution that produces a generalized conformism.[4] Some find in Alexis de Tocqueville's work the view that this is fated in "democracy." First of all, we are not in a democracy; we live in liberal-oligarchical regimes. Next, I don't see what would allow one to affirm that vulgarity would be the fateful bent of democracy. Contemporary vulgarity is the effect of general commercialization, and the author-critic-public triangle is increasingly immersed in this commercialization, in a mutual collusion, tacit on the part of the public, explicit between authors and critics, through the medium of publishing houses.

When I advance these kinds of formulations, one reacts as if it were a matter of the moods of an atrabilious eccentric. But whether it's a matter of literary criticism, of the corruption and useless incompetence of politicians, or of the aberrations of the glorious "market economy," the facts are there, in newspapers, laid out daily, read by the Tocquevilleans (at least, one must suppose so), but forgotten by these same Tocquevilleans when they do "theory" or "political philosophy."[5] A single example in the domain that concerns us: *Le Monde*—about which it will not be said that

---

[4] See "The Retreat from Autonomy: Postmodernism as Generalized Conformism," in *WIF*. —T/E

[5] Castoriadis rejects the very existence of "political philosophy"; see, e.g., "The Nature and Value of Equality" (1981), in *PPA*, p. 125, where he states that "what is called political philosophy . . . itself really has never been anything but a philosophy talking about politics and external to the latter." —T/E

VERSION

BETA

it is a newspaper that is looking for scandal—published last Fall three full pages about what used to be called Galligrasseuil (and which is now essentially Grassograssigrasset), namely the publishers Gallimard, Grasset, and Le Seuil,[6] showing the mechanisms whereby these three publishing houses divide up among themselves, year after year, the French literary prizes and especially the Prix Goncourt. As is known, the Prix Goncourt automatically guarantees a print run in excess of one hundred thousand copies. The *Monde* articles exposed not only the exploits of the press relations departments of these three publishers, and especially Grasset's—it will be said that, after all, it's their job to sell books like others sell Panzani pasta or toilet paper, and one doesn't see why, in today's logic, there ought to be a difference—but also how the Goncourt academicians themselves,[7] who award this prize, are actively involved parties in all these schemes. I write for you a dithyrambic critique for so-and-so and I support him for the prize; the following year, you push for the Prize some protégé of mine, etc. You scratch my back, I'll scratch yours, as they say in English.

Once again, I am not comparing this to a hypothetical golden age. Coteries, mafias, and cliques have existed in every epoch. Still, one might ask oneself whether the "cliques" that promoted *Antigone*, Filippo Brunelleschi, or Richard Wagner were of the same intrinsic quality as those that promote contemporary geniuses. The important thing is that today there is almost nothing more *but* that; that commercialization is invading everything; that it cannot

---

[6] Since the original French publication of *IIS* in 1975, Éditions du Seuil has been the main publisher of Castoriadis's writings, and *FC* itself, of which the present volume is the translation, is a Le Seuil publication. —T/E

[7] The ten lifetime members ("Les Dix") of the Goncourt Literary Society a.k.a. "Académie Goncourt" award this prize. In light of the previous chapter, it may be noted that speaker Jorge Semprun "was elected as the first foreigner to become a member of the academy" in 1996, the year before Castoriadis's death; see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Acad%C3%A9mie_Goncourt —T/E

VERSION

BETA

operate without the ongoing fabrication of single-season "stars"; that this process is instrumented in tremendously efficient mechanisms like television; that this tends to crush everything else; and that everything tends to be adjusted to the ratings.

I shall end with a qualification that is in part "optimistic," in part "pessimistic." All this is not absolute, and the proof of that is—I'm going to wound a bit our Gallic or French pride—that there exist at least two foreign publications that, without being perfect and impeccable models, nonetheless fulfill the critical role of which I spoke shortly beforehand, the role of providing information and arguments, and allow me to say: I am ordering such and such a book or I am not ordering it. These are the fortnightly *New York Review of Books* and the English weekly *The Times Literary Supplement* (with some highs and lows in the case of the latter publication). It would be naive to say that in these two cases the mechanisms described above are nonexistent; it's a running joke among New York intellectuals to call *The New York Review of Books* "The New York Review of Our Friends' Books." But their effects are second order; there is open correspondence, allowing one to defend criticized authors or to attack praised authors; and, above all, the reviews are at once informative and well argued.

The "pessimistic" side of my qualification is that, qua sociologist, I consider these two publications to be manifestations that are not vanguard but rearguard. They are like the last pockets of resistance in a world where the share price of vulgarity is rising daily. It's a question of vulgarity, not a matter of "the people": *vulgarity* and *people* are antithetical terms. And one arrives at a final paradox. In this society that boasts about being more and more open, a statistically insignificant, and in fact closed, milieu had to be created that reads *The New York Review of Books* or the *Times Literary Supplement*, or in France a narrow milieu within which opinions about the quality of publications spread by word of mouth and which ensures that good books silently passed over by critics have a circulation of 1,000 to 3,000 copies. Awaiting better times, these marginal milieux no doubt keep a small flame alive.

VERSION

BETA

Yet at the same time, it is typical that, for a long time now, we no longer have been witnessing—in France, in any case—any genuine discussions, any controversies that include an intellectual issue. Here again, the gooey compromise that is the essence of the spirit of the age prevails, and generalized conformism has transformed the former avant-gardism, now deeply sunk in banality, into postmodernism, the religion of just anything.

To sum up, the *agora*—the genuine public/private sphere—disappears, replaced by a homogenized commercial and televisual space, disturbed only at the edges by a few discordant notes. Contrary to the official proclamations and to the dominant ideological discourse about "democracy" and the "open society," we live, as some had long seen before others rediscovered Tocqueville, in a massified and manipulated society—and opposition to such a society is more and more reduced and risks becoming less and less historically pertinent.

VERSION

PART THREE

Window on the Chaos[*]

BETA

A few words now about art, while reminding you first the little bit that had been said about it in advance at the very start of this year's seminar, which I am going to try to develop. Its specific mode of being is—and we shall see what is to be understood thereby—that of "giving form to the Chaos." As for the subject's relation to the work, it's a matter not of *explanation*—even if, in the work of art, there are elements that pertain to the ensemblistic-identitarian—or *comprehension*—it conceals no previously deposited meaning in it that would be awaiting its imitation or its *hermēneia*, its interpretation by the subject—or *elucidation*, either. The attitude of the subject faced with the work is—I don't see any adequate word in French—*Zaubertrauer*, "enchantment-mourning" (which can be one of the meanings of Aristotle's *katharsis*) or "enchanted mourning." This is certainly not a very satisfactory translation, for *Zauber* is of course magic or enchantment but also the fact of being struck by something that goes beyond the normal course of events. What mourning is doing here is another story: perhaps that will be spoken of later on.

I would like, by way of introduction, to call to mind an enigma, that of the difference between great art, the masterpiece, and run-of-the-mill artistic productions. Why this difference? And why is it so important? The question is not: Why is Bach a better composer than, let us say, Camille Saint-Saëns? Rather, it is: Why is there such an abyss between Bach and Saint-Saëns? Maybe that's a bad example, because Saint-Saëns is atrocious. But some pieces of furniture are beautiful: What differentiates them, then, from the Winged Victory of Samothrace or from a picture by Rembrandt? And it's not a piece's popular or folkloric character that is determinative: there, too, one finds great works and run-of-the-mill ones. For me, to take one example,

VERSION

---

[*] The following pages are a partial transcription of two seminars delivered January 22 and 29, 1992 at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales (EHESS). First published as "Fenêtre sur le Chaos" in *FC*, pp. 133-67.

BETA

the popular Greek song called "The Albanians' Funeral Lament"—you know that half of Greeks are more or less Albanian—is a very great piece of music, just like great flamenco, *cante jondo*.[1] I would give all nineteenth-century Italian opera, all Gounod, and the rest for ten minutes of real *cante jondo*. In short, "popular" creations can be great art, and ninety-nine percent of the products of "learned" art are not. We shall therefore try to elucidate art from the two angles that what is traditionally called *aesthetics* has always tried to cover over: from the side of the object and from the side of the subject. That is to say, we shall attempt to respond to the following two questions: What is a great work of art, a masterpiece? What is its specific mode of being? And, on the other hand: What is the relation of the subject (I am not speaking here of the creator) to the work of art he receives?

In order to work out an answer to the question of the specific mode of being of the work of art, we must go back to the philosophical significations about which we have spoken at length during the previous years of this seminar. We said that being is at once Chaos and Cosmos. For human beings, this chaos is in general covered back over by the social institution and by everyday life. A first approach to the question of great art would thus be to say that it is the unveiling of the chaos by means of a "giving form" and, at the same, the creation of a cosmos through this giving-form. I say *unveiling of the chaos*, because great art tears to pieces everyday, self-evident truths [*les évidences quotidiennes*], the "holding together" of such self-evident truths, and the normal course of life: for she who loves and understands the music she listens to, the picture she contemplates, usual time and everydayness are broken up. Yet at the same time, art can effectuate this unveiling of the chaos only by means of giving-form. And this giving-form is the creation of a cosmos: here

---

[1] "*Cante jondo* is a vocal style in flamenco. An unspoiled form of Andalusian folk music, the name means deep song (Spanish *hondo* = 'deep'.) It is generally considered that the common traditional classification of flamenco music is divided into three groups of which the deepest, most serious forms are known as cante jondo." http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Cante_jondo

VERSION

BETA

again, we have the creation of a form on a background. An enormous problem we cannot dwell upon here: in a certain fashion, a great work of art is absolutely closed upon itself. It does not have need of anything. Materially speaking, it has need of printers, violinists, colored pigments, or museum curators, but in fact it lacks nothing. And this is, moreover, what theologians say of God. . . . At the same time, what it presents is not only itself, is not only the chaos, but is also a cosmos in this chaos. Quite evidently, any great picture is a world-fragment, which you can extend. You can extend *The Night Watch* or *Las Meninas*. It is told that, when Konstantin Stanislavsky wanted to change the way his actors were acting, he brought them to a villa near Saint Petersburg and shut them up there for two weeks, telling them: “Now, we’re not going to work on the piece; you are going to *live* as one lives in *Three Sisters* or *Macbeth*.” That’s a director’s “trick,” of course, but a brilliant one, and it’s one that allowed the actors to understand that *Three Sisters* or *Macbeth* is “torn” from a universe of its own [*propre*] that can be extended.

It’s in relation to the creation of a cosmos that one can understand both why Plato—who is here, obviously, at the origin of everything—and then Aristotle and others went astray with the theory of *mimēsis*, of imitation, etc. and the grain of truth that is nonetheless there within it. The sole *mimēsis* that there would be in art—if one is not speaking of material and second-order elements, to which I’ll return—is that of being in general: as being is *vis formandi*, so is art *vis formandi*. It’s a power of creation. It’s this giving-form, but it is not a particular *mimēsis*. Dance, architecture, music, they do not imitate anything; they create a world. “Imitative” music is obviously the most mediocre variant of music. I remind you that, when Beethoven wrote a symphony he called *Pastorale*, he specified on the first violin’s part: “It’s a matter of expressing the affect and not of doing painting.”[2] It’s not a matter of depicting pastoralness; it’s a matter of man’s affects

VERSION

---

[2] A more common rendering into English of this musical direction by Beethoven is: “it is more an expression of feelings rather than tone-painting”; see: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Program_music. —T/E

BETA

in nature. But can it be said that music imitates human feelings? I believe not: music *makes feelings exist* or in any case gives them a form that doesn't exist elsewhere. Who had ever felt before what was felt in listening to Bach's *Art of the Fugue*? *The Art of the Fugue* creates an absolutely unique feeling, which we try, as best we can, to connect with what we are familiar with when speaking of sadness or some other poor equivalent. But it's a type of feeling created by the music itself, and here again it's a giving-form to the chaos.

Of course, utilization of matter cannot offer any sort of support to an idea of *mimēsis*. In a great novel, say *In Search of Lost Time* or *Sentimental Education*, does art imitate life? It's the material that is drawn from life, as one takes some colored paints to make a picture. There is no imitation in that. There is creation of a form, of a story. It's an entire world that is created, to such a point that it's a delight, in Balzac or in Proust, to follow the characters, their encounters, to imagine other ones. . . . Great literature, just like great painting, makes one see something that was there and that no one was seeing. And at the same time, it sometimes makes what was never there exist and this exists, precisely, only as a function of the work of art. That is true for painting and music, but also for danse, for great architecture (the Parthenon, Chartres, or Reims, Cologne). Take a novel like Kafka's *The Castle*. No one lived in a world like that one, and we have all lived in this world once we have read *The Castle*; that's what creation is. Or take that fantastic picture called *Monument to the Birds*, where Max Ernst recreates both birds and the creation of birds. No imitation there: birds figure therein only as matter. For, when we speak of great art, what may appear as *mimēsis* is in fact only the utilization of a matter that, quite often—but not always, far from it—and with varying degrees of skill, different degrees of education, is already there, for example, as color and as sound.

The example that in my view is the strongest—though one could find others—is Kafka's *The Castle*. This novel creates a world that, of course, has numerous points of contact with our everyday world, with the empirical world, but Kafka's full genius—a genius perhaps in this regard without precedent—is that, while everything is caught within the

VERSION

BETA

usual world, we know from the first pages that we have entered into another world. One can then tell stories like: Kafka, that's the bureaucracy. And that's true; he also deals with bureaucracy. Or one can show—this is what Milan Kundera did two or three months ago in a *New York Review of Books* article[3]—that people have always rubbed out the very strong dimension of sexuality that is there in *The Castle*. And he's right. Recall the much-talked-about scene where the land surveyor and Frieda embrace each other on the floor of the bar, amid the spittle, the cigarette butts, and puddles of beer.[4] . . . That said, that's not where the issue lies: even this sexuality is other. And everything that happens in *The Castle* is other. Yet at the same time, as soon as we have entered into *The Castle*, we perceive this inframillemetric shift with respect to reality, this imperceptible twist that ensures that this world, all of whose fragments could be caught within reality, will never be the world of everyday reality and that it is realer than that world.

So, as it is certain that one cannot always talk while ignoring what others have said, one is sometimes obliged—most of the time in a very fecund way, sometimes in a very painful way—to broach and to discuss, and perhaps to refute, what is said by others. Let us take Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari's book *What is Philosophy?*—a title that is perhaps not ultra-original, yet quite valid; Martin Heidegger had already used it. There, one reads that, while "philosophy creates concepts"—that it creates is not such a big discovery: it's already, for example, in the Preface to *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*;[5] concepts, that's an asininity, but that would have

---

[3] Milan Kundera's article "The Umbrella, the Night World, and the Lonely Moon" appeared in *The New York Review of Books*, 38:21 (December 19, 1991): 46-50; Kafka's work is discussed briefly at the end (p. 50). —T/E

[4] Franz Kafka, *The Castle*, a new translation by Anthea Bell (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2009), p. 40. —T/E

VERSION

[5] "The historical dimension of philosophy is also what is realized as *creation*. It is the emergence of other figures of the thinkable" (Preface, *CL*, p. xx of the English translation). —T/E

BETA

to be discussed at length—"art, itself, creates percepts."[6] Yet it is obvious that *The Castle* creates no percept, except in a

---

[6] These are paraphrases. See Gilles Deleuze and Félix Guattari, *What is Philosophy?* (1991), trans. Hugh Tomlinson and Graham Burchell (New York: Columbia University Press, 1994): "philosophy is the discipline that involves creating concepts" (p. 5); "art extracts *percepts and affects*" (p. 24). The same year *What is Philosophy?* was published in French, Castoriadis pointed out in an interview ("The Rebirth of a Democratic Movement," in *PSRTI*, pp. 115-16):

> And the relationship between chaos and the physical cosmos is clearly not the same as that between chaos and the social-historical cosmos. Elucidating all that requires the creation of new philosophical significations (not "concepts") . . .

And in his Translator's Afterword to *OPS* (p. 183), Curtis noted, regarding Castoriadis' seminars at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales:

> Audiotapings as well as transcribings of seminars by Castoriadis and other participants commenced early on. Transcriptions began to circulate informally. Starting in 1991, Agora International, a group dedicated to fostering the project of autonomy as elucidated by Castoriadis, made photocopied transcriptions available to all at cost. Castoriadis's only proviso was that circulation of unpublished work remain limited to interested parties and not itself become a form of publication: he had already seen his ideas plagiarized and debased too many times. he said, and he didn't want unfinished work turned into someone else's fashionable book.

Curtis added there, in a note (ibid., p. 196, n. 16):

> The name he cited, seemingly out of the blue, was Gilles Deleuze's. Only later did I form the hypothesis that Castoriadis may have felt that Deleuze/Guattari's book on capitalism and schizophrenia may have taken over, without attribution or the same depth of revolutionary purpose, his own ideas on the contradictory nature of capitalism, which simultaneously *excludes* workers' participation and *solicits* it.

