DEMOCRACY AND RELATIVISM

DISCUSSION WITH THE "MAUSS" GROUP

by Cornelius Castoriadis*

translated from the French
and edited anonymously
as a public service

*"Cornelius Castoriadis" is here a pseudonym for Paul Cardan.**

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

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The Rising Tide of Insignificancy (The Big Sleep). http://www.notbored.org/RTI.pdf. Electronic publication date: December 4, 2003.

Figures of the Thinkable, Including Passion and Knowledge. http://www.notbored.org/FTPK.pdf. Electronic publication date: 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. Electronic publication date: 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 Electronic publication date: March 2011.

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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.

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.

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.

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.

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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.

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:

CE *La culture de l'égoïsme*. Avec Christopher Lasch. Traduit de l'anglais par Myrto Gondicas. Postface de Jean-Claude . Flammarion, Paris, 2012. 105pp.

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 les 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, 1982. 285pp. 2e éd. revue et corrigée, 1983. 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 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.

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EP2 *Écrits politiques 1945-1997*. Tome 2. *La Question du mouvement ouvrier*. Édition préparée par Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas et Pascal Vernay. Paris: Éditions du Sandre, 2012. 578 pp.

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 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.

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

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

SPEAKERS' BIBLIOGRAPHY

A French-language bibliography of the main speakers is provided in the French edition (pp. 137-43), followed by the mention: "For all the speakers, one may be interested to consult the *Revue du MAUSS* website: www.revuedumauss.com." We present here a shortened version consisting of the English-language versions of books authored by MAUSS speakers.

ALAIN CAILLÉ

The World of the Gift. Jacques T. Godbout in collaboration with Alain Caillé. Trans. from the French by Donald Winkler. Montreal and Ithaca: McGill-Queen's University Press, 1998.

SERGE LATOUCHE

In the Wake of the Affluent Society: An Exploration of Post-Development. Intro. and trans. Martin O'Connor and Rosemary Arnoux. London and Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Zed Books, 1993.

The Westernization of the World: The Significance, Scope, and Limits of the Drive Towards Global Uniformity. Trans. Rosemary Morris. Cambridge, MA: Polity Press, 1996.

CHANTAL MOUFFE

The Challenge of Carl Schmitt. Ed. London and New York: Verso, 1999.

Deconstruction and Pragmatism. Ed. London and New York: Routledge, 1996.

Deliberative Democracy or Agonistic Pluralism. Vienna: Institut für Höhere Studien, 2000.

The Democratic Paradox. London and New York: Verso, 2000.

Dimensions of Radical Democracy: Pluralism, Citizenship, Community. Ed. London and New York: Verso, 1992.

Gramsci and Marxist Theory. Ed. London and Boston: Routledge & Kegan Paul, 1979.

Hegemony and Socialist Strategy: Towards a Radical Democratic Politics (1985). With Ernesto Laclau. 2nd ed. London and New York: Verso, 2001.

The Legacy of Wittgenstein: Pragmatism or Deconstruction. Ed with Ludwig Nagl. Frankfurt am Main and New York: Peter Lang, 2001.

On the Political. London and New York: Routledge, 2005.

The Return of the Political. London and New York: Verso, 1993.

Introduction*

The encounter between Cornelius Castoriadis and the Mouvement Anti-Utilitariste dans les Sciences Sociales (MAUSS; Anti-Utilitarian Movement in the Social Sciences) may seem both necessary and subject to chance. It seems necessary, given the questions broached both by MAUSS researchers and by the initiator of the review *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. But still more does it seem subject to chance, like the encounter evoked by Diderot between Jacques the Fatalist and his Master, because this belated encounter, on a Saturday in December 1994, does not have the proper and conventional character of an academic colloquium, and because, before finding a place in what Pierre Bourdieu calls the "intellectual field," Castoriadis long remained in the world of far-left militants, a microcosm far removed from the academic circles in which the MAUSS group has anchored itself since its creation. As its cofounder, Alain Caillé, tells it, the MAUSS group was formed in 1981 following a colloquium on the theme of gift-giving during which he, along with Gérald Berthoud,[1] had noticed that numerous speakers were in accord that gift-giving could be reduced to a utilitarian strategy and those speakers even came to the conclusion that "gift-giving does not exist." It was as if they were unaware of the thought of Marcel Mauss and his famous essay, *The Gift*, which presents gift-giving as a "total social fact" in which the dynamic of a society is deployed and in which there must be a threefold obligation to give, to receive the gift "by returning the favor," and to outdo it through a countergift whereby a desire to "save face" is expressed. Such a system is *agonistic*; it is one in which prestige counts infinitely more than venal

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*_DR_, pp. 11-36.

[1]In his book *Critique de la raison utilitaire: Manifeste du MAUSS* (Paris: La Découverte, 1989), Caillé recalls the creation of the MAUSS group. Berthoud, mentioned in this anecdote, is among the interlocutors to whom Castoriadis responded in "Done and To Be Done" (1989; *CR*), which testifies, at least, to the existence of relations between Castoriadis and the members of the MAUSS group well before the December 1994 meeting.

[*mercantile*] interest.

Even though this specific occasion served as a pretext, and even though, we may believe, something like the MAUSS group would have come into existence anyway, whatever the circumstances, the anecdote is there to bear out the fact that the MAUSS acronym summons up memory of Marcel Mauss for the project of criticizing utilitarianism in the social sciences. *In the social sciences*, I say, because this critical project was shared by anthropologists, sociologists, and economists, though it was also to inspire such *philosophers* (who were readers of Alexandre Kojève and Georges Bataille) as Jean-Luc Boilleau and Jean-Louis Cherlonneix who, in their own works, linked agonistic gift-giving, the Nietzschean critique of Platonism, and the desire for recognition.[2]

Readers of Castoriadis will rediscover here this familiar theme that had played a role in his critique of Marxism and that was still playing that role in the early 1990s. In a text quoted below, he mentions the Kwakiutl Indians, "who amass wealth *in order* to destroy it"—this being the much-talked-about practice of *potlatch* studied by Franz Boas that served as a basis for Mauss's research. "Myopic 'Marxists,'" writes Castoriadis,

> laugh when one cites these examples, which they consider to be ethnographic curiosities. But the real ethnographical curiosities are precisely these "revolutionaries," who have set up the capitalist mentality as the eternal content of human nature considered everywhere the same.[3]

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[2] See Jean-Luc Boilleau, *Conflit et lien social: la rivalité contre la domination*, preface by Alain Caillé (Paris: La Découverte/MAUSS, 1995); Luc Marie Nodier (pseudonym for Jean-Louis Cherlonneix), *Anatomie du bien: explication et commentaire des principales idées de Platon concernant le plaisir et la souffrance, la bonne façon de vivre, et la vie en général* (Paris: La Découverte/MAUSS, 1995); see my review of the latter work, "Anatomie d'un mirage," in *La Revue du MAUSS semestrielle*, 8 (2, 1996): 360-66.

[3] In "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory" (1964-1965; now in *IIS*, p. 26) [restoring two sets of quotation marks from the original French —T/E].

Now, this text by Castoriadis dates back to the 1960s, to an era when Marxism was, for an author as recognized and accepted as Jean-Paul Sartre, an "unsurpassable horizon." As for the MAUSS group, it arrived on the scene in the early 1980s, after the "collapse of Marxism," which the authors of *French Philosophy of the Sixties* have situated in the mid-1970s.[4]

Nonetheless, MAUSSians were not unaware of Marx, as Caillé underscores in a 1997 text, "De Marx à Mauss sans passer par Maurras" (From Marx to Mauss without passing by way of Maurras). There, he recalls that all those who

> were, from the start and until today, the main pillars and leaders [of the MAUSS group] had had a Marxist past. It was not a Marxism of tiny political groups [*groupusculaire*] and was often more academic than properly militant in character—a professorial Marxism, but with a Marxist past all the same. And in a sense, their decision to join a movement that took its inspiration from Marcel Mauss, while it did consummate a definitive break with institutional Marxism, did signify, as well, a sort of faithfulness to their old Marxist ideals.[5]

Let us note that, by the time he met with the MAUSS group, Castoriadis had already quite long beforehand broken in a very radical way from every form of Marxism, however heterodox it might be. That is perhaps not the case with the MAUSS group because, according to Caillé,

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[4]Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut, *French Philosophy of the Sixties: An Essay on Antihumanism* (1985), trans. Mary H.S. Cattani (Amherst: University of Massachusetts Press, 1990).

[5]As with all the other quotations of Caillé that will follow, this one is drawn from the article "De Marx à Mauss sans passer par Maurras," which appeared in *Marx après les marxismes*, vol. 1, Michel Vakaloulis and Jean-Marie Vincent, eds (Paris: L'Harmattan, 1997). An expanded version of this text, cowritten with Sylvain Dzimira, was published under the title "Que faire, que penser de Marx aujourd'hui?" in *La Revue du MAUSS semestrielle*, 34 (2, 2009). The present citation comes from pp. 66-69.

> even if Marx was hardly ever quoted or specially commented on in its columns, what is characteristic of the experience of the MAUSS group, as opposed to most of the abovementioned authors,[6] is precisely its reluctance to sever too thoroughly the links with those central aspirations that are of a Marxian character and its refusal to throw out the baby of radical hope—or, rather, the hope of a certain sort of radicality—with the dirty waters of totalitarianism.

This serves to mark a certain distance, even if it is added that:

> to be specific about the family connection, the Marxism that inspired the MAUSS group was seriously revised and corrected by the tradition of thought that was developed, via Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis from *Socialisme ou Barbarie*[7] to *Textures*[8] and then *Libre*,[9] along with Marcel

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[6]Ibid., p. 67, where one will find Caillé's citation of the "abovementioned" authors, namely, Cornelius Castoriadis, Claude Lefort, Marcel Gauchet, Pierre Clastres, Guy Debord, Jean Baudrillard, and Karl Polanyi.

[7]Retrospectively, *Socialisme ou Barbarie* may appear to be an "antitotalitarian" review, but no one at the time would have used that word. The word *totalitarian* is itself used there, though rather rarely, to describe the Stalinist regime, but it ill matches the Marxist problematic predominating in this "review of critique and revolutionary orientation" (that is how it presented itself). The group existed from 1948 to 1967; the review stopped appearing in 1965.

[8]*Textures* ceased publication in 1976. I seem to remember that the subscribers, of whom I was one, were "compensated" for this interruption by shipment of Leszek Kolakowski's *L'Esprit révolutionnaire*, translated (from the German) by Jacques Dewitte and published by Éditions Complexe in 1978.

[9]*Libre* appeared between 1976 and 1980 in the form of volumes published twice a year in the "Petite Bibliothèque Payot" collection. Its interruption was the result of a conflict between Lefort and Castoriadis apropos of the latter's work, *Devant la guerre* (Paris: Fayard, 1981). See Jean-Louis Prat, *Introduction à Castoriadis* (Paris: La Découverte, 2007).

> Gauchet and Pierre Clastres, by the searing intensity of *L'Internationale Situationniste* and of Jean Baudrillard, as well as by the socialist humanism and historical heterodoxy of Karl Polanyi.

Back in the era of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Lefort and Castoriadis undoubtedly represented a "seriously revised and corrected Marxism." But both of them, each following along his own path, had broken with the rationalistic and deterministic postulates of historical materialism while working out ways of thinking that were no longer situated within a Marxist horizon.

Nevertheless, MAUSS's Marxist family connection might have gone unnoticed, for the criticisms the group formulated against "utilitarianism," against the "axiomatics of interest," and against the "explanation of social practices in terms of rational (economic) interests that ruled supreme everywhere in the social sciences of the 1970s/1980s" could not help but

> cast deep doubt on all that remained of utilitarianism within Marxism and, more specifically, on the explanation of history solely in terms of the reality of material and economic interests. In the view of Marxists and orthodox materialists, nothing can seem more radically anti-Marxist than such a refutation of the "axiomatics of interest," and this as much so from the standpoint of its capacity to explain social action in positive terms as from that of its claim to judge it in normative ones.[10]

Caillé presents this antagonism—between the Marxist vulgate and the heretics who called it back into question—as an "exacerbation of the tension running through Marxism between two ways of reading History in general and economic

[10] Alain Caillé, *La Revue du MAUSS semestrielle*, 34.

history in particular."[11] Even while it intends to remain faithful to the original inspiration of Marxism, this critique of "orthodox" Marxism is in many respects reminiscent of the critique Castoriadis was developing back in 1964 in "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory,"[12] a text in which he showed that, despite some lovely turns of phrase, such as "The emancipation of the workers will be the work of the workers themselves," Marxism adopted the bourgeois conception of history and society. Its way of representing history was applicable only to "what has occurred over a few centuries on a narrow strip of land bordering the North Atlantic." Indeed, a theory that claims to explain the history of human societies by the development of the forces of production "no longer speaks of history in general, it speaks only of the history of capitalism."[13]

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[11] "The first, which constitutes the framework for the canonized form of historical materialism, goes by way of advancing a crude and linear evolutionism wherein one mode of production follows the next in rigorous order to end up necessarily with capitalism posited as the moment when the reality of selfish material interests is revealed and therefore as the truth of history. In this outlook, while socialism appears as a 'higher mode of production,' that is so solely on account of the higher instrumental capacity, the rationality, it allegedly gains in granting priority to the public interest over private interests, thanks to the state takeover of the economy. The second way of reading, the one that MAUSS of course privileged even against the creeping economistic Marxism of the *Annales* School, while leaning in particular on the work of Karl Polanyi, is the one that, on the contrary, aims at the unprecedented historical singularity of the capitalist economy in comparison to universal history and the relatively recent and fleeting dimension not only of capital but also of 'commercial categories.' In this outlook, Marx is found to be, at bottom, rather close to Max Weber" (*La Revue du MAUSS semestrielle*, 34: 69).

[12] "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory," which first appeared in the last five issues of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, forms the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975).

[13] "To say, in fact, that men have always sought the greatest possible development of the productive forces, and that the only obstacle they have encountered in this endeavor was the state of technique—or to claim that societies have always been 'objectively' dominated by this tendency, and organized on this basis—is to extrapolate unwarrantedly to the whole of

These few quotations, it seems to us, attest, if not to a perfect identity of views, at least to a very close proximity in the perception of the problems, between Castoriadis and the MAUSSian researchers, whether they be anthropologists, economists, or sociologists. This proximity does not preclude, however, the existence of some serious disagreements, which are expressed in the text to be read here, the transcription of a discussion between Castoriadis and the members of MAUSS. Indeed, such disagreements also run through the MAUSS group itself, Jean-Luc Boilleau recalling, during another discussion in which he represented MAUSS, that it was in no way a "monolithic group." He took delight at the time in assigning two popes to the MAUSS church, Pope Alain Caillé and the Antipope Serge Latouche, without ruling out the possible appearance of a heresiarch. . . . The coming meeting, which was to take place three years later, in December 1994, would lead them to take opposite positions, as a matter of fact, on the themes of universalism and relativism, on direct democracy and the system of political representation, and on the very idea of an "autonomous society" as compared with the "society against the State" (such as it was defined in Clastres's work). Let us note that, on these themes, Pope Caillé finds himself close to Lefort and Clastres, whereas the Antipope Latouche is more appreciative of Castoriadis's positions. Chantal Mouffe, it seems to me, defends the orthodoxy of "political science" against the totalitarian drift she sees breaking through in direct

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history the motivations, the values, the movement and organization of present society—more precisely, the capitalist half of present society. The idea that the meaning of life consists in the accumulation and conservation of wealth would be madness for the Kwakiutl Indians, who amass wealth *in order* to destroy it. The idea of seeking power and the authority to command would be sheer madness for the Zuni Indians, for whom making someone the leader of the tribe means beating him until he accepts. Myopic Marxists laugh when one cites these examples, which they consider to be ethnological curiosities. But the real ethnological curiosities are precisely these 'revolutionaries,' who have set up the capitalist mentality as the eternal content of human nature considered everywhere the same" (*IIS*, pp. 25-26; for the two quotations in the body of the text, see pp. 28 and 25, respectively).

democracy. As for Jacques Dewitte, who saw a lot of Castoriadis back when they both were collaborating at the review *Textures*, his personal development, under the influence of Leszek Kolakowski and Emmanuel Levinas, has taken him so far away from Castoriadis's theses that he no longer even understands the idea of autonomy, as a text he devoted to Levinas's thought confirms. There, he describes autonomy as a "form of liberty freed from all responsibility, . . . a permanent temptation of the West in its conception of liberty as pure autonomy, detached from every tie, unbound by all responsibility." Autonomy is embodied by the mythic figure of Gyges, a character whom he describes "as an object of mistrust and reproach; he is the very embodiment of pure liberty detached from every tie, of an attitude of fleeing from one's responsibilities."[14] Like Luc Ferry and Alain Renaut in the book they dedicated to Castoriadis, *68-86, Itinéraires de l'individu*,[15] Dewitte reduces autonomy to a "process of emancipating the individual from traditions," and he does not take into consideration the collective autonomy of a community that institutes its *nomos*, its law, instead of receiving it from a transcendent authority.

But let us linger, instead, over a discussion that took place before the one that will concern us here, one in which Castoriadis participated, though the MAUSS popes were absent therefrom. Let us go back to May 1991, when the Association of Friends of the Sauramps Bookstore, the major university bookstore in Montpellier, France, organized in that city a colloquium around three great themes: "Democracy as Violence?", "The End of History?", and "Another Europe to the East?" The choice of these three themes was, of course, tied up with the questions that were being raised since the fall of the Berlin Wall about the future prospects of a

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[14] *Cahiers d'Études Lévinassiennes*, 2 (2003): 110, 112. ["Indétermination et contraction, ou: De l'anneau de Gygès à l'Alliance" was the title of Dewitte's text. —T/E]

[15] Paris: Gallimard, 1987. [On the strange circumstances surrounding Ferry/Renaut's dedication of this volume to Castoriadis, see *WIF*, pp. 415-16, n. 1. —T/E]

regime—"the toughest and most fragile of regimes," as Castoriadis had said in 1982[16]—the one Mikhail Gorbachev was still trying to save at the time by carrying out reforms whose dynamic he was no longer able to control. Such questioning had already crystallized around the publication of a text by Francis Fukuyama[17] where he sketched out his much-talked-about thesis:

> The transformations currently underway in the Eastern countries, this apparent evaporation of Communist regimes, are said to signify not simply the end of Communism but basically the end of history itself; these transformations are said to involve a growing awareness on the part of humanity that there is nothing beyond present-day society. Present-day society is the industrial, capitalist, commercial society that constitutes our modernity.

I am quoting here the summary Jean-Claude Michéa gave during the Montpellier colloquium as an introduction to the discussion on "the end of history." Along with Edgar Morin and Boilleau, Castoriadis participated in that discussion.[18]

After having recalled that, for Fukuyama, "to note that we have entered the end of history . . . is to understand, whether one rejoices about this or is saddened by it, that, with the last illusions having dissipated, and fortified by this new

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[16] See "The Toughest and Most Fragile of Regimes," David Berger's translation of an interview with Paul Thibaud (first published in *Esprit* in March 1982), in *Telos*, 51 (Spring 1982): 186-90. —T/E

[17] In the Summer of 1989, Fukuyama published an article entitled "The End of History?" in the American review *The National Interest*. This article was translated in issue 47 of the French review *Commentaire* in the Autumn of 1989. It was in 1992 that he published the work that developed his controversial theses: *The End of History and the Last Man* (New York: Free Press).

[18] The speeches were printed in a collective work, *De la fin de l'histoire* (Paris: Éditions du Félin, 1992). [Castoriadis's talk has now been translated as "The 'End of History'?" in *PSRTI*. —T/E]

knowledge, there no longer is anything else to do but to manage things as they are," Michéa broached the discussion of this thesis and formulated three questions:

"1. First problem: modern society, unlike so-called traditional societies which (however diverse their forms might be) aim at maintaining an equilibrium, has as its ideal and principle to posit its own development as carried to infinity. . . . Now, can this disenchantment of the world—this increasing submission of life to economic laws—be pursued to infinity without encountering some limits in natural resources, on the one hand, and in the patience of individuals, on the other? . . .

"2. If that is not possible, if therefore, contrary to what Fukuyama thought, the critique and the surpassing of this world remain practical necessities, does that mean—and this is the second problem—that it would suffice to dust off the Marxist critique (which remains the conscious or implicit basis for Communist and Socialist undertakings), so that history might rediscover its true rhythm? In other words, should it be thought that Communism was not an interlude in the century but a mere false start: it was not the essence of the project that was aberrant but just the historically determined forms of its implementation. Now, is not suggesting that to be the case a way of failing to show what is *fundamentally common*—since Saint-Simon—among the imaginaries of communism, socialism, and capitalism, viz.: the near-religious belief in the necessity, and in the possibility, of an infinite development of large industry?

"3. Finally—and here we have the last problem—it is obvious that these questions presuppose a philosophy of history. Is the latter, as Hegel and Marx would have had it, the site for a dialectical, logical, and necessary development? Were the expansion of capitalism and the Westernization of the world sleeping—as potentials—within the Neolithic revolution or within the practices of the Indians of the Amazon forest? Or does one, along with Jean-Jacques Rousseau for example, have to, on the contrary, rehabilitate the role of the contingent, of the accidental, all of what makes history an unforeseeable adventure that brings into play people's freedom, that is to say, their ability to invent

something new?"[19]

Michéa is someone who is quite close to the MAUSS group. And though he, too, has passed by way of Marxism, it may be noted that he is not content just to "dust off the Marxist critique" or to rehabilitate a "heterodox" version of Marxism, because he refuses to blind himself about "what is *fundamentally common*—since Saint-Simon—among the imaginaries of communism, socialism, and capitalism, viz.: the near-religious belief in the necessity, and in the possibility, of an infinite development of large industry."

As for Castoriadis's Montpellier talk, I would like to quote his parting sentences, for they lead us to the questions that will be discussed during the meeting with the MAUSS group and they bear both on democracy and on the historical privilege of the societies in which democracy appeared:

> All cultures have created, outside of the ensemblistic-identitarian, some magnificent works, but as far as human freedom is concerned, there have been only two cultures, like two great flowers sprouting on this bloody field of battles, in which something decisive has been created: ancient Greece and Western Europe. This second flower is perhaps in the process of wilting; perhaps it depends upon us that it might not wilt for good—but ultimately, there is no guarantee that, should it wilt, a third flower would shoot up later on, with more beautiful colors.[20]

In *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, Castoriadis was already writing that "The Athenians did not find democracy among the other wild flowers growing on the Pnyx."[21] Democracy is not given by nature or by the dialectical development of social relations; it is a historical

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[19] *De la fin de l'histoire*, pp. 59-61.