At the time, within the newly formed Agora International association, there was a heated discussion, soon related to Castoriadis himself, about whether the newly published *Qu'est-ce que la philosophie* (the French original of Deleuze/Guattari's book) would be a worthy object of reading for a study group. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

stupid and vulgar sense: I read a book, therefore my optical apparatus, central nervous system, knowledge of language, and so on are put into operation. *In Search of Lost Time* and *Father Goriot* do not create any percept. And where one could talk of percept—since, of course, there is something that can be sensed [*du sensible*] in literature, sculpture, architecture, and in dance, obviously—this perceived or felt being is there, once again, *hōsper hulē*, “like a matter,” as Aristotle would have said. Of course, this matter is not separable from form. Yet that holds for everything: as the very same Aristotle said, it is stupid to ask oneself whether the knife is the iron or whether it is different from the iron. Of the iron to which one gives a certain form, it’s a knife; or a knife is some iron to which one has given a certain form, and the question of their separation is meaningless. There’s no percept in this affair—or then you are a picture, or I am a picture. . . . One can take a photograph, for example, that will be trivial or marvelous. And here again, one finds the following distinction: certain photographs are great works of art, despite the mechanicalness of the process, and others—for sightseeing, family celebrations, marriages—are a kind of *mimēsis*, a more or less deft restitution of what is there. Yet neither is there here any percept as such: it’s a question of a form and the adequation of the matter to this form, as well as, moreover, of the form to this matter, the two being inseparable.

After the orchestral prelude to the third act of *Tristan* {*und Isolde*}, the first scene begins with an incredible melody, of such a sadness—the word *sadness* is stupid, moreover—that it heralds, that, in a certain fashion, it *is* the mourning of what has happened and of what is going to happen, of what, inexorably, cannot but happen. The melody is quite beautiful, and Wagner was a very great composer of melodies. Yet he was also a very great orchestrator: from the first chord, one knows that it’s Wagner. Now, this melody is handed over to a single instrument; there’s no orchestration. And this instrument is not just any instrument; it’s an English horn. To describe its tone would again be to engage in some bad literature; let’s say that it is, in itself, highly nostalgic, quite sad, and somewhat bitter. And, here again, it’s a stroke

VERSION

BETA

of genius. I make this digression in order to say that here, perhaps, one could introduce the categories of form and matter and make the melody the form. In a sense, the melody is something entirely abstract. Bach wrote *The Art of the Fugue* without specifying which instruments would perform it (except for one part, clearly written for harpsichord). So, each musical group that plays *The Art of the Fugue* does its own orchestration. The Wagner melody of which we were speaking is an abstract form, from the standpoint of the musical instruments. But form and matter mutually require each other, and Wagner takes the English horn. Here again, this form is like an adequate incarnation of a specific signification. And it's of this signification that the work of art speaks. It's solely in and through this form that this signification—the content, if I might put it like that; it's no longer a question of matter, of the work of art—can be conveyed. Its mode of being is *sui generis*, and that's the reason why it is absolutely untranslatable into another language. And that's also the reason why what I was saying shortly beforehand about the beginning of the third act of *Tristan* is bad literature: a very clumsy attempt to describe through language something whose truth can exist only in a performance of the work itself. Of course, since we're talking about Wagner, you know that Wagner wanted to make a total work of art, a musical drama that would be at once poetry, music, and spectacle uniting painting, sculpture, dance, architectural elements, and so forth. This union may or may not be made. Most of the time when one sets poems to music, it's ridiculous. But there are a few miracles in which the poems become a new work. Schubert's Lieder, for example. Sometimes, the poems in themselves are fantastic: *Gretchen am Spinnrade*, *Der Erlkönig*, and a few of the songs from the *Winterreise* cycle; sometimes, they are works of a second order, as with Heinrich Heine's—although Heine also wrote some very beautiful poems—*Der Doppelgänger* or *Die Stadt*: the poet returns to his hometown, and it's the same town and it's no longer the same. . . . The poetry is almost banal, but with Schubert's music, it becomes something else entirely, a magnificent work. One can sometimes say as much of the librettos Wagner wrote for his dramas, even if, as in *Tristan*,

VERSION

BETA

some passages are to be found there with some very great poetry, which can be read as such.

I return a bit to *mimēsis*. We will agree, I think, in saying that there is no *mimēsis* in architecture, or in music, or in dance, or in poetry, or in novels, or in tragedy. All that imitates nothing but uses, at the very most, some elements of the given world "like a matter." There is, nevertheless, the problem with tragedy and, behind this whole affair, Aristotle's much-talked-about definition, which has made the fortune of the term *mimēsis*. All that is, from the standpoint of history and philosophy, quite bizarre and merits a digression, which can unfortunately drag us into still other digressions. I already have reminded you that the English philosopher and logician Alfred North Whitehead (author, with Bertrand Russell, of the *Principia Mathematica*), who ended his days in the United States, wrote, at the beginning of *Process and Reality*—one of the rare major books of metaphysics in the twentieth century—that the best way to understand the totality of Western philosophy is to make of it a series of notes in the margins of Plato's text.[7] And he was right, though not entirely. Because, between this history of *mimēsis*, poetry, and what I intend by *poietic* and *creation*, there is a strange ballet.

So, Plato wrote about art on several occasions: in the *Phaedrus*, in *Ion*, and elsewhere. He did so in order to say, for example, that the poet is possessed by a divine madness, inspiration <*Ion* 533-534>. One can see therein the equivalent of my *radical imagination*, and Castoriadis is a tiny marginal note in Plato's text. . . . And not only Castoriadis: all those who speak of inspiration are commenting this same dialogue by Plato. But the latter, in the *Symposium* <250c1> says, too, the following wholly astonishing thing: "We call *poiesis*—poetry or creation—that which makes something pass from nonbeing to being." Indeed. Making something pass from

---

VERSION

[7] "The safest general characterization of the European philosophical tradition is that it consists of a series of footnotes to Plato" (Alfred North Whitehead, *Process and Reality: An Essay in Cosmology* [1929], corr. ed., ed. David Ray Griffin and Donald W. Sherburne [New York: Free Press, 1978], p. 39). —T/E

BETA

nonbeing to being is exactly that, a creation. Plato speaks of it as something obvious and natural—which is, moreover, the case. He posits that and doesn't discuss it again. And when he goes on to broach what is, in his view and in the absolute, creation par excellence, that is to say demiurgy, the creation of the world in the *Timaeus*—a dialogue you can read fifty times and still always find some new things in it—well, this creation is not a creation, it's an imitation. The demiurge of the *Timaeus* looks at a paradigm, a model that is the idea of a perfect world, and then with the materials he has at his disposal, particularly space and matter, which are not reducible to any kind of perfection, that is to say, in Plato's view, to a total rationality, he manufactures a world that is perfect as much as is possible, *kata to dunaton*.

Nevertheless, Plato does not speak too much about *mimēsis*, imitation—except, of course, in the *Republic*. It was his student Aristotle—a friend but also a mortal enemy—who at length goes back over that in the *Poetics*, the first systematic work on art, which was to have two parts: the first on tragedy, which we have; and a second one on comedy, which we don't have (and around which Umberto Eco wrote his very amusing *Name of the Rose*, in which a fanatic monk burns the sole remaining manuscript version because "the Philosopher" oughtn't have introduced the mockery of serious things by speaking of comedy). And it's therefore in this work <1449b24-28> that Aristotle gives his much-talked-about definition: "Tragedy is the imitation (*mimēsis*) of an important or distinguished (*spoudaias*) and perfect (*teleias*) action (*praxeōs*)." This term *teleias* poses a problem: one will say "perfect" or, better, "finished off" [*parachevée*], "complete." There's a bit of ambiguity because *telos*, especially in Aristotle's work, also means *finality*, that's where *entelechy* comes from. Therefore, *telos* is the finality immanent to something; it's the moment when it arrives at its perfection—"by means" (and here follows a purely technical phrase) "of a soothing, embellished (*hēdusmenō*, that is to say, with music, and not as a mere recitation) discourse." But what does this *mimēsis* do? It "brings to its term (*perainousa*) through pity or terror (*di' eleou kai phobu*) the *katharsis* of these passions (*tēn tōn toioutōn pathēmatōn katharsin*)"—it

VERSION

BETA

could even be said: "of these sufferings," *pathēmata* also having that meaning; as for the word *katharsis*, it continues to fill up entire libraries.

So, Plato talks about a passage from nonbeing to being—which is in perfect contradiction with his entire philosophy, wherein there is no such passage, and wherein there cannot be one, since genuine being is eternal . . . —and Aristotle, who could have seized upon this definition of *poiesis* in order to speak of *tekhnē* in general, art in its current meaning, technique as well as art (in Greek, the two words go together, and moreover *tekhnē* also means knowledge [*savoir*])—well no, he doesn't, and he speaks of imitation, of *mimēsis*. Here opens another sub-labyrinth. In this definition, *teleia* obviously cannot signify *perfect* in Aristotle's sense, that is to say, having ended in its *telos*, because *telos* contains, even if the word was unknown to Aristotle in this acceptation, the idea of value. Why? What is the *teleiōsis*, the ending of the tragic action, the object, that which the tragic action imitates? It's parricide, matricide, fratricide, infanticide, all the "cides" you could imagine, plus the massacre of innocent prisoners as in Euripides' *The Trojan Women*, and so on, all that happening, moreover, in general among kings, queens, disputing kingdoms, States, *poleis*. But *teleia* nonetheless signifies: going to the end. And apropos of this *teleia*, Aristotle gives elsewhere, in Book Beta of the *Physics* <2.199a15-17>, a definition of what *tekhnē*, art in the most general sense, is. And there—that's why I wrote that Aristotle was sitting astride the ancient world and something else—he wrote that *tekhnē* either "effectuates what it is impossible for nature to accomplish (*epitelei ha hē phusis adunatei apergasasthai*) or imitates it (*ta de mimeitai*)." So here we are at another crossroads in the labyrinth (you can consult thereupon my text "Technique," about which I have already spoken to you),[8] because, while there are things nature cannot accomplish, we are no longer within Aristotle's philosophy. In his work, everything that can be accomplished, that's nature, that's *phusis*. Therein, there's Aristotle's oscillation

VERSION

---

[8] "Technique" (1973), in *CL*, pp. 229-59 of the English translation. —T/E

BETA

between *phusis* and *nomos*, and here *nomos* takes on the look of *tekhnē*—it's, if you will, human creation. But, of course, a hardline Aristotelean, a rigorous Thomist for example, would say: "But no, Sir, you are mistaken about Aristotle's sentence. *Epitelei* does not signify *effectuate*, even if this meaning existed in Greek, but simply *finished off.* As for the things nature *adunatei apergasasthai*, 'has not the possibility of accomplishing,' in my translation it's simply a matter of 'working (them) out to the end.'" I nevertheless believe that the Thomist in question would be wrong. Not that my interpretation is the sole one possible: in the text, both significations are included. And it's true that the hardline Aristotelean's interpretation would be more in agreement with an entire aspect, with the kernel, of Aristotle's ontology. But it's true, too, that that interpretation would not be taking into account some problems Aristotle encountered along the way, and in particular that of human creation in general, the human world, *nomos*, *polis*; since he is affirming, for example, in speaking of the *polis*, that is to say of the political collectivity, that there is one of them that is always by nature the best[9] but that one never encounters it in reality—which has nothing to do with the Aristotelean concept of *phusis*. For, Aristotle would have never said that there is an animal that is called *horse*, that has four legs, on which one can ride, which runs very fast, and that that's the nature of the horse, but that unfortunately there's no horse in empirical reality. No, the horse as it is defined by its nature is the horse of nature, the one that one encounters in reality. Obviously, there can be monstrous horses, ones that are born with three or five legs, but that's not interesting. Aristotle is familiar with monsters and he excludes them; that's *para phusin*, against nature, and destined to disappear. The same goes for a monstrous human. So: Does the *polis*, which is a human creation, imitate nature? Certainly not. Does the *polis* simply finish off what nature could not work out to the end? That makes no sense, intrinsically. And how does it happen that there would be this whole infinite variety of *poleis*? In *tekhnē politikē*, which is,

VERSION

---

[9] Aristotle *Nichomachean Ethics* 5.7.1135a. —T/E

BETA

he says, the most architectonic of all, one encounters precisely a kind of *tekhnē* that realizes, that effectuates something that is beyond nature, something that nature finds it impossible to realize. It's not here a matter, however, of nature but of human *praxis*. Do human *praxeis* belong to nature? The question in general can remain open. Only, is it within human nature to sleep with one's mother, to kill one's father, to kill one's brothers, etc.? Twenty-three centuries later, it will be said: It's in human nature. But for Aristotle, that's certainly not the case; such is, however, the "important and perfect action" the human being accomplishes in tragedy and that tragedy imitates.

One therefore already has something that is not "natural" in the object. But is tragedy itself an imitation? Yes, once again, it is so if one considers *hōsper hulē*, like a matter, the human acts it contains. But there is the tragic form. And especially, for example, this whole story of Oedipus—even if one supposes that there was in effective actuality a character who was exposed to the elements, who encountered his father, killed him without knowing who he was, unknowingly went back home, encountered the Sphinx . . . —it is certain that that story never unfolded as it is represented: compressed into an hour and a half, with a chorus supposed to be the people of the city though necessarily reduced to a dozen individuals, with masked actors, etc. It remains the case that, in Aristotle's definition, one has both a one-to-one correspondence and a crossed correspondence: between *mimēsis* and *katharsis*; between an important, complete action (*praxis*) and the "of these passions (*tōn toioutōn pathēmatōn*)"; between the embellished discourse (*logon hēdusmenos*) and, on the other hand, the means, which are pity and terror (*eleos kai phobos*); finally, between the existence of a complete *praxis* [*une* praxis *complète*] and the culmination [*achèvement*] of *katharsis* through tragedy. Aristotle therefore wrote: *tōn toioutōn pathēmatōn,* and one might think that it's a question of what happens to tragic heroes, of what they undergo—*pathēmatōn* also has that meaning. Moreover, this tiny word *toioutōn*, *these kinds* of passions, has a much easier meaning if it is attributed to the acts of tragic heroes. But in fact that interpretation doesn't hold, for reasons of general

VERSION

BETA

coherence. The passions *katharsis* brings about [*s'accomplit*] are really those of the spectators, for, on the stage, one could speak of *katharsis* only for one or two heroes. . . .

And here, after this series of interlocking digressions, I come to my main point: the end of the tragedy, its signification, is *katharsis*; it's not *mimēsis*. Even in Aristotle —and that's why our contemporaries who come back to the theory of *mimēsis* delude themselves and go astray for ideological reasons—the finality of tragedy is *katharsis*, that is to say, this purging or purification. For, the term really is a medical one; on this, there is strictly no doubt. And if you take Hermann Bonitz's *Index Aristotelicus*, you'll find two columns on the use of this term in a medical context and only ten lines on its use in the *Poetics*. *Katharsis* is the purge, the elimination of bad humors. Yet it isn't by chance that Aristotle uses this term, and we shall see what kind of elimination is at issue here. In any case, it operates through pity and terror, which are obviously affects. Yet that's very strange: what are these humors? They are all these passions, one could even say these *compassions*, of the spectator while the action unfolds—there's a distance that allows the effect of tragedy, but no distancing, *pace* Mr. Brecht's shades—which, in a crescendo of terror and pity, are going to end up in a purification. Where is the imitation in that? Let us suppose that you saw, in reality, a son who kills his mother while his sister is in the next room shouting to him "Strike her, if you can, several times!" You will perhaps feel pity, terror, anger, but it would produce no *katharsis*. Or suppose that you were witnessing the spectacle of an old man who is wandering in a tempest, a storm, and the cold because the two daughters between whom he has divided up his kingdom have kicked him out and treated him like a beggar. Perhaps you'll then have some compassion for him; perhaps you'll be filled with fury against Regan and Goneril. But you won't experience *katharsis*. Now, the finality of tragedy is, precisely, this *katharsis*. And *mimēsis*, to the extent there is *mimēsis*, is a mere means.

VERSION

I'll take up this point again later on. But I would like, in order to conclude about *mimēsis*, to mention the problem of what are called the *figurative arts*, like painting or

BETA

sculpture. I believe that here one has, in some way, become obsessed with what, in the history of art, is but a tiny interval, which extends perhaps from the fifth century B.C.E. to the third century C.E., and then from the Trecento, at least starting with Giotto, until 1880. There really is there a sort of realism, which appears to be imperative for the figurative arts. It is indeed difficult to deny—though let us grant that this depends on one's taste—that Apollo Belvedere, Praxiteles' Hermes, and the Venus de Milo are beautiful specimens of humans in the perfection of their form. Or even that *Laocoön*, in the Hellenistic age, is a perfect sculptural representation of pain and fear [*terreur*] of death. . . . But that's just one period of art. There is no realism of that type or any *mimēsis* at Lascaux, at Altamira; there is none of that in Cycladic statuettes or in Mayan statues or in African masks, nor any more beginning with the Impressionists. {Marcel Duchamp's} much-talked-about *The Bride Stripped Bare by Her Bachelors, Even* doesn't imitate anything at all. Wassily Kandinsky, Paul Klee, Constantin Brâncuşi, Alberto Giacometti, and so on: where's the imitation therein? There, one sees very clearly that the human form is like a matter to the second degree, that it is used as a sort of material with a view to something else. That said, it is true that, in the human form, there is something more, and that great portraits, during this "realist" period, give a particular truth impression. I do not know what would happen if the painting of Antiquity had been preserved; just a few specimens remain that are not of the best quality—which, of course, is not the case for sculpture. But, well, let's take the great portraits of Western painting: some of them are absolutely fantastic, sometimes even those by second-order painters. One can mention whomever you want: Titian's *Man with a Glove*, at the Louvre; all Albrecht Dürer's *Self-Portraits*; a *Self-Portrait* by Rembrandt; Jan van Eyck's *Portrait of a Man in a Turban*; Eve's face in Masacio's *Expulsion from the Garden of Eden*. . . . Here one has, indeed, the impression that one is acceding to the truth of the human being. But what truth?