[20] "The 'End of History'?" in *PSRTI*, p. 126.

[21] In "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory"; now in *IIS*, p. 133. —T/E

creation, and, as such, subject to chance. Nothing is more foreign to Marxist thinking.

In Marx's thought, from "The Jewish Question" to *Capital* and to "The Critique of the Gotha Program," the founding ideas of modern democracy are constantly reduced to the role of a legalistic phraseology. They constitute merely the formal conditions that render possible the generalization of commercial exchange. A commodity can be sold and bought only if its current holder, as well as the purchaser to whom it will be transmitted, are free legal subjects who have at their disposal one and the same *jus utendi, fruendi et abutendi* about the thing they transmit. So long as the commercial sector remains hemmed in within a feudal or "Asiatic" society, the liberty and the formal equality of economic agents are not yet erected into "natural," eternal, and universal principles of social organization. But within modern capitalist society, where all products of human labor, and labor itself, become commodities, the legal conditions for generalized exchange define the "natural, imprescriptible, and inalienable rights" of man. The ideology of democracy is thus only the conscious, apparently rational expression of the historical necessity that is fulfilled in the social relations of production, but it conceals the historical and contingent character of capitalist society; it gives that society the appearance of a "natural" organization, one based on "human nature" and on "natural" economic laws. Following the famous formula from *The Poverty of Philosophy*, "there has been history, but there is no longer any."[22]

Let us not underestimate the powerful critique contained in an argument that remains of use in the face of the ideological discourses of the liberal oligarchies, discourses that continue to cover up relations based on exploitation and domination beneath the cloak of "democratic values" and the "rule of law." This is, indeed, the same approach that, in the late 1940s, had led the young Castoriadis to reject the *legal fiction* that, under the guise of Marxism, presented the USSR

[22]This passage appears in the "Seventh and Last Observation" from Part 1 of Chapter 2. —T/E

as a socialist State as soon as it instaurated the "collective" ownership of the means of production. For the same reasons that had led Marx to repudiate the fictive equality bourgeois law establishes between employer and wage earner, Castoriadis repudiated the fictive appropriation of social wealth by the "working class," whose representation had been monopolized by a single party. Beneath different veils, the same exploitation persisted in the East as in the West. It even was reinforced by the fact that it deprived laboring people of those means of struggle they had been able to create in their previous struggles (unions, the right to strike, workers' councils). And yet, it also has to be pointed out that exploitation itself is not thinkable within the framework of an alleged *economic* science.[23]

And in any case, this reduction of democratic principles to the ideology of the bourgeois class misreads the reality of basic freedoms that have nothing to do with free trade—like the freedom to communicate one's opinions, a liberty that can be enjoyed only if all others enjoy it, too. If the freedom of the selfish, utilitarian individual "*stops* where the other's freedom begins," the freedom of the citizen "*begins* where the other's freedom begins."[24]

On all that, Castoriadis and the MAUSS group seem

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[23] "Exploitation is a *political* idea: it presupposes that another society is possible and it states that present-day society is unjust. If one accepts society such as it is, all expenses (the *categories* of expenses) that take place in it are necessarily determined by its structure and are necessary for its continuation: food for the workers as much as the police, prisons, etc. If society has to exist and operate as capitalist society, law and order are inputs that are just as (if not more) necessary to the manufacture of the total product as is labor power. There is no Egyptian economy without priests and without Pharaoh. If an Egyptian peasant or slave had had the idea that the Pharaoh and the priests were exploiting him, that would have meant that he would have conceived the possibility of another institution of society and deemed that one preferable" (*Devant la guerre*, pp. 211-12). Castoriadis had already upheld this thesis in an unpublished article that was to have been part of "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory" and that can now be read in a collection of posthumous writings established by Nicolas Poirier (*HC*, p. 175).

[24] *IIS*, p. 92.

to be in agreement. But in the discussion, Caillé turns back around against Castoriadis the argument the latter had put forward against Marxism: if Marx was able to reduce universal history to a pattern he drew from the recent history of Western capitalism, does Castoriadis escape from Hellenocentrism, or from Eurocentrism, when he presents democracy as a Greco-Western creation? Does he not (in spite of the invaluable observations of Clastres and, more unexpectedly, those of Jean Baechler) misread the democratic character of archaic societies, societies that had known how to reject the emergence of a separate established power as well as society's division into antagonistic social classes?

This objection presupposes that democracy would be defined only in terms of procedures, such as election or the drawing of lots, to which one has recourse, quite naturally, in societies where the site of power remains indeterminate, where there remains an empty site, like the Greek *agora*, and where each can take turns speaking. As Jean-Pierre Vernant has shown, it is under those conditions that democracy was constituted in Greece, when what is "in the middle" of the city and of social life is no longer the palace of a king, as at Knossos, but the public square. Are those conditions "necessary and sufficient"? Does it suffice that they are given for democracy to blossom naturally, like a flower in springtime? Let us recall that, among the Greeks, the most democratic institution, the drawing of lots, was at first viewed as a means of leaving the decision in the hands of the gods when men dared not decide for themselves. But if we think, rightly, that the Greeks created democracy, that is because they took upon themselves the responsibility to give themselves laws that were dictated neither by the gods nor by fate nor even by nature.

That, of course, is something that cannot be found in primitive societies, which remain dominated by traditions from times immemorial. Democracy is therefore irreducible to the indeterminacy of the site where legitimate power—and the legitimacy of power—is established; for, such indeterminacy defines merely an "open society," in Karl Popper's sense, that is to say, a liberal society, one we certainly prefer to fascism and Stalinism, but that is

something entirely other than democracy. In the discussion with the MAUSS group, Castoriadis refuses to define democracy in terms of indeterminacy, a word he leaves to Lefort, and recalls that, for his part, he speaks of *creation*:

> Starting from the moment when we speak of *radical imagination*, among individuals and—this is what interests us here—of *radical instituting imaginary* in history, we are obliged to admit that all societies proceed, under the same heading, from a movement whereby institutions and significations are created. . . . Now, starting from the moment when one no longer limits oneself to considering history . . . but grants oneself the right to have political positions—and that's already to exit not only from philosophical considerations but also from a mere acknowledgment of a *prima facie* equivalence among all societies—well, such a right does not go without saying.

That is why, it must be said again, democracy is really a historical creation of the Greco-Western world—which does not mean that it belongs to that world, like a good that would have to remain its prerogative. On the contrary, as soon as we adopt democratic values—those of a society in which, as Rousseau said, "obedience to the law we have laid down for ourselves is liberty"[25]—we posit them as universal values, and we want them to govern every society, but we cannot believe them to be "natural," in the sense in which the law of gravity is natural. And since they are not natural, it would be false to say that they *are* universal, if one meant thereby that they are so by nature, since forever and for always. They *become* universal; they are created by the instituting imaginary. Men—*anthrōpoi*, *hommes*, *Menschen*, human beings of both sexes, and not *andres*, *viri*, *Männer*, men of the masculine sex—are not free and equal in rights; we want these men and women to be so, and we hold to be inhuman those societies

[25] *The Social Contract*, Book 1, Chapter 8. —T/E

that treat men as unequal or women as unequal—a judgment that applies to *our* societies. And creating those values, Greco-Western man legislates for all men, but this is not a matter of the imperial ethnocentrism through which one claimed to impose "civilization" on "barbarous" peoples.

That is so, first of all, because the Greeks, in the classical age, never believed that they were more civilized than the Persians and the Egyptians, whom they certainly called "Barbarians," but that word, which appears in Herodotus, was far from having a pejorative meaning at the time, and Plutarch, long afterward, would write an essay on "The Malice of Herodotus," whom he accused of partiality in favor of the Barbarians. It is only in the Roman era that the word *Barbarian*, in being applied to peoples who lived beyond the *limes* of the Roman Empire, took on the meaning that, later on, starting in the sixteenth century, would furnish a pretext for the Western world's colonial expansion. The progressive [*progressiste*] intelligentsia thought it was denouncing such colonial expansion when, following Claude Lévi-Strauss, it repeated that "the barbarian is, first and foremost, the man who believes in barbarism." Yet Lévi-Strauss himself, in a note added to a new edition of *Race and History* for his collection of texts in *Anthropolgie structurale deux*, recognized the logical inconsistency of this shock statement in which "the man who believes in barbarism" is described as a "barbarian" by someone who claims that one should not believe in barbarism. Montaigne was able to avoid such an absurdity in a text where he denounced European ethnocentrism without falling into the trap of cultural relativism: "I conceive," he wrote in his essay "Of Cannibals,"

> that there is more barbarity in eating a man alive, than when he is dead; in tearing a body limb from limb by racks and torments, that is yet in perfect sense; in roasting it by degrees; in causing it to be bitten and worried by dogs and swine . . . , than to roast and eat him after he is dead.

Montaigne does not call into question the existence of

barbarism; he is content to observe that the conduct of Europeans is still more barbarous than that of cannibals, who are certainly barbarians "in respect to the rules of reason: but not in respect to ourselves, who in all sorts of barbarity exceed them"—which implies a reference to universal values, in the name of which a European can condemn the barbarism of his compatriots and render justice to colonized peoples, because the word *barbarian* is no longer used to describe a people as such, but instead an aggressive and cruel manner of acting.

These universal values are not to be confused with the values of our culture. They are universal only because they do not belong to us *and because every man, in every other culture, has a right to make them his own*. They are "European" or "Greco-Western" only inasmuch as Europe no longer designates, as Castoriadis explains in a 1983 text,

> a geographic or ethnic entity. One of the strongest moments of European creation took place in New England, at the end of the eighteenth century, and its reverberations are still being felt, even though Europe itself has not been terribly lively now for almost two centuries. Japan, the dissidents from the Peking Wall, millions of people scattered all over the globe belong to that moment of European creation, but not white South Africa.[26]

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[26] "Defending the West," trans. Alfred J. MacAdam, *Partisan Review*, 51 (1984): 375-79; see: p. 376 (translation altered). [Castoriadis called this title "misleading"—the French title, written in the form of three "What?" questions, was "Quelle Europe? Quelles menaces? Quelle défense?" (now in *DH*)—and the translation "particularly bad"; his letter of protest to *Partisan Review* concerning this unauthorized translation was never published. —T/E] At the time this text was written, the "dissidents of the Peking Wall" were those whom the Sinologist Victor Sidane was letting speak out in a survey study entitled *Le Printemps de Péking novembre 1978-mars 1980* (Paris: Gallimard-Julliard, 1980). The best known among them, Wei Jingsheng, was imprisoned for a long time before being deported in 1997; against Mao's heirs, including Deng Xiaoping, he was calling at the time for the "fifth modernization," that is to say, democracy.

Europe, in this sense, is the society that wills itself to be autonomous and cannot will to impose its autonomy on men or on peoples who would be satisfied with being heteronomous. Peoples do not like armed missionaries,[27] and it is out of the question "to settle by force of arms differences with peoples who continue to say, 'Adulterers must be stoned to death,' 'We must cut off the hands of thieves, etc.'"[28] Autonomy, Castoriadis declares in another text, is spread "like a virus or a poison"; it exerts a "liberatory contamination" that will be able to "eat away at [*corroder*]" the "essentially religious significations" that dominate, among others, Islamic cultures.[29] The "superiority" of secular and democratic societies can be claimed only as that of societies in which we can ask ourselves whether our laws are just or whether we are to change them, whereas such an interrogation has no meaning in a society where it is imagined that the laws have been dictated by a god.

Moreover, such questioning may disappear in a postmodern world where divine laws are replaced by "natural" laws, those of economics, of bioethics, or even those of a liberal creed that grants to "human rights" the transcultural status of an eternal truth, thereby occulting the extraordinary historical creation their invention has been. To combat such a relapse into heteronomous thought, Castoriadis remains more topical than ever.

To conclude, I would like to express my gratitude to Rafael Miranda, Jordi Torrent, and Juan Manuel Vera, who originated this effort when they came up with the idea of

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[27] See *ASA(RPT)*, p. 14, n. 7 for the source of this Robespierrean phrase, often quoted by Castoriadis himself. —T/E

[28] *De l'écologie à l'autonomie*, transcription of a lecture delivered by Castoriadis (jointly with Daniel Cohn-Bendit) at Louvain-La Neuve, Belgium on February 27, 1980 (Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981), p. 106. [This Castoriadis quotation, drawn from the post-lecture discussion, did not appear in "From Ecology to Autonomy"; now in *CR*. —T/E]

[29] "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary" (1991; now in *WIF*, p. 103).

publishing a Spanish-language edition.[30] I revised for that edition the text of the discussion, which had initially been published in two parts in *La Revue du MAUSS* in 1999. And, last but not least, I would like to express my gratitude to Juvénal Quillet, who passed on to me his tape recording, thanks to which I was able to supplement this text and correct a few errors.

[30] *Democracia y relativismo* (Madrid: Trotta, 2007).

Foreword

We are not habituated to view a book as a "work-in-the-making," continually and forever shot through with strife.[1] Whether privately printed/distributed (a form of gift giving), a commercial item on the capitalist market, or an instance of that strange new ethereal medium, the internet, that allows for infinite variation and modification of the "same," a book is taken to be a once-and-for-all "finished product," with at most some further possible "editions." To be sure, the author may be seen to have struggled, a process oft depicted (rather tritely and boringly) in film, words on a page violently crossed out or paper torn in frustration from a typewriter, yet that all leads, teleologically, toward a single, final end. And when a work is translated, the translator may describe the struggle of rendering not only the words but the ideas and significations behind those words into another language,[2] for another linguistic community—a process that may be "disturbing" both for the initial linguistic community that sees some of its words transformed beyond recognition and for the one that is called upon to welcome foreign meanings and expressions into its evolving corpus.[3] But that process, too, seems foreordained to come to a halt at the moment of publication.

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[1]It was Castoriadis himself, in his *IIS* Preface, who heightened precisely this understanding for "a work of reflection" as a "work-in the-making" when he explained that "the walls of the building are displayed one after another as they are erected, surrounded by the remains of scaffolding, piles of sand and rocks," etc. "There is no finished edifice here, nor an edifice to be finished," he warned in order to help the reader avoid "the disastrous illusion, toward which he, like all of us, is already naturally inclined, that the edifice is constructed for him and that he has only, if he so desires, to move in and live there." Sounding a (Charles) Ivesian theme, Castoriadis declared, "Thinking is not building cathedrals or composing symphonies. If the symphony exists, it is the reader who must create it in his own ears."

[2]See, e.g., David Ames Curtis's Translator's Foreword to Claude Lefort's *Writing: The Political Test* (Durham: Duke University Press, 2000).

[3]On this view of the dually "disturbing" (*dérangeant*) process of translation, see Curtis's 2004 censored lecture, "Effectivité et réflexivité dans l'expérience d'un traducteur de Cornelius Castoriadis."

A first indication of such ongoing strife in the present "book" is that it is associated with the name of an author and speaker who never published a traditional single-themed tome in his entire lifetime (1922-1997). Citing David Ames Curtis's Translator's Afterword to *OPS*, the Anonymous Translator/ Editor (T/E) noted in the foreword to *RTI(TBS)* that

> none of Castoriadis's many "books" were actual written volumes composed at one time for book publication. Castoriadis was primarily an essayist and editorialist for various reviews as well as a public speaker for a variety of audiences who subsequently collected his writings and speeches for book publication, never an author of weighty tomes.

The present work, posthumously published under his name in French in 2010 after first appearing in the two 1999 *Revue du MAUSS* issues, is a third (and fourth)-party transcription of a 1994 discussion with the MAUSS group.[4] Had Castoriadis lived, he would not have published it as a separate, stand-alone tome, though he might have included it in one of the anthology volumes from his *Carrefours du labyrinthe* series. And then Castoriadis's longtime English-language translator, Curtis—whom Castoriadis had specifically invited to this meeting they both attended—would most likely have translated this give-and-take talk for another of the collected volumes in English, perhaps first publishing a version for an academic or militant review. Presented here in (electronic) *book* form, it is not necessarily to be read as such.

A second indication of continuing conflict appears in the dual name of the author—"Cornelius Castoriadis" and "Paul Cardan"—noted on the title page of the present

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[4]The French Editors have *débat*, which has been translated here as "discussion." In English, "debate" is usually a more formal type of discussion, allowing equal time for each debater around a specific theme, pro and con. Castoriadis intervened at the MAUSS-group meeting by answering a set of prepared questions, which occasioned further questions directed at him by audience members, with no set time limits.

translation. As with previous "electro-Samizdat" volumes prepared by T/E,[5] this one, too, both humorously blurs the lines of authorship for an unauthorized translation and seriously points, via revival of the militant name "Paul Cardan" (the last in the series of Castoriadis's *Socialisme ou Barbarie*-era pseudonyms), to activist, engaged contestation of the editorial shortcomings, as well as of the politically and ethically questionable behavior, of the Castoriadis heirs and the "Association Cornelius Castoriadis" (ACC) they control through secretive and undemocratic means.

Secrecy and conflict were also present in the very effort to transcribe and publish the Castoriadis/MAUSS-group discussion. Initially appearing under the titles "La relativité du relativisme" and "La démocratie" in two consecutive *Revue du MAUSS* issues, the original transcription—by Nicos Iliopoulos in "contact with the heirs"—was rife with problems. Undertaken in secret without the knowledge even of the ACC's rank-and-file members, no specific public call was put out to obtain recordings that would yield this discussion in its entirety. Nor were all members of the MAUSS group in attendance back in 1994 given an opportunity to examine the resulting transcription before publication. Thus, the first written attempt to recover the Castoriadis/MAUSS-group oral discussion ended up being both partial and inaccurate.

One participant in particular, Jacques Dewitte, contacted Curtis at Agora International in 2000 to express his consternation that several of his contributions had been inaccurately attributed to a more stellar MAUSS member, Serge Latouche. Curtis, having already found the secretive ACC to be a dysfunctional and exclusionary organization,

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[5] *The Rising Tide of Insignificancy (The Big Sleep)* (2003), *Figures of the Thinkable, Including Passion and Knowledge* (2005), *A Society Adrift: More Interviews and Discussions on The Rising Tide of Insignificancy, Including Revolutionary Perspectives Today* (2010), and *Postscript on Insignificancy, including More Interviews and Discussions on the Rising Tide of Insignificancy, followed by Five Dialogues, Four Portraits and Two Book Reviews* (2011).

nonetheless tried to pass along these criticisms to the ACC Council via his sole contact there: Dominique Walter, half sister to Castoriadis's daughter Sparta. Walter (who later resigned from the Council and the ACC altogether in disgust) reported that the top leadership of the ACC—engaged in "war of all against all"—could not be counted on to communicate with Dewitte, let alone make any effort to note corrections.

To rectify this intolerable situation, an initiative therefore had to come from outside the ACC. A small number of people on both sides of the Franco-Spanish border who had long followed the work of both Castoriadis and the MAUSS group (see pp. xxvii-xxviii above) set about to piece together a complete recording of the 1994 discussion, restoring missing segments to the transcription while correcting speaker attributions. Interestingly, some of these same people had also undertaken to write a letter to the ACC in support of Curtis, urging the ACC to resume the negotiations with him (which the ACC had unilaterally interrupted) regarding a valid, signed translation contract. Even though this *ad hoc* group included rank-and-file ACC members, these people never received an acknowledgment from the ACC hierarchy, let alone any substantive reply to their mild and politely worded letter.

As one of those persons, Jean-Louis Prat, notes above, a Spanish translation, *Democracia y relativismo*, that appeared in 2007 incorporated formerly missing and mislabeled material. A French edition reflecting this valuable new work was published in 2010, with Enrique Escobar, Myrto Gondicas, and Pascal Vernay taking over as the French Editors, the Castoriadis heirs allowing Prat to publish his Introduction. It should be noted that Escobar and Vernay, the originally appointed members of the ACC's Publication Committee, had resigned their posts at some unknown date, though they never explained to the rank-and-file membership the reasons for or circumstances of their departure. They continue on, in an opaque editorial role that is characteristic

of the secretive activities of the ACC as a whole.[6]

Thus, in this specific instance, it was not the effort of the Anonymous Translator but, instead, another independent initiative that altered the behavior of the Castoriadis heirs and of the ACC they control. In *RTI(TBS)*—"our first risky experiment in Castoriadis/Cardan internet publication for the third millennium," which was "translated from the French and edited anonymously as a public service"—T/E had announced possible additional translations; that announcement induced the heirs to publish *Une société à la dérive* (translated by T/E as *ASA(RPT)*), despite the fact that Castoriadis's widow, Zoé, the ACC Secretary, had previously announced that no further posthumous collections of her late husband's writings would be made available to the public subsequent to *Figures du pensable* (translated by T/E as *FT(P&K)*). Similarly, a three-continent collective (from North and South America as well as Europe) did an end-run around obstructions from certain former Socialisme ou Barbarie members by originating the "Soubscan" Project, whereby the 40 issues of the revolutionary journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (*S. ou B.*, 1949-1965) are being scanned and placed online, each issue appearing exactly sixty years to the month after its initial publication. Moreover, it was a mere month after the October 2010 Translator's Foreword to *ASA(RPT)* criticized the Castoriadis heirs for their lengthy failure to reprint his *S. ou B.* writings (which had been collected during the 1970s in the eight-volume Éditions 10/18 series but have long been out of print) that the first rumors of a forthcoming new French edition were heard; the actual first two volumes, *EP1* and *EP2*, finally appeared two years later, in August 2012. All

[6]It is impossible even to know whether Escobar and Vernay are still ACC members, since the membership roles of this ostensibly public organization are not available to rank-and-file members—though incumbent Council members can avail themselves of that list each time they wish to obtain proxy votes for their inevitable and repeated reelections. ACC practices constitute an extreme caricature of the antidemocratic nature of the so-called representative democracy Castoriadis himself so vigorously and astutely criticizes in the present discussion—which is why they are mentioned here.

these efforts are among the autonomous initiatives that have occurred subsequent to the 2003 "pirate" edition, *RTI(TBS)*.