Permit me to read you, on this subject, a fragment of a youthful text by Georg Wilhelm Friedrich Hegel conventionally called the *Jenaer Realphilosophie*, which I

VERSION

BETA

have already happened to quote,[10] and which is now translated into French by Jacques Taminiaux under the title *Naissance de la philosophie hégélienne de l'État*. It's a remarkable text that is worth reading in its own right, independent of our discussion. Hegel speaks of the human being, of the Self, and of the image the Spirit conserves of it in its *treasury*, in its *night* which is without consciousness (*bewusstlos*)—that could be Freudian representation. And there, we find the following extraordinary passage:

> The human being is this Night, this empty nothing which contains everything in its simplicity—a wealth of infinitely many representations, images, none of which occur to it directly, and none of which are not present.[11]

Present here means: *present to consciousness.*

> This [is] the Night, the interior of [human] nature, existing here—pure Self—[and] in phantasmagoric representations it is night everywhere: here a bloody head suddenly shoots up and there another white shape, only to disappear as suddenly. We see this Night when we look a human being in the eye, looking into a Night which turns terrifying. [For from his eyes] the night of the world hangs out toward us.[12]

---

[10] <*IIS*, p. 127 (English translation). Castoriadis quoted (see ibid., pp. 388-89, n. 26) Kostas Papaioannou's *Hegel* (Paris: Seghers, 1962), p. 180.>

[11] The French Editors provide the citation for Taminiaux's 1984 translation. Used here is *Hegel and the Human Spirit. A Translation of the Jena Lectures on the Philosophy of Spirit (1805-6)* with commentary by Leo Rauch (Detroit: Wayne State University Press, 1983); the passage appears on p. 87. The mention of the "Spirit's treasury" appears on the preceding page. Also appearing on p. 87: "The image is unconscious, i.e., it is not displayed as an object for representation." —T/E

VERSION

[12] Ibid. The additions in brackets are the English translator's. In Taminiaux's translation, *effroyable* ("terrifying" in Rauch) is italicized. Also, the end of this passage could be translated from the Taminiaux

BETA

And Hegel has marked in the margins: "self-positing, internal consciousness, activity, division (*Entzweyen*)" and "the power to draw images out of this Night or to let them fall away."[13] Now, in portraiture—I would have liked to bring here some reproductions of Van Eyck or Vermeer, this woman with a blue turban, though the poster is everywhere, and her girlish gaze where there is everything and there is *nothing*—what we have, what really matters, is not imitation. What portraiture allows us to see, especially in the gaze a great portrait can render, is actually this "night" of which Hegel speaks, this abyss, this indefinite possibility of representations. That's what one sees through this gaze. And the term *imitate* then loses all importance: what does that mean, to imitate this abyss? It's not a matter of imitation; it's a presentation of the abyss, which conceals nothing.

Before opening up the discussion for you to speak, I would like to say a few words about what happens on the side of the subject. For Aristotle, we have seen, what tragedy provokes in the spectator is *katharsis*, purification, the purging of his passions by means of pity and terror. He would certainly now say nothing of the sort about contemplation of the Parthenon. . . . Let's make a leap of twenty-three centuries. Kant, as for him, well he says something quite different—this difference must be reflected upon . . . —and he speaks of pleasure: beauty, from the subjective side, is pleasure or "disinterested satisfaction," *uninteressiertes Wohlgefallen*.[14] In front of the work of art, one feels a pleasure that has no relation to the fact that one has eaten

---

French translation Castoriadis was using to say, more simply: "The night of the world falls upon you." —T/E

[13] Ibid., 87, notes 7 and 8. What Rauch translates as *activity* Taminiaux translates as *faire*, which, when Castoriadis uses the term directly, is translated as *making/doing*. —T/E

[14] Immanuel Kant, *Critique of Judgment, Including the First Introduction* (1790), trans. with an intro. Werner S. Pluhar, with a Foreword by Mary J. Gregor (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987); see §2 "The Liking That Determines a Judgment of Taste Is Devoid of All Interest," pp. 45-46.

VERSION

BETA

well, that one has earned some money, or slept with someone. No, aesthetic pleasure is not tied to desire. That may seem a bit pale after Aristotle, but it's the idea of *disinterestedness* that's very important therein. In German, too, one has an adjective that qualifies a substantive: satisfaction is qualified as "without interest." But the true weight of the words has to be reversed: through what is anyhow a certain pleasure, a certain satisfaction, one arrives at a *disinterestedness*, and it on this that I would like to conclude.

Previously, this pleasure that, all the same, does exist, that is indeed always there—well, where does it comes from? For my part, I would say that it comes from a certain way of feeling meaning [*d'éprouver le sens*]. And in the great moments of art—and I'm not playing with words; I'm not being Paris-centric here, or, moreover, Hegel-centric—this meaning, this signification, is the meaning of nonsensicalness/ meaninglessness and the nonsensicalness/ meaninglessness of meaning [*le sens de l'a-sensé et l'a-sensé du sens*].[15] Reread the *Iliad*, reread any Greek tragedy,[16] reread Shakespeare, reread Honoré de Balzac's *The Splendors and Miseries of Courtesans* or his *Lost Illusions*, *Sentimental Education* or *In Search of Lost Time*, Kafka, or James Joyce's *Ulysses*, relisten to *Tristan* or Mozart's *Requiem*, or anything by Bach: it's the meaning of nonsensicalness/meaninglessness and the nonsensicalness/meaninglessness of meaning that one feels therein. And these condense art as window on the abyss, on the chaos, and the giving-form to this abyss—that's the moment of meaning, that is to say, the creation, by art, of a

---

[15] See "Passion and Knowledge" in *FT(P&K)*, p. 267: "At the psyche's origin, a 'sensible/meaningful [*sensée*]' representation is a representation that is a source of pleasure, and a representation that is a source of displeasure is senseless/meaningless [*a-sensée*] (like a cacophony)." —T/E

[16] Castoriadis usually eschewed use of the phrase *Greek tragedy*: "People usually speak of 'Greek tragedy,' but there is no such thing. There is only Athenian tragedy. Only in the city where the democratic process, the process of self-institution, reached its climax, only there could tragedy (as opposed to simple 'theater') be created" ("The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy" [1983], now in *PPA*, p. 117). —T/E

VERSION

BETA

cosmos. Also, great art is not phenomenal; it's transparent: never is something hidden there behind something else. The infinite wealth of a great work of art is not that one thing is in front and hides other ones; it's that, on the contrary, some things that may be in front always lead to other things. And it's in this that there is no phenomenality, that there is an absolute transcendence—in another sense, of course, of the term—in great art. There is an abolition of difference through difference itself.

As for the disinterestedness of pleasure, I remind you what I told you the other time apropos of Aristotle's definition of the law: according to him, there can exist "a thought without desire" <*Politics* 3.16.1287a30-32>. Likewise, in the case of a great work of art—and that's what corresponds to the *katharsis* of tragedy—one can speak of an indescribable and specific affect. Once again, one can wretchedly try to put it into words, to say that it's a mixture of joy and sadness, of pleasure and mourning, of endless astonishment and acquiescence. Proust speaks somewhere, apropos of Vinteuil's sonata, of "the pertinence of the questions, the evidence of the responses."[17] And that's true; there is always that in art. But what in the end rises up suddenly as end—and {this is meant} in all the senses of the term: at once finality, culmination, ending—for the subject, the spectator, the listener, the reader of the work of art is the *affect of the end of desire*. And I think that that's the meaning of *katharsis*: when we leave a performance of *Oedipus Rex*, or of *Macbeth*, of *King Lear*, when we leave a concert of the *Requiem*, of the *St. Matthew Passion*, for a few instants at least we desire nothing and we live the affect that accompanies the end of this desire. And the relation to death is that we would like for that never to stop; or for everything to stop with that, with that moment. And this is not only true for the works I've mentioned. It's

---

[17] This passage is quoted more fully in "The Intertwining—The Chiasm," from Maurice Merleau-Ponty's posthumous work *The Visible and the Invisible*, ed. Claude Lefort, trans. Alphonso Lingis (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1968), p. 151. Lingis provides the Proust reference: *Swann's Way*, trans. C.K. Scott Moncrieff (New York, 1928), p. 505. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

what seizes hold of you when, for the first time, at Olympia, you enter into the museum room where Praxiteles' Hermes is presented or at the Louvre when, despite the crush, you can admire the Winged Victory of Samothrace, or a portrait by Jean Clouet, the Titian of which I spoke shortly beforehand, or at the Prado *Las Meninas*, the *View of Delft* {by Vermeer}in The Hague, Frans Hals's *Regents of the Old Men's Almshouse* in Haarlem, *The Night Watch* in Amsterdam—everything stops. You are there, in front of the work, and you desire nothing. It's an extraordinary state. . . .

Certainly, during the tragedy—let's come back to Aristotle—there constantly are pity and terror. And curiously, it's Jean Anouilh, an author for me quite secondary, who said what is to be said on this score—perhaps there are some antecedents elsewhere—in his *Antigone*: at the beginning, the chorus explains the difference between tragedy and drama, and explains it in a definitive way. In drama, he says, it could have happened otherwise; things could have turned out differently—if the police had arrived sooner, if the medicine hadn't been lacking, if that letter had been discovered. . . . There's suspense. In tragedy, there is no suspense for the spectator; she witnesses it while knowing in advance what is going to happen. The Athenian who was going to see *Oedipus Rex* or even when we are going to see *Macbeth*, we know what is going to happen. If there's suspense, it's in the play itself, but that's something else: we know what the tragic hero knows not. Yet, as a matter of fact, one of the dimensions of *Oedipus*, as well as of *Macbeth*, moreover—and that's why Shakespeare is the greatest author of the West—is that the character is the actor of his own destiny—of which he is not the author, since it's a destiny; but he is simultaneously the *discoverer*, through his acts, of his truth and of his destiny. That's what happens with Oedipus, or with Macbeth: it's in doing what has been predicted that he has to do, what he is going to do, what is going happen to him that he discovers the ambiguity of those predictions. For the spectator, the pity and the terror suddenly rise up anyhow due to the fact that his participation is absolutely unavoidable, and that there is ultimately this *katharsis*—once having gone through pity and terror—that is the affect of the end of a desire. One could sum

VERSION

BETA

up all that with a few words: there's enchantment; there's mourning; there's what in German is called *Wunder* and in ancient Greek *thaumazein*, in the face of the astonishing, miraculous thing that arouses more than astonished admiration, takes you out of the state you're in, and that contains, too, a cognitive dimension, not only an affective one; one wants to know (Aristotle says that *thaumazein* lies at the base of philosophy);[18] and at the end, there is—Freud himself uses this word in another context—*Versöhnung*, a sort of reconciliation—reconciliation with the end of desire.

I would like to mention, finally, two poets. First, August von Platen, an early nineteenth-century German author, who wrote in his *Tristan: Wer die Schönheit angeschaut mit Augen*, he who has gazed at beauty with his own eyes/*Is dem Tode schon anheimgegeben*, has already put himself to death. There is, in these lines, neither "Romanticism" nor any sniveling but precisely this affect, the affect of the end of desire. And I believe that that, too, is that of which Rilke speaks in his much-talked-about lines from the first *Duino Elegy*: *Denn das Schöne ist nichts/Als des Schrecklichen Anfang*, for the beautiful is nothing other than the beginning of the awesome [*terrible*]. The awesomely terrible is this end, and {it also is} this opening to something else—in my language, the window on the chaos—which is, at the same time, end of desire. And I stop here in order to leave you a bit of time to discuss.

Questions

QUESTION: What do you think of Heidegger's idea in "The Origin of the Work of Art": the work is opening, "the

---

[18] Aristotle *Metaphysics* 982b13-15. Socrates had already said in Plato's *Theatetus* (155d): "This sense of wonder is the mark of the philosopher. Philosophy indeed has no other origin" (*The Collected Dialogues of Plato, Including the Letters*, ed. Edith Hamilton and Huntington Cairns [Princeton, NJ: Princeton University Press, 1961]). —T/E

VERSION

BETA

advent of the truth”?[19] For him, the work is “being qua other.” Is not chaos, too, in a sense, the “other” of the form?

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS: This text by Heidegger is . . . I’m not going to say *one of the least bad*; it is undoubtedly one of his best. It is indeed a text that, in some respects, is not very far removed from what I am saying. But what is not in Heidegger’s text is precisely the idea of chaos; the “other” remains indeterminate there. If I have understood you well, you are saying: Can one call chaos *the other*? Yes and no. Here, distinctions must be made. I am saying that chaos is at once the origin and the power of sudden appearance, of surging forth, what I have called *vis formandi*. And this is at the same time, of course, the unfathomable as such. Now, I cannot speak of *other* in the chaos because the other exists only as form, because form is what results from the *vis formandi*. And because the form is what results from the *vis formandi*, the whole set of forms is the cosmos. Chaos, if you will, is the other of cosmosÌ—or cosmos is the other of chaos—but this at a level, if you will, that is total, or overall [*global*]. Cosmos is the other of chaos and is not the other of chaos, since chaos is precisely a *vis formandi*; it’s the power to give form, to make forms surge forth, and since these forms all together, at every instant, form a superform that is cosmos. But we shall go back over that.

Q.: <On the difficulties raised by the phrase “*ex nihilo* creation.”>

C.C.: There is, within this, a, let us say, terminological dimension, but also a substantive dimension. You say: “*Ex nihilo* signifies . . . .” And what you mean is: For centuries, and certainly since Parmenides and Aristotle, this expression or its Greek equivalent signifies that nothing can come out of nothing. To say that something comes out of “nothing” offends common sense. True, Hesiod said that, in the beginning there was the chaos in the sense of *khainō*, that is to say, the void, gaping openness; but all that is from mythology, right?—even though mythology is, let us say, the

VERSION

---

[19] Martin Heidegger, “The Origin of the Work of Art,” in *Basic Writings*, ed. David Farrell Krell (New York: Harper & Row, 1977), p. 184. —T/E

BETA

womb of philosophy. But that doesn't matter much. . . . There is, here, a terminological dimension, for while *ex* really means "starting from" [*à partir de*],[20] no word has absolute signification, the meaning is to be specified each time; and {specified} not only vertically but also horizontally, and I therefore place *ex* opposite *cum* and *in*. What is *ex nihilo* in my conception of creation? You can say straight off, of course: "That's absurd." But then you have to come back to a conception, certainly a venerable one, for which nothing is *ex nihilo*, everything is starting from something, and therefore every new form is starting from some other form. "Starting from" in what sense? Here, there's a bifurcation. Either you bring the reasoned argument to its strict conclusion, and you arrive either at Hegel—again, with the difficulties of which we have spoken—or to a universal reductionism, and our seminar was, in a certain fashion, already there at the initial moment of the Big Bang—15 billion years ago. And then there was deployment, evolution, unfolding, etc., *Entwicklung*, one says in German. This conception, of course, renders meaningless [*prive de signification*] the term *new*, which {in itself} wouldn't be serious, but in addition it is unacceptable for reasons that are reasons of substance, of which we have already spoken. Or, you concede that the new exists, and you say that this new comes out "starting from" something else. But either this other thing is truly other or it is simply different. If it is truly other, as to what is it truly other? It is truly other *as to form*. Let us take an Aristotelean example: you have a big chunk of bronze or marble. The sculptor, of this bronze or marble, *poiei*, creates a statue. What really matters to us in this statue? It's obviously the form. Aristotle says, and he's a thousand times right: form inseparable from its matter. But this statue can be a new form. . . . One only has to compare Giacometti, for whom there is an exhibition going on right now, and, let us say, Auguste Rodin. It could be objected: Giacometti isn't interesting; he's not a great sculptor, just a curiosity. As for myself, I think that he's

VERSION

---

[20] An English-language speaker familiar with Latin would probably think of "out of nothing" before "starting from nothing" for "*ex nihilo*" —T/E

BETA

a great sculptor, but that's not the issue. Let's suppose that he would be. What does it mean here to say: These sculptures are created "starting from" something else? They are created, of course, *cum* a host of things: not only the metal but the entire sculptural tradition, and a certain amount of opposition to this tradition, and a thousand ideas in Giacometti's head, and so on. And they are created *in* something, and we can truly say *in mundo,* in a universe, a world that is not only the physical world but also a cultural world, the Paris of the 1930s to the 1950s, what the artist knew about primitive art, without wanting for all that to imitate it, and so on. But can it be said that this form, Giacometti's statue, is simply a modification of what was there? In philosophy, too, as we shall see later, a certain philosophy, qua form, suffices unto itself, in a sense. And that's also the case, as we have said, for the work of art. Or, qua form, for living organisms, where of course the form does not suffice entirely unto itself, because an organism constantly needs to be exchanging with the environment and, if it is sexed, to be related to another living organism for the species to continue. Yet this form is a modification of what was there solely if one considers it qua what it is not, that is to say, qua matter, and if what one sees therein are simply molecules: carbon, oxygen, nitrogen, etc. This form, therefore, as such, suddenly rises up, is posited, is created, and I cannot find an antecedent for it. Its relation to what precedes it is a relation of alterity. These forms are other; they are not simply different—difference is precisely what allows me to produce a form starting from another one. Considered as such, this form suddenly arises *ex nihilo*. I understand what might bother you in this expression, which, you suspect, is deliberately chosen in such a way as to be provocative. But if you reject this *ex nihilo,* let's go to the limit, which is the theological limit. Does a god create the world *ex nihilo*? That depends on which god, which world, which theology, which philosophy. . . . In Plato's *Timaeus,* there already are matter and the forms; the demiurge is an artisan who has models and who has materials. In the Old Testament, the matter of the world is quite evidently there since the Spirit of God [*l'esprit*

VERSION

BETA

de Dieu] swept over the waters.[21] God gives form. Let us take up some more radical views, like those of certain Christian theologians—once, it is true, Neo-Platonism passed through there. God creates matter and creates time. But does He create them radically? All that already exists—as Spinoza will put it very well; from this standpoint, he's the best theologian (and an atheist, to boot)—eternally as idea in the infinite understanding of God. And that's a *pons asinorum* of theology. Of course, the temporal and material world exists in time, and, qua material, it is going to be destroyed. But this world, qua idea, is eternal in the mind of God [*l'esprit de Dieu*]. The idea of creating a world does not come one fine morning to a God who's bored. The world is eternal, qua noneternal world, nonperishable in the mind of God. God's creation, for the theologians, is therefore not *ex nihilo*. It is in this sense that I have always said that spiritualists are the worst materialists: what for them is *creation in the world* is this laughable, derisory act. And here, they meet up with the physicists who say: Your idea of creation is absurd, Castoriadis; try to create an electron starting from nothing. I have never said that creation concerned electrons. Moreover —parenthetical remark—electrons are created starting from nothing: according to what these same physicists, or their brethren, now say, the entire universe comes from a fluctuation of the quantum void. And here, it's very difficult not to think of Hesiod. . . . To what extent one can speak then of creation is another story. Let's come back to the Supreme Being: this perishable world exists for all eternity in the mind of God; and even when God will destroy it, He won't forget it, and this world will continue to exist from the sole genuine existence, in the mind of God. You don't find creation *ex nihilo*, therefore, in theology, and if you eliminate this "*ex nihilo*," you arrive at the idea of an eternal being that is mind or spirit and in whom, close by whom, in whose bosom everything exists in its ideal form. Were it just as one of the possible universes. Leibniz says: God chooses to make this-

VERSION

---

[21] Genesis 1.2: "And the Spirit of God moved upon the face of the waters." —T/E

BETA

here world—by carrying out a sort of huge optimization calculation—it's the "best of all possible worlds" (reread *Candide* if you don't want to reread Leibniz). Here, it's a matter of mathematics: this circle I draw has a very interesting property; it's the greatest surface that can be contained in a given perimeter, and you have there at once a maximum and a minimum. In this elementary consideration, there is the seed of what will become an enormous branch of mathematics, functional calculus. You are performing a function that obeys two constraints; this will be found again in physics especially, and in applied economics (though applied economics is just a vast joke). And this is what the God of Leibniz does for the world: what is to be minimized is evil; what is to be maximized is goodness. It's a matter of a calculation, but this calculation does not unfold over time; it's instantaneous. Now, this instantaneous calculation unfolds in a mathematical space, wherein God, at one moment—which is not one, since He is timeless; it's the moment of the creation of the world—contemplates *simultaneously* the uncountable infinity of curves and sees immediately—since He's God—that it's this circle we see that is the optimal figure. Is it that, starting from that moment, all the other curves have ceased to exist? Certainly not. To one of the curves He has given this kind of vulgar—"Judeo-phenomenal," as Marx says[22]—empirical, touchable existence, in which there are human beings and so on. All the rest exists, as for a mathematician all these curves exist simultaneously as possibilities in a two-dimensional space, or as *n*-dimensional spaces exist, even if he doesn't take the trouble to enumerate them, and so on.

Starting from the moment when you reject *ex nihilo* as creation in being and of being, you enter into what Plato called an "abyss of prattling"; you fall into some absolutely insoluble aporias. And these lead to unacceptable ideas: that all that goes beyond our understanding, goes beyond natural light, as has been affirmed since Augustine and even earlier;

---

[22] Castoriadis is referring to the first of Marx's eleven *Theses on Feuerbach*, wherein the phrase *schmutzig-jüdischen Erscheinungsform* was intended to contrast Jewish and Christian views of divine creation. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

in short: It’s not for us. The mode of coexistence of time and eternity is not conceivable. Yet if there is eternity, all the forms are there. And there is one of them, marked by God or I don’t know who else as the good one, which has to materialize, though this materialization is in any case only an infinitesimal parenthesis between creation and parousia. . . . You cannot escape it: if you don’t accept the idea that forms suddenly arise in being, that being and time—true temporality—are creation, you are sooner or later, if you are consistent, obliged to arrive at this kind of, let’s say, “unthinkableness” in the bad sense of the term. It is certain that, in what I am saying, one must accept as point of departure a certain number of things: that there is something new; that being is chaos in the sense we have tried to specify; that not everything is reducible. . . . These are things that can be elucidated, things about which one will reason; things, too, that cannot be proved or grounded. Yet I believe that they do not create the kind of absurdity that all idealism—or all materialism, since they’re the same, that is to say, at bottom, that every form of theology—necessarily creates.

Q.: You have said that disinterested pleasure comes, in a certain fashion, from feeling the meaning of the meaningless and the meaninglessness of meaning. I didn’t understand very well what you meant by that. And the impression I have is that this contradicts what you say elsewhere, that the only meaning that exists is the meaning we create.

C.C.: No. I was speaking of art, and of art as window on the chaos. Now, the chaos is on the far side or the near side of all signification. Being has signification only for theologians or for theological philosophers: it’s God; it’s the world created by God for us. . . . But, well, the meaning of the meaningless and the meaninglessness of meaning—what does that mean [*cela veut dire quoi*]? The meaninglessness of meaning, first. What is the meaning that human beings create? It’s that old King Lear, who tries to find a sensible [*sensé*] way of handing over power and of sharing his kingdom among his three daughters, whom he loves. He calls them together, and the first two express to him what, par excellence, gives meaning to human life, that is to say, the

VERSION

BETA

love of some for others and, in particular, the love of parents for their children and of children for their parents. Regan and Goneril, therefore, make speeches that are sensible par excellence: these are loving daughters; they adore their father, say that they would do anything for him, in long, very well constructed speeches. And King Lear's response is sensible: each daughter will have a third of the kingdom. And then comes Cordelia, disgusted by all these sensible—even doubly sensible—speeches: apparently sensible, in the filial sense, and really sensible, in the commercial sense—we're in 1600—that is, in the sense of interest. And in a way that is otherwise sensible, she pretty much says: You are my father; I love you as your daughter; and I have nothing else to say. So, Lear, in an also altogether sensible human reaction, violently takes umbrage: How's it that that's all you have to say to me; don't you find anything else to say? But love is something that is expressed. And that's what we say all the time: The way you are speaking to me proves that you don't love me; the way you behave with me in bed proves that you don't love me; you forgot my birthday because you don't love me. . . . One expects from others some proofs of love that are something other than: I love you, etc. Even Saint Teresa said: "There are no words of love; there are only acts of love." And Lear finds no manifestation of this love in Cordelia's too brief speech. He becomes, a sensible reaction, angry with her—the youngest, the favorite one; a classic theme—and he divides up the third third of his kingdom between his two other daughters.

Things then begin to unfold in an altogether sensible, and altogether atrocious, altogether senseless [*insensé*] fashion. Everyone will be destroyed in this affair. Lear, in an entirely sensible reaction, hopes that his daughter Cordelia, thus disinherited, won't be able to marry anyone. But the king of France ("France," in Shakespeare, for whom the country is he who reigns, and he who reigns is the country: France, Burgundy, Cornwall, and that is something that will have to be remembered when we'll go on to speak about politics), who already loved Cordelia, is, in a reaction that is sensible, but at another level, even more touched by her disinterestedness and wants, despite her lack of a dowry, to

VERSION

BETA

marry her. Starting from that moment on, catastrophe comes to pass and the tragedy unfolds as it had to unfold. I suppose that you are familiar with the play. If that's not the case, hurry up and read it; it's one of the greatest monuments of universal literature. Regan and Goneril drive out their father. Then, they tear each other to pieces because one of them loves the lover of the other—which is altogether sensible, moreover; those are human passions, which at the same time lead to atrocious and senseless acts. In order to deliver her father from the clutches of her sisters, Cordelia persuades her husband to prepare an armed expedition. They land in England, fight against the armies of Goneril's husband and of the bastard Gloucester, and are defeated. And Cordelia is dead, Lear is dead, and Regan, and Goneril. . . . And all the particular meanings of which these human actions were made end in this senseless totality whose culmination is the pity and terror through which this series of important and perfect acts is accomplished, and the *katharsis* of the passions born in the souls of the spectators. Such is the nonsensicalness/meaninglessness of meaning. And the meaning of the nonsensical/meaningless is that, if ultimately there is a meaning in our existence, there it is. Go see *Lear*, go see *Macbeth*, go see *Oedipus*; that, that's meaning.

Q.: But you liken meaning to rationality. . . .

C.C.: No, I am likening meaning to what we feel as meaning. I call *sense/meaning* [*sens*], as I have called *signification* for us, that which combines three vectors: what we can represent to ourselves, what is for us object of a desire, and what is the object of an investment or cathexis, of a positive affect. Let us take this in a quite silly form—it's not silly at all, moreover; it's not by chance if that's so—think about the end of the stories told to children: they marry; they have many children, and live for a long time. This is something that, all at once, you can represent to yourself; that seems desirable to you; that, in any case, seems so to children and to ordinary mortals; and that one would like to attain. That makes sense. That is not rational, provable. That makes sense for us.

VERSION

PART FOUR

How I Didn't Become a Musician[*]

BETA

DORA BACOPOULOU: So, this was one of your first emotions?

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS: Oh, yes, certainly, one of the very first.

D.B.: And you never dreamed of becoming a musician yourself?

C.C.: That's another story. I have always loved music immensely. Yet, while I knew how to read a score and I managed to peck out, for better or worse, a few melodies and songs on the piano, I had no desire, before I was 12 or 13, to set myself to studying it seriously. And then one day I met, in my 8th grade class, Michalis Dinopoulos, who became a very great friend and who played a rather major role in this story. He was the son of a junior-high-school literature teacher. Michalis was studying music. He was, to tell the truth, very talented in all domains; he had a very lively mind, but where his genius really burst forth was in music. He was studying at the Greek National Conservatory with Vargolis—with whom I myself would also later study harmony—and he was composing music. I often went to his home on Didimou Street—I was living at the time at my grandmother's, at 58 Acharon Street, in a very beautiful old house, with a huge garden—and for entire afternoons, over the winter, he played me his compositions. Michalis's story is tragic. He had received a scholarship and had come to Paris; this was a little before the Italian army's entry into Greece in 1940, or perhaps it was just before the rout in France, I no longer remember. So, I lost track of him, and when I myself came to France at

---

[*] Radio interview with Cornelius Castoriadis by the Greek pianist Dora Bacopoulou, broadcast November 22, 1996 on the "Third Program" in Greece. Translated from the Greek into French by Cybèle Castoriadis and Myrto Gondicas. Title and footnotes by the French translators. French translation first published here: http://www.castoriadis.org/fr/readText.asp?textID=79 [First names of people were added where available. —T/E]

VERSION

BETA

the end of ’45, I looked for him and I found him, in early 1946, as well as one of his cousins who was also my friend. Michalis had at the time gone practically mad. When I saw him, he was behaving quite bizarrely, as if he thought that he was being persecuted. . . . His cousin told me that they had succeeded in organizing a concert where his works would be played and that, on the day of the concert, he had disappeared.

D.B.: He had stage fright?

C.C.: I don’t know if it was just stage fright. I never saw him again, but I learned later on that he had returned to Greece. When I found his mother again, she told me of the tragedy of her son: he had gone completely mad and would no longer go outside. One day, he took all his scores, went to the port of Phalerum, and handed out his compositions to American sailors. He died a bit later. Whatever happened, Michalis played a very great role in my life. We listened quite often to music, at his house or mine, on an old phonograph. . . .

D.B.: Are there some performances that have left a special mark on you?

C.C.: I remember, among others, a record where Feodor Chaliapin sang a marvelous aria by Mussorgsky, “Song of the Flea,” based on Goethe’s *Faust*. I have long sought to find this recording again.[1] Mephistopheles sings with the people drinking in a Leipzig tavern. The words are quite subversive, dealing with a king whose favorite is a flea that poisons the existence of everyone at court. “But she’d be wise not to bite us, because we’ll crush her right away,” the drinkers threaten.

[*Musical excerpt*]

C.C.: And then there was the craze for musical films in

VERSION

---

[1] One of his four recordings of this song (Victor JD-1277-B, 1927) is available here: http://www.youtube.com/watch?v=1rCEVktDZfw. —T/E

BETA

Athens. The very first one was Al Jolson's *The Jazz Singer*.[2] This was the start of the talkies. Next, a film was shown that ran for weeks: the *Unfinished Symphony*,[3] with Martha Eggerth, who both acted and sang, and an actor named Hans Jaray in the role of the composer. The film was highly sentimental, but one heard a lot of Schubert in it. I had seen it with Michalis, and we adored it. One evening, we therefore went to Lambropoulos's, one of the major record companies at the time, in order to buy the record with our savings, but they didn't have it. We found a record on which was written "Bach"; we thought that it was by the great Bach, so we bought it and brought it home. And there, we discovered that it was a symphony by Johann Christian Bach, one of his sons who, as you know, belongs at the beginnings of the Mannheim School and who is very well . . .

D.B.: . . . known and at the same time underrated.

C.C.: No doubt. But at the time, comparing it to the *Unfinished Symphony*, we were disappointed, because it was very . . . let's say, old-fashioned [*rococo*].

D.B.: Let's listen a bit to the *Unfinished Symphony*, Karl Böhm conducting.

[*Musical excerpt*]

C.C.: That's far-off. Today, music is everywhere: we have the radio, cassettes, CDs.[4] . . .

D.B.: But does it occupy as much of a place within us as back then? The quantity of information is so . . .

---

[2] Film directed by Alan Crosland (1927). [The French translators misidentify the main singer-actor as "Al Jonson." —T/E]

[3] Willi Forst and Anthony Asquith's *Unfinished Symphony* (1934).

[4] Castoriadis never owned a television set. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

C.C.: That's difficult to say. If you talk like that, people will respond by telling you: You're old, that's all. For us, at the time, and even more so in Greece, music was something extremely rare and precious; there were but a few classical-music records and radio didn't even exist yet. Radio broadcasts began around 1935, 1936, with the famous musical motif of the shepherd opening and closing the day. . . .[*They sing.*]

There was then another film,[5] where Harry Baur played Beethoven.

D.B.: What year are we talking about?

C.C.: I was still in 8th grade, so it should have been in 1934.

D.B.: And there weren't yet any radio broadcasts?

C.C.: No. In any case, only very few families had radio sets; it was a privilege. My father was a strange man: it was only when I left Greece that he decided to buy a set [*laughter*], even though he adored music and he had a phonograph. Later, another film was shown, about Chopin,[6] which also was quite lovely. I remember in particular one scene, an alleged encounter between Chopin and Liszt, at Pleyel's in Paris. You see two pianos there, set back to back. Chopin sits down at one of them and begins to play. Liszt enters the store, hears him, and, understanding what's going on, sits down at the other piano and starts playing. At one moment, Chopin breaks off his playing, listens to him, and says to him: "That's not possible. You must be Franz Liszt." And the other guy answers him, "Indeed. And you are Frédéric Chopin." [*laughter*]

D.B.: *Se non è vero, è ben trovato. . . .*

VERSION

---

[5] Abel Gance's *Beethoven's Great Love* (1936).

[6] James A. Fitzpatrick's *Life of Chopin* (1938).

BETA

C.C.: Yes. . . . Well, it's not at all *vero*, but *ben trovato*, certainly. There you have it. So, it was at that time that I discovered Chopin. I had seen another film with my mother; it wasn't a musical film, but you could hear numerous excerpts from Tchaikovsky's *Sixth Symphony*. My mother adored it and played a version of it for piano. The entire symphony had been imprinted within me, but especially that very sweet melody from the "Allegretto" of the first movement. [*He sings.*]

[*Musical excerpt*]

C.C.: That symphony is magnificent; it is somewhat like a confession, with a very nineteenth-century side to it: all these musical movements shot through with struggle and ending with sorrow and catastrophe, unavoidable death. Well, those were the films that were being shown at the time. Encouraged by my friendship with Michalis, I set myself to making some vague attempts at composition on the piano.

D.B.: What were your influences?

C.C.: Oh, at the time that must have been some kind of pastiche and plagiarism of Beethoven, because, as I told you, my mother played his sonatas a lot: the *Pathétique*, the *Appassionata*. . . . Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*, too.

D.B.: It must have been rather rare at the time, in Athens, that a woman would have had a piano and played it, right?

C.C.: No, not at all, because she had received an upper-middle-class education; indeed, rather the middle than the upper part of the bourgeoisie. And the three conditions for a young woman to marry were that she be a virgin, have a dowry, and play the piano. [*laughter*]

D.B.: That she knew a bit of French?

VERSION

C.C.: And that she knew a bit of French, too. [*laughter*] Seriously, many women played piano, but my mother liked to

BETA

play it immensely; she adored music. She played very well.

D.B.: You told me that, once, you were walking in the street and that you heard . . .

C.C.: That happened later. Let's not get ahead of ourselves. So, I had begun, allegedly, to compose on the piano. I set down in writing a few of my compositions, and I showed them to Michalis, who told me that that wasn't music. In the end, I wrote something that was a sort of pastiche of Mendelssohn's *Songs Without Words*. "It's rather ordinary, but OK, it resembles music," Michalis then told me; he was very sharp-tongued and severe. My father, seeing that I was taking an interest in the piano, decided that I would take some classes. I therefore began to go to the Conservatory and to take some lessons with a lady whose name I have forgotten. I never really worked at the piano; I couldn't force myself to do it. . . .