Another indication of conflict both surrounding and contained within this posthumously transcribed Castoriadis talk also comes from Dewitte's letter to Curtis. Dewitte expressed regret that a particularly embarrassing lapse on the part of meeting organizer Alain Caillé remained in the printed version. Dewitte signaled, as well, his desire to add to his own remarks, once they would be restored under his name, for he thought that the conversational tone of the discussion, with lapses like Caillé's and incomplete thoughts on the part of other speakers, was detrimental to serious debate on the underlying issues—these issues having not been addressed in a "philosophical" enough manner. Nevertheless, we have retained the halting conversational tone of the transcription, as it finally has come down to us, for the simple reason that allowing still-living MAUSS-group speakers to amend their remarks made to a man who died before seeing even the flawed original transcription would do an obvious injustice to their now-deceased guest.

The group's two main stars nevertheless ventured to comment on the discussion after the fact—without taking Castoriadis's express views into account. In the Presentation for *La Revue du MAUSS*'s thirteenth issue, Latouche wrote of "some of the difficulties inherent in an oversimplified opposition between universalism and relativism (from which [Castoriadis] himself does not always escape)"—a strange criticism, since only MAUSS-group speakers, not Castoriadis,[7] mention *universalism* (Caillé and Latouche) or *universalization* (Chantal Mouffe). For his part, Castoriadis had clearly stated:

> What I mean is that, starting from a moment when these [Western] values are achieved somewhere—be it only in a very inadequate and very deformed way, as they have been and as they still are in the West—they

[7]Except, that is, for a few brief mentions of "universal history," intended by Castoriadis in a purely neutral and general way.

> exert a sort of appeal on others, without there being, for all that, some kind of inevitability or universal calling on people's part for democracy.

Castoriadis never advocated, as such, "universalism"—which needs, rather, to be written *in the plural*, for it indeed includes a variety of forms he found repugnant, as in the universalisms of monotheistic religions. Nor would there be, in his mind, any sort of automaticness to any values, Christian, Western, or otherwise, just because they have been proclaimed *universal*. In response to Mouffe's question about "the condition for the universalization of these values," he replies:

> The condition is that the others appropriate those values for themselves—and here, there's an addendum, which, in my mind, is quite essential: Appropriating those values for themselves does not mean Europeanizing themselves. That is a problem that I am not up to resolving: if it is resolved, it will be so by history.

When he finally addressed Latouche's critique of Western ("humanist") universality—which, Castoriadis had just insisted, does not entail the "Europeanizing" of non-Western peoples—it was *hardly from an unnuanced position*:

> Now, when you say that, in the West, universality has won out over an enemy that is nature and that the instrumentalization of nature has been transformed into an instrumentalization of men, I would say: Yes and no.

Latouche accompanied his criticism of Castoriadis's alleged inability to fully articulate universalism/relativism with a new text, "Il n'y a plus de Persans!" (an allusion to Montesquieu's *Persian Letters*), strategically placed immediately after the first half of the Castoriadis/MAUSS-group discussion. There, beneath a quotation of Castoriadis's statement from this discussion that no one in Teheran (i.e., modern-day Persia) is "asking the Ayatollah Khomeini

whether he's Iranocentric or Islamocentric," Latouche declares that "there are no longer any Persians" in a world dominated by economic Westernization and "singular thought [*la pensée unique*]." (In his Presentation, Latouche had described this subsequent text of his as a "rejection [*refus*] of singular thought and one-dimensional man.") Yet nowhere in his Presentation or in his "Persians" text does he even mention the existence of Castoriadis's central thesis, viz.: that, far from "one dimensional," the Western world involves a *dual and conflictual institution of modernity* that includes both a capitalist project of the "unlimited expansion of (pseudo) rational (pseudo)mastery" and a countervailing, if now waning, project of individual and collective autonomy, achieved through self-limitation and civic responsibility, and based on an awareness that we make our own laws and therefore can change them. Latouche's attempt at arguing with Castoriadis *ex post facto*, indeed *post mortem*, barely engages Castoriadis's actual positions. On the other hand, had Latouche gotten further in touch with his own "rejection" of "one-dimensional man," he might have found, precisely in the ongoing autonomy project, a basis for this rejection that both precedes and goes beyond himself, thereby giving it a more coherent social, political, and philosophical basis than a Marcusian "Great Refusal."

More egregious, perhaps, is Caillé's Presentation of the second half of the Castoriadis/MAUSS-group discussion in the following *Revue du MAUSS* issue: "One does not have to share the certainty of Castoriadis, for whom democracy is direct, on the Athenian mode, or does not exist at all." From the very start of the discussion, Castoriadis, in answer to Caillé's specific questions, had gone to great, repeated lengths to dispel the illusion that he viewed Athens as a "model." And as he had explained in "Done and To Be Done" (1989):

> My reflection began not with Athenian democracy . . . but with the contemporary workers' movement. To cite the texts that, since 1946, put this reflection on record would be to cite the tables of contents of the eight volumes of my *Socialisme ou Barbarie* writings [abridged in *PSW1-3*]; in these three thousand pages,

> there is in all but one allusion to Thucydides and another to Plato. What is constantly discussed, described, analyzed, and reflected upon therein is the modern experience (*CR*, p. 414).

Appealing implicitly to what he takes to be a Lefortian defense of "representative democracy,"[8] Caillé also declares:

> It is hard to see how it would be possible to surmount the ills of our cities[9] by refusing to create in them public spaces on which socially conflictual situations might manifest themselves and become symbolized.

This additional attempt to reply to Castoriadis beyond the grave makes no effort, either, to engage with his oft-stated position (as in "Done and To Be Done") on representation:

> It is saddening to read from [Agnes] Heller's pen that my opposition to the idea of representation comes from the fact that it was not practiced at Athens. I

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[8]One should always be wary about taking Lefort as an authority. Lefort's entire collection of essays, *Writing: The Political Test*, is designed to show how the political writer must undo the expectations not only of his opponents but especially of his friends. For, Lefort explains, the practitioner of political philosophy

> doesn't wish to furnish arguments to persons whom he holds to be adversaries, imbeciles, or devotees of a doctrine, nor does he wish to seduce others who are in a rush to grasp one or another of his formulas and, without understanding him, hasten to make themselves his supporters while making him the hero of a cause. For him, quite particularly, writing is therefore facing up to a risk [*l'épreuve d'un risque*]; and the risky test he faces offers him the resources for a singular form of speech that is set in motion by the exigency that he spring the traps of belief and escape from the grips of ideology, bringing himself always beyond the place where one expects him via a series of zigzag movements that disappoint by turns the various sections of his public (p. xli)

[9]In French, *cité* does double duty as "city" in the classical sense and as a designation for housing projects inhabited by the poor and marginalized.

> have not ceased reiterating that Athenian democracy cannot be for us anything but a *germ*, and in no way a model; one would have to be a fool to claim that the political organization of 30,000 citizens might be copied so as to organize 35 or 150 million citizens, and someone who has flipped, even casually, through [my writings] ought to have glimpsed that this folly is not mine. But there is something graver still. Heller forgets the devastating critique of representation made in Modern Times, at least since Rousseau (CR, p. 407).

Caillé treats "representative democracy" as somehow a philosophical and empirical necessity whereas Castoriadis had argued that it is a philosophical incoherency that, additionally, leads away from democracy. "Every form of irrevocability, even when 'limited' in time, logically and really tends to 'autonomize' the power of elected officials," he asserted in "Done and To Be Done" (*CR*, p. 408). Without the possibility of recall of delegates designated by ongoing grassroots organizations, no ongoing democratic exercise of power:

> An autonomous society is a society that has institutions of autonomy, for example, magistrates. I was saying just a moment ago that I accept such magistrates and that not only do I accept them but I defend the need for them; they just have to be able to be recalled. In this "able" of "able to be recalled" lies the whole question.

This is why, within the current system of representation, recent American revivals of the Progressive-era practice of recall have not yielded democratic results. Powerful and influential monied interests helped lead to the elimination of California Gov. Gray Davis in favor of Arnold Schwarzenegger (2003) and the retention of Wisconsin Gov. Scott Walker over the Democratic Party candidate (2012), as these recall votes, in the absence of ongoing grassroots organizations acting at the base of a democratic society, merely offered more of the same system of representation.

Dewitte's expression of regret about the insufficiently "philosophical" nature of this exchange points to another, deeper source of conflict built into the discussion found in this "book": there was no *consensus* among the participants as to what the nature of that exchange was to be. In both their questions and their comments, MAUSS-group members often remain confined within a rather abstract and academic discourse, whereas Castoriadis continually endeavors to bring the discussion back to a more practical, if not always praxical, basis. While such terms as "Hellenocentrism," Western "humanism," "political liberalism," "pluralism," the "mixed regime," and so on are constantly being bandied about, Castoriadis offers such replies as: "The question perhaps does not have an enormous interest in today's discussion" and:

> Perhaps this discussion shouldn't be prolonged, because here we are entering onto a terrain that is complex, very difficult, and very slippery—that of the connection between real history and the evolution of ideas. And personally speaking, I am rather opposed to the idea of reducing real changes to ideas or making them correspond to ideas.

Later, he sternly admonishes his interlocutors to "look at what happens in reality; you really need to do some concrete political sociology." The practical and the praxical join in a question he twice asks in identical terms—"What does one do now?"—regarding modernity's dissolution of traditional social ties. He thus does not eschew a forward-looking standpoint, based on principles. "That's perfect," he exclaims, when the discussion finally turns to a future-oriented praxis: "We're heading in the right direction since we're talking about what is to exist and not miserable present-day reality!" And near the end of the discussion, he welcomes Anne-Marie Fixot's salient points about today's concrete, practical obstacles to citizen participation as well as the general goals of a new society:

> Now, when you mention socioeconomic conditions, I fear that we'll have to set up another meeting,

> because we'll never get to finish today. One would have to deal with the huge problem of the way society is structured economically and in production, as well as the objectives of economic activity.

The purpose and the very nature of this discussion therefore remain bones of contention throughout for all parties. Castoriadis even envisions "another meeting" to get at real, but hitherto unaddressed, social and economic issues.

The unresolved character of what the discussion was to be about and how it was to proceed perhaps helps to explain, in part, the difficulties the discussants experienced in understanding one another. At one point, Castoriadis modestly admits that he may partially be at fault in this regard:

> I fear there may be another misunderstanding. I no doubt set about very badly explaining my positions, because very often I don't recognize myself in the criticisms people make of me. Or else I am blind about myself.

But in two major instances, he had made his positions clear before any misunderstanding arose. Castoriadis told Caillé: "The discourse on democracy as indeterminacy is lovely—or not lovely, I don't know—but it's not my cup of tea." Yet Caillé later attempts to "get back to the very beginning of your presentation, the unconditional value of the acceptance of the radical indeterminacy of social relations." Similarly, in describing "politics as collective activity that is meant to be lucid and conscious and that calls the existing institutions of society into question," Castoriadis added: "Perhaps it does so, so as to reconfirm those institutions, but it does call them into question." Dewitte nonetheless asks him the following:

> You reminded us of your fundamental . . . philosophical position, explicit self-institution, and I said to myself—well, it's perhaps trivial to say, so excuse me: But isn't it conceivable that one might freely recognize some laws as good?

Something else must be going on that explains these repeated misapprehensions of Castoriadis's clear-cut statements.

Prat offers an initial interpretative hypothesis regarding how Castoriadis is received by his principal interlocutors:

> Pope Caillé finds himself close to Lefort and Clastres, whereas the Antipope Latouche is more appreciative of Castoriadis's positions. Chantal Mouffe, it seems to me, defends the orthodoxy of "political science" against the totalitarian drift she sees breaking through in direct democracy. As for Jacques Dewitte, . . . his personal development, under the influence of Leszek Kolakowski and Emmanuel Levinas, has taken him so far away from Castoriadis's theses that he no longer even understands the idea of autonomy.

Here reemerges the name of Claude Lefort, cofounder with Castoriadis of the revolutionary tendency, and then journal and group, Socialisme ou Barbarie.[10] Lefort, whose election at the École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales had preceded Castoriadis's, also figured as a MAUSS-group invitee prior to the Castoriadis discussion. Positioning oneself in relation to or in opposition to one or the other or both of these thinkers has a long tradition in both intellectual and political circles, both in France and beyond. Yet, already within the discussion itself, the connections and differences between the two were being problematized by another speaker, Louis Baslé: "I think that, in spite of yourself, you aren't as far from Lefort as you say, and that, at the same time, you are in radical opposition." A more complex hypothesis for reading this discussion may be entertained.

When Caillé was wrongly attributing the Lefortian concept of "indeterminacy" to Castoriadis, it was to *contest* it as an "unconditional value"—a challenge with which Castoriadis would heartily agree. Significantly, Caillé's huge blunder involved another instance of confusion between these

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[10] We shall deal below with Castoriadis's and Lefort's views on Clastres.

two S. ou B. cofounders, Caillé again taking a stand *against* a Lefortian position mistakenly attributed to Castoriadis:

> And you say—I'm looking for a quotation from your work; I'm not finding it: starting from the moment when there is no explicit collective self-institution in archaic societies, there is no question of talking about democracy. And you say, more precisely, that you don't mean to define democracy as a regime, as an institutional form.[11]

To mark the supposedly definitive nature of his (misplaced) criticism, Caillé adds: "*I believe that the whole discussion is there*," before finally finding himself obliged to admit: "I didn't find the quotation. . . . I was mistaken. I confused you for a moment with Lefort. I apologize to you."[12] Yet this

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[11] Despite the fact that it was Castoriadis who penned a text entitled "Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime" (1996; now in *RTI(TBS)*), mistaken impressions abound as to whether or not he or others believed that democracy is a regime. In an otherwise interesting essay, Manuel Cervera-Marzal recently attributed the view that democracy is *not* a regime to both Lefort and Clastres but also to Castoriadis ("Miguel Abensour, Cornelius Castoriadis. Un conseillisme français?" *La Revue du MAUSS*, 40 [2, 2012]: 300-20; see: 305), whereas, in a lecture paper dated November 7, 2012, which was to be delivered to a January 17, 2013 seminar at the University of Ottawa's Centre for Interdisciplinary Research on Citizenship and Minorities (CIRCEM), Yves Couture, on the contrary, claims that the phrase "democracy as regime . . . will designate here the thought of such authors as Claude Lefort, Cornelius Castoriadis, Marcel Gauchet, Pierre Manent, Robert Legros and even Pierre Clastres," but he does not even mention the title of Castoriadis's original text on this subject, which was directed against Jürgen Habermas.

[12] Castoriadis, a commanding personality who had been bald since puberty, goodnaturedly jokes, "Were it just visually, that's a bit much!" Lefort, a highly reticent man, wore his hair longish in the back until his death. This "radical misunderstanding" on Caillé's part nonetheless offered Castoriadis an occasion to express briefly in his own words what he himself perceived as his difference with Lefort on this score: "Perhaps now you see better why Lefort, in his conception of indeterminacy, would actually refuse to say anything whatsoever about democracy as a regime. Which is not my case."

defining opposition turns out to be *without any consequence for him*, once the names are reversed and it turns out that the position he had been criticizing is instead Lefort's. Caillé is repeatedly drawn to Castoriadis's positions—when he believes that those positions are opposed by Castoriadis. He also admits to Castoriadis that, "personally, I am quite attached to this requirement for direct democracy. It's totally disappeared from the French intellectual landscape for a very long time; one no longer hears it spoken of—except by you." And yet, he adds, "I, too, stumble over your formulation, for I don't think that direct democracy could substitute for a regime of representative democracy." Caillé, once again unable to support a position Castoriadis, by name, champions, ultimately defends instead a position associated with Lefort.

This was not the first time Castoriadis had been criticized for positions that turned out to be Lefort's or were attributed to Lefort. Gabriel Cohn-Bendit, older brother of the former May '68 student activist and later The Greens leader Daniel Cohn-Bendit, had been a member of S. ou B., and together the brothers proudly proclaimed in a 1968 book their "plagiarism" of *S. ou B.* and Castoriadis.[13] Yet, in the early 1990s, when translator Curtis approached "Dany," seeking a blurb for the back cover of the third volume of Castoriadis's *Political and Social Writings*, Dany summarily dismissed the invitation, saying that he disagreed with Castoriadis's view of Russia as a totalitarian society incapable of change—whereas it was Castoriadis who had argued for a decade precisely against that position, which was instead Lefort's and which is what led to the final break between S. ou B.'s cofounders.[14]

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[13] *Obsolete Communism: The Left-Wing Alternative* (1968), trans. Arnold Pomerans (San Francisco: AK Press, 2000), pp. 19 and 123.

[14] To Lefort's consternation, Castoriadis argued in *Devant la guerre* (1981; the original article was published in *Libre* in 1980) that Russia was no longer a classic totalitarian regime but had become, instead, a "stratocracy." The next year he described Russia's as "the toughest *and most fragile* of regimes" (see Prat's Introduction, n. 16). Back in 1977, he was proclaiming that, "among industrialized countries, Russia remains the prime candidate for a social revolution" ("The Social Regime in Russia"; now in *CR*, p. 228).

Latouche is described by Prat as "more appreciative of Castoriadis's positions." One can certainly find in Latouche, the "growth objector [*objecteur de croissance*]," many laudatory statements about Castoriadis, whom he has described as being, along with Ivan Illich, a "very important source for me" as well as a "thinker of ecological democracy and a precursor of the degrowth [*décroissance*]" movement Latouche himself champions.[15] But we get a first glimpse of Castoriadis's differences with him in Caillé's humorous depiction, from his letter of invitation to Castoriadis, of the "Leftist Heideggerian Third Worldism of my friend Serge." Indeed, it was discomfort with this perceived outlook on Latouche's part that had occasioned Lefort's decision to speak before the MAUSS group and lay out his own differences, thus setting the stage for the subsequent MAUSS-group invitation to Castoriadis. Neither Lefort, Maurice Merleau-Ponty's former student and his literary executor, nor Castoriadis, the independent philosophical thinker, has shown sympathy for the Heideggerian "antihumanism" that gained a second life in the "French Ideology" Castoriadis had attacked as "anti-'68 thought"—that is,

> the type of thinking that has built its mass success on the ruins of the '68 movement and as a function of its failure. The ideologues discussed by [Luc] Ferry and [Alain] Renaut are ideologues of man's impotence before his own creations; and it is a feeling of impotence, discouragement, tiredness that they have come to legitimate, after May '68 ("The Movements of the Sixties" [1986; now in *WIF*, p. 54]).

For example, Heideggerian antihumanism was used by Louis Althusser, in a particularly odious argument, to make believe that Stalin's error was to have remained overly "humanist."

Aware of this significant divide, Castoriadis makes his

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[15] See Latouche's December 22, 2011 *Article 11* interview, "Vous vous sentez heureux à consommer toutes ces conneries," and the title of his article in *Le Sarkophage*, 22 (January/February 2011).

differences clear early on, as when he provides the nuanced ("yes and no") reply to Latouche, quoted above. He continues:

> I am completely in agreement with you in saying that there is a new attitude toward nature that appears in the West and—contrary to Martin Heidegger, moreover—I don't think that that would be the result of Western metaphysics. I think that the turn taken by Western metaphysics starting at a certain moment is correlative with, without in any way being the result or the reflection of, the turn the entire society takes.

And Castoriadis returns to this key point of discord when, as we saw earlier, he suggests that "this discussion shouldn't be prolonged, . . . I am rather opposed to the idea of reducing real changes to ideas or making them correspond to ideas"—an idea he pointedly calls "this sort of inverted Marxism that is, moreover, Heidegger's besetting sin . . . Western technology as the culmination of Western metaphysics, etc. Well, that's not true." The struggle over what kind of discussion Castoriadis was to have with the MAUSS group in general and Latouche in particular as well as Castoriadis's insistence that that discussion not become unmoored from concrete realities and lost in the vague realm of a history of ideas thus relate directly to Castoriadis's strong, principled disagreement with Latouche over the value and import of a critique of "humanism" for the instauration of this "ecological democracy" they could both generally be said to favor.[16]

As for Mouffe, her repeated references to "pluralism," to a "mixed regime," and to "political liberalism" as well as her search for the "guarantee [for] individual freedom" and her positioning against a Rousseauistic "general will" do seem to place her in the tradition of "orthodox" political science, as Prat hypothesizes. Yet Mouffe's is a quite strange

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[16]Castoriadis added (see the title of his 1980 joint talk with Cohn-Bendit, now in *CR*) that one must proceed "from ecology to autonomy," thereby recognizing the dual institution of modernity, whereas Latouche seems to adhere to the diagnosis of modernity as "one dimensional," which was advanced by former Heidegger student Herbert Marcuse.

sort of orthodoxy, combining as it does in her first question a Kantian-like search for the "conditions of universality for [Western] values" with a very specific search for Gramscian hegemony: "How is it that you see these values of Western origin becoming dominant values in other societies?"[17] Castoriadis strove to answer politely her request to lay out the practical as well as theoretical conditions, thereby giving himself an opportunity to explain that non-Westerners' acceptance of the Western-originated value of self-questioning would not necessarily entail their "Europeanization." He was, however, less charitable in an earlier encounter with Mouffe:

> I wouldn't want to joke about serious matters, but I just heard Chantal Mouffe tell us that "one must struggle against the bureaucratization of the state apparatus." Well, one must also struggle then against the militarization of the Army and the medicalization of medicine. Struggling against the bureaucratization of the state apparatus is to struggle against the vegetal nature of plants ("Response to Richard Rorty" [1991; in *ASA(RPT)*, p. 108]).

Dewitte's questions and comments, here restored, permit an even greater complexification of the interpretative hypothesis advanced by Prat for the reading of the present, strife-torn text. For Prat, Dewitte's reading of the (religiously oriented) philosophers Kolakowski and Levinas has rendered him incapable of "even understand[ing] the idea of autonomy" as elucidated by Castoriadis. Yet, unencumbered by Caillé's befuddled feelings of admiration/repulsion for Castoriadis and by Latouche's earnest attempt to enrol Castoriadis as a "precursor" for his own views, Dewitte, who knew Castoriadis and collaborated with him at *Textures*, is freer to pick up on comments by Castoriadis and to pose pertinent questions from his own standpoint, without always

[17] As noted in the Speakers' Bibliography, Mouffe edited *Gramsci and Marxist Theory* and coauthored *Hegemony and Socialist Strategy*.

feeling obliged to take an immediate stand in relation to him that would lead off into misunderstandings. As a longtime participant in the MAUSS group, Dewitte can also try to bring the discussion back to issues involved in a real confrontation between MAUSSian theses and Castoriadis's views.