D.B.: Why?

C.C.: I don't know: it demands patience, and I am someone who is impatient, at least impatient for those kinds of things. I can remain ten hours staring at a half page of Aristotle. [*laughter*] But the kind of work that the piano requires . . . maybe because of the exercises. . . . Still, when piano is taught well—I no longer know who told me this, later on—you shouldn't do too many exercises; everything is in the pieces.

D.B.: Yes, but you must rehearse the pieces quite often, which you couldn't bear, no doubt.

C.C.: Certainly. That being said, it's very different to work on pieces. So, my father had taken me to a pianist whose name was Alex Thurneyssen.

D.B.: I know him; he's famous. . . .

VERSION

C.C.: He was a very good pianist. He taught at the

BETA

Conservatory, where, inevitably, he slept with most of his female students. [*laughter*] That said, he really knew music and taught me loads of things. We ended up no longer even doing classes—he knew that I was interested in composition; I had shown him two or three attempts. We sat down and discussed; he played for me. He introduced me to Liszt's *Sonata in B Minor* and lots of other pieces that were unknown to me. I remember, especially, a humiliating scene. We were talking about Wagner, and he said to me: "Wagner, what an extraordinary composer." I responded to him: "Yes." Then, he added that one of his operas contains all the music that was to come after him. I thought right away of *Tristan*, excerpts from which I knew at the time. But I was afraid of making a mistake and I said to myself: "OK, what is Wagner's last opera? That's what he must have in mind." I therefore responded: "Oh, yes, *Parsifal*." "*Parsifal*," he cried, "For pity's sake, no! *Tristan und Isolde*!" I was a child at the time.

D.B.: So, Liszt was his favorite composer?

C.C.: In a way, yes, but he also played for me some Debussy, a few Ravels, *Gaspard de la nuit*. . . .

D.B.: Thurneyssen could play *Gaspard de la nuit*?

C.C.: Yes. I remember he played for me the second and third parts, "Le gibet" and "Scarbo."

D.B.: You surprise me. I didn't think he had such technical proficiency. That's one of the most difficult works for piano.

C.C.: Yes, yes, he played marvelously well. That's when I began to go to the Conservatory regularly. I cannot complain about Thurneyssen: even though he gave me Czerny exercises, he also had given me Béla Bartók's *Mikrokosmos*. That's ideal for learning to play the piano; it's gradual: it begins quite easily and then it evolves toward some very hard and very beautiful pieces.

VERSION

D.B.: And what about Beethoven?

BETA

C.C.: My mother, I told you, played the *Pathétique*, the *Appassionata*, most of the first sonatas. I don't know why, but she never had the second volume of the *Sonatas*, only the first, which I still have in my possession. She also played the *Sonata in A Flat* with variations, the one that contains the *Funeral March*, which is quite beautiful. And also a lot of Liszt, the *Rhapsodies*, particularly the *Sixth* [*he sings*]; I can see her hands running over the keyboard. And some Chopin: I remember the *Grande Polonaise*. . . .

D.B.: Whatever the case may be, and not liking exercises, you display a certain amount of dexterity. . . .

C.C.: Not so. . . .

D.B.: Why not?

C.C.: No longer, now. It's then that I understood that I had to learn a little piano in order to be able to compose. And I began some harmony courses with Vargolis, who was an adorable, unselfish [*désintéressé*] man, very open and always very much there for his students.

D.B.: And an excellent musician.

C.C.: Indeed. It's a shame that he didn't compose more. So, I went to his house; he was living then above Dexameni.[7] I began to compose, to try, at least, to compose for orchestra, etc. All that stopped when I came to France.

D.B.: Does anything remain of these compositions, if only a keepsake?

C.C.: There remain a few tape recordings: when, later on, I came to France, I bought a tape recorder and I recorded a great number of my compositions, mostly improvisations. One or two scores must also have remained, though they

VERSION

---

[7] A district in Athens. —T/E

BETA

aren't worth much. But all that stopped because, upon my arrival in France, I discovered the type of music that was then being written. And I discovered that what I myself was writing, in the best of cases [*laughter*], was situated somewhere between Ravel, *Petrushka,* Bartók, etc.

D.B.: That's no mean feat!

C.C.: Yes, but it's what was being done forty years earlier, as had already been stated. I have always been in agreement with Immanuel Kant, who said, in the *Critique of Judgment*, that "Fine art is the art of genius":[8] as I didn't think of myself as a brilliant [*génial*] musician, I stopped. Well, I continued, but for my pleasure, or that of a few young women. [*laughter*]

D.B.: I wanted to ask you . . . Goethe said of Beethoven: "This composer is so naive that he thinks that he can change the world with his music." Irrespective of whether he was right or not, and although he himself was insignificant as a musician. . . .

C.C.: Insignificant? Nonexistent!

D.B.: He didn't understand Schubert. . . .

C.C.: Schubert sent him the scores of *Gretchen am Spinnrade* and *Der Erlkönig*, and Goethe didn't respond to him. That says it all.

D.B.: He preferred {Johann Carl Gottfried} Loewe!

C.C.: Perhaps. . . . He understood nothing about music.

D.B.: Whatever the case may be, that's a major question: Can music influence humanity's aesthetic sense?

VERSION

---

[8] *Critique of Judgment, Including the First Introduction* (1790), trans. with an intro. Werner S. Pluhar, with a Foreword by Mary J. Gregor (Indianapolis: Hackett Publishing Company, 1987); see §46.

BETA

C.C.: Listen, I think that music contributes enormously to the formation of one's aesthetic sense and to making it evolve, but I don't know if it can be said that it has any primacy over the other arts. Take Richard Wagner, for example: he arrives at the time of Charles Baudelaire, and, more or less, Édouard Manet, that is to say, in an era of ferment, general upheaval. True, if one thinks of Mozart or Beethoven, they are quite above and beyond their era, and there's no doubt about that.

D.B.: A man who has in himself as a sensation, as a lived experience, the music of Mozart or Beethoven can no longer be the same.

C.C.: I'm afraid that we would have to be humbler and more modest.

D.B.: I don't mean that he becomes a superior being but, rather, that he has understood things concerning his own path.

C.C.: And yet, one knows of those SS who, after having gassed some Jews, went home to listen to Schubert lieder. That's how it is. . . . And there's a very beautiful film, *Chapaev,*[9] from the era of the great Russian film makers of the Russian Revolution. Chapaev was a Russian partisan. In the film, one sees a White general, who, like all White generals—the film has its stereotypical side—is extremely hard on his men, and so on. One day, during the Civil War against the Reds, his orderly doesn't polish his boots correctly. The general orders that the man be given thirty lashes with the knout. While these lashes are being administered and his orderly is dying by inches, the general sits down at his piano and plays the first part of the *Moonlight Sonata*. This is, of course, an extremely ironic scene, done by the director to show thereby that bourgeois culture does not better the human being.

VERSION

---

[9] Georgi and Sergei Vasilyev's *Chapaev* (1934), based on Dmitry Furmanov's autobiographical tale.

BETA

D.B.: Yes, but there would be a serious objection: the fact that he plays it doesn't mean that he would understand it.

C.C.: The director shows him in the process of playing it reverently, with eyes half closed. It's an extraordinary scene which, as far as I know, is true, as concerns those kinds of characters. Stalin's daughter tells, in her memoirs, of how her father went to the Bolshoi when *Boris Godunov* was being performed—he had a box protected by a grate to keep people from seeing him but also in order to discourage potential attackers—and of how she had seen him crying. I myself cannot imagine Stalin crying. Yet *Boris Godunov*[10] is the tragedy of absolute power, isn't it? That is to say, the tragedy of a man who has committed innumerable crimes in order to accede to power and who then dies of remorse. And Stalin went to listen to this work. Obviously, remorse wasn't *his* strong suit!

D.B.: I believe that, under Stalin, they had to change the ending. . . .

C.C.: Yes, they no doubt had to overturn some passages; they had to put the revolution in the forest as a conclusion. It's a magnificent passage. If we could listen to it. . . .

[*Musical excerpt*]

C.C.: I should no doubt say a few additional words about the people who played a role in my discovery of music, but here I am remembering an episode that took place during the Occupation, in 1944, or perhaps after the departure of the Germans, therefore in October or November. It was a very mild Athenian night; I had spent the evening at the home of

---

[10] In a quarter-hour "home movie" created by French New Wave director Chris Marker for Castoriadis on the basis of video images taken by Marker at Clara Gibson Maxwell's request during Castoriadis's 70th birthday party, Marker humorously and knowingly ended his video-gift with a sequence from *Boris Godunov*, lifted from a television program. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

friends in Kolonaki,[11] and I went home on foot around 2:30 in the morning—I was living then at my father's, on Hypatia Street, near Mitropoleos Street. And while I was going down Kanari Street, a little before the intersection with Akadimias Street, on the right while going down, I heard the sound of a piano coming from the open window on a balcony. I stopped for a moment: it was the first *Impromptu* from Schubert's *Opus 90*. And I stayed glued to the spot, fascinated, in that marvelous Athenian night—Athens was not back then the tragedy it is today; it was, in its own way, a very beautiful city. Next came the second or third *Impromptu*, which is also magnificent. At one moment, a man came out for some air or in order to look outside and asked me: "Do you like music?" "Passionately." "Why not come up? I'm coming down to open the door." I went up; it was on the second or third floor, I no longer remember which, and I saw an extremely beautiful woman playing piano. Two men, including the one who had just let me in, were in her company. We introduced ourselves and she started playing again. I was completely bewitched by the music. A few romantic-novelistic thoughts quite obviously went through my head: Is this a threesome? Who are these two men? The husband and the lover? A relationship where each accepts the other? Or, perhaps, something quite innocent. . . .

D.B.: A muse who was bewitching both of them. . . .

C.C.: A muse, yes. . . . She played many things, some Chopin, including the *Scherzo in B Flat Minor*, I believe, which I love so much.

D.B.: Ah yes, the second . . .

C.C.: . . . which begins in a marvelous way [*he sings*]. In short, she played for a very long time, and this is one of the most beautiful memories in my life.

VERSION

---

[11] A neighborhood in central Athens. —T/E

BETA

D.B.: You love Chopin?

C.C.: Immensely, and from the start. For me, he's a very great musician. When I arrived in Paris and became the friend of young French intellectuals and philosophers, Chopin wasn't at all fashionable; people had returned to Bach, on the one hand, and to the French Baroque, to Rameau, to Couperin, on the other. Chopin was considered a composer for girls. . . .

D.B.: Is that possible?

C.C.: . . . and I quarreled with them. One of my greatest pleasures was to see them a few years later change their opinions and listen to Chopin. The critics had then discovered that, for Debussy, Chopin was an extraordinary musician, that Ravel had also been highly influenced both by Liszt and by Chopin, and that Wagner liked him a lot.

D.B.: At what moment did you encounter Wagner?

C.C.: That began in Athens. My father had a record with a *Tannhäuser* aria, another from *The Flying Dutchman*, and still another I listened to for hours because it seemed to me to be both marvelous and incomprehensible, the duo of Tristan and Isolde's night of love, in the second act. With the marvelous voice of Brangäne, who tells them: "Be careful! Be careful!"

D.B.: It's an erotic duet that never stops. . . .

C.C.: It stops at the moment when—it never stops, obviously. . . . And it has, if I dare say so, a clearly sexual dimension: this music rises and rises, and it is brusquely interrupted by the arrival of King Marke. But there is a magic moment, if you can find it for your listeners, when, while they are lost in the night and in their love, the duet breaks off and one hears the voice of Brangäne, Isolde's maid, whom she has placed at the top of a tower in order to keep watch and warn them of the coming of the dawn. It's an extraordinary melody, in homophony with a voice, I believe, that tells them, "*Habet acht! Habet acht! Schon weicht dem Tag die Nacht!*" (Be

VERSION

BETA

careful! The day already chases away the night!), and the king is going to return. They of course don't hear it and the king returns.

[*Musical excerpt*]

D.B.: Did Wagnerian ideology disturb you?

C.C.: I cannot say that it would have disturbed me at the time: it was only later that I had the unpleasant surprise of discovering that Wagner was anti-Semitic. He had been, to begin with, a revolutionary; he was so in 1848. The beginning of the *Tetralogy* was written in a revolutionary spirit, and it begins with a scene, in *Das Rheingold*, I believe, or maybe in *Siegfried*, where one sees Alberich, the magician, with one of his slaves: one then hears the noise of a machine and this noise is clearly industrial. It's Alberich's workshop, his steelworks, let us say. In a way, it's the proletariat suffering the exploitation of the capitalist factory; that's heard very distinctly. Later on, Wagner became an anti-Semite and wrote the rubbish we know. You know, when one thinks of all the intellectuals and artists who were anti-Semites, it's frightening. People like Edgar Degas, for example. If one takes French intellectuals during the Dreyfus Affair, half of them were for him, so I'm delighted about that, and that consoles me because the other half, and among them some great names, were, along with public opinion, in favor of his sentence.

D.B.: Do you think that Émile Zola, by writing *J'Accuse*, played a decisive role?

C.C.: Yes, he played a crucial role: it's with Zola that everything began. No one wanted to do anything, and Georges Clemenceau, who was at the time the editor of *L'Aurore*, hesitated to act. Zola had seen the President of the French Senate, the Alsatian Auguste Scheurer-Kestner, who was convinced of Dreyfus's innocence and had told him so. So, Zola arrived one evening at the offices of Clemenceau with his text and the presses started rolling right away: that's the

VERSION

BETA

famous *J'Accuse* on the front page, the beginning of a terrible history that would last ten years.

D.B.: Isn't it gripping to see that, at one moment, a man of letters brought the truth to light?

C.C.: Of course. Unfortunately, that's also quite rare. What is rarer still is that he would be heard.

D.B.: You also have been heard, apropos of the Soviet Union.

C.C.: No, I was heard once the party was over. I was heard when one heard the same bell tolling everywhere, but not beforehand—well, that doesn't matter much.

D.B.: You spoke to me of your love for the wind instrument one hears at the end of *Tristan*.

C.C.: Yes, one hears at the beginning of the third act a shepherd playing the English horn. And in fact, this instrument has an extremely nostalgic sound to it. . . .

[*Musical excerpt*]

C.C.: I would now like to mention two young women who also played a role in my musical education. I don't believe you know the first one, Mimica Cranaki, who lives in France. When we met at the university, she had begun to take piano classes, and I had frequently heard her play during the Occupation at her home. I believe I recollect that she was playing Robert Schumann's *Symphonic Studies*, as well as Beethoven's *Diabelli Variations*. The second person is Nelly Andrikopoulou, whom you've met once, I think. Moreover, I almost got into an argument with her, because I maintained that it was at her house that I had first heard a marvelous Chopin *Étude*, the third one, the posthumous *Étude in A-Flat Major*, if I'm not mistaken, which is like a poem by Rilke. She told me that she had never played it and that she had never been capable of playing it.

VERSION

BETA

D.B.: Yet this *Étude* in A-flat major is not very hard.

C.C.: But that's precisely why what she says surprises me, because even I can play it: it's a series of arpeggios, with a slight rhythmic difficulty because the right hand plays triplets while the left hand is playing eighth notes, right?

D.B.: Quite right.

C.C.: So, you have to succeed in synchronizing them. Whatever the case may be, it is to Nelly that I owe my discovery of Mozart's sonatas: she played the marvelous *Sonata in A Minor* and many other pieces. And some Chopin.

D.B.: Let's listen a bit, if you'd like, to that Chopin *Étude,* in Arthur Rubinstein's extraordinary performance.

[*Musical excerpt*]

C.C.: There you have it. Let's now get to France, where I arrived in late 1945 and where I began, as the French say, by living hand to mouth [*par tirer le diable par la queue*] or by going through lean times [*par manger de la vache enragée*].[12] The little bit of money I had came from my student scholarship. . . . The voyage that took us from Athens to Paris was extraordinary; someone should recount it some day in a tragicomic mode.[13] We won't talk about it in detail here, for

---

[12] See "Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Interview: Cerisy Colloquium (1990)": http://agorainternational.org/enccaiint.pdf, pp. 3ff.

[13] With his jazz group Kaïmaki, composer-pianist Stéphane Tsapis released in 2012 an album titled *Mataroa* that recounted in music, poetry, and song the famous voyage of French Institute of Athens scholarship students (including Castoriadis) who had sailed from Piraeus in December 1945 on the Mataroa, a New-Zealand troop transport ship. Kaïmaki also presented this composition live at a number of venues, including in November 2010 at the University of Paris's Cité Internationale in the Fondation Hellenique (Greek student house), where a talk was given by Castoriadis's longtime friend and fellow Mataroa voyager Nelly Andrikopoulou (mentioned above by Castoriadis). In December 2014, the Théâtre du Soleil in Paris

VERSION

BETA

it has no relation to music, except that, among the 180 scholarship students who were on the Mataroa, there was one female pianist. She was a caricature of a pianist, clearly a spinster. The conditions on the ship were foul; we had to carry all alone all our baggage—and there were, among us, about twenty sculptors. We had taken everything we could: manuscripts, books, and so on. As for the sculptors, they had taken impressions of their sculptures and we carried these for them, as in a cooperative. The pianist herself had a small piano. . . .

D.B.: A silent piano?

C.C.: A silent piano, in order to do her exercises. Only, this piano had a hard time keeping silent; it was extremely heavy. I can see us back at the port of Taranto, leaning over the side of the boat, and our friends trying to bring the piano down a lateral staircase. . . .

D.B.: And she rehearsed on her silent piano?

C.C.: Of course: on the boat, in the train, etc. In short, for two or three years, there was great poverty, but at the end of a year and a half I rented an apartment. A friend gave me an old radio set and I began listening to a lot of music—I was working at the time at home, at least when I had some work. I will never understand how we succeeded in living during those three years, before I worked at OECD.[14] Where did the money come from for the steaks, the cheese, the bread, and for my child who was born at the time, Sparta? It was the marvelous era of Jean Witold and his show *Les Grands Musiciens* (The great musicians), which went on for two

---

presented Hélène Cinque's *Le Voyage du Mataroa*, based on testimony by Andrikopoulou and others. —T/E

VERSION

[14] Castoriadis worked for what became the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development from 1948 until his retirement in 1970. He eventually held the position of Director of Statistics, National Accounts, and Growth Studies before his retirement. —T/E

BETA

hours in the morning and was introduced by Albinoni's *Adagio*.

[*Musical excerpt*]

C.C.: He methodically played all the recordings that were available at the time. He had begun with Mozart, and I was then able to hear *Don Giovanni* in its entirety.

D.B.: Another important stage. . . .

C.C.: A major stage, yes. Then the *Requiem*, which I had heard for the first time in 1943 in Athens, at the Olympic, and which literally stunned me. He had also broadcast everything by Bach: one performance per piece. There was no complete recording of his work; I don't even know if that exists today. This show therefore played an important role. Later on, I rented a piano and I continued my improvisations, my vague attempts at composition. When the state of my finances improved a bit, I also bought a tape recorder, and I began to record myself on it.

D.B.: In short, an uninterrupted relationship with music?

C.C.: Yes.

D.B.: If you'll allow me, I would like to pause for an instant on Mozart. *Don Giovanni* and the *Requiem* are different moments. There is, in the *Requiem*, a profound reverence. Let's listen to it.

[*Musical excerpt*]

D.B.: *Don Giovanni*, by contrast, is the height of theatricality.

C.C.: Theatricality, but also tragedy. What I reproach Mozart for, however, is the last scene. *Don Giovanni* should have ended with the appearance of the Commendatore and the death of Don Giovanni, whom he hurls into Hell. The chorus is magnificent at that point. I think that the opera's conclusion

VERSION

BETA

was a concession to the public's taste and to what the morality of the time wanted: the good come back together and celebrate, so to speak, the triumph of virtue over vice.

D.B.: I, too, don't like the ending.

C.C.: Even musically speaking, it's weak. As I told you a few days ago, I have always dreamed of staging and directing *Don Giovanni*: I would then eliminate this last scene.

[*Musical excerpt*]

D.B.: I have a question that interests me personally and that I have not yet posed to you. Don't you think that the greatest music has always been inspired by religion?

C.C.: It's true up to a certain point. Listen, I have written that, while the Revolution was unfolding in France and there was what was called *dechristianization*, where the clergy was obliged to pledge allegiance to the Constitution and where those who refused became known as *nonjuring priests* and were forbidden to preach and so on, at the precise moment when campaigns against the official religion were going wild, Mozart wrote the *Requiem*, which is the last great religious work written in the West.[15] For, and don't get mad, but

---

[15] "The Dilapidation of the West" (1991), now in *RTI(TBS)*, p. 82:

> By the end of the eighteenth century, however, the European creation had freed itself from all "pregiven" meaning. It is one of those marvelous "coincidences" of history that the last very great religious work of art, Mozart's *Requiem*, was written in 1791—at the moment the French Revolution was going to launch its attack against the Church and against Christianity, a few years after Lessing had defined Enlightenment thinking as the triple rejection of Revelation, Providence, and Eternal Damnation, and a few years before Laplace had responded, apropos of the absence of God in his *Système du monde*, that he had no need of that particular hypothesis. This elimination of "pregiven" meaning did not keep Europe from entering, for one hundred and fifty years, from 1800 to 1950, into a period of extraordinary creation in all domains. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

Beethoven's *Missa solemnis* is not at the same level as his really great compositions.

D.B.: I don't know. . . .

C.C.: It has something theatrical about it; I cannot say that one senses much reverence in it.

D.B.: In what way does that contradict my question?

C.C.: Because, after the *Requiem*, what does one find that can be taken as religious music?

D.B.: It must be said that, already, faith was weakening.

C.C.: Of course. There are two things. On the one hand, up to a certain era, as long as religion was alive, practically all art is religious in inspiration. All great Western painting, all architecture—what is that? It's the Romanesque style, the style wrongly named *Gothic*, and which has to be called *French*, because it's a French creation, from Île-de-France, that later spread elsewhere. . . .

D.B.: But at the time, the separation between France and Germany wasn't clearly defined. . . .

C.C.: All of Europe wasn't clearly defined. Most of the Renaissance painters . . .

D.B.: . . . were inspired by religion.

C.C.: That's why, though I have nothing to do with God and religion, I reproach education in France, but also in other countries, for not teaching, out of respect for secularism [*laïcité oblige*], religious history in the schools—or religious texts. A child who leaves high school today knows nothing about the various episodes in the Old and New Testament and cannot understand the subject of half of the great pictorial works.

VERSION

BETA

D.B.: He has no reference points in relation to these works.

C.C.: Exactly. Rembrandt's *Susanna and the Elders*—to what does that allude? To the Old Testament. The *Pilgrims at Emmaus* are two followers who did not recognize Christ beside them. And so on and so forth. Yet all that holds so long as religion is really society's religion. After 1800, that's no longer the case.

D.B.: And you mean that, despite this, some great works have come into being?

C.C.: Yes, painting as well as music or poetry ceased to be religious. That doesn't stop me from literally melting when listening to Bach's *Passion* or to the *Requiem*.

D.B.: On the other hand, if I take Beethoven's *Ninth*, though it isn't directly religious, it has a relation to the universe, to something that goes far beyond earthly life. . . .

C.C.: . . . that goes beyond everyday life, yes, but for me, the *Ninth* is, in a sense, closely connected with our world. One senses therein, as in a number of pieces by Tchaikovsky or in Beethoven's symphonies, in the *Fifth* or in the *Third*, an unfolding historical process.

D.B.: OK, but the *Ninth* has something that goes beyond the human.

C.C.: I don't think so: it begins with this terrible human tragedy, with the chaos. . . .

D.B.: And with fright. . . .

C.C.: Yes, but inevitably, in the face of the chaos of the world, we all remain speechless and we go down to our knees. That doesn't necessarily imply some religious sentiment, right? It's something else. In the second part, which is marvelous, there are hordes of humans who were fleeing before their destiny [*they sing*].

VERSION

BETA

D.B.: Tremendous energy.

C.C.: Yes, and then comes the third part, which I don't like much.

D.B.: I adore it.

C.C.: I find it a bit soppy.

D.B.: It's a melody of fraternal, not erotic, love. That's where the main difference resides with respect to Tchaikovsky, though I like him a lot, too.

C.C.: Certainly, but, well, there is no possible comparison between Beethoven and Tchaikovsky. Then comes the chorus, about which we have quarreled once, which I don't like, either. I think that the true *Ode to Joy*, you know, is the second part of *Opus 111*.[16]

D.B.: Oh, no. That's a reconciliation with human destiny!

C.C.: Not at all. When the fearsome [*terrible*] gallop comes, in the fifth or sixth variation (I no longer know which), with the descending arpeggios, it's an extraordinary explosion of joy, which I don't find again in the *Ninth*.

[*Musical excerpt*]

D.B.: At what hour do you listen to music?

C.C.: In the evening, always. When I am healthy and I am working, I can put on music very loud—when I am writing by hand, not with the typewriter.[17] And I am present in both

---

[16] Piano Sonata No. 32, Beethoven's final piano sonata. —T/E

[17] Only at the end of his life did Castoriadis receive, from his students, a personal computer with word-processing software. He said that he'd keep his old manual typewriter for the composition of polemical pieces, pressing down hard on the keys.—T/E

VERSION

BETA

things at once. I cannot listen to music if I am not concentrating.

D.B.: What music do you listen to in order to work?

C.C.: That depends on my mood. Well, I will never listen to opera, Wagner, the *Tetralogy*, *Tristan*, the *Requiem*, but I'll listen to sonatas by Beethoven, Mozart, Schumann, Chopin, that kind of thing. . . .

D.B.: Well, whatever the case may be, we are still talking about music that stops at Stravinsky, if I'm not mistaken.

C.C.: [*laughter*] And yet, Stravinsky's first period, before his neoclassical period. Next, Bartók. Let's say that, beginning with Arnold Schönberg, I smell trouble brewing. . . . Yet there are some works from the much-talked-about Third Viennese School that move me a lot.

D.B.: Some Schönberg?

C.C.: Yes, his *Transfigured Night*, for example.

D.B.: Which is not twelve-tone. . . .

C.C.: I'm afraid not. . . . But also *Pierrot Lunaire*, which is the beginning of twelve-tone music, Alban Berg's *Concerto* "To the memory of an angel." . . .

D.B.: And *Wozzeck*?

C.C.: Less so. As for what follows . . . the pseudo-Moderns, whatever, people like Hans Pfitzner in Germany and even Francis Poulenc in France, leave me indifferent.

D.B.: And among the contemporary Russians?

VERSION

C.C.: I have always thought that Sergei Prokofiev was an extraordinary composer—the *Scythian Suite*, for example, is a fabulous work—and that it was Stalin who destroyed him.

BETA

He was obliged to write music that, as the latter recommended, the audience could remember on the way out and could whistle. [*laughter*]

D.B.: Shostakovich? He wasn't as subject to that diktat. . . .

C.C.: And yet, ... Dmitri Shostakovich's problems with Stalin are well known. Moreover, he fell into disgrace the last fifteen years of his life. It's not solely Stalin's fault, but the whole system's: what happened with Shostakovich also occurred with the writers and their Union. A veritable intellectual clique was created there that seized all the posts because this clique was in Stalin's good graces. That said, in Prokofiev's work, there are even works from his "Stalinist" period that I like.

D.B.: Let's listen to the *Scythian Suite*.

[*Musical excerpt*]

D.B.: Are we living through the end of artistic creation?

C.C.: That's the great question today. I think that there will be new creation and that in decadent eras one cannot see new creations, one cannot even imagine them. If one could, one would carry them out. There already have been periods of waning of creation, for example in England after Shakespeare or in France, as concerns poetry, after the classics of the seventeenth century. The eighteenth century, in this regard, is empty, with some imitations, some second-order creations; Voltaire wrote some tragedies that are uninteresting. In England, a mediocre academicism prevailed. One therefore has the impression that in 1790, let's say in 1800, poetry was finished, that it was no longer possible. And suddenly, there was something like an outpouring: the three great English Romantics, Keats, Shelley, Byron, Hölderlin in Germany, Novalis and the others—let's leave aside Schiller, who is rather classical; and, in France, the Romantics, who, whether you like them or not, created something new and they were followed, right afterward, by Baudelaire, Rimbaud, Mallarmé.

VERSION

BETA

Then Rilke in Germany, and so on. It is obvious that no one in 1750 could know what this new poetry would be. If one had known it, one would have written it.

D.B.: Yet there were domains that had not been explored.

C.C.: Of course, but one cannot know that *a priori*.

D.B.: In speaking with you on other occasions, I've had the feeling that a renaissance of music could, according to you, arise from jazz. . . .

C.C.: That's another chapter, which we haven't broached at all. We'd be talking about my love for a whole series of popular—really popular—kinds of music; I'm not talking here about some sort of international pseudo-razzmatazz [*pseudo-folklore*]. Some Greek popular songs are splendid; "Albanian" *miroloi*,[18] in particular, is an extraordinary kind of music.

D.B.: Albanian *miroloi*?

C.C.: You don't know it? Oh, you have to listen to that!

[*Musical excerpt*]

C.C.: Balinese music is also extraordinary. Each time I went to Bali, I was literally enchanted. When one goes into the villages, one hears the young practicing gamelan: there are extraordinary percussion instruments that produce a monotone music but also some unimaginable magic. Likewise, I am passionate about flamenco music. And I adore Albéniz, his *Iberia*, for example.

D.B.: Let's stop for a moment to listen to *El Albaicín*.[19]

VERSION

---

[18] Funeral laments.

[19] The first piece in Book Three of Albéniz's *Iberia*. —T/E

BETA

[*Musical excerpt*]

C.C.: Jazz, too, obviously, has yielded some gigantic works. We absolutely have to listen to a jazz piece.

D.B.: You yourself play jazz very well. Rather the blues, moreover!

C.C.: Oh, no. Let's listen to a *real* jazz pianist, Erroll Garner, for example. There are things by him that are fantastic.

[*Musical excerpt*]

C.C.: But jazz has dried up; Miles Davis and Thelonius Monk are, to my mind, the last two greats. Afterward, it's free jazz[20] . . . or rock. And now rap, which is completely unbearable; it's uninterrupted repetition of the same rhythm on the drums over a series of chords that have been reduced to the minimum. There's neither harmony, in the musical sense, nor melody; there's nothing. Whereas what was marvelous in classical jazz was the harmonic invention.

D.B.: What do you think of the Minimalists?

C.C.: I don't like them at all. One is beginning, moreover, to sense now a sort of reaction. . . . Around 1945 and afterward, Europe experienced a musical blossoming: Karlheinz Stockhausen, Luciano Berio, Iannis Xenakis—including his *Nuits*, for example, which I like immensely. Berio's pieces sung by Cathy Berberian are quite beautiful, but he wrote other ones that are not their equals. And later on, instead of

---

[20] The last year of his life (1997), Castoriadis modified his appreciation of "free jazz" or, at least, that of the music of Ornette Coleman, the person most closely associated with this approach. An admiring Coleman provided cover art for Castoriadis's last two English-language book-length translations published in his lifetime, *CR* and *WIF*, and Castoriadis attended a July 3 Coleman concert at La Villette in Paris, a few days before he spoke on music improvisation at a Coleman-organized La Villette symposium. —T/E

VERSION

BETA

writing Berio, he set to recopying fragments of Beethoven's *Fifth* or pieces from other composers. For me, that's terribly decadent: when Bach seized on a work by Vivaldi that he liked, he transcribed it, that's all.

D.B.: Among the Moderns, you see only pastiche?

C.C.: Quite right! Pastiche and collage. And I truly find that so-called serious music (but the other kind, too, moreover) makes an excessive use of that.

D.B.: Do you think that, despite everything, great music is going to continue to nourish humanity and move it?

C.C.: I'm convinced of it. See, for example, how difficult it is—I am speaking of France; I don't know if it's the case in Greece—to find a ticket for a concert, whatever the program might be. Of course, it can be said that there may be here a lack of discernment: imagine a packed house for a Sibelius program. . . .

D.B.: Sibelius, I like him a lot!

C.C.: It has to be said that you like a lot of things. [*laughter*]

D.B.: I have noted that there exists in Greece a tendency to reject classical music as reserved for an elite. . . .

C.C.: I willingly believe that, though it seems to me that that has always been more or less the case. And yet, I recall that, when I was a student, we dug down deep into our pockets to pay to go on Sunday mornings to the Olympic—a hall that has since been torn down—in order to hear there the general rehearsal for the Monday evening concert. The conductor usually was that poor man Philoctetes Economides, but before the War, there were some good conductors, like Dimitris Mitropoulos, Antiochos Evangelatos, and also some from abroad: Michalis Dinopoulos, of whom I have spoken to you, told me that Arturo Toscanini had intended to come; several great German conductors had come through, maybe Wilhelm

VERSION

BETA

Furtwängler, I'm no longer sure. . . . Of course, that's where one sees the role an orchestra conductor plays: with Economides, I would not say that it sounded like a bar orchestra, though . . . whereas with the great ones, it can become something dazzling.

D.B.: Charles Munch also had come to conduct.

C.C.: That was during the German Occupation, and there were a few German members of the audience. I recall an admirable *Eroica*, preceded by Bedřich Smetana's *The Bartered Bride*, a quite lovely piece.

D.B.: What would you like to listen to, to end our show?

C.C.: Let's listen to Schubert's *Gretchen am Spinnrade*.

[*Musical excerpt*]

D.B.: Mr. Castoriadis, I thank you for this fascinating conversation and for the time you have devoted to us.

C.C.: It is I who thanks you for having given me the opportunity not only to speak with you but also to go back over certain things. That's what happens in an interesting conversation: it makes us shift in relation to our usual positions.

VERSION

POSTFACE

French Editors' Postface[*]

BETA

As our French Editors' Notice indicated, we have taken the initiative to publish this anthology because it seemed to us that, even outside of the framework in which they were conceived, the texts printed herein have lost none of their pertinence, whereas, for a few years now, the question of the meaning—and of the future—of artistic and cultural creation has been posed overtly in France.[1] That the first of these, "Social Transformation and Cultural Creation," had not found, in 1979, its audience was not really surprising.[2] The

---

[*] Postface, *FC*, pp. 169-77.