It is unfortunate, for instance, that other MAUSS-group members never followed up on Castoriadis's initially stated reservations about the central MAUSSian theme of *gifting*.[18] Yet, Dewitte, starting off from Castoriadis's reply to Mouffe's first question, can bring the discussion back both to MAUSSian concepts and to ourselves as moral beings:

> You said: At bottom, it's not a matter of becoming Europeanized. Therefore, you support the idea that it would be desirable, ideally of course, to maintain certain tribal values, the idea, the practice of a form of solidarity. . . . But doesn't all that send us back to ourselves? Isn't that also valid for us? Isn't there ultimately a danger in . . . understanding ourselves purely, essentially as self-questioning beings who call ourselves into question but who forget that there is something else in our identity, in what we are, in our tradition; that there are also values of solidarity and what is called here, I believe, in the MAUSS group, "primary sociality"? It therefore seemed to me that that sent us back to ourselves.

Castoriadis, who had spoken positively of the "values of sociality and community that still live on—to the extent that they have lived on—in the countries of the Third World," did

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[18] The "missing person" here (except for one passing mention of him by Caillé in another text, cited by Prat in his n. 6) is Guy Debord, whose Letterist International titled its mid-1950s bulletin *Potlatch* (a détourned reference to the destructive Pacific Northwest Native American festival) and who briefly joined S. ou B. in the early 1960s. Debord committed suicide eleven days before the December 10, 1994 Castoriadis/MAUSS-group meeting. It may also be noted here that Juvénal Quillet, who is thanked by Prat for having provided a tape recording of missing passages from that meeting, was a friend of Debord in the 1960s and 1970s.

not take up directly the MAUSSian theme of "primary sociality" brought back in here by Dewitte (perhaps because it suggested to Dewitte a Levinasian ethics of the face-to-face encounter). It should be noted, though, that Caillé—principal proponent within the MAUSS group of the Maussian "gift" theme and of "primary sociality" as the person-to-person relationships within which gifting occurs—had already been criticized on this score by Lefort in his prior talk, Lefort doing so in terms not wholly unreminiscent, in some respects, of Castoriadis's hints at his reservations about the MAUSS group's conception of the gifting process:[19]

> I no longer follow [Caillé] when he transfers (at least that's how it seems to me) the circuit governed by the triple obligation [of gifting] as Mauss analyzes it, onto the level of what [Caillé] calls *primary sociability* [*sic*], in our time, while specifying at the same time that the operation of society depends upon the latter. Recognizing the permanence of the triple obligation cannot make us forget the characteristics of its exercise in savage societies. Caillé, it will be recalled, indicates that primary sociability may be spotted in the field of person-to-person relationships. Now, person-to-person relationships are built up thanks to gifts, as Mauss shows; but these persons, their relationships are invested with *general* significations; such significations become clear only if we try to understand a certain mode of institution of the social sphere, I'd dare say a *political form* of society, or at least a certain number of traits common to societies organized differently, but whose kinship appears as soon as they are compared to societies whose internal ordering, cohesion and continuity in time depend on the existence of a State.[20]

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[19] This partial overlap between them adds another layer of complication to the hypothesis that Caillé would be siding with Lefort over Castoriadis.

[20] Lefort, "Réflexions sur le projet politique du *MAUSS*," *La Revue du MAUSS semestrielle*, 2 (2, 1993): 733.

For his part, Castoriadis, who stated that "it is necessary to try to deepen, to criticize a bit this idea of gift-giving," had promised that "I will say a few words about that in a short while," yet never did so.[21] Elsewhere, however, he challenges the supposed primacy of person-to-person relationships when they are divorced from the overall institution of imaginary significations in a given society:

> Society is irreducible to"intersubjectivity"—or to any sort of common action by individuals. Society is not a huge accumulation of face-to-face situations. Only already socialized individuals can enter into face-to-face, or back-to-back, situations ("Power, Politics, Autonomy" [1988; now in *PPA*, p. 144]).

And like Lefort, he stresses the political, and not just moral, component of this institutionalization process, in a passage that anticipates his apparently ethical question, "What does one do now?" but that also seemingly takes aim at Levinas:

> How can one, when faced with someone who wants to raise the question *What am I to do?* only in a very narrow sense, forget for an instant that the conditions and the ultimate norms of making and doing [*faire*] are fixed in place each time by the overall institution? The question *What am I to do?* becomes almost insignificant if it leaves out the question of what I am to do in relation to the conditions and norms of making and doing, therefore in relation to the institutions already in place. Some people have been talking a lot, lately, about *the other*. There is an entire philosophy that claims to be built upon the "gaze of the other," which is supposed to create for me some sort of exigency. But *what* other? These philosophers are thinking of the "others" they have met—or else, an

[21] This is another indication that, in the struggle over the meaning and direction of this discussion, Castoriadis was not always successful in imposing his orientation.

> other in general. The big problem is raised, however, by these real "others"—five and a half billion of them—whom one does not encounter but about whom one knows, quite pertinently, that they do exist and that they lead, for the most part, a heteronomous existence. The question *What am I to do?* is essentially political ("Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics" [1990; now in *RTI(TBS)*, p. 203]).

Where Lefort and Castoriadis do part ways is instead around the issue of the import of "the political." Making no direct mention of Lefort, Castoriadis nonetheless pointedly wrote:

> We witness today an attempt . . . to expand the meaning of the term until it resorbs the overall institution of society. . . . "the political" is presented as that which generates the relations of humans among themselves and with the world, the representation of nature and time, the mutual positions of religion and power. This is, of course, exactly what I have defined since 1965 as the imaginary institution of society. . . . the gains to be made . . . are hard to see, but the damages are obvious. Either, in calling "the political" that which everybody would naturally call the institution of society, one merely attempts a change in vocabulary without substantive content, creating only confusion . . . , or one attempts to preserve in this substitution the connotations linked with the word "political" since its creation by the Greeks, that is, whatever pertains to explicit and at least partially conscious and reflective decisions concerning the fate of the collectivity; but then, through a strange reversal, language, economy, religion, representation of the world, family, etc., have to be said to depend upon political decisions in a way that would win the approval of Charles Maurras as well as of Pol Pot. "Everything is political" either means nothing, or it means: everything ought to be political, ought to flow from an explicit decision of the Sovereign ("Power, Politics, Autonomy," *ibid.*).

In his talk, Lefort goes on to speak of "a sociality that can be called neither *primary* nor *secondary*, in the sense [Caillé] gives to these expressions," adding that,

> if one is convinced that the gift reveals a fundamental dimension of social life, one should attempt to decipher its new forms of manifestation in the societies we inhabit, without limiting oneself to the "primary," [and also] seek what "giving, receiving, giving back" may mean where there is not, for the individual, an identifiable other.[22]

Similar to this lack of "an identifiable other" that would inaugurate a form of sociality other than Caillé's "primary," person-to-person sort, Castoriadis often speaks of the "collective anonymous." But Castoriadis goes so far as to declare that "the ultimate source of historical creativity is the radical imaginary of the anonymous collectivity"[23] in *each particular* society. Thus, when Dewitte, listening closely to Castoriadis, solicits from him "an acknowledgment of the limits of our power to act," the latter replies affirmatively:

> Absolutely. We are not society. We are one component of it in some possible social movement, and we can therefore also say, as Caillé does, that there are some values of solidarity that are very important; yet we cannot make that into one of the points in a political program.

Castoriadis's view of the collective anonymous as the source, each time, of the institution of society combines here with his refusal to dilate either "the political" or "politics" to such an extent that one might entertain the illusion that either one

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[22] Lefort, "Réflexions," p. 733. For Lefort, a telling political—and not "primary"—form of gifting is to be found in the still socially significant, though not morally uplifting, "gift of self" to the One (the dictator or tyrant), as in La Boétie's ca. 1548 *Discourse on Voluntary Servitude*.

[23] "Psychoanalysis and Politics" (1989; now in *WIF*, p. 134).

could ever overlap with society's overall institution. Thus, when addressing the question of the revocability of delegates, *Castoriadis marked out the very limits to the discussion* he was struggling to have with the MAUSS group by adding to his previously quoted statement—"In this 'able' of 'able to be recalled' lies the whole question"—the far broader observation: "and one sees here to what (enormous) extent effectively actual history outstrips all our discussions."

Castoriadis and Lefort seem united in saying that the person-to-person relationships Caillé places under the rubric *primary sociality* must be viewed within the broader context of the social and/or political institution. Yet, in questioning whether "primary sociality" is always the primary locus for the gifting process, Lefort appears focused mainly on "our time," "the societies we inhabit"—by which he means *modernity*, the period that has witnessed the democratic invention.[24] Castoriadis, on the other hand, is elucidating a project of individual and collective autonomy with philosophical and political components whose "cobirth" first occurred in ancient Greek *poleis*, culminating in the creation of democracy in certain Greek *poleis*, and was resumed and reworked, after a long eclipse, starting with the "constitution of free cities" in the late medieval world, as he says at one point in the present discussion. Nevertheless—and contrary to what one might surmise in reading too quickly Prat's not implausible hypothesis that "Pope Caillé finds himself close to Lefort and Clastres"—when it comes to their respective assessments of their *Libre* colleague Clastres, Lefort *and* Castoriadis are actually closer to each other than either of them would be to Caillé. Their differing analyses on the relative contributions of ancient Greece and Modern Times to the "creation" or "invention" of democracy do not prevent Castoriadis and Lefort from elaborating overlapping views about the institutional bases for the differences between so-called primitive societies and those in which the State and a different type of religious outlook make their appearance.

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[24] Claude Lefort, *L'Invention démocratique: les limites de la domination totalitaire* (Paris: Librairie générale française, 1983).

Castoriadis's final reply to Caillé regarding Clastres's view of certain primitive Indian societies as being "against the States" is that Clastres

> doesn't see the foundation of heteronomy. Society is "against the State." But society is, in a certain sense, for the transcendence of the source of its norms. And there, in the primitive societies he's talking about, this transcendence is not a transcendence in the Western, metaphysical, Christian, Judeo-Christian, and so on sense. It's the society's past; it's the word of the ancestors. And over this word we have no power.

Taking up the question of ritual (which also was an object of discussion between Castoriadis and Caillé), Lefort, in his (posthumous) "Dialogue with Pierre Clastres," declared that ritual "does not only attest to nonseparation; upon it is read an ordeal of alterity . . . ritual seems to us to be constitutive of the identity of the social, of communitarian life or of the life of individuals as members of a group." Furthermore:

> Ritual rests, in effect, on belief in the power of invisible beings, on the belief that men are in constant commerce with them, nay, that they are inhabited by them or shot through with forces that are *other*. Generally speaking, the meticulous sequencing of the ritual's operations testify to belief in a knowledge that hangs over and looks down upon the actors, one that has been transmitted to them by their ancestors and draws its origin from a past that lies beyond the frontiers of the time in which men move.[25]

"Is it not the phenomenon of this belief," asks Lefort (who himself believes that society's *division* is constitutive of "the political"), "that allows one to pose in the right way the question of social division and to set aside resolutely the

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[25] "Dialogue with Pierre Clastres" (1987), *Writing: The Political Test*, p. 225.

unfortunate image of 'indivision' to which Clastres sometimes had recourse?" He continues:

> The full affirmation of the community, and the way in which it forbids the chief from exercising a particular power, cannot, in effect, be dissociated from the assignment of its order and of the origin of its institution to a site that is *elsewhere* [*un lieu* autre].[26]

In the present discussion, Castoriadis mostly expresses to Caillé his strong distaste for the particular rituals that are the price of admission to primitive societies, whereas Lefort, in his extended "dialogue with Clastres," goes much further in articulating the specificity and significance of these primitive rituals both Castoriadis and Lefort contrast with later forms of religious experience. Clastres's "interpretation of the primitive law as a writing on the body," Lefort argues,

> not only does not take into account the initial exteriority of the law, as we have said, but also neglects the fact that the incision and the mark signify an opening of the body to the *other*, the fact that each person's own body does not belong to himself; that, a natural body, it is simultaneously a supernatural body; that, a suffering, mortal body, it finds itself inhabited by, shot through with forces that have their seat outside it. In this sense, one must agree that there is no split between the visible and the invisible and that this split arises only in historical society (and rather belatedly) with the aid of a religious experience of an entirely new type.[27]

Starting from an initial disquiet with certain formulations by Latouche, Lefort focused his (rewritten) MAUSS-group talk on the group's failure to take the (political) institution of

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[26] *Writing: The Political Test*, p. 225.

[27] Ibid., p. 226.

society sufficiently and satisfactorily into account. While hinting at this problem in his initial remarks about the MAUSSian conception of gifting, Castoriadis's (posthumously transcribed) MAUSS-group discussion represents an overlooked opportunity, as Dewitte repeatedly laments.

This missed rendez-vous is unfortunate, for the discussion lacks, on this precise issue, the sort of trenchant remark for which Castoriadis is so well known when expounding criticisms. In particular, such an absence allows Jean-Claude Michéa—"someone who is quite close to the MAUSS group," Prat reports—to pick up on Castoriadis's remark (partially quoted above) that he has

> always thought that there should be . . . a common overcoming that would combine the democratic culture of the West with stages that are to come, or that should come, that is to say, a genuine individual and collective autonomy in society, with the preservation, resumption, and development, in another mode, of the values of sociality and community that still live on—to the extent that they have lived on—in the countries of the Third World.

while conjuring up, as a "simple" solution, the MAUSS group's conception of *primary sociality*. As we shall see, Michéa thereby disregards Castoriadis's entire critique of the supposed primacy of face-to-face or person-to-person relationships, not to mention his basic theme of a "rising tide of insignificancy" in today's world that could not and should not be minimized or ignored through the invocation of worn-out nostrums and panaceas or through superficial attempts at fault finding. This is precisely what Michéa does in his Postface to a new French translation of the 1986 Castoriadis/Christopher Lasch BBC talk.[28] There he blithely

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[28] Jean-Claude Michéa, Postface to Cornelius Castoriadis and Christopher Lasch's *La culture de l'égoïsme*, trans. Myrto Gondicas (Paris: Flammarion, 2012).

invokes the "analyses developed by the MAUSS researchers":

> In order to rediscover, starting from Castoriadis's final corrective statement [*mise au point*], the genuine anthropological foundation of Orwellian "common decency," it would suffice simply to add—in conformity with the [MAUSSian analyses]—that these "values of sociality and community" are quite far from having disappeared, *including in modern Western societies*.[29]

To this "simpl[e] add[ition]," Michéa adds: "But it is, of course, *first of all* in the daily life of these classes that have become invisible in the media (and which, however, still constitute the ordinary fare of the *people*), that it is fitting today to go seek out" those "values of sociality and community" Castoriadis had mentioned (supposedly only belatedly). And to establish the pertinence of this broad claim regarding popular values "today," Michéa does no more than quote an (unsourced) 1845 (!) statement by Friedrich Engels to the effect that, "in daily life, the worker is much more human than the bourgeois . . . because he does not see everything through the prism of interest," thereby creating a feedback loop to the "MAUSSian analyses" he added earlier.[30]

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[29] Ibid., p. 103n21. The "corrective" in question allegedly would be needed because, as Michéa blatantly misinformed his readers earlier in the same note, Castoriadis had "at the outset, privileged especially the 'Greek moment'" in his discussion with the MAUSS group! Caillé's misrepresentation of Castoriadis, *post mortem*, lives on.

[30] Michéa does add that, "On this point, one will find a great deal of indispensable information in the pioneering work of Christophe Guilluy." This claim cannot be examined, as no references are provided, no specific texts cited. Guilluy, however, admits that "the proletarian no longer exists" in a May 2011 issue of *Causeur* (no. 35; "Le prolo n'existe plus" is also the article's title)—an issue that examined the drift of sections of the working class and the popular classes toward support for the French far-Right *Front National*. It is unclear why there would be some sort of timeless "common decency" among "the people" that would necessarily

It is difficult to decide what is most egregious in Michéa's "Orwellian" game. The book begins with a gross misrepresentation about itself, for the "Note on this Edition" claims that the Castoriadis-Lasch BBC program not only was "never rerun" but was "still less [*sic*] published" and was "until then unknown to the public." In fact, large excerpts appeared immediately in an official mass-circulation BBC magazine,[31] and a scan of the photocopy Castoriadis had given to Curtis has long been available online, as has, since 2009, a French translation of those excerpts.[32] Moreover, an edited version of them appeared—perhaps just coincidentally . . . —in the wildcat translation *PSRTI* a whole year *before* the French publication in which this false claim was made.[33]

It is perhaps in the contents of this Postface, especially this last endnote, that Michéa is most outrageous. The ideas behind Castoriadis's "rising tide of insignificancy" theme are present throughout his 1986 BBC talk with the author of *The Culture of Narcissism*, as they are, too, at many key points in his 1994 discussion with the MAUSS group. To say that it is

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and automatically resist alteration. And it is unclear what value accrues from treating "common decency," instead of the "good unity" (see below) both Castoriadis and the MAUSS-group discussants reject, as the solution to the complex and changing political and social problems we now face. Nor is it clear how such an assumption prepares us for *the fresh expense of creative effort in both thought and action* that those changes call for.

[31] "Beating the Retreat into Private Life" (edited excerpt from Michael Ignatieff's broadcast "Voices"), *The Listener*, March 27, 1986: 20-21.

[32] See http://www.magmaweb.fr/spip/IMG/pdf_CC-Lasch-BBC.pdf and http://www.magmaweb.fr/spip/spip.php?article230.

[33] Also to be considered is the Castoriadis literary heirs' principle, violated at every turn by themselves, that "Castoriadis needs no introduction." Michéa has published this Postface, just as the French Editors, or others (including Prat), have introduced Castoriadis volumes in French, or in translation; this broadly stated principle has been applied, in fact, only to Curtis, so as to try to prevent him from writing translator's forewords and eventually as one excuse in the effort to break his valid translator's contract. The principle did not apply, either, to scab translations subsequently published in English with the heirs' approval.

"simply" a matter of "add[ing]" in MAUSSian analyses of primary sociality for us to found anthropologically Orwell's notion of *common decency* misses not only the ravages created by this "rising tide" but also the pertinent question Castoriadis recurrently asks here: "What does one do now?" As Prat points out, Michéa has no illusions that it would just be a matter of "dust[ing] off the Marxist critique"—a view consonant with Castoriadis's 1964 denial, in "Marxism and Revolutionary Theory," that "the solution" could henceforth be "a 'return to Marx,' pure and simple, whereby the historical evolution of ideas and practices [since Marx's death] would be considered no more than a layer of impurities concealing the resplendent body of a doctrine intact" (*IIS*, p. 10). Yet, on the basis of a single 1845 quotation from Engels about "the workers," Michéa imagines that *today* "the people" remain intact in their everyday lives—as if Castoriadis's analyses of depoliticization and privatization and his "rising tide of insignificancy" theme held no significance at all (after all, it's the fault of "the media"!). It is worth quoting another Castoriadis text from that same year, where he offers the corollary, for the workers' movement, to this fantasy that Marxist doctrine might have remained intact:

> One thus forgets, and makes others forget, that the crisis of the workers' movement is not simply the degeneration of social-democratic or Bolshevik organizations but a crisis embracing practically all the traditional expressions of working-class activity; that it is not some scaly excrescence covering over the intact revolutionary body of the proletariat or a penalty of condemnation imposed from without, but an expression of problems lying at the very heart of the workers' situation, upon which, moreover, this crisis acts in its turn ("Recommencing the Revolution," in *PSW3*, p. 30; reprinted in *CR*, p. 111).

Castoriadis identified this "crisis of modern society" in the mid-1960s on the basis of his earlier critiques of bureaucratization, rationalization, and the destruction of meaning, first in work and eventually spreading throughout

society.[34] This theme was later expressed in his analyses of a "rising tide of insignificancy" in a "society adrift," the self-limiting project of autonomy waning before the advances of the bureaucratic-capitalist project of the "unlimited expansion of 'rational mastery'" and of the potentially lethal "dead end" at the close of "the mad race of autonomized technoscience."[35] Michéa seems to be writing about Castoriadis without a clue.[36]

Dewitte, by way of contrast, persists till the very end in posing, in his own way, the key overall questions to be raised in this discussion. Recalling a 1976 Castoriadis talk that fundamentally challenged Western notions of *rationality* and *development*, he says that "what surprises me is that, in a meeting between Castoriadis and the MAUSS group, this aspect would not be mentioned. For, here," in an example Castoriadis draws from traditional Greek society,

> there's something like an economy that is other than rational, that is a wager for the future: the foundation of a temporality that is not immediate profitability. Now, that's how I also understand where Alain's reflections are in fact leading, with the interpretation of the idea of the gift.

While he would not agree with where Dewitte wanted to take

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[34] Paul Cardan, *The Crisis of Modern Society* ("lecture given in May 1965, in Tunbridge Wells [Kent, England] before the comrades and supporters of Solidarity"), *Solidarity Pamphlet*, 23 (London: Solidarity, no date); now in *PSW3*.

[35] See "Dead End?" (1987; in *PPA*) and "War, Religion, and Politics" (1991; in *ASA(RPT)*), p. 241.

[36] The theme of a "rising tide of insignificancy" is hardly an unprecedented novelty in Castoriadis's overall oeuvre—which began by taking seriously the prospect of *barbarism* as one half of the "present contending alternative" *socialism or barbarism* (see Curtis's "Socialism or Barbarism: The Alternative Presented in the Work of Cornelius Castoriadis," *Autonomie et autotransformation de la sociéé. La philosophie militante de Cornelius Castoriadis*, ed. Giovanni Busino [Geneva: Droz, 1989]).

the discussion—"That implies something like a transcendence, something that also goes beyond immediate interest. But then, we're engaged in a more ethical or even metaphysical discussion that would be another discussion than this one, and it's one to which I am perhaps personally more attuned," says Dewitte—Castoriadis does state that he is "completely in agreement" with Dewitte's point while indicating one last time how he views the discussion he is struggling to engage in: "We're engaged above all in a discussion about the ends of human life. . . . I don't believe that there can be any politics without a certain position on the ends of human life." Already back in his 1972 General Introduction to his *Political and Social Writings*, Castoriadis had gone so far as to envision "a new self-positing of social-historical man" that would

> challeng[e] man's relation to his tools as well as to his children, his relation to the collectivity as well as to ideas, and ultimately all the dimensions of his possessions [*avoir*, literally his "having"], of his knowledge [*savoir*, his "knowing"], of his powers [*pouvoir*, his "being able"] (*PSW1*, p. 33).

The "permanent self-institution of society" Castoriadis envisioned would entail "a radical uprooting of the several-thousand-year-old forms of social life" and would also have to take into account "privatization, desocialization, the expansion of the bureaucratic universe, the increasing ascendency of its form of organization, of its ideology and of its myths as well as"—and here Michéa might have taken note—"the concomitant historical and anthropological changes" (ibid.).

Here, it is tempting to go beyond the discussion Castoriadis and his questioners were able to have. It is striking that thinkers with "a Marxist past" and "a sort of faithfulness to their old Marxist ideals" would be so concerned with *consensus* and *pluralism*—the terminology often employed by mainstream American sociologists from a few generations ago. Indeed, immediately after agreeing with Dewitte, Castoriadis pointed out that we are brought back

> to the question of pluralism. Today, we have our backs to the wall; one cannot continue to speak of *indeterminacy* or just of *the divergence of opinions*; the ends of human life are achieved by contemporary society in a certain form.

Similar to his rejection of the "pluralism" advanced by Mouffe (author of two books on the subject),[37] Castoriadis also challenges Caillé's views on "consent" and "consensus" (sometimes paired with "unanimity").[38] Castoriadis has no trouble dismissing Mouffe's hypothesis that his conception (in fact, his elucidation) of direct democracy would be Rousseauistic in inspiration and would thus entail "some kind of good unity"; for, he explains that, just because he mentions Rousseau's critique of political representation, that does not mean that he would share Rousseau's idea of the "general will." The missed occasion lies rather in Castoriadis's failure to challenge more explicitly the idea that the regime of "representative democracy" would be based on the Moderns' lack of "homogeneity" (Mouffe) or "autochthony" (Caillé)[39]

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[37] Again, see the Speakers' Bibliography. Castoriadis replied directly to Mouffe: "And how does one settle a political question? By political decisions. You can go on repeating the words *pluralism* and *cultural difference*; you'll still really have to set the limits beyond which such pluralism no longer holds."

[38] Castoriadis's clear-cut reply to Caillé reads as follows: "Consensus as such, contrary to what one thinks, to what one seems to think today, has no value. There absolutely can be consensus in a completely hierarchical society." Another strong democratic critic of consensus, concerned, like Castoriadis, with ecological questions, was Murray Bookchin; see, for example, *Social Anarchism or Lifestyle Anarchism: The Unbridgeable Chasm* (Edinburgh, Scotland and San Francisco, CA: AK Press, 1995). Even though Caillé says he is "on the same course as" Mouffe, Mouffe's version of "pluralism" is, according to the subtitle of one of her books, more "agonistic" than consensual.

[39] Mouffe: "For, I believe—and this is what Alain was saying, too—the great difference, in my opinion, between the situation today and the Greek situation is the question of homogeneity, the question of pluralism." Caillé: "On what did ancient direct democracy rest? It basically rested on

—situations said to exist, rather, in Antiquity, as with the Athenian direct democracy.

As astounding as Michéa's "simpl[e] add[ition]" is Caillé's incredible statement that "the question of modern democracies is simple: it arises precisely when there is no more autochthony, no more unity, no more social, cultural, and economic homogeneity"—as if the creation of democracy in ancient Greece were, by contrast, a relatively leisurely, natural affair.[40] In order to be "autochthonous" *citizens*, the residents of Attica first had to think of themselves as all belonging to the same political entity. Before the Cleisthenean reforms led to the instauration of the democracy among the "Athenians," a synoecism of the separate villages of Attica had to take place. Even if we were to accept the myth of the first Athenian king Theseus being the source of the Attican synoecism, it was a *political instituting act*, not the natural outcome of some preexisting "social state" based on a uniform (Ionian) "race" and shared "values." Far from easy, far from homogeneous on the "social, cultural, and economic" levels, the creation of democracy came out of a context of conflicts between different regions (plains, mountains, coast), different social and economic classes (aristocrats, merchants, farmers, *thetai*), differing interests (rural vs. commercial, among others), and clan-based conflict. Prior to 508, "Athens" had witnessed factional disputes, debt abolition, abolition of debt slavery, multiple tyrannies, tyrannicides, civil war, mass exilings of opponents, aristocratic counterrevolutions—to name just a few political phenomena

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autochthony. It rested on the fact that people had come from one and the same stock, one and the same race, one and the same culture, one and the same soil, that they started off from shared values, and that that allowed the unity of political decision."

[40]This attitude fits perfectly with Caillé's attempted naturalization of Amerindian "democracy" and, more generally, Baechlerian-hypothesized "democracies" in all primitive, pre-statist social groupings. It also ignores or fails to address Castoriadis's historical point that political representation was created within a special social-imaginary context—bodies of citizens choosing representatives *to* existing lordly powers (noble or king)—and not as a solution to issues of multiculturalism.

that arose in this supposedly undifferentiated territory. And what was instituted under Cleisthenes's leadership was a reorganization of the tribes (from four kinship-based to ten *deme*-based ones) and of the regions (now divided between urban, coastal, and inland areas) that required cooperation within each new tribe, people of different regions being brought together under the same artificial "tribal" heading in order to act politically beyond immediate self-interest—thereby establishing a new and deeper political form of synoecism that in no way was preordained.[41] Nor did the triumph of the ancient democracy entail the end of all struggle because of some supposed uniformization. Civil strife certainly continued, as did social conflict—leading, for example, to the oligarchic tyranny of 404 as well as to the overthrow of those Thirty Tyrants, who had obtained their position with the support of the Spartans, Athens's wartime enemy, a Doric *polis* intervening in an Ionian city's affairs for the benefit of one faction of this "autochthonous" people over another part.

Nor is it clear why the only viable political recourse in Modern Times would be to *representation*—unless, that is, one adopts the hypothesis that defenders of the system of representation and "indirect democracy" are caught within the modern political imaginary[42] without knowing it or while being unwilling or unable to acknowledge it. Why would the invention of *new direct-democratic forms of synoecism* have to be ruled out *a priori* instead of being placed at the top of the political agenda today? How might such forms facilitate greater political participation on the part of those who are

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[41] See Pierre Lévêque and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, *Cleisthenes the Athenian: An Essay on the Representation of Space and of Time in Greek Political Thought from the End of the Sixth Century to the Death of Plato* (Atlantic Highlands, NJ: Humanities Press, 1996). Printed as an appendix to this book are the proceedings of a colloquium, "On the Invention of Democracy," with contributions by Vidal-Naquet, Castoriadis, and Lévêque.

[42] See Castoriadis's 1991 talk, "The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary" (now in *WIF*).

today discouraged or disenfranchised[43] (as Fixot had pointed out) and thus foster a different kind of political involvement that would be based not on group identity and immediate interest but, rather, on solidarity-inducing intergroup cooperation focused toward both defining and achieving the ends of human life in a more human society than the present one? Vast questions—to be taken up in a new discussion, one that would not short circuit, from the outset, the question of contemporary possibilities for direct-democratic governance.

Other questions also remain open or must be forced back open. For example, when Castoriadis declares that "what is called *the general interest* or *the common good of the political body*" is not "definable by a philosopher, by a Plato, or by a Niklas Luhmann writing a theory of social systems, and still less by a computer [yet] it *can be discussed* by citizens, and citizens alone can discuss about it and then settle the matter," this declaration—while it contains no presumption of a "good unity" that would somehow automatically be guaranteed in advance of the sort of direct-democratic discussions and decision-making he is calling for—nevertheless still contains an appeal to "the political body." While it is doubtful that Lefort, who sets "division" as the source of "the political," would have been any more attracted by the lure of "consensus" than Castoriadis was, Lefort does indeed question the appropriateness of the "body politic" metaphor for Modern Times, in which, he argued, the unity of knowledge, power, and law has been dissolved after the beheading of the Sovereign. Castoriadis, on the other hand, states categorically:

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[43] As Curtis said, with Castoriadis expressing his approval, during the 1997 Ohio State University *Agon* conference organized by Vassilis Lambropoulos: If certain contemporary magistracies (political offices) and assembly seats were now chosen by lot or via rotation (following longstanding direct-democratic practice), about half those magistrates and those delegates would now be women (whereas, according to Wikipedia today, "the global participation rate of women in national-level parliaments" is still under 20 percent in our system of "representative" democracy).

> But one has to maintain—and on this point I'm absolutely intransigent—the unity of the political body *qua* political body that has in sight the general interest of society and not, for example, that of the southern French wine growers.

This significant point of contention between the two political thinkers is no doubt also related to Lefort's conception of an "empty place of power" at the center of modern democracy, a conception Castoriadis found highly objectionable.[44]

Here opens up an indefinite series of investigations and inquiries whose contents cannot be anticipated in advance for this strife-torn "book" that, as has been seen, continues to be a "work-in-the-making" and is one that can be "inhabited" by the reader only to the extent that she habituates herself to another way of reading and makes it her own by herself pursuing the questions and conundrums it raises.

This "book" may thus itself remain open and could even be altered and added to. In particular, once the "first edition" of this electro-Samizdat tome appears online, Jean-Louis Prat, first, along with his collaborators, and then the participants in the MAUSS-group discussion could review the present translation and make suggestions for corrections, modifications, improvements. Such suggestions could be incorporated into a second edition. There would be no objection to *La Revue du MAUSS* publishing a French translation of the Translator's Foreword, provided that it not be altered or abridged and that Curtis be given the opportunity to review that translation and grant his approval of it before publication. Moreover, such a translation could be accompanied by written replies from the MAUSS-group discussants or others who might be interested in responding, in an ongoing dialogue (from which Curtis is not to be excluded) that could appear in the *Revue* and then be

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[44]Castoriadis: "Excuse us; we were stupidly thinking that decisions about whether to send people to get themselves killed, to reduce them to unemployment, or to confine them in ghettos were to emanate from a highly occupied 'site of power'" ("What Democracy?" [1990; in *FT(P&K)*, p. 213]).

translated as an Appendix for a possible third edition of this ever expanding and enriching, open-ended endeavor.

December 2012 - January 2013

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*.[45]

We note here simply a list of the various English-language words and phrases Prat, Castoriadis, and his MAUSS interlocutors have employed in the original French-language version: last but not least, double bind, give and take, and self-evident.

[45]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)*, and *PSRTI*.

DEMOCRACY AND RELATIVISM

DISCUSSION WITH THE "MAUSS" GROUP

A transcription of this conversation, executed by Nicos Iliopoulos, has already been published in the 13th and 14th issues of *La Revue du MAUSS* (1999). We have gone over a version corrected and completed by Jean-Louis Prat, adding some formal corrections in accordance with the practices established for the publication of Castoriadis's seminars. We have also reviewed and arranged the original note apparatus.

Enrique Escobar
Myrto Gondicas
Pascal Vernay

THE RELATIVITY OF RELATIVISM

C.C.: I have a weak point in this discussion, which is that, while I have followed your publications, I have undoubtedly done so without adequate diligence and care. Therefore, you mustn't be cross with me if, now and then, I exhibit a disgraceful lack of information about your positions; and if ever I distort them—though I don't think that I will—I will have done so unintentionally.

Alain Caillé had asked me how to prepare for this meeting. I had told him that, in order to avoid an introductory presentation that is always overly heavy—for the audience, at least—the best thing would be to send me a number of questions, and that's what he did. There are two parts to the letter he sent me. The first one is not really a question. He asks me to offer an assessment of the MAUSS group [*Castoriadis reads from the letter of invitation*]:

> It was in this spirit that we had invited Claude Lefort, who, rereading a few texts published in *MAUSS* with a view toward drafting a short paper for the celebration of our tenth anniversary, suddenly felt a great sense of distance from some of our statements, and in particular those of my friend Serge Latouche. As, he said, it would require too much time and too many pages to explain the reasons for his disagreement, I invited him to come and formulate them before the quite informal MAUSS group. You could perhaps follow up on this first discussion, with which you are, I believe, familiar, and this would open up right away the questions we could pose to you.

After that come some other questions . . .

I would like to say simply a few words about that. I feel a lot of affinity for the MAUSS group. I feel a lot of affinity for what you are doing and for your critical spirit. But I wouldn't venture to offer an assessment about you. What poses a bit of a problem for me are the boundaries you would trace, or that you do trace, for the idea, for the signification of "the gift" as means, but also perhaps as finality of an institution of society. For, concurrently, most of you—and, in

any case, Caillé, in what follows in his letter—seem, all the same, to be defending very firmly the idea of the market. We shall come back to this in the discussion. There is here something that isn't entirely homogeneous, I think. Or else it would be necessary to delimit what are the spheres of the market and what are the spheres of gift-giving, and then, perhaps—though I would prefer that it be done later on—it is necessary to try to deepen, to criticize a bit this idea of gift-giving. I will say a few words about that in a short while.

I read the paper Lefort had sent you.[1] You ask me to say what I think of it. I don't have a lot to say about it, in fact. To speak quite frankly, as is my habit and my nature, I think that there is, in Lefort, an apology for democracy in general—a theory of democracy, if you will (I will say in a minute a few words about my own position)—but what I don't see in Lefort, despite the footnote you have added to his text,[2] is any sort of critique of contemporary society. And on that, I'm both very firm and very unpleasantly surprised. There are some phrases of the sort, "Don't think I'm an unconditional supporter of modernity or of contemporary society." I don't know who is an unconditional supporter of them. [French Prime Minister Édouard] Balladur himself is undoubtedly not one, since he says, "We need change." But what does that mean? What is it that one has against contemporary society?

As soon as it's compared, in fact, with its implications—be it nothing but the genuine idea of democracy, the idea in its full potentiality—one sees that there are things that aren't right. And this critique goes far beyond traditional Marxist critiques and so on. There are new

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[1] Claude Lefort, "Réflexions sur le projet du MAUSS," *La Revue du MAUSS*, 2 (2, 1993): 71-79.

[2] Castoriadis is perhaps referring to n. 8 on p. 9 of Caillé's introductory "Présentation" for this same *Revue du MAUSS* issue, where Caillé says, "most *MAUSS* readers cannot help but find Lefort too subdued about the defects of the present era." Also, MAUSS-group member Ahmet Insel wrote a reply, "L'anti-utilitarisme et la pensée politique. Réponses à Claude Lefort," ibid., pp. 80-88. —T/E

phenomena, more disturbing phenomena, a sort of collapse, a subsidence, it could be said—like a building whose foundations are giving way—on the part of contemporary Western humanity. It's subsiding, and it's beginning to lean like the Tower of Pisa, but perhaps without the same resistance. . . .

ALAIN CAILLÉ: It'd go quicker!

C.C.: Yes, it would go quicker. But it's not only that. It is not in terms of pragmatic considerations that the contemporary situation is being criticized—that's a small aspect of the issue and not such an important one. It is being criticized for reasons of principle, namely: What is this society in which people's main occupation—the occupation, at least, of those who are able to do so—is to get rich and that of the others is to survive and to veg out [*s'abrutir*]? Here we have a genuine problem. The discourse on democracy as indeterminacy is lovely—or not lovely, I don't know—but it's not my cup of tea. Well, the basic contemporary situation cannot be accepted just as it is. . . .

I come back now to the questions. I don't know if there are any commentaries on that, to be discussed right away?

JACQUES DEWITTE: You can warm us up a bit more.

C.C.: I'll continue then, and I'll raise the temperature a bit by reading from Caillé's letter: "On the other hand, and I am speaking here in my own name, I have to tell you that, while I have always felt an affinity for what you write, and for its clarity," etc., "I still feel there is something missing as regards the following points":

> First point: I do not understand very well how you reconcile your statement that all cultures are of equal value with the one that one of them is more equal than the others, the culture of Greek society.[3] A subsidiary

[3]In several places, Castoriadis ironically borrows Orwell's phrase, which is itself ironic. For example, in the discussion with Daniel Cohn-Bendit (*De l'écologie à l'autonomie* [Paris: Éditions du Seuil, 1981], pp. 99-100): "I think that there is a singularity to the West or, as you'll like to say,

> question: To what extent is Western culture the legitimate heir thereto and would it have the right, it too, to be more equal than the others? This brings us back to the initial discussion about the Leftist Heideggerian Third Worldism of my friend Serge [Latouche] [*laughter*].

I think that here the temperature is already beginning to rise [*laughter*]. It is also rising for another reason: I'm a bit offended. For, first of all—since there are again these accusations of Hellenocentrism—I am not speaking of Greek society exclusively; I am speaking of the movement of autonomy in this segment of universal history that is the Greco-Western segment. It's not just a matter of Greece; it's a matter, undoubtedly too, of Western Europe starting at a certain moment, probably in the eleventh or twelfth century. Secondly, I have always taken the trouble to state that I do not consider Greek culture or, of course, Western culture, even in what's best of it, as a model for the rest of humanity or for ourselves in the future. I am simply saying that here, there's the beginning of something; there is the germ of something.[4] What is this germ? Quite simply, and to take it in its simplest expression: it's the calling into question of oneself. And that's what we are going to do, what we are already in the process of doing today. Caillé's question: "Aren't you Eurocentric?"

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to Greco-Western or European history within universal history. I think that this history creates something particular. As that other guy would say: All cultures are different, but that one is more different than the others [*laughter*]. More different in its horror, moreover, as well as in what allows us to speak here this evening as we are speaking." Castoriadis can allow himself this witticism because there could be no possible misunderstanding among his listeners as to what he means thereby: "I think that each culture, all cultures, have an equal, or better incomparable, value; that, of course, each collectivity, each nation, each people has to find its way; but also that there exists *de facto*—as created, moreover, by capitalism itself—a world society and a universal history in a sense that is no longer simply formal."

[4] See, in particular, "The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy" (1983; now in *PPA*, pp. 82-84, and reprinted in *CR*, pp. 267-69).

is a Eurocentric question. It's a question that is possible in Europe, but I don't see someone in Teheran asking the Ayatollah Khomeini whether he's Iranocentric or Islamocentric. Because that goes without saying. This self-criticism begins in Greece. It's Herodotus saying that the Persians are infinitely better than the Greeks and that the Egyptians are wiser.[5] It is resumed in the West starting in at least the sixteenth century, with Bartolomé de Las Casas, Montaigne, then Jonathan Swift, and then Montesquieu—I am thinking of *The Persian Letters*—and then the people of the Enlightenment. . . . This contestation, this calling into question of oneself, is for me the key feature in the contribution of ancient Greece, first of all, and then the West. And it's what allows there to be, for example, a political movement and true politics [*la vraie politique*], and not *the political* [*du politique*] as is said now in a fashionable way that I, for my part, find stupid.

The Political and Politics

C.C.: The political is what concerns power in society. There has always been and there always will be power in a society—power in the sense of decisions concerning the collectivity, which take on an obligatory character wherein one is penalized in one way or another when failing to respect them, be it only in the form of "Thou shalt not kill." Unless, that is, one believes in the bad anarcho-Marxist utopia that one day individuals will act spontaneously in a social way and that there will be no need for coercion, etc., and that there will not even be a need to make collective decisions. Marx speaks, for example, of the rational planning of exchanges among men and with nature. Now, who does this rational planning? It's men. Are they all miraculously in agreement? No. There is a minority, perhaps, or several minorities. Do they have to follow the majority or not? Or does each withdraw to a portion of a continent and apply his own plan? But what could

[5] References to Herodotus on this point and Castoriadis's commentary thereon may be found in *CFG2*, pp. 252-54.

that mean? There will therefore be decisions of a collective character. Such decisions will have to apply to [*s'imposeront à*] everyone. That does not mean that there will have to be a State, but there will have to be a power of some sort. Now, such a power has always existed—in a primitive tribe, in Clastres's tribe,[6] on the Upper Burma plateau, in China: Confucius was concerned with it. What's that about? It's about the discussion of the best means to manage an existing power. It involves advice given to the rulers—saying that a good emperor is the one of whom one speaks the least, as is said in the *Tao Te Ching*. That's *the political*. But that's not what interests us.

On the other hand, the contribution of the Greek world and of the Western world is *politics*. Politics as collective activity that is meant to be lucid and conscious and that calls the existing institutions of society into question. Perhaps it does so, so as to reconfirm those institutions, but it does call them into question. Whereas, within the framework of the Pharaonic Empire, the Maya or Inca Empire, the Aztec or Chinese Empire, or in the kingdom of Baïbar in the Indies,[7] there is perhaps a question of whether or not to wage some war, whether or not to increase taxes, peasant *corvée* labor, etc., but there is no question of challenging the existing institution of society. Therefore, here we have what is the privilege, the only privilege, of—let us no longer say Greek—let's say, Western culture, and that's what really matters for us today. It's that that culture calls itself into question and that it recognizes itself as one culture among others. And here we do indeed have a paradoxical situation: we say that all cultures are equal, but we have to admit, as a first approximation—a first stage, if you will—that, among all

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[6]The Indian tribes of Paraguay or of the Venezuelan Amazonia studied by the ethnologist Pierre Clastres (1934-1977). See *Chronicle of the Guayaki Indians* (1972), trans. with a foreword by Paul Auster (New York: Zone Books; Cambridge, MA: distributed by MIT Press, 1998), *Society Against the State: Essays in Political Anthropology* (New York: Zone, 1987), and *Recherches d'anthropologie politique* (Paris: Seuil, 1980).

[7]It is unclear to what "the kingdom of Baïbar in the Indies" refers. —T/E

these cultures, a single one recognizes this equality of cultures; the others don't recognize that. That's a problem that raises theoretical political questions and can end up raising practical ones.

It happens that the present-day situation is altogether disastrous and that, for the time being, we see no opening. Ten or fifteen years ago, Colonel Gaddafi—it was said: "He's crazy"; maybe so—declared that the catastrophic fork in universal history took place when Charles Martel stopped Arab expansion at Poitiers and that what would be needed now is to Islamize Europe. . . . If one wants to be Islamized, that's very good. If not, what does one do? There's not just that. People are constantly talking now about humanitarian interventions [*du droit d'ingérence*]. In yesterday's *Le Monde*, there was a protest from an Italian Christian missionary in Sudan: the local Islamist government had, after having whipped them, tortured, crucified, and executed four Christians, tribal chiefs perhaps.[8] I don't know whether one should start a humanitarian intervention—in any case, it won't be done—but, since cultures are equal, ought we to stop denouncing such acts, whereas we won't give up, and we are not giving up, denouncing, for example, the maintenance of the death penalty in the United States? So, there you have it. We have here at once an intellectual problem—if I might put it like that—and a paradox. But they have to be confronted. And there is also a practical problem which, for the time being, we have been spared, but which perhaps we won't always be spared, and whose consequences risk being very heavy indeed.