[1] Concerning the sometimes violent debate about the "crisis" of contemporary art which has unfolded in France between 1991 and 1997, the reader will find the necessary references, as well as a quite useful history in Yves Michaud's work *La Crise de l'art contemporain: utopie, démocratie et comédie* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1997, 2005, pp. 7-30 [a 2nd ed. appeared from PUF in 2011 —T/E]). See, especially, Jean-Philippe Domecq's *Artistes sans art?* (Paris: Esprit, 1994; Paris: Éditions 10/18, 2005), Philippe Dagen's *La Haine de l'art* (Paris: Grasset, 1997), and Jean Clair's *La Responsabilité de l'artiste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1997); but Michaud, *op. cit.*, gives a complete bibliography (as well as, on pp. 174-96, analyses of the contributions by Thierry de Duve, Georges Didi-Huberman, Nathalie Heinich, Rainer Rochlitz, Catherine Millet, etc.).

[2] Let us draw attention, nonetheless, to Luc Ferry's critique ("Déclin de l'Occident? De l'épuisement libéral au renouveau démocratique," *Revue Européenne des Sciences Sociales* [Geneva], 86 [December 1989], a text partially reprinted, with a few modifications, in *Homo Aestheticus: The Invention of Taste in the Democratic Age* [1990], trans. Robert de Loaiza [Chicago: The University of Chicago Press, 1993]. In this article, Castoriadis is placed among "those who hold the modern world in contempt" (p. 241). Ferry reproached him for not having understood that what characterizes contemporary culture is "its absence of reference to a share world, its *Weltlosigkeit*" (p. 245) and that that is so "precisely because it moves toward autonomy" (ibid.). The distinction between the modern subject's autonomy and the contemporary subject's independence (p. 259) grounds Ferry's whole argument on this point. The reader will fruitfully consult, on what "subject" and "individual" mean for Castoriadis, his text "The State of the Subject Today" (1986), now in *WIF*.

VERSION

BETA

era had hardly been carried away by doubt[3] as to the value of contemporary artistic production, whose glory was being celebrated at the brand-new Pompidou Center. The times have changed, and numerous people who yesterday greeted with skepticism the idea of a subsidence of postwar Western cultural creativity today view this as self-evident—these people now having their opinion backed up by numerous testimonials.[4]

Castoriadis noted in 1978 that, whatever interest this or that particular work might have, in the cultural domain the era was living, practically speaking, only in the mode of repetition. A decade later, his diagnosis was more precise, whether it be a repetition of the gesture of breaking with traditionÌ—fake avant-garde movements—or the incoherent pillaging of the riches of the past under the various forms of postmodern cooptation,[5] since it had become impossible to

> underestimate the growth of eclecticism, collage, spineless syncretism, and, above all, the loss of the *object* and the loss of meaning, which go hand in hand with an abandonment of the search for form.[6]

---

[3] With a few exceptions. See, for example, in the United States, the concerns expressed by Harold Rosenberg in *The De-Definition of Art: Action Art to Pop to Earthworks* (New York: Horizon Press, 1972).

[4] Some, however, seem to believe that it is still the same game—Moderns vs Antimoderns—that has been playing out since the early twentieth century. Thus, we have Ferry's “Y a-t-il une beauté moderne?” in André Comte-Sponville and Luc Ferry's *La Sagesse des modernes* (Paris: Laffont, 1998). All reference to Castoriadis's 1978 text has here disappeared, but an attentive reading would show—right down to certain formulations—that it has not altogether been forgotten.

[5] “‘Postmodern’ art has rendered an enormous service, indeed: it shows how really great modern art had been” (“The Retreat from Autonomy: Post-Modernism as Generalized Conformism” [1989], now in *WIF*, p. 41).

[6] “Culture in a Democratic Society” (1994), in *CR*. Let us avoid all misunderstandings: despite appearances, Castoriadis's critique, even in its most abrupt forms (“contemporary culture is, as a first approximation, nil”), will not be confused with the critique formulated in the 1950s by

VERSION

BETA

There thus is, for him, a collapse of the present that poses a threat to both past and future; the past, for "where there is no present, there is no more past"; the future, for "living memory of the past and projects for a valued future are disappearing together."[7] Tirelessly returning to the need to instaurate a relation to the past that would be neither subservience [*asservissement*] to a tradition nor touristic or museum-oriented entertainment [*divertissement*], but resumption and reinterpretation, Castoriadis was forced to note that the epoch, "neither 'traditionalistic' nor creative and revolutionary (despite the stories being told on this score), . . . lives its relation to the past in a mode that itself certainly represents as such a historical novation: that of the most perfect exteriority."[8] This situation is all the graver as the problem of the relation to culture is also a problem of the relation to values—to what a society values and wants, to what makes it "hold together" (its great social imaginary significations)—at the same time that it is a problem of modes of socialization. The crisis of cultural creation in the Western world is thus only one of the manifestations of the collapse of society's self-representation.[9]

In no way was he ignoring the fact that—with art, like religion, having a relation to fundamental beliefs that ensure

---

young dissident Lettrists. Castoriadis, who in his youth was passionately interested in the adventure of Surrealism and the great creative period of modern art, was trying in 1978 to draw up an assessment of the experience of the fortysome years that had elapsed. The young Guy Debord himself knew, as early as 1954, that art is dead, having read Hegel—"Thus art, with its high destination, is something belonging to the past. It has measurably lost for us its truth and its life" [see p. 12 of John Steinfort Kedney's *Hegel's Aesthetics: A Critical Exposition* (A Digireads Book, 2010) —T/E]—and Isidore Isou.

[7] "Social Transformation and Cultural Creation" (1979), above in Part One of the present volume.

VERSION

[8] "The Crisis of Western Societies" (1982), in *CR*, p. 263.

[9] Ibid., pp. 261-63.

BETA

societies' cohesion[10]—"great art" was therefore quite often religious, just as he was also aware of the fact that, in societies characterized by the retreat of the religious, democratic creation, the "creation of endless interrogation," "abolishes all transcendent sources of signification."[11] Yet he also knew that such secularization did not prevent the appearance of some great profane art, then a period of extraordinary cultural creation that goes from the great revolutions of the late eighteenth century to World War II, a period during which, "in the fields of research and of meaning-creation a lucid intoxication took hold"[12] involving "the exploration of ever new strata of the psyche and the social, of the visible and the audible, so that it might, in and through this exploration, and in its own unique way, give form to the Chaos."[13] Against those who would be tempted to believe that "the truth of the work of art is henceforth to be found in the artist,"[14] he has ceaselessly reminded people that

---

[10] See "Institution of Society and Religion" (1982), now in WIF.

[11] "Culture in a Democratic Society" (1994), in *CR*, p. 343. —T/E

[12] "The Dilapidation of the West" (1991), now in *RTI(TBS)*, p. 83.

[13] "Culture in a Democratic Society," in *CR*, p. 345.

[14] As Ferry says in "Y a-t-il une beauté moderne?", *La Sagesse des modernes*, p. 496. This author, faced with the "pessimistic diagnoses" about "the decline, defeat, or decadence of contemporary culture," asks himself where one can find the "material of a modern grandeur." What could set us on the path is consideration of "sport, the democratic spectacle if there ever was one." Might this example be "trivial, since it's given in an analogy with high culture?"

> . . . Think rather about this: sports competition rests, par excellence, on the principles of egalitarianism, which is so dear to modern humanism. The rules there are the same for all, the equipment one uses, too, to the point that "cheating," which introduces inequalities, symbolizes therein the foremost crime. Nevertheless, some hierarchies have re-formed there on a purely human basis, and even, it must be admitted, with a certain amount of grandeur. . . . These are partial forms of

VERSION

BETA

there is no great art, nor any creative art, without a *public* that is itself in a sense creative, that "the genuine 'reception' of a new work is just as creative as the creation thereof."[15] He forcefully went back over this collective dimension a dozen years later when he affirmed that cultural works are creations

> that go beyond the private sphere; they have to do with what I call the "public/private" [the sphere that is open to all, but wherein political power does not have to intervene] and "public/public" spheres [the one involving publicly sanctioned decisions that apply to all]. These creations necessarily have a collective dimension (either in their realization or in their reception), but they are also the ballast of collective identity. This, let it be said parenthetically, is what liberalism {in the Continental sense} and "individualism" forget. In theory and strictly speaking, the question of a collective identity—of a whole with which one might, in key respects, identify, in which one participates and about which one might bear some concern, and for whose fate one feels oneself responsible—cannot and must not be raised in liberalism and "individualism"; it has no meaning there.[16]

> transcendence, certainly, but ones that give an image—it is only that—of the unfathomable grandeur of humanity. Why would we not find it also in culture and politics? (pp. 500-501)

The reader will easily be able to compare these arguments to the effectively actual social reality of contemporary sport. Castoriadis would undoubtedly have seen at work here, once more, the systematic denial of what are, *in effective actuality*, the different modes of socialization (and of de-socialization, of atomization) in contemporary society, whether it be the pseudomarket, political "representation," noneducation, or one's (passive) relation to the media.

[15] "The Dilapidation of the West," now in *RTI(TBS)*, p. 81.

[16] Ibid., now in *RTI(TBS)*, p. 98. But also above, pp. 22-24, and "Culture in a Democratic Society," in *CR*, pp. 344-46.

VERSION

BETA

Some commentators, like Yves Michaud, reckon today that art cannot be and has never been a “social cement,” that the “comedy of Great Art” must even be denounced, that the present-day situation is characterized by a process of “cultural democratization” in which the diversity of social, cultural, and artistic groups manifests itself, and that, thus, “art forms” are going to continue to develop within “motivated communities”—in short, that we are living the end of “the utopia of art” and that it suffices to take note of this fact without useless lamentations. In his view,

> the idea of a Great Aesthetics for a Great Art is the fictive and terroristic machine designed to deny this plural reality of artistic behaviors. It is correlated with efforts to deny the diversity of groups within the social space.[17]

Such views, which strangely combine extreme pessimism and extreme optimism, are difficult to defend unless one reckons that the pseudomarket, the manipulated and manipulative media, and increasingly neglected electoral rituals are the sole conceivable forms of the social tie—for, such a tie is really needed, among those groups and communities. And unless, too, one reckons that all that is going to help maintain a fecund diversity. Manifestly, Castoriadis did not believe that for one second.

> If its institutions constitute a collectivity, [the cultural works of a society] are the tie between its past and its future; they are an inexhaustible deposit of memory and at the same time the mainstay of its future creation. That is why those who affirm that in

---

[17] Michaud, *La Crise de l'art contemporain*, pp. 266-68. For Castoriadis, “Far from being incompatible with an autonomous, a democratic society, great art is for this reason inseparable from such a society” (“The Dilapidation of the West,” now in *RTI(TBS)*, pp. 83-84). He saw in this fact one of the reasons for “the affirmative hatred of the beautiful” which was characteristic of the Russian bureaucratic regime (see above, the first chapter in Part Two of the present volume).

VERSION

BETA

> contemporary society, within the framework of "democratic individualism," no place exists any longer for great works, are, without knowing it or wanting it, pronouncing a death sentence upon this society.[18]

It could be added that those who today are too easily resigned to the great work of art having apparently become impossible, being content with what passes today for contemporary art or seeing therein an "unsurpassable horizon," are de facto giving man, as André Breton wrote in another context, "a derisory idea of his means." It could also be added that they have given up and that they would like to make believe that one must forever give up on "giving a new face to *beauty*."[19]

As for Castoriadis himself, he thought that there is a relation—certainly a complex and enigmatic one—between the apparent exhaustion of Western cultural creativity and the retreat of the democratic project, the phase of political lethargy through which these societies are going. Yet, while he reckoned that, despite appearances, "we are living the most conformist phase in modern history," he knew, too, that

---

[18] "The Dilapidation of the West," now in *RTI(TBS)*, p. 99.

[19] André Breton, "The Situation of Surrealism Between the Two Wars" (1942), *Yale French Studies*, 2 (1948): 76, 77. Apropos of his relations with Surrealism, Castoriadis responded, in February 1990, to some British interlocutors:

> I knew a bit about it because there were some Greek Surrealists, and I was very fascinated by them. Then, when I came to France, I learned much more. . . . [A]mong the people who for me were the most important in France at that time was Breton. And then Benjamin Péret, who came later to *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, and published a text in the journal; and a younger Surrealist called Jean-Jacques Lebel who was in the group and very much in touch with us ("Cornelius Castoriadis. An Interview," *Radical Philosophy*, 56 [Autumn 1990]: 39; the first part, reprinted as "Autonomy Is an Ongoing Process: An Introductory Interview," appeared in *ASA(RPT)*; see p. 31).

VERSION

BETA

> it would be absurd to believe that we might ever exhaust the thinkable, the feasible, the formable, just as . . . it would be absurd to set limits on the formative potential always stirring within the psychical imagination and within the collective social-historical imaginary.[20]

And he wanted to contribute, as much as he could, to making this phase of subsidence and lethargy be as brief as possible.

Castoriadis's questions have lost none of their topicality, as also remains topical what he was championing elsewhere: "the affirmation of substantive sociality and historicity as values of an autonomous society," a choice that

> is indissociable from the one that makes us want a just and autonomous society, in which free and equal autonomous individuals live in mutual recognition. Such recognition is not merely a mental operation, but also and especially an *affect*.[21]

---

[20] "Culture in a Democratic Society" (1994), in *CR*, pp. 346, 348.

[21] See "Social Transformation and Cultural Creation," above in Part One of the present volume. These statements might sound strange to some. We will not resist the temptation to quote Tocqueville here:

> Freedom and freedom alone can extirpate these vices ["love of gain, a fondness for business careers, the desire to get rich at all costs, a craving for material comfort and easy living quickly become ruling passions"], which, indeed, are innate in communities of this order; it alone can call a halt to their pernicious influence. For only freedom can deliver the members of a community from that isolation which is the lot of the individual left to his own devices and, compelling them to get in touch with each other, promote an active sense of fellowship. In a community of free citizens *every man is daily reminded of the need of meeting his fellow man, or hearing what they have to say, of exchanging ideas, and coming to an agreement as to the conduct of their common interests* (Foreword to *The Old Régime and the French Revolution* [1856], trans. Stuart Gilbert [New York: Anchor Books, 1955], pp. xiii and xiv, emphasis added).

VERSION

APPENDIX: POTENTIAL FUTURE TRANSLATION PROJECTS[*]

BETA

N.B.: Translations of some of these texts may be prepared at a later date for publication in electronic volumes devoted to Castoriadis's post-S. ou B. public interventions.

BOOK-LENGTH TRANSLATION PROJECTS

FR2002A *Sujet et vérité dans le monde social-historique. Séminaires 1986-1987. La Création humaine, 1*. Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2002. 496pp.

FR2004A *Ce qui fait la Grèce*. Tome 1. *D'Homère à Héraclite. Séminaires 1982-1983. La Création humaine II*. Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 2004.

FR2009A *Histoire et création. Textes philosophiques inédits (1945-1967)*. Réunis, présentés et annotés par Nicolas Poirier. Paris: Editions du Seuil, 2009.

FR2011A *Ce qui fait la Grèce*. Tome 3. *Thucydide, la force et le droit*. Séminaires 1984-1985. *La Création humaine IV*. Texte établi, présenté et annoté par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay.

VERSION

---

[*] All date-letter references mentioned in this Appendix refer to the Bibliographies on the Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Website: http://www.agorainternational.org/fr/bibliographies.html; # = missing info.

BETA

A VOLUME ON SCIENCE, PSYCHOANALYSIS, AND PHILOSOPHY

FR1982B “Table ronde. Égalités et inégalités: Héritage ou mythe occidental?” (“Le 29 septembre 1981”). Ibid.: 70-98; Castoriadis, ibid.: 70-72 et 87-88.

FR1983F Cornelius Castoriadis, René Girard, *et al*. “La contingence dans les affaires humaines. Débat Cornelius Castoriadis-René Girard” (13 juin 1981 au colloque de Cerisy). *L’Auto-organisation. De la physique au politique*. Sous la direction de Paul Dumouchel et Jean-Pierre Dupuy. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1983: 282-301. Présentation. Ibid.: 281.

FR1983I “Je ne suis pas moins esclave de mon maître”. *Information et réflexion libertaire* (Lyon), 51 (été 1983): 33-35.

FR1986B1: Préface (Paris, 1er décembre 1985). *CL*: 7-15.

FR1987A “L’auto-organisation, du physique au politique” (entretien à Radio-France avec Gérard Ponthieu). *Création et désordre. Recherches et pensées contemporaines*. Paris: L’Originel/Radio-France, 1987: 39-46.

FR1987C “Imaginaire social et changement scientifique” (conférence-débat organisée par l’Action locale Bellevue le 23 mai 1985). *Sens et place des connaissances dans la société*. Paris: CNRS, 1987: 161-83.

FR1987H “L’histoire du savoir nous a pris par la peau du cou et nous a jetés au milieu de l’océan Pacifique de l’Être en nous disant: ‘Maintenant nagez!’” (“Un entretien [du 18 février 1987] mené par Dominique Bouchet”). *Lettre Science Culture*, 28 (octobre 1987): 1-2.

VERSION

FR1988C “L’utilité de la connaissance dans les sciences de l’homme et dans les savoirs” (“table ronde présidée par Étienne Barilier”). *Revue européenne des sciences sociales*,

BETA

79 (avril 1988): 87-131; Castoriadis, ibid.: 91-95, 99-101, 102-03, 106, 107-08, 113-15, 116, 117-18, 122, 128-29 et 130.

FR1990A “Pour soi et subjectivité”. *Colloque de Cerisy. Arguments pour une méthode (Autour d’Edgar Morin)*. Sous la direction de Daniel Bougnoux, Jean-Louis Le Moigne et Serge Proulx. Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1990: 118-27.

EN1991C “Cornelius Castoriadis interviewed by Paul Gordon.” *Free Associations*, 24 (1991): 483-506.

FR1991O “Fragments d’un séminaire philosophique”. Ibid.: 104-6.

EN1993D “Imagining Society—Cornelius Castoriadis Interview.” *Variant*, 15 (Autumn 1993): 40-43.

EN1994C “Cornelius and Cybèle Castoriadis: Writer Psychoanalyst, Paris, 1991.” *Fathers and Daughters: In Their Own Words*. Introduction by William Styron. Photographs by Mariana Cook. San Francisco: Chronicle Books: 1994: 66-67.

FR1995A “Tract” (texte pour une oeuvre d’art). Costis Triandaphylou. *Espace électrique*. Athens: Artbook, 1995: 41; voir: 26 (31 en grec), 63.

FR1997B “Conseils à un débutant: apprendre à discerner” (entretien par Nicolas Truong), *Le Monde de l’Education, de la culture et de la formation*, 244 (janvier 1997): 48-49.

FR1997C “Les carrefours du labyrinthe V” (conférence du 22 mars 1997). *Parcours. Les Cahiers du GREP Midi-Pyrénées*, 15-16 (septembre 1997): 385-410 (voir FR1998D).

FR1999D “Fragments d’un séminaire sur la vertu et l’autonomie”. *Areté. Revista de filosophia*, 11:1-2 (1999): 293-313.

VERSION

EN1998A Elie Wiesel, Fritjof Capra, Vaclav Havel,

BETA

Bronislaw Geremek, Seizaburo Sato, René-Samuel Sirat, Cornelius Castoriadis. "Man's Freedom, God's Will." *Civilization. The Magazine of the Library of Congress*, 5:2 (April-May 1998): 54-57; see 57 (see also quotation on 67).

EN1998B Immanuel Wallerstein, Michael Novak, Timothy Garton Ash, Cornelius Castoriadis, Michael Mann, Richard von Weizsäcker. "The Prospect of Politics." *Civilization. The Magazine of the Library of Congress*, 5:2 (April-May 1998): 70-77; see 74.

EN1998C "A Conversation Between Sergio Benvenuto and Cornelius Castoriadis" (7 May 1994). Trans. Joan Tambureno. *Journal of European Psychoanalysis*, 6 (Winter 1998): 93-107.

FR1999G "Extraits. Cornelius Castoriadis: 'Se reposer ou être libre'" (Dossier: L'autonomie, une valeur qui monte). *Dirigeant. Revue Proposée par le Centre des Jeunes Dirigeants d'Entreprise*, 38 (Mars 1999): 17.

FR2008C *L'imaginaire comme tel*. Texte établi, annoté et présenté par Arnaud Tomès. Paris: Hermann Éditeurs, 2008: 145-58.

FR2008D "Les conditions du nouveau en histoire" (séminaire du 18 janvier 1989). *Cahiers Critiques de Philosophie*, 6 (été 2008): 43-62.

A VOLUME ON WAR AND REVOLUTION

EN1980B "Facing the War" (translation of FR1980A). Trans. Joe Light, *Telos*, 46 (Winter 1980-81): 43-61.
"Facing War." Trans. ## ##. *Solidarity Journal*, 2 (### 198#): ##-##.

FR1981C "Vers la stratocratie" (extraits de *DG*: 114-21, 124-27, 169-77, 179-82 et 237-38). *Le Débat*, 12 (mai 1981): 5-17 (voir FR1980A et FR1981B).

VERSION

BETA

FR1981D “Illusions ne pas garder” (20 décembre 1981). *Libération*, 21 décembre 1981: 9.
DH: 50-55.

EN1982A “The Impossibility of Reforms in the Soviet Union” (translation of FR1981B : 171-82). Trans. Jim Asker. *Thesis Eleven*, 4 (1982): 26-31.

EN1982B “The Toughest and Most Fragile of Regimes” (translation of FR1982F). Trans. David Berger. *Telos*, 51 (Spring 1982): 186-90.

FR1982D “Le pouvoir au bout du char” (propos recueillis par Louis-Bernard Robitaille). *Le Nouvel Observateur*, ## (2 janvier 1982): 14-19.
Devant la guerre (12 décembre 1981).

EN1982C Alain Besancon, Alexandre Astruc, Andre Glueckmann, Bernard-Henri Levy, Cornelius Castoriadis, Czeslaw Milosz, Edgar Morin, Fernando Arrabal, Huber Matos, Jean-Marie Benoist, Jean-Marie Domenach, Lane Kirkland, Leonid Plyushch, Marek Halter, Michel Crozier, Michel Leiris, Natalya Gorbanevskya, Nikita Struve, Olga Svintsova, Olivier Guichard, Olivier Todd, Pierre Golendorf, Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Samuel Beckett, Stanislaw Baranczak, Susan Sontag, Tania Plyushch, Vladimir Bukovsky, Vladimir Maximov (partial list). “Help Save *Que Me*.” *New York Review of Books*, 29:8 (May 13, 1982): 51.

EN1982E “‘Facing the War’ and ‘The Socio-Economic Roots of Re-Armament: A Rejoinder’” (reply written in English). *Telos*, 53 (Fall 1982): 192-97. (See EN1980B.)

FR1982E “L’Occident est déjà en retard d’une bataille”. *Paris-Match*, 1706 (5 février 1982): 80-81.

FR1982F “Le plus dur et le plus fragile des régimes” (“Entretien avec Paul Thibaud, enregistré le 3 février 1982”). *Esprit*, mars 1982: 140-46.

VERSION

BETA

FR1982I "La vraie menace russe" (interview d'Eugène Silianoff). *Paris-Match*, 30 octobre 1982: 3-5, 11, 13 et 16.

FR1982J "Le régime russe se succédera à lui-même" (11 novembre 1982). *Libération*, 12 novembre 1982: 16.
DH: 69-73.

FR1982K "La Russie ne veut pas la guerre: elle veut la victoire" (propos recueillis par Olivier Nouaillas). *La Vie*, 1942 (18-24 novembre 1982): 51.

FR1983A "Pologne, notre défaite" (Tripotamos, Tinos, 11-15 août 1982). Préface à la *Banque d'images pour la Pologne*. Paris: Limage 2, 1983: 7-13.

EN1983A "The Destinies of Totalitarianism" (article originally written in English; subsequent translation by Castoriadis as FR1986B9). *Salmagundi*, 60 (Spring-Summer 1983): 107-22

FR1983D "Le débat du *Débat*. Union soviétique". *Le Débat*, 24 (mars 1983): 190-92.

EN1984E "Defending the West" (translation of expanded version of FR1983C). Trans. Alfred J. MacAdam. *Partisan Review*, 51 (1984): 375-79. (Castoriadis called this title "misleading" and the translation "particularly bad"; his letter of protest to *Partisan Review* concerning this unauthorized translation was never published.)

EN1987B "Cold War Fictions" (translation of letter to Professor Otto, editor of *Sozialwissenschaftliche Literatur Wissenschaft*, concerning Hauke Brunkhorst's review of *Devant la guerre*). *Solidarity Journal*, ## (Summer 1987): 14-15.
"Communication." *Thesis Eleven*, 16 (1987): 125-26.

VERSION

FR1988E Alain Besançon, Cornélius [*sic*] Castoriadis, Robert Charvin, Jean Ellenstein, Marc Ferro, Patrice Gelard, Annie Kriegel, Michel Lesage, Lilly Marcou. "Débat. De

BETA

Khrouchtchev à Gorbatchev, le système soviétique est-il réformable?” *Pouvoirs*, 45 (1988): 115-##; Castoriadis, ibid.: 116-18.

FR1988J “La Russie, premier candidat à la révolution sociale” (entretien). *Iztok. Revue libertaire sur les pays de l’Est*, 16 (septembre 1988): 29-34.

EN1988C “The Gorbachev Interlude” (translated by Castoriadis as FR1987J / FR1990B2). *New Politics*, New Series 1 (Winter 1988): 60-79.
Thesis Eleven, 20 (1988): 5-29.
Gorbachev: The Debate. Andrew Arato and Ferenc Fehér, eds. Oxford: Polity Press, 1989: 61-83 (reedited version).

FR1990E “Le grand colloque de la liberté organisé à la Sorbonne par ‘Le Nouvel Observateur’. Cinq pièges pour l’autre Europe” (18 janvier 1990). *Le Nouvel Observateur*, 1er février 1990: 10-18; Castoriadis, ibid.: 12 et 18.

FR1991F “Entretien. La tragique supériorité de l’Occident” (propos recueillis par Michel Audétat). *L’Hebdo* (Lausanne), 10 janvier 1991: 44-45.

FR1991G “De toute façon, l’Occident est piégé!” (propos recueillis par Jean-Claude Raspiengeas). *Télérama*, 2140 (19-25 janvier 1990): 8-10.

FR1991H “Les Occidentaux sont piégés” (propos recueillis par Bernard Le Solleu).*Ouest-France*, 29 janvier 1991: 3.

FR1991J Cornelius Castoriadis, Alain Touraine et Pierre Vidal-Naquet. “Trois intellectuels face à la guerre” (propos recueillis par Vincent Jacques; colloque sur la guerre du Golfe à l’École des hautes études en sciences sociales, le 11 février 1991). *Politis*, 14 février 1991: 32-33.

VERSION

FR1991M “Qu’est-ce qui est mort samedi?” (propos recueillis par François Reynaert). *Libération*, 28 août 1991: 11.

BETA

FR2011B “Considérations sur la Grèce moderne.” Trois entretiens avec C. Castoriadis. Traduits du grec. Le mouvement grec pour la démocratie directe. Le “mouvement des places” du printemps 2011 dans la crise mondiale. Première partie. Brochure no. 18. Septembre 2011: 15-23.

http://www.magmaweb.fr/spip/IMG/pdf/MouvementGrecDemocratieDierctPremierePartie-2.pdf
Sans titre. EP 4: 513-17.

FR2012A *Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 1. *La Question du mouvement ouvrier*. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2012.

FR2012A1 Documents sur la Réponse. Ibid. : 121-126. (Voir FR1974A5, FR1971b, FR2001Aet FR2001j.)

FR2013A *Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 3. *Quelle démocratie?* Tome 1. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2013.

FR2013A1 “Notes sur la question de l’organisation” (janvier 1974). Ibid.: 459-77.

FR2013A2 “Deux lettres sur l’activité révolutionnaire et la situation en Espagne” (le 19 juillet 1975 et le 7 novembre 1976 à Jordi Torrent Bestit). Ibid.: 611-15.

FR2013B *Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome *4.Quelle démocratie?* Tome 2. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2013.

FR2013B1 “Illusion et vérité politiques” (“entre les premiers mois de 1978 et février 1979”). Ibid.: 17-75.

FR2013B2 “L’affaire Negri” (11 juin 1979). Ibid.: 107-108.

VERSION

BETA

FR2013B3 “Lettre à Moishe Postone sur Marx et les épicycles” (Paris, 2 avril 1980). Trad. de l’anglais par E.E. Ibid.: 109-110.

FR2013B4 “Spécificité et crise des sociétés occidentales” (1981). Ibid.: 111-220.

FR2013B5 “Lettre à Toni Negri” (26 janvier 1982). Ibid.: 221-22.

FR2013B6 “Un autre rapport entre instituant et institué: Lettre à Paul Thibaud” (Paris, 30 juin 1982). Ibid.: 223-24.

FR2013B7 “Lettre à Il Manifesto” (29 mai 1988, “d’après l’original dactylographié”). Ibid.: 329-30.

FR2013B8 “Spiros Stinas”. Trad. de EL1989? par Z. Castoriadis et M. Gondicas (“le texte a été parfois retouché en tenant compte du manuscrit de Castoriadis. Nous avons renvoyé en annexe à la fin de la traduction une partie du manuscrit assez étendue qui n’avait pas trouvé place dans le texte publié”). Ibid.: 339-46, avec les notes 1 et 2, ibid.: 339, la note 1, ibid.: 341, la note 1, ibid.: 344, et les notes 1 et 2, ibid.: 345.

FR2013B9 “Le rôle des villes dans la construction de l’Europe” (“Résumé de la contribution de Castoriadis à la conférence du réseau Gulliver-Amsterdam sur ‘The Role of the Cities in Building Europe’ [Leningrad, URSS, 21-26 mai 1990]. Exemplaire dactylographié de l’auteur, daté de Paris, 30 mai 1989. Original anglais, trad. E.E.”). Ibid.: 347-49.

FR2013B10 “Les problèmes d’une démocratie des conseils” (“nous disposons de deux textes dactylographiés [accompagnés de quelques notes manuscrites] concernant une conférence prononcée à Budapest le 14-6-1991 à l’invitation de l’Institut pour

VERSION

BETA

l’histoire de la Révolution hongroise de 1956 [groupe de recherche de l’Académie des sciences de Hongrie]. Le texte de la conférence rédigé par Castoriadis [3 pages dactylographiées] est incomplet. Nous n’en donnons que le premier paragraphe, le contenu de l’ensemble étant repris dans le résumé, dont la traduction fait suite, rédigé par l’auteur lui-même après la conférence [‘The Problems of a Council Democracy—Summary (14 June 1991)’, 4 p. dact.]. Original anglais, trad. E.E.)”. Ibid.: 389-93.

FR2013B11"‘Quelle démocratie?’: Discussion” (“Discussion entre C.C. et des intervenants au Colloque de Cerisy consacré à son oeuvre [juillet 1990]”). Ibid.: 435-52. (Voir: FR1999C7.)

FR2013B12 “L’avenir du projet d’autonomie” (“Conférence de Porto Alegre [Brésil], septembre 1991; nous ne donnons ici que la deuxième partie, la première ayant été consacrée à un exposé des thèmes philosophiques généraux de Castoriadis. Transcription d’après l’enregistrement en ligne ‘Conferências em Porto Alegre 1991’ [Preifeitura Municipal de Porto Alegre], avec de légères modifications de forme”). Ibid.: 453-68. (Voir: FR2009B.)

FR2013B13 “Qu’en est-il du ‘Contenu du socialisme’?” (“entretien de Stéphane Barbery avec C.C. au sujet du ‘Contenu du socialisme, II’, 31 mars 1993. Mise en forme par nous d’après un enregistrement de S.B. Notre titre”). Ibid.: 477-88.

FR2013B14 “Orthodoxie et histoire grecque” (“Le texte qui suit est une traduction de trois fragments d’une interview que Castoriadis a accordée en avril 1994 à la journaliste Téta Papadopoulou pour le quotidien Eleftherotypia. L’interview a été reprise sous le titre ‘Nous sommes responsables de notre histoire’ dans un recueil publié par les soins de T. Papadopoulou, Tou Korníliou Kastoriádi, Athènes,

VERSION

BETA

Polis, 2000, p. 13-38. Ne sont retenues ici que des parties qui concernent la Grèce moderne. Le premier [p. 21-25 de l'original] et le troisième [p. 31-38] de ces fragments ont été traduits par Michail Dimitrakopoulos. Le deuxième [p. 21-31] par le collectif Lieux Communs [et publié avec deux autres extraits d'entretiens de Castoriadis sous le titre 'Considérations sur la Grèce moderne' dans la brochure Le mouvement grec pour la démocratie directe. - 'Le mouvement des places' du printemps 2011 dans la crise mondiale, septembre 2011, disponible sur le site www.magmaweb.fr]. L'ensemble a été relu par M.G."). Ibid.: 511-21. Voir: FR2011B.

FR2013B15 "Les transformations du capitalisme" ("Conférence prononcée le 14-3-1996 à Clermont-Ferrand à l'invitation de la Société Philosophique d'Auvergne. Transcription de Z. Castoriadis d'après l'enregistrement des Archives Castoriadis. Nous avons procédé à une mise en forme"). Ibid.: 541-78.

FR2013B16 Autour de La Montée de l'insignifiance: Entretiens 1996.

> FR2013B16b "2. Avec Reginald Martel (Radio Canada)" ("Entretien avec le critique et journaliste québécois Reginald Martel dans l'émission 'Signes des temps' [21-5-1996]"). Ibid.: 585-93.
>
> FR2013B16c "3. Alain Veinstein" ("Entretien sur France Culture, le 22-5-1996"). Ibid.: 593-608.
>
> FR2013B16d "4. Avec Lison Méric (Radio suisse romande)" ("Entretien sur la Radio suisse romande, dans l'émission 'C'est votre siècle', le 4-8-1996"). Ibid.: 608-626.

VERSION

BETA

FR2014A “Entretien inédit avec Cornelius Castoriadis” (“propos recueillis par Christian Descamps”; entretien “réalisé au début des années 1990”). *La Nouvelle Quinzaine Littéraire*, 1099 (16-28 février 2014): 20-21.

FR2015A *Écrits politiques 1945-1997.* Tome 5. *La Société bureaucratique*. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2015.

FR2015A1 Barjot. “Sur Grace Lee Boggs et C.L.R. James”. Ibid., 519-25 (“Ces pages sont tirées de la ‘Note d’introduction’ par ‘Barjot’ [C.C.] au ‘Rapport d’orientation pour Correspondence par Ria Stone [Grace Lee Boggs]’ diffusé sous forme renéotée au sein du groupe S. ou B. comme ‘Texte no. 2 - 11 octobre 1962’ de la Tendance ‘Pour une nouvelle orientation’. Titre des éditeurs”). Ibid.: 519-25.

FR2015A2 “Onze thèses provisoires sur la question russe” (“original grec dactylographié, daté de février 1945, traduit par Zoé Castoriadis et Myrto Gondicas”). Ibid.: 585-88.

VERSION