A subsidiary question on this point: To what extent is modern Western culture the legitimate heir of Greek culture, and would it, too, have the right to be "more equal" than other cultures? I've responded to this in part: I think that, at the present time, even within this collapse or this dilapidation, Western culture is, all the same, pretty much the only culture within which one can exercise some contestation of the

[8] "Soudan: persécutions contre des chrétiens dans le sud du pays," *Le Monde*, December 9, 1994.

established order and call some existing institutions back into question. . . . I'd say that it does not immediately stamp you as Satan's fiend, a heretic, a traitor to the tribe, to society, etc. To what extent is this culture the legitimate heir of Greek culture? The question perhaps does not have an enormous interest in today's discussion, and, moreover, there can be no simple answer. In one sense, there are very large parts of Greek culture that have been abandoned, and that is something that may be regretted. For other parts, one cannot but rejoice about that—slavery, for example, or the status of women. As for the problem of secularism among the Greeks—even though this question hasn't been settled in the modern world—the fact is that they had a very bizarre attitude toward religion. It was indeed a civic religion, an appendage to the State, and not the other way around.[9] And then these days there really is an intellectual opening that is greater than it was in Greece. But, well, that's not really a question of an immediate practical interest, even if it has a very great philosophical interest, and even if one would be right, I believe, to say that there is, particularly in the history of philosophical thought, a tangent that has been taken—I would say, *a derailment*—in relation to initial Greek thought. But this tangent, this derailment, they're already there in Plato—it's what will later become, let us say to proceed quickly, a sort of rationalism, etc., which will be manifested on the philosophical, intellectual level as well as on the practical level. But, well, for it to manifest itself, other elements also have to come in that were not there, even in Plato. . . .[10] It's a really particular question. Well, I'll stop there for this point.

ALAIN CAILLÉ: Thank you. I believe that there already is a load of questions. Maybe this starts up an initial discussion? [*silence*] Since no one is rushing in, I'd really like to resume, because I still feel there's something missing, and

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[9]It is hard to think of any other time when Castoriadis would have referred to a Greek *polis* as a "State." Many authors translate *polis* as "city-state," but for Castoriadis the *polis* is *not* a "State" (see, e.g., *PPA*, pp. 109-10). —T/E

[10]See *CFG2*, pp. 216, 220, 223.

I'm still perplexed. At bottom, it seems to me that you are defending both a position that I would call *hyperelativist*—even if you have not done so for the moment—by stating that all societies proceed from one and the same arbitrariness, from the radical instituting imaginary, and that, from that standpoint, it is impossible to organize them into a hierarchy, and that, therefore, they are all valid. And in another connection, you're on the side of what seems to me to be a very radical universalism, since you affirm—and it's here that I would like to question you—in an almost unconditional way the value of one cultural dimension among all others, beyond all the others, which is that of self-questioning. And from that standpoint, affirming this unconditional value of self-questioning, which is moreover, to get back to the very beginning of your presentation, the unconditional value of the acceptance of the radical indeterminacy of social relations, and therefore, accepting this unconditional value, you say: This value would be achieved only in one society, during a certain period of history, in the case of Greek society, in a moment in the history of Western Europe, the eleventh-twelfth century . . .

C.C.: . . . starting from . . .

ALAIN CAILLÉ: . . . starting from the eleventh-twelfth century, quite right, and that isn't found anywhere else. One has to take note of the fact of this historical singularity.

That's what raises a question, in two ways. There is, on the one hand, a *de facto* question that could be discussed. I believe that you are right about the acceptance of collective indeterminacy. One could find, I believe, in a lot of other places than the West, traces of acceptance of the indeterminacy of the individual subject, that of Buddhism, Taoism, etc., though, as concerns the strictly political level, I believe that you are right. But the question I am asking you is perhaps not so much the *de facto* question, even though this question could be discussed; it's the *de jure* question.

No matter what you do, I don't see how you could not give value to, not grant an eminent value to this self-questioning, to the acceptance of this indeterminacy. And starting from the moment when you accept it—which,

moreover, seems to me to be legitimate in a bunch of regards—necessarily, you have to give value to and think as more equal than the others, as superior to the others, the sole society in history that places at its heart the acceptance of indeterminacy. And all your arguments, moreover, head in that direction, since, as you just said, you show that in all other societies—all societies other than European society—some appalling practices occur: you talk about slavery, the situation of women . . . so much so that, starting from the acceptance of all the cultural values of all societies, you end up in fact with the condemnation of all the values of all societies, except those of Western society. . . .

Indeterminacy and Creation

C.C.: First of all, a commentary on the word *indeterminacy*. This word is not at all mine; I object to it. I am talking about creation. And creation is not simply indeterminacy. There perhaps is indeterminacy in the quantum world—I don't know—and there undoubtedly is an indeterminacy in the human world. What democracy accepts, however, is not just indeterminacy but also many other things. It accepts, it affirms freedom. It affirms the rule of the majority and, at least, the equality of opinions; otherwise, majority rule has no meaning: people wouldn't be counted if Plato were right, if there were people who knew and others who didn't know. And more generally, on the ontological level, what defines being is not indeterminacy; it's the creation of new determinations. And if ever there is a society that would meet with my wishes, it won't be a society of indeterminacy; it will be a society that determines itself otherwise, precisely in the manner of allowing its own questioning, and so on. But that, that's a creation; it's a *law* of that society. To say *indeterminacy*—in my view, that means nothing. One has to speak of a *creative, instituting*, that is to say, *determining imaginary*. Here, we're talking philosophy. . . . So, in this regard, from the philosophical point of view, I had to speak just a moment ago of a paradox, a paradox that may perhaps be summed up in essence by the passage from philosophy to politics. Starting from the moment when we

speak of *radical imagination*, among individuals and—this is what interests us here—of *radical instituting imaginary* in history, we are obliged to admit that all societies proceed, under the same heading, from a movement whereby institutions and significations are created. There are the creations of the Maya and the Aztecs, those of the Egyptians, of the Greeks, those of the Italians of the thirteenth-fourteenth centuries, etc., and ours today or those of the Chinese—it doesn't much matter which. So, on the philosophical level, I want to challenge historical forms of determinism and also challenge, for example, a Hegelian type of philosophy of history, with its hierarchy of societies that make progress while always realizing more Reason until one reaches a society that achieves the reign thereof. There's that, on the one hand. Now, starting from the moment when one no longer limits oneself to considering history—*theōrein*: to doing theory, theory in the deep and strong sense of the term, to looking at the unfolding of human history, to trying to understand it, to trying to understand various societies—but grants oneself the right to have political positions—and that's already to exit not only from philosophical considerations but also from mere acknowledgment of a *prima facie* equivalence among all societies—well, such a right doesn't just go without saying.

As for me, what very often astonishes me in these discussions—I'm not saying that for you—is our provincialism. One speaks as if all the time people had taken political positions, had given themselves the right to discuss, to criticize their society. But that is a total illusion; it's the provincialism of a hypercultivated milieu! These things existed for only two centuries in Antiquity and three centuries in Modern Times. And yet, not everywhere: just on some very little promontories, the Greek promontory and the Western, European one; that's all. A Chinese or a traditional Indian does not consider the act of taking political positions, of judging his society, as something that goes without saying. On the contrary, that would even seem to him inconceivable; he does not have at his disposal the mental frameworks to do so.

So, starting from the moment when we give ourselves this right, we also find ourselves obliged to say: Among these

different types of societies, what do we choose? Islamic society? The Roman Empire under the Antonines—a golden age, at least for those who were really rolling in gold? And is one to restore the Antonine Empire? Why not? Well, no! But why? In the name of what? Precisely because—and this is one more paradox—the culture in which we find ourselves gives us the arms and the means to have a critical posture by means of which we make a choice among . . . let's say: the present historical paradigms or among the possible projects—and it's rather the projects than the paradigms, since, as I just said, there is no model. There is a project of autonomy, which has its germ—in Greece and in the West—but which no doubt has to go much further. At that moment, we are situating ourselves as political men—as political beings, as *anthrōpoi*, not as males—and we say: Here we are, we're *for* . . . for example, we're for human rights and equality, among men and women, and *against* . . . for example, against vaginal infibulation and excision. We are against. I am against. So, I don't see where the contradiction is. I have never said that, from the standpoint of political choice, all cultures are equivalent, that the slaveholding culture of the southern American States, so idyllically described by Margaret Mitchell in *Gone with the Wind*, for example, is of the same value as another culture from the political standpoint. That's simply not true.

I don't know if this answer satisfies you.

CHANTAL MOUFFE: In relation to what you have just said, what would be the conditions of universality for these values, therefore for self-criticism, for democracy, which you defend? Because, I suppose that this cannot become generalized without a given series of cultural conditions. Therefore, how is it that you see these values of Western origin becoming dominant values in other societies? What would your position be in relation to that?

C.C.: That's a practical question?

CHANTAL MOUFFE: Practical and theoretical at the same time. . . .

THE CONDITION FOR THE UNIVERSALIZATION OF WESTERN VALUES

C.C.: On the theoretical level, the answer would not be very difficult, because one can quite simply talk about Tiananmen Square in Beijing. Contrary to what some have said (or wished), democracy does not belong to the Chinese tradition. It's not true. There were some movements, there was Taoism, etc. But that's not what we call *democracy*. The Chinese, some of them at least, demonstrated in Tiananmen Square, and one of them was there, in front of the tanks; he got crushed while demanding democracy.[11] What does that mean? That means that these values have, all the same, an appeal, as is the case—though things are highly bastardized there; it's unpleasant, but that's the way it is—in the countries of Eastern Europe after the collapse of Communism. What I mean is that, starting from a moment when these values are achieved somewhere—be it only in a very inadequate and very deformed way, as they have been and as they still are in the West—they exert a sort of appeal on others, without there being, for all that, some kind of inevitability or universal calling on people's part for democracy.

But if what you're asking me is: What does one do if the others persist?—because that's ultimately the question—the answer is: One cannot do anything, except, for example, preach. Robespierre said, "Peoples do not like armed missionaries."[12] For my part, I'm not for imposing any kind of democracy, any kind of revolution by force in Islamic

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[11] Castoriadis may be scrambling the story a bit. "Tank Man" or "the Unknown Rebel" was not crushed but instead pulled away from in front of a line of tanks, never to be seen in public again, and perhaps, though there has never been any confirmation of this, executed. See: http://en.wikipedia.org/wiki/Tank_Man. Nevertheless, estimates of the number of protesters killed during the June 4, 1989 crackdown range from the hundreds to the thousands. —T/E

[12] As already mentioned in an added footnote for Prat's introduction, see *ASA(RPT)*, p. 14, n. 7 for the source of this Robespierrean phrase, often quoted by Castoriadis. —T/E

countries or in other ones. I am for the defense of these values, for their propagation, for example, and I believe—but here, it's another question—that if at present this . . . let's say *radiant influence* has lost a lot of its intensity (things are more complicated than that, moreover), that's in large part because of this sort of internal collapse of the West. The rebirth of forms of fundamentalism, in Islamic lands or elsewhere—for, in India, there are similar phenomena among the Hindus—is in large part due to what must really be called the spiritual bankruptcy of the West. At present, Western culture appears for what, more and more, it is, alas! A culture of gadgets. What do they do, those others? With admirable duplicity, they take the gadgets and leave the rest.[13] They take the jeeps, the submachine guns, and television as means of manipulation—at least the owning classes, who have color televisions, cars, etc.—but they say that all the rest is Western corruption, the Great Satan, etc. I believe that everything is due—and is also conditioned by—the fact that the West itself has a dimmer and dimmer radiance, a less and less strong influence, because, as a matter of fact, Western culture, and this culture *qua* democratic culture in the strong sense of the term, is becoming weaker and weaker.

But, to come back to your question: the condition for the universalization of these values. The condition is that the others appropriate those values for themselves—and here, there's an addendum, which, in my mind, is quite essential: Appropriating those values for themselves does not mean Europeanizing themselves. That is a problem that I am not up to resolving: if it is resolved, it will be so by history. I have always thought that there should be, not some possible synthesis—I don't like the word; it's too "radical-socialist"—but a common overcoming that would combine the democratic culture of the West with stages that are to come, or that should come, that is to say, a genuine individual and collective autonomy in society, with the preservation, resumption, and development, in another mode, of the values

[13] See "The Dilapidation of the West" (1991; now in *RTI(TBS)*, pp. 77-80) and "The Rising Tide of Insignificancy" (1994), ibid., pp. 146-49.

of sociality and community that still live on—to the extent that they have lived on—in the countries of the Third World. For, there still are, for example, tribal values in Africa. Alas, those values manifest themselves more and more in mutual massacres. But they also continue to manifest themselves in forms of solidarity among people that are practically all lost in the West and wretchedly replaced by the Social Security system. . . . So, I am not saying that one must transform Africans, Asians, etc. into Europeans. I am saying that there might be something that would go beyond and that there still are in the Third World, or at least in some parts of it, behaviors, anthropological types, social values—imaginary significations, as I call them—that, they too, could be caught in this movement, transforming it, enriching it, fertilizing it.

SERGE LATOUCHE: I would like to pick up again, to take up again finally the question posed by Caillé, since, in fact, Alain has, in a way, taken up again my question. I find that your position is really a bit radical about this distancing—or this capacity for self-criticism—in other societies. I find it so because the examples you take, you take them within contemporary reality, that is to say, in societies that are Westernized and are badly Westernized. These are modernized societies, that is to say, ones in which one witnesses, on account of their contradictions, what could be called a *totalitarian closure of the mind*. There nevertheless were in ancient societies—in great societies, in China, in India—major periods of philosophical discussion with universalistic dimensions and acts of distancing. So, I quite understand that this self-criticism, this distancing from oneself, has never attained the same level it attained in the West. That's obvious. But there's a reverse side to this. Of course, it's the West that has pushed the furthest the idea of a universal humanity—as opposed to some specific cases of existence within tribal isolation, which, moreover, has never been a total isolation; certainly, the idea of a potentially fraternal humanity of men who are identical or equal and so on has never been developed so extensively as in the West. But how was it developed, how was it constructed? In a very peculiar fashion. What has made of men a collection, an interdependent whole [*un ensemble solidaire*], is precisely the

fact that a common enemy of this humanity has been defined, something that other societies have not done. And that enemy is nature.

Starting from the moment when it was decided that man was "master and possessor of nature,"[14] one has designated the victim that unified [*solidarisait*] men among themselves: nature, whose secrets must be penetrated, and which had to be, as Bacon said, "subjected, like a prostitute, to our desires"[15] in order to physically draw therefrom what was the condition for a universal kind of fraternity: the enrichment of all, which would thus allow the elimination of conflicts among men and shift them into conflicts between men and nature—with, potentially, the following contradiction, that, in instrumentalizing nature (which previous societies or other societies had never done to that extent), one also endowed oneself with the means to instrumentalize man himself. While, in the same movement, a universalist form of fraternity was proclaimed, such fraternity was destroyed by the decision that some men were not men, or were subhuman, and as slaves they tipped to the side of nature; and so they, too, could be subjugated and dealt with in accordance with our desires. In the process, slavery

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[14] This quotation, from part 6 of René Descartes's *Discourse on the Method of Rightly Conducting One's Reason and of Seeking Truth in the Sciences*, is often cited by Castoriadis himself, as he does again below. —T/E

[15] In a later work, *La mégamachine. Raison technoscientifique, raison économique et mythe du progrès: essais à la mémoire de Jacques Ellul* (Paris: la Découverte, MAUSS, 1995), p. 137, and again in *Décoloniser l'imaginaire. La pensée créative contre l'économie de l'absurde* (Paris: Parangon 2003), p. 29, Latouche quotes a somewhat more extended version of the same phrase—"Nature is a prostitute. We must tame it. We must penetrate its secrets and chain it according to our desires and interests"—citing as his source Norbert Rouland's 1991 book *Aux confins du droit* (Paris: Odile Jacob), p. 249. Neither there nor anywhere else, however, does Rouland provide a bibliographical reference of any sort. Alan Soble's "In Defense of Bacon" (*Philosophy of the Social Sciences*, 25:2 [June 1995]: 192-215) challenges claims about Bacon advanced by Sandra Harding, Carolyn Merchant, and Evelyn Fox Keller, upon which perhaps this unsubstantiated quotation, still often found on the web and in other volumes, is based. —T/E

perhaps was abolished, but concentration camps were invented. . . .

C.C.: I have no problem with, let's say, rounding off a bit the edges of an opposition I am presenting as clear-cut because I want to underscore something. I want to shake people up, and I want them to understand that man is not, by divine right, a democratic being; that democracy was a creation, a conquest by history; that it is constantly in danger; and that, moreover, it is already in the process of skipping out. In Europe, we've had totalitarianism and, after totalitarianism, we've had the power of the media and corrupt politicians and big businessmen. . . .

But first of all, historically speaking, one undoubtedly has to come back to and examine more closely the case of India and China. It isn't only on the intellectual level that self-questioning was pushed much less far. The two points are, indeed, quite linked. It's that this philosophical culture remained a culture of mandarins, in the broad sense of the term. That culture doesn't unfold in the agora. It unfolds in a closed setting that is the milieu of lettered men, sages, philosophers, etc. This is true in India as well as in China. And, connected with that—for me, this is obvious—you'll never see in either India or China that confluence of restlessness and of the movement of philosophical interrogation with the political question. Take the greatest sages, and you'll see that they are saying: Emperor X ought to do this or that. That is to say, it's a matter of some sort of reasonable management of instituted power. For example—and even if the idea of a radical utopia can be criticized[16]—never does a radical utopia appear under the signature of a philosopher concerning the state of the city, of society. So much for the first point. Otherwise, I'm completely in agreement with you and accept the idea that, in Buddhism—or, moreover, in Taoism—there is a calling into question that goes rather far, on the level, once again, of representation, of the representations of the tribe.

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[16]See Castoriadis's criticism of utopian thinking in, e.g., "The Project of Autonomy Is Not a Utopia" (1993, in *ASA(RPT)*). —T/E

Now, when you say that, in the West, universality has won out over an enemy that is nature and that the instrumentalization of nature has been transformed into an instrumentalization of men, I would say: Yes and no. Why? I am completely in agreement with you in saying that there is a new attitude toward nature that appears in the West and—contrary to Martin Heidegger, moreover—I don't think that that would be the result of Western metaphysics. I think that the turn taken by Western metaphysics starting at a certain moment is correlative with, without in any way being the result or the reflection of, the turn the entire society takes. There is an imaginary of rational mastery that appears in the West—moreover, before René Descartes and even before Bacon—with the Swiss watchmakers as early as the end of the Middle Ages: one has to have a precise measurement of time. And this aspect is not necessarily tied to the other ones; it is not in itself a form of progress for the forces of production. It is also a will to put things in order. There's Bacon; there's Descartes: "masters and possessors of nature." There's Gottfried Leibniz: "As God calculates, the world is made," etc.[17] There is this whole movement and also, of course, the idea that one can and should exploit nature to the hilt, with nature there as a mere object of exploitation.

As you no doubt know, I am completely opposed, including politically, to that attitude. But I would say that this is not necessarily tied to what I have called *the Greco-Western movement toward autonomy*. For example, this isn't at all an attitude that would be characteristic of the ancient Greeks; absolutely not. Their relation to nature is wholly other: trees are inhabited by dryads; the rivers are gods, etc. Here, we are dealing with the question of the relation between the movement toward autonomy and capitalism. For, there is indeed something very important, very strange that unfolds in the West, starting in the sixteenth and seventeenth centuries, which is the coexistence of two core imaginary significations

[17] The full quotation, *Cum Deus calculat et cogitationem exercet, fit Mundus*, originally appeared as a handwritten addition to his 1677 *Dialogus*. —T/E

—on the one hand, the movement toward autonomy; on the other, to be brief, capitalism—which seem more or less to come together around the idea of rationality. It's a historical misunderstanding, if I might put it thus—if the term *historical misunderstanding* has some meaning, if history can be accused of generating misunderstandings. But, as Charles Baudelaire said, "The world goes round only by misunderstanding."[18] And in the seventeenth-to-nineteenth centuries, this misunderstanding manifested itself also in the adoption of a certain number of straight-out capitalist ideas and orientations by the workers' movement, for example—and by Marx in particular, among others (Marx not being synonymous with the workers' movement, but you know what I mean . . .).

A last point on this score: Neither do I think that it is the instrumentalization of nature that leads to the instrumentalization of men. I think that the two come from something else: from the idea, the imaginary signification of an unlimited expansion of rational mastery. The instrumentalization of men—in the form of slavery, for example—is something you have independent of capitalism, independent of ancient Greece. Ancient Greece didn't have the privilege of slavery all on its own. All ancient societies were familiar with slavery, including African societies, as is very well known. Therefore, it's something else, I think. What has to be said is that, in previous societies, the exploitation of nature, like that of men, occurred, if I might put it like this, in a naive fashion—someone was chained; he was made to work, for example—and only with capitalism were both of these, exploitation of nature and exploitation of man, done with chronometer in hand: you will make so many gestures in an hour of work, and so on.

I don't know if you're satisfied with my answer.

JACQUES DEWITTE: I have two questions to pose, but I'll save the second one for later, because it's more general. The first, a remark, came to me while listening to you

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[18]From section 76 of the "Mon coeur mis à nu" part of his *Journaux intimes*. —T/E

here just a moment ago, when you said: At bottom, it's not a matter of becoming Europeanized. Therefore, you support the idea that it would be desirable, ideally of course, to maintain certain tribal values, the idea, the practice of a form of solidarity. So, in listening to you, I said to myself: But doesn't all that send us back to ourselves? Isn't that also valid for us? Isn't there ultimately a danger in thinking of ourselves, in understanding ourselves purely, essentially as self-questioning beings who call ourselves into question but who forget that there is something else in our identity, in what we are, in our tradition; that there are also values of solidarity and what is called here, I believe, in the MAUSS group, "primary sociality"? It therefore seemed to me that that sent us back to ourselves. . . .

ALAIN CAILLÉ: Can I append a tiny addition to Jacques Dewitte's question? You were calling for combining the values of self-questioning with solidarity and with general sociality, which are hardier elsewhere than here. But the tough question is really that of the extent to which these values of solidarity are not tied in part, if not to repression, at least to a holding back on the values of self-questioning.

C.C.: Since, with Lefort, you were talking especially about Tocqueville, I'll send you back to Tocqueville. For him, there was, under the Ancien Régime, that social chain that went from the poorest of the peasants, and even from the serf, all the way up to the monarch. There were forms of solidarity: the nobleman was not only, or not essentially, the horrible exploiter, dominator, etc.; he was also the one who took care of his men, and everything else. The village was interdependent and unified [*solidaire*]. For Tocqueville, all that has been dissolved—or is tending more and more to be dissolved—into the movement toward the equality of conditions. That's quite right. But the question is: What does one do now? In the West, those values have been lost or are in the process of being lost. Without going off into some long digressions or telling my life story: on a Greek island where I always go to spend the summer, each year I witness—I can see, as on a thermometer—the growing dislocation of the village community, which was still quite hardy fifteen years ago. Fifteen years ago, one family was responsible each year

for the village festivals; it prepared the great collective Christmas feast that takes place next to the church, and so on. The village was alive in all that and in a whole series of other things. I've made a quick calculation, it lived—how to put it?—97 percent in a state of self-production and self-consumption. It imported iron and silk, that's all. All the rest was produced, manufactured, cultivated, woven, recycled, and so on in the village. And all that is in the process of disintegrating, if only because the village is no more: people aren't leaving for Germany or Australia, but for Athens. What can be done about that?

If there is something tremendous in politics, it's to note—when one isn't being superficial, and I hope that I'm not being so—that the citizen is not, should not, and cannot be, if she is a true citizen, a disembodied being. This is not some sort of political consciousness that calls itself into question, that calls into question what surrounds this consciousness. This is a human being; she belongs to a community, and so on, and this community has values that aren't, as such, either philosophical or political. They are, in part, artistic values, but above all values of human life, like the ones to which we were alluding here. And those values cannot even be formulated, still less imposed, in and through a political program. What can one say about that? When I arrived in Paris, Bastille Day still existed; I danced every evening in my neighborhood, around rue Falguière and the Pasteur *métro* stop. Each bistro had its ball, with its little orchestra, the accordionist, and all the people from the neighborhood. There was Bastille Day, July 14, and things began on the afternoon of 13th and ended on the 14th, late at night, eating sandwiches and dancing—especially the dancing of *la musette* to the accordion, but also, starting at a certain moment, the rumba, the samba, etc. And as early as the Sixties, that no longer existed. Paris no longer exists. There were neighborhoods; there no longer are any. What does one do now? Does one write into a political program the rebuilding of Paris's neighborhoods as urban villages with their Bastille Day, the corner grocer, and all the rest? I am absolutely devastated by the way Paris has changed. . . . Yet it was an authentic informal creation by society, now ruined,

about which one may hope that it will recover—it no doubt will recover in other forms—but which cannot be rendered explicit in a political discussion, except perhaps to note that there really is a problem there.

JACQUES DEWITTE: So, it's an acknowledgment of the limits of our power to act. . . .

C.C.: Absolutely. We are not society. We are one component of it in some possible social movement, and we can therefore also say, as Caillé does, that there are some values of solidarity that are very important; yet we cannot make that into one of the points in a political program.

SERGE LATOUCHE: I didn't react immediately, a moment ago, to your answer. But I really want to get back to it. . . . It doesn't fully satisfy me, because you are dissociating the three elements that, for me, constitute a sort of whole in my analysis, that is to say, rational mastery, domination of nature, and humanism. First of all, I think that these three elements are already there in embryo [*en germe*] among the Greeks, that there is no radical break in the history of the West between Antiquity and the Renaissance. And, on the other hand, I think that these elements are not found elsewhere. When you say that slaves were not only in the West, that's true. But the category *slave* covers some extremely different things, some extremely different attitudes. A "hereditary household slave [*captif de case*]" in Africa is a slave, since he can be transformed into a slave by the slave trade, but he is not a thing. He is neither a tool nor a thing. He's not quite a man, since when one is not a member of the tribe, one is not entirely a man, but animals are not men, either, and are not, for all that, things. They also belong to the universe, the cosmos, etc. Therefore, it's something quite different. Now, as a matter of fact, it seems to me that this attitude changes already in ancient Greece. You mention the dryads, but I don't think that Aristotle believed much in dryads, and in his era . . . There are texts by Aristotle—obviously, you are much more competent than I about them; my mastery of Greek is very limited—there's a text where he says, if my memory serves me well, that there is no place in the city for horses, for other animals, for things, etc.; that no *philia* is possible between man and horse. . . . All

the same, there is a rather radical exclusion of nature, which didn't exist in an African animist society. And indeed already, Greek and Latin law therefore on this account defines the slave as an *instrumentum vocale*, and thus makes possible a sort of instrumentalization. There is therefore already a beginning, and it's not by accident that, at the same time, with Stoicism, the humanist ideology appears, that is to say, the idea that there exists a common interest on the part of humanity. And what is the common interest of a humanity divided into tribes, into religions, into nations, etc. if it isn't that all men have in common having an interest in overcoming AIDS, in penetrating the secrets of nature, in mastering the universe, etc.? Starting at the moment when this idea of a common interest, of a humanity against nature, is constituted, this category *humanity* can appear. It therefore appears, let us grant, with this Western universalism; but it appears in these two wings that, in my opinion, cannot be dissociated.

C.C.: Perhaps this discussion shouldn't be prolonged, because here we are entering onto a terrain that is complex, very difficult, and very slippery—that of the connection between real history and the evolution of ideas. And personally speaking, I am rather opposed to the idea of reducing real changes to ideas or making them correspond to ideas—this sort of inverted Marxism that is, moreover, Heidegger's besetting sin . . . Western technology as the culmination of Western metaphysics, etc. Well, that's not true. Thomas Aquinas is a great metaphysician, but he has nothing to do with rational mastery and the technical world.

I don't agree with your historical analysis. I believe that a quite peculiar turn was taken by the West, starting at a certain moment. I do not think that the situation is the same in Antiquity. Slaves can be freed—much more so in Rome, moreover, as you know, than in Athens. There even were, in late Antiquity, some emperors in the third century who decreed some collective emancipations. In the history of slavery, Aristotle is a special case. To my knowledge—and no one has contradicted me up till now in this kind of discussion—Aristotle truly is the first Greek who justified slavery—Plato doesn't justify it, nor anyone else—and that was done,

moreover, with certain restrictions, because, when he talks about *slaves by nature*,[19] he is giving a definition that could almost be accepted: he says that these are people who are incapable of being in charge of themselves [*se diriger eux-mêmes*]. But we put in a psychiatric hospital people who aren't capable of being in charge of themselves. And it must not be forgotten that the Greeks *became* Greeks. They learned to read and to write with Homer; they sang Homer in the festivals. Now, in Homer, there are some characters about whom it is known in advance that they are going to become slaves. And who are they? These are the noblest characters in the epic. Andromache, for example. And you'll see in Thucydides, in the discussion between Athenians and Melians,[20] that there is no attempt at rational justification. The Athenians say: This is a law that we have not invented, that we have found there and that holds among men and among the gods; right is the right of the strongest. It is Aristotle who had the idea, *qua* philosopher, of rationalizing this state of affairs and of saying: No, there is not just Andromache; there are lots of people who are slaves by accident and who should not be.[21] So, I think that we have here something that changes with modern capitalism and that changes even in the relation one has with slaves, inasmuch as they, too, continued to exist in the Western hemisphere, in the early nineteenth century, and in the slavery, the near-slavery, of the industrial proletariat, in what was called, rightly, the reification of labor, which is something rather different. And the idea of humanity doesn't go along with the idea of rational mastery. Here, we're entering into some extremely complicated discussions. For example, the idea of humanity is that of the Stoics, of course, who drew, moreover, no practical conclusion therefrom, as you know, since for them it was not a question of political action. But this is also the Christian idea. It's Saint

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[19] Aristotle *Politics* 1254b16–1255a2. —T/E

[20] Thucydides 5.85-112. [There is a last reply at 5.113, and the entire historical account, which begins at 5.84, concludes at 5.116. —T/E.]

[21] See *CFG2*, p. 39 and n. 29.

Paul: "There is neither Jew nor Greek, there is neither bond nor free, there is neither male nor female."[22] This idea, *qua* idea, was there for fifteen centuries; *qua* reality, this isn't Christianity. Contrary to what the clerics tell you, Christianity never lifted its little finger to abolish slavery. And when Las Casas defended the Indians by saying, "No, they have souls," this was to say, at the same time, "No, the Africans don't have souls; therefore you can enslave them and transport them to the Americas." I think that these ideas play a role, of course, in history, but they are expressions, results; they can become motive forces again when they are taken up in the course of historical change. For example, Western Europeans had been more or less converted to Christianity for a long time, but it was only in the fourteenth century that the peasants rose up in England and began to sing, "When Adam delved and Eve span/Who was then the gentleman?"[23] That idea was also in the air sixty years after the start of the Christian era. No serf, no slave had yet used it. But when the historical situation changed, when society began to protest, Christianity was taken back up and it was made into something else. And this is not a true form of Christianity—the one that preaches equality on earth. Christianity preaches equality in heaven above. My answer is a bit diffuse, but I believe that the question itself is diffuse. Not your question—the question, *die Frage*, the problem.

ALAIN CAILLÉ: Is there one last question, perhaps,

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[22] See I Corinthians 12.13; see also Colossians 3.11; Galatians 3.28, 4.7 [the quotation above is from Galatians 3.28 —T/E]. Commentary by Castoriadis in *SV*, pp. 353 and 459n**.

[23] This rhyme originally appeared in a 1381 sermon by John Ball during the Peasant's Revolt. In *IIS* (1965), p. 155, the same passage appears in German with a different translation, and it is attributed there to "the German peasants in the sixteenth century" who "sang [it] as they burned the nobles' castles" (ibid., p. 156). In the intervening years, Castoriadis's friend David Ames Curtis had given him, as a small birthday present, a photocopy of the frontispiece from William Morris's *A Dream of John Ball and A King's Lesson* (New York, Bombay, and Calcutta: Longmans, Green, and Co., 1910), where the English-language version of the verse, quoted here, is presented as a caption for a Morris engraving. —T/E

on this point? Louis Baslé?[24]

LOUIS BASLÉ: These are, above all, remarks; there is neither agreement nor disagreement. Yet the Hebraic question has never been broached, and monotheism seems to be a very important element in the idea of humanity, as well as what I'd call the *Judeo-* . . . well, *Hebraico-Greek confluence*—you quoted Saint Paul. There are here some things, some really interesting points of bifurcation, that can sleep for centuries. That's a first point. There is another one: I think that, in spite of yourself, you aren't as far from Lefort as you say, and that, at the same time, you are in radical opposition. As soon as you speak about the possibility of contesting things, you have quarrels, you have indeterminacy, there's nothing to be done about that; and when you pass from a world of aristocratic warriors to a mass democracy, well, you automatically have decadence, privatization, withdrawal, everything that Tocqueville rightly analyzed, the fact that, instead of forming a community, one forms a society, as Baechler says in his latest work;[25] the fact that, at that moment, political will declines, quite obviously, and that the stage is occupied, one could say, by communities of interests. That's well understood; it's really what you just said a moment ago. Therefore, this seems to me, at that moment, to be referring back, rather, to a positive sociological description, that is to say: there are social mechanisms that are automatically going to be deployed and a certain number . . . I'd say, of referents, principles, adjustments are in place; and this means that, at that moment, it's not because you have an imaginary that is radical, self-critical, and so on that you've forgotten the inertia of power, the inertia of the social sphere, etc., which are treated in another way in your society, in particular, the invisible and all those things one talks very little about. . . . The act of emancipating oneself from the

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[24]The exchange between Baslé and Castoriadis had not been retained in the *Revue du MAUSS* publication.

[25] Jean Baechler, *Précis de la démocratie* (Paris: UNESCO/Calmann-Lévy, 1994). See also *La Grande Parenthèse (1914-1991). Essai sur un accident de l'histoire* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1993).

invisible brings the question back to Tocqueville, to Rousseau, to all those questions you, too, have broached; and here, I believe that democracy is called upon to die and to be reborn; that seems to me to be something inscribed, I'd say, within the very stream of the evolution of social systems. I have a sort of radical pessimism—or radical optimism, in the sense that this is reborn, it restarts—but I think that there is entropy in democracy, that this leads to a massification, which ensures its self-destruction, as Baechler says, and sometimes, curiously enough, by the learned [*les clercs*] and not necessarily by the masses or by corruption, which can also play a role. So, that's it.

C.C.: I'm not going to go back over the question of monotheism. You've said what is of the essence: whatever may have been its importance, the ideas relating to these questions remained dormant for centuries, and from that moment on it has to be asked: Why the devil did they wake up at a given moment?

LOUIS BASLÉ: You no doubt are thinking about the return to Greek Antiquity.

C.C.: It's before the return to Antiquity, it seems to me; I connect this to the protobourgeoisie, the constitution of free cities—we'll get back to that, moreover—in the West, with the attempts at self-government, in opposition to the central power, and the opportunity they had of navigating between the king, the pope, the feudal system, etc. As for the question of contestation, of indeterminacy: Yes and no, because, if you will, for me indeterminacy . . . how to put it? starting from the moment when I speak of *radical imagination* and of *the radical instituting imaginary*, that is to say, of a creative spontaneity in human beings, it is obvious that there is indeterminacy; such indeterminacy is everywhere. It was there in imperial China; it was there in Stalinist Russia. . . . Starting at what moment does that take on some genuine substance? Starting at the moment when one exits from heteronomy; it's what you call *the emancipation from the invisible*. Now, traditional societies are mythical-religious societies, or, indeed, just traditional, not necessarily religious in the proper sense of the term, in which it is not, as a matter of fact, a question of contesting the social law or the

representation of the world—both of them created by society—because they are seen as a gift of the invisible or an imposition, a law of the invisible realm, etc. And from this standpoint, modern society stands out from all the other ones. Greek society occupies a peculiar position—not that it would have been a secular society, it wasn't one—but because, as I was just saying, religion there was a civic religion, thus anticipating, in a way, Rousseau, and because religion there pertained to the operation of the city. While being very pious most of the time in other respects, the Greeks never dreamed of sending people to the Oracle at Delphi to ask her, "What laws are to be made?" However, they did send emissaries to the Oracle to ask all sorts of questions, even: "At what place should a colony be established?" But not: "Is such and such a law, or some other law, good?" That is to say, legislation was outside the domain of religion; political society was outside the domain of religion. Now, starting at the moment when there is democracy, is there a mass, privatization, the inertia of power, etc.? Here, we diverge in our sociological and other sorts of assessments. I don't think that this would be an inevitability. I don't think, in particular, that this would be tied to the democratic component of modern societies. Here, too, we have a very complicated discussion. There was a moment of struggle that culminated in the revolutions against the Ancien Régime, at the end of eighteenth century and even for a great part of the nineteenth century, collective participation in political battles, and democratic regimes were instaurated in Europe as a function of popular struggles. These popular struggles were struggles of the people; these were also struggles of the petite bourgeoisie, for the latter, and not just intellectuals, played a very important role in all countries. It is true that, starting at a certain moment, you have a withdrawal on the part of the population—what I have called, since 1960, *privatization*.[26] But to say that such withdrawal is due to the democratic component of this regime, which is what Tocqueville more or less

[26] See "Modern Capitalism and Revolution" (1960-1961; now in *PSW2*). —T/E

foresaw—let's recall that Tocqueville didn't note it; he made a forecast, because in his time this wasn't true—that would be, in my opinion, erroneous. A whole series of factors then came into play and headed in the direction of a vanishing of the project of autonomy. Starting at a certain moment, the movement to extend democracy, particularly in the social and economic domain, came to a halt. There also was the role of Marxism; there was the expropriation of the popular workers' movement by the latter; the way the parties claiming to be Marxist evolved, even if they were, starting at a certain moment, divided between Social Democracy and Bolshevism, in both cases with catastrophic effects; and the bureaucratization of the workers' movement. But the bureaucratization of the workers' movement is not a phenomenon of democratization: it's quite the opposite; it's the expropriation of what could have been, in its beginnings, a power, a control exercised by workers' collectives over organizations, as, for example, in the early English unions, and elsewhere, too; it's the transformation into bureaucratic organizations and the cornering of power by bureaucracy. Let us add to that the way in which we know Bolshevism evolved; the experiences of Communist Parties; the split in the workers' movement; the conviction, on the part of a great section of the working class, that there was a paradise, that there were guides who knew everything; the conviction, on the part of the other half of the working class, that it was hell over there and that the Bolsheviks were the devil's emissaries—that was the case in English-speaking countries, in the United States, for example—therefore, the collapse of the forms the project of autonomy could take on starting from the moment when one wished to bring it beyond the narrowly political sphere, the sphere of rights: the right to vote, and so on. This factor was combined with capitalism's own movement, that is to say, whatever the precise terminology, let's say, *consumer capitalism*, that is to say, this sort of strange dialectic by means of which the workers imposed on the capitalist regime a rise in the standard of living by imposing a huge enlargement of the domestic market, without which capitalism undoubtedly would have collapsed, as Marx had thought it would; and starting at that moment, without

there being a conspiracy or a conscious act, there was the express adoption, by the capitalist regime, of a policy of enlarging domestic markets, therefore agreements to raise wages—whence, if one adds to that the lifelessness and subsidence of the combative side, the population's turn toward consumption, television, and so on. I believe that this is a sociological evolution that is very, very complex, and I absolutely do not agree that it can be imputed to egalitarian ideology, in Tocqueville's sense.

DEMOCRACY

ALAIN CAILLÉ: We are perhaps going to get now to the second question. . . .

C.C.: Yes. [*He reads from Caillé's letter.*]

Another question, that of democracy. Here again, I find you a bit too Hellenocentric. If democracy never existed except in Athens, that's because it represents a political regime that is too improbable for it to be worth the trouble to fight for. What do you think of Baechler's theses on the naturalness of democracy?[27]

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[27] In *Démocraties* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1985), Baechler, who devoted 728 highly documented pages to support his thesis, writes: "Because of venerable but deceptive academic distinctions, to pursue historical studies is to deal almost exclusively with kingdoms and empires. Democracies appear there as improbable exceptions, Greece, medieval towns, contemporary Western nations, and the exhaustive list thereof has been drawn up. This conviction rings true so long as one considers only around five thousand years of the human adventure. But if one claims to grasp it over the entire species since the beginning, over thirty-five to forty thousand years, and over the entire planet, one is led to a Copernican Revolution. A massive empirical datum makes its presence felt: democracy is, it seems, the normal condition of humanity; kingdoms and empires are what constitute the exception and are to be explained. As always, the most important propositions, the ones that demand years of restless intellectual wandering before making their presence felt, appear, once stated, to be obvious. For, it sufficed to bring out the ultimate consequences of the conceptual analysis to conclude that *man is naturally democratic* or that *democracy is the natural regime of the species Homo sapiens sapiens*" (emphasis in the original). [Note by Alain Caillé.]

> Is there really a Berber democracy, an Iroquois democracy, etc., or do the Greeks have the exclusive monopoly on it?

First of all, the Greeks don't have the exclusive monopoly on it, since there are also the Western Europeans and the North Americans. It isn't a matter of Hellenocentrism. Secondly, I completely disagree with Baechler's theses, which I consider to be completely harebrained, but I don't want to discuss them. I don't believe that there would be a naturalness to democracy. I believe that there is a natural bent of human societies toward heteronomy, not toward democracy. There is a natural bent to seek an origin and a guarantee for meaning elsewhere than in people's activity: in transcendent sources or in the ancestors, or—the Friedrich von Hayek version—in the divine operation of Darwinism through the market, which ensures that the strongest and the best always prevail over the long run; it's the same thing. . . .

Is there democracy among the Berbers? Next Thursday, someone is going to defend a dissertation I am overseeing about this people. I don't think that one could truly speak of Berber democracy; that's a late nineteenth-century French ideological mirage tied to the needs of colonization. The Berbers, presented as true Europeans, were contrasted with the Algerians. It even was said that they looked like the people of Auvergne; their homes were built in the Auvergne style! One had there a good basis for French colonization in Algeria. There no doubt was, if not a democracy, at least some sort of collective power among the Iroquois, among other Indian peoples, among the Zuni, if, at least, Ruth Benedict is to be believed. But what is the difference? I believe that the difference with respect to Athens, with respect to Western Europe, is that, in the case, for example, of the Iroquois or the Zuni, we find ourselves faced with something traditional, inherited, that is quite simply there. This is the law of the tribe, which doesn't have to be changed. The law of the tribe is that the collectivity exercises power. Apart from that, there is nothing to change. In the tribes described by Clastres, the chief has a decorative role; it's being a tape from a tape recorder that repeats: "This is what

our ancestors laid down as law; this is the law of all; and it's a good law." The role of the chief is to chant that from morning till night, like a cockatoo could have done, had it been taught that. In short, there is no real chief.[28] But there is no calling into question; there's no idea that the law comes from the collectivity. What comes from the collectivity is the government. Let's take the three functions of any established power: legislating, judging, and governing—and not *executing*, a hypocritical term employed in modern constitutional laws, because the government does not execute the laws; the government governs. Declaring war is not executing a law; it's governing. Presenting the budget is not executing a law, save in the formal sense that says that the government, each year, presents the budget. But what's there in the budget? The law says nothing; the Constitution says nothing. It's the government that decides, insofar as it decides. . . .[29] Therefore, of these three functions, two of them are exercised by the collectivity among the Iroquois: it judges, probably; and it governs, it decides to make or not to make war with neighboring tribes. But it does not legislate. It does not institute.

Now, for me, democracy—and here again we're back to the discussion, if you will, with Lefort—it's not indeterminacy; it's explicit self-institution. It's the act of saying, as the Athenians said, *edoxe tē boulē kai tō dēmō*: "It appeared to be good to the Council and to the Assembly of the people," or, as is said in some modern Constitutions, "sovereignty belongs to the people." It's the people that is

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[28] See the works by Clastres cited above, in n. 6.

[29] Castoriadis seems to be speaking primarily of France here. It might be objected that the requirements of the U.S. Constitution differ, as these two prerogatives—declaration of war (art 1, sec. 8) and origination of bills relating to revenue (art 1, sec. 7, clause 1)—are left to Congress. In fact, war has been declared by the nevertheless historically highly militarily active United States only five times (six counting the campaign against Pancho Villa), and it is the President that in practice presents the budget each year to Congress. It is nonetheless true that the U.S. Congress is not as subordinate to the wrongly named "executive" branch as the French Parliament under the Fifth Republic is to the French President. —T/E

sovereign. Therefore, the people can change the law, it mattering little in this regard whether the people don't change the law, whether it is added afterward that the people exercise sovereignty directly or by means of its representatives, and whether, ultimately, its representatives monopolize everything, etc. It's this aspect that makes the difference, and I don't think that there would be a naturalness to democracy: democracy is a very improbable regime, and a very fragile one, and this is precisely what shows that it is not natural.

So, if you allow me, I'll go to the other question: "What chance is there today, according to you, to revive some forms of direct democracy, and what relation could direct democracy have with the system of representation?"

ALAIN CAILLÉ: All the same, I would like to pose a question again on this point. . . . For, I asked you this question, obviously, because it's important to me. I think that Baechler's thesis is more defensible than you state, but I believe that one has to come to an understanding about things. A great part of the total lack of communicability in this matter, in this type of discussion, is that you—like, moreover, Lefort—define democracy fundamentally as a process of autonomy, as a process of collective self-interrogation. And you say . . .

C.C.: . . . and of self-institution.

ALAIN CAILLÉ: And of self-institution. And you say—I'm looking for a quotation from your work; I'm not finding it: starting from the moment when there is no explicit collective self-institution in archaic societies, there is no question of talking about democracy. And you say, more precisely, that you don't mean to define democracy as a regime, as an institutional form. I believe that the whole discussion is there.

C.C.: That's not quite correct, but, well, . . .

ALAIN CAILLÉ: I haven't found the quotation. . . . Let's say that you are more attentive, like Lefort, to the movement of interrogation, of self-institution, of collective self-creation than to the form of the political regime. Therefore, you don't want to bring the discussion onto the terrain of the form of the political regime. That's conceivable. But I find that that nevertheless has a few drawbacks—which

are, moreover, the same ones I just pointed out in your discussion about the place of the West in relation to the universe—because, starting from the moment when you argue like that, setting aside the European, Hellenic-Western democratic historical moment, at bottom you are positing that all political regimes are roughly of the same value. In any case, you don't introduce any criteria for distinguishing among them. Now, it seems to me, however, that there is a considerable difference between the various non-Western forms of power. We are really in agreement that they are not based on collective self-interrogation, self-creation, but there is a considerable difference between powers grounded on brute physical violence or on symbolic violence—which isn't very easy to define, but that's another matter—and a power grounded on one form or another of consent, and often even on some kind of unanimity. That's the basis of Baechler's argument. You say that for you the natural tendency of humanity is the tendency toward heteronomy; you'd no doubt add *political* heteronomy.

C.C.: Total heteronomy. Why *political*?

ALAIN CAILLÉ: Because we're talking for the moment about political matters; we're talking about democracy. That's really why I am speaking about political heteronomy. For, what you are saying is certainly true for a few recent millennia that have been marked by the proliferation of forms of monarchy and empire, but Baechler's perspective consists in saying that this is ultimately a relatively short period in view of the history of humanity. And he introduces into his argument all the issues relating to savage political regimes, and so on. The question I am asking you is this: Can democracy be defined solely by an explicit self-instituting dynamic, and can one refrain from posing the question of the foundation of collective obedience and the foundation of power? Can one refrain from distinguishing between regimes grounded on violence pure and simple and regimes grounded on some kind of acceptance?

C.C.: Let's make sure we really understand each other. There is a difference between regimes grounded on acceptance and regimes grounded on violence pure and simple. In saying what I was just saying, I didn't mean to say

that, when we view things from a political standpoint, everything's alike and everything's of equal value. But on this point—I'll get back to the question of the regime—there is a quite fundamental misunderstanding, and here again we're back to the discussion with Lefort. What happens in a consensus democracy of the type . . . let's put that in quotation marks, since no one went to look very closely at it, after all, among the Iroquois? Well, it's consensus. But consensus as such, contrary to what one thinks, to what one seems to think today, has no value. There absolutely can be consensus in a completely hierarchical society. A good feudal system is a society based on consensus and is one in which each is in his place. And it's also the society of Combray, according to Marcel Proust, where each was in his place and where a bourgeois woman who married a nobleman lowered herself just as much as the nobleman who married a whore. She was a person who was just as contemptible because she got married outside her status, outside her place. *That* was the European reality not so long ago, but in the feudal system it was the same thing. So, no doubt, a regime established on the basis of consensus may appear to us to be preferable. It is indeed more human, even though . . . There is a memorable text by Clastres about rites of initiation in primitive societies, where it is seen what extremes of violence are the price of entry into this egalitarian society.[30]

ALAIN CAILLÉ: There were limits . . .

C.C.: It happened in the jungle with ants' nests on the skin, etc. As for me, I'd really like for that to be more human . . . but that's not directly our problem. Our problem is: Can we have a society that would truly be free?

ALAIN CAILLÉ: It's, in Clastres's sense, a society against domination . . . all the same, there's a question . . .

C.C.: But where there is domination, there's a heteronomy of another type, and that's something Clastres didn't see; that wasn't his issue.

ALAIN CAILLÉ: He says it. You've just recalled it.

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[30] See Clastres, "Of Torture in Primitive Societies" (1973), in *Society Against the State*.

C.C.: No, he doesn't see the foundation of heteronomy. Society is "against the State." But society is, in a certain sense, for the transcendence of the source of its norms. And there, in the primitive societies he's talking about, this transcendence is not a transcendence in the Western, metaphysical, Christian, Judeo-Christian, and so on sense. It's the society's past; it's the word of the ancestors. And over this word we have no power.

I'd like to mention a radical misunderstanding that surprises me, since clearly you have read the text called "Done and To Be Done"[31]—I believe that it's there that was always to be found the source, and perhaps the touchstone, of all my divergences with Lefort—when you say that for me, democracy is not a regime. It's quite the contrary. Democracy is a regime. There is a description of the democratic regime that fits within five pages at the end of this text. Democracy is a regime in which there are rights, where there is *habeas corpus*, where there is direct democracy, and where a transformation of social and economic conditions allows citizens to participate. I don't know if one should elaborate further on that, but I remind you that there has been a description of the democratic regime as I have always thought and written about it, since the time of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, in the text called "On the Content of Socialism."[32] Why? Because it is absurd to speak of a regime, of a society that self-institutes itself, if there are not some already instituted forms that allow self-institution. Otherwise, it doesn't mean anything. And it's really for that reason that the discourse about indeterminacy, in my opinion, is empty. For society to be able to be effectively and actually free, to be autonomous, for it to be able to change its institutions, it has need of institutions that allow that to be done. What does it mean, for example, to have freedom or the possibility of citizen participation, to rise up against the anonymity of a mass democracy, if there is not in the society about which we are

[31] "Done and To Be Done" (1989; now in *CR*).

[32] "On the Content of Socialism, II" (1957; now in *PSW2*).

speaking something—which is disappearing in contemporary discussions, including in Lefort and others—and that something is *paideia*, citizen education? It's not a matter of teaching them arithmetic; it's a matter of teaching them to be citizens. No one is born a citizen. And how does one become one? In learning to be one. This is learned, first of all, by looking at the city in which one finds oneself. And certainly not the television one looks at today. Now, that is part of the regime. One has to have an educative regime. Moreover, one has to have an economic regime, too. If a Berlusconi over there or a Bouygues[33] here owns the means of mass communication, it may be asked where things are at concerning freedom of information and whether that freedom has not been terribly reduced. It is not being harmed by the police, but rather by infinitely more effective means. Proof of this is the abrupt change that took place in the countries of the East starting from the moment when the formal dictatorship was abolished. Before, there was an interest in politics; now, there no longer is. Why? Because, on the level of civic cretinization alone and on practically no other level, they have been Westernized straight off. Right away. In two weeks' time. Three months after the fall of the Berlin Wall, elections were held. The people who had been struggling against the regime received 0.4 percent of the vote, while those who had at their disposal the West's televisions, and in particular Chancellor Helmut Kohl and the Christian Democrats, received the majority. Now, the pendulum is swinging back, but that's for reasons that are just as bad or almost so.

Democracy therefore is, for me, a regime. Incidentally, I've just written a text against Jürgen Habermas that's called

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[33] Francis Bouygues, who died in July of the year preceding the present discussion, was the founder of Bouygues, at the time the world's largest private construction firm. His son Martin had succeeded him in 1989 as CEO of this formerly family-owned enterprise, which diversified into television (by purchasing France's formerly public flagship channel TF1), telecommunications, etc. Through Mediaset and its holding company Fininvest, Silvio Berlusconi, who had just become Prime Minister for the first time in May 1994, has dominated the Italian media. —T/E

"Democracy as Procedure and Democracy as Regime,"[34] where I say that democracy as a set of procedures is meaningless because such procedures themselves cannot exist as democratic procedures if there aren't institutional arrangements that allow it to exist as a regime; and such institutional arrangements begin with the training and education [*formation*] of citizens and continue through various ways and means that allow them to be incited to participate to the maximum in political, collective, and other aspects of life. There is, therefore, a radical misunderstanding. And perhaps now you see better why Lefort, in his conception of indeterminacy, would actually refuse to say anything whatsoever about democracy as a regime. Which is not my case.

ALAIN CAILLÉ: Indeed, I didn't find the quotation I thought I had read. I was mistaken. I confused you for a moment with Lefort. I apologize to you. . . . [*laughter*]

C.C.: Were it just visually, that's a bit much! [*laughter*] I believe that, on this point, we're now clear. I resume the thread of your questions: "What chance is there today, according to you, to revive some forms of direct democracy, and what relation could direct democracy have with the system of representation?"

In my view, there is no democracy but direct democracy. A representative democracy is not a democracy, and on that point I am in agreement not with Marx but with, among others, Rousseau: "The English are free one day every five years,"[35] etc. And not even one day every five years, because, on that day, the die has already been cast. We're

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[34] First published in *MI* in 1996 (now in *RTI(TBS)*).

[35] *The Social Contract or Principles of Political Right* (Book 3, chapter 15). See Castoriadis's commentary in *CFG2*, p. 27. [As noted in *FT(P&K)*, p. 212, n. 4, the full quotation, in English translation, appears in *The Social Contract and Other Later Political Writings*, ed. and trans. Victor Gourevitch (Cambridge, England: Cambridge University Press, 1997), p. 114: "The English people thinks it is free; it is greatly mistaken, it is free only during the election of Members of Parliament; as soon as they are elected, it is enslaved, it is nothing." —T/E]

going to elect a president of the French Republic next Spring. What will the freedom of the French be? That of choosing between Édouard Balladur and Jacques Chirac or Balladur and Jacques Delors.[36] That's all. The big argument against direct democracy in modern societies is the size of those societies. Now, that argument is presented in bad faith. Historically, concretely, and politically. Why historically? The regime of representation such as we practice it was unknown in Antiquity: the Ancients had magistrates; there were no representatives. As far as I'm concerned, I'd really like to have magistrates; I'd really like to elect magistrates who can be recalled and so on, but I don't want to be represented. I consider that an insult. The regime of representation appears in the West during medieval times. There's a very good book by the late lamented Yves Barel, *La Ville médiévale*,[37] which describes the evolution of medieval society in this regard. This regime appears in cities that were tending toward self-government as early as the eleventh and twelfth centuries. Those cities included 3,000 to 6,000 citizens, or a tenth of the 30,000 to 40,000 active citizens of Athens during the classical period, half of whom certainly gathered in the *ekklēsia*, and perhaps more of them when major decisions were to be made. Now, those medieval cities did not elect magistrates; they elected representatives. The idea of representation is therefore a modern idea, and its rootedness in political heteronomy and alienation is obvious. What, after all, are representatives? The term has become intransitive with time, but at the outset it was transitive. Representatives are representatives to the established power. Therefore, the act of electing

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[36] Actually, in the first round Balladur was beaten out as top candidate of the Right by Chirac, who then defeated the eventual French Socialist Party candidate, Lionel Jospin, in the runoff. Despite favorable poll numbers, then-outgoing President of the European Commission Delors had decided not to run. —T/E

[37] Yves Barel, *La Ville médiévale: système social, système urbain* (Grenoble: Presses Universitaires de Grenoble, 1977). [See Castoriadis's discussion of Barel's work in "Complexity, Magmas, History: The Example of the Medieval Town" (1993; now in *RTI(TBS)*). —T/E]

representatives presupposes that there is a king—and that's the classic case in England, for example—to whom one sends one's representatives. And the king governs. "The King in his Parliament": that's not absolute monarchy; it's the king in his Parliament with the representatives of his subjects. So, this has nothing to do with the size of the population. And the proof of that is that the question can be posed from another angle. In a modern nation, it is said, one cannot have direct democracy. Why can there not be direct democracy in a city of, say, 100,000 inhabitants, that is to say, 50,000 active citizens? It's not the size that is at issue, since in Athens such democracy was possible when there were 40,000 active citizens. So, one could say: Let's establish direct democracy in units that bring together 40,000 active citizens. But, no: no one raises the issue from that angle. . . . The size argument is therefore entirely sophistical and is presented in bad faith.

I don't want to offer here a critique of the regime of representation. That's been done a thousand times, and there's nothing to add. The true argument for representative democracy—it must not be forgotten—is that of Benjamin Constant in "The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns," which dates from around 1820, and it was already sketched out by Ferguson in *An Essay on the History of Civil Society*, around 1770.[38] Those people were not ideologues or theorists arguing in bad faith; they were political men who had their feet on the ground. What's their argument? It's that, in modern societies, what interests people is not the management of common affairs but the guarantee of their enjoyments [*jouissances*]. Those are Constant's terms, but Ferguson was already saying pretty much the same thing. Constant adds that, as the majority of people in modern society—this is a wholly Aristotelean argument—occupy trades that are . . . "banausic," he would have said if he spoke Greek, exhausting, mind-destroying [*abrutissants*] trades, like workers in industry, it's quite normal that there be an income-

[38] Adam Ferguson, *An Essay on the History of Civil Society* (1767) and Benjamin Constant, "The Liberty of Ancients Compared with that of Moderns" (1819) [speech delivered to the Royal Athenaeum of Paris —T/E]; Castoriadis's commentaries in *CFG2*, pp. 32-33, 149-52, 218-19.

based suffrage and that only persons who, by their way of life, have the leisure to reflect on public affairs and to attend to them should vote.

There remains the (real) question of a direct democracy on the scale of modern societies, of nations, perhaps of continents, or even of humanity in its entirety. I have no answer about the institutional forms it could take. All I'm saying is that some germinal forms of regimes allowing direct democracy will be found in the creations of the great political and social movements of the modern era. For example, the form of the Paris Commune, or of the soviets—the true ones, before they were domesticated by the Bolsheviks—or workers' councils. With, in fact, the greatest possible power for general assemblies, that is to say, direct democracy for making the ultimate decisions and, subsidiarily as one would now say, power on the part of delegates, but obviously delegates who are elected and can be recalled at any moment, ones unable to expropriate the collectivity of its power. But, on this point, once again, I think that, if there is to be a democracy, it cannot but be direct and that it will be able to come out only from an enormous popular movement that concerns the majority of society. There is a creativity on the part of society which, it alone, is up to the task of facing up to a problem of this type. If society isn't capable of finding some forms for exercising power that would be truly democratic—whether they be those I sketched out or other, perhaps more effective ones—there is nothing to be done, and there will again be a regime based on representation and again what Marx called a relapse into all the "old rubbish," that is to say, into the expropriation of power by the representatives, by the propertied classes, today by the media people, and so on. There you have it for that question.

JACQUES DEWITTE: In what has just been said, I recognize your positions, ones with which I have been quite familiar for a very long time. But I am still astonished by what appears to me to be more and more the radicality—well, you fit things in a clear-cut alternative—the extreme form you give to the idea of autonomy, to the point that, at that moment, one ends up no longer being able to recognize any institution, any representation as having a value of its own, be

it only temporary. There is, on the one hand, a pure autonomy, and, on the other, every form of institutionalization or representation. But that, too, belongs nonetheless to political history. All exteriority is at that moment discredited.

I return to a statement made a bit earlier in the discussion that concerned laws, with the example of the Iroquois. You reminded us of your fundamental concept, your fundamental philosophical position, explicit self-institution, and I said to myself—well, it's perhaps trivial to say, so excuse me: But isn't it conceivable that one might freely recognize some laws as good? Does this idea of autonomy necessarily have to lead to a sort of compulsion for change? Here there risks being a shift between the requirement of freedom and autonomy, and perhaps something else. It seems to me that one would have to examine things closely from that side. You yourself recognize that there is no pure act of self-institution. You just recognized that there is a limit on our power of action. Therefore, it's also tied to our finitude. We are inscribed within a tradition. We recognize that the world already existed before us. So, isn't there a possibility that we might recognize certain laws as good without having an absolute need to change them, even if we retain this eventuality, and if this is necessary?

C.C.: I fear there may be another misunderstanding. I no doubt set about very badly explaining my positions, because very often I don't recognize myself in the criticisms people make of me. Or else I am blind about myself. I believe that I am, as much as is possible, autonomous in the domain of thought. I'm talking about me, Castoriadis. What do I mean by that? I certainly don't mean that I have a compulsion for change and that each morning I get up, I take everything I've written, leaf through it, and say to myself: I wrote it, it can no longer be true, therefore it must be changed. No. Absolutely not. For me, being autonomous means that I continue to think, that from time to time I have some new ideas, that I hope that I will continue to have some—unless Alzheimer's catches up with me—and that I grant myself the right to write, as it has happened to me to do, that what I have written in such and such a place was wrong, or inadequate, and that it must be revised and carried further. I've done that. You know my

career. I began by being a Marxist. Then I first of all rejected Marx's economics, then his theory of labor and technique, then his sociology, then his conception of history and his philosophy. And I started to take up again the history of philosophy, to reject many things that until then I had accepted, etc., and I continue on. And I could say the same thing about Freud, for example, for whom I have enormous respect. I am a psychoanalyst, but at the point where I am at now there are very few things that would literally be from Freud in what I think, in what I do, in what I say in the field of psychoanalysis. That's the way it is. There is no compulsion for change. And I don't think of an autonomous society as one dominated by a compulsion for change.

What is autonomy? It's that one might, at each moment, say: Is this law just? Heteronomy is when the question will not be brought up, as one says in the courts. The question will not be posed. It's forbidden. If you are a believing Jew, you cannot raise the question: Are the dictates from Exodus and Deuteronomy just or not? The question has no meaning. It has no meaning because the name of God is Justice and because these laws are the word of God. So, to say that this is unjust is to say that the circle is square. There you have it. We find here its most extreme and evolved, its most subtle and grandiose form; but the same thing holds for all heteronomous societies. It's therefore not a matter of putting back on the assembly's agenda on a daily basis all existing legislative arrangements and inviting the population to reapprove them or change them. It's simply a question of allowing for the possibility—though, the effectively actual possibility—that the institutions might be altered, and without having to have barricades, buckets of blood, upheavals, and all the rest just to do that.

So, you say that all institutionalization is ruled out. I am saying precisely the opposite. An autonomous society is a society that has institutions of autonomy, for example, magistrates. I was saying just a moment ago that I accept such magistrates and that not only do I accept them but I defend the need for them; they just have to be able to be recalled. In this "able" of "able to be recalled" lies the whole question, and one sees here to what (enormous) extent effectively actual

history outstrips all our discussions. For, of course, one has to inscribe within the Constitution the following clause: "Every magistrate can be recalled by his or her constituents [*mandants*]." And it will be inscribed within democratic society as I conceive it. But this clause in itself means nothing. First of all, it may be that the magistrates are irreproachable, or in any case excellent, and that, therefore, they would be allowed to complete their mandates and would be reelected, and so on. But it may also be that people begin to stop giving a damn. And, as has so many times been seen in strikes, in student movements, etc., the magistrates, the delegates, the representatives, the secretaries may therefore become embedded—not necessarily because they want to become embedded, but because the other people say: Oh, there's Dewitte, there's Caillé, there's Latouche; they'll manage to work shit out. We'll go to the movies! Now, what institutional measure do you want to take against that? Of course, you can take some institutional measures, like certain ones that exist already, but one sees what they yield. It's certain that, even if the magistrates become embedded because the constituents don't exercise their right to recall them, these magistrates cannot do just anything—because there are courts, because there's the Council of State or the Court of Audit {as in France}, etc. You see every day, in the newspapers, how weak those means of control are. . . . Such safeguards must be kept, of course, but they aren't going to resolve the problem. The only solution is people's activity. But one cannot see in such activity a miracle that will occur or won't occur. . . . The desire and capacity of citizens to participate in political activities are themselves a political problem and a political task. And in part, they pertain to institutions that induce them, prescribe them, and create citizens who are carried toward that and not toward the guarantee of their enjoyments. There you have it. And that's what must be institutionalized.

ALAIN CAILLÉ: [*to the audience*] No other questions? As for me, I'd like to go back over one question. I'm sorry, but there are questions I've wanted to ask you for a very long time. . . . So long as I've got you here, I'm shamefully going to make the most of it. . . . Chantal . . . ?

CHANTAL MOUFFE: Yes, I would like to go back over this question. For, while I have a lot of sympathy for many of your positions, this is really where things stick. . . . I would be prepared to accept, along with you, that there can be no democracy but a direct one. Let's grant that. But I am going to say, right away, where the limits are. . . . I am quite in agreement that the argument about size is a bad-faith argument. But I will nevertheless mount a defense of what I would call *the system of representation*, not at all on the basis of arguments pertaining to size or on the basis of Constant's arguments, either. I believe that, at bottom, the political philosophy that would justify this system—the regime of representation—hasn't truly been worked out yet, and one would have to, as a matter of fact, look for arguments from another side, ones that would have to do, rather, with the defense of individual freedom. Let me explain myself: there is no democracy but direct democracy, OK; but does democracy guarantee individual freedom? In order, precisely, to be able to guarantee it, isn't it necessary to have, alongside democratic institutions, other institutions that would have to do, rather, with what I'd call *the question of pluralism*? And therefore, at bottom, that's the reason why, for me, the best regime is always a mixed regime.

In your position, in Rousseau's position, there is nonetheless something that bothers me. Doesn't it rest on the idea that, at bottom, the "one" people, when it's going to decide directly in this representative democracy, is necessarily going to choose policies and make decisions that are going to guarantee the freedom of all? Isn't that the question that, at bottom, people like John Stuart Mill raised? It's here, in what I call *political liberalism*, that there is really something important for thinking about democracy today; it's the defense of minorities. After all, Switzerland is a much more democratic regime than many others, but that doesn't stop it from making decisions that, for example, as concerns immigrants, are nevertheless quite problematic. Doesn't your position presuppose, as a matter of fact, some kind of good unity that ensures, if one can all decide together, that one is necessarily going to make good decisions? But I don't think so; and that's why, alongside this democracy, institutions are

needed that are not democratic—OK, they aren't democratic—but that are going to allow one, as a matter of fact, to guarantee, under certain conditions, individual freedom and a certain pluralism.

C.C.: I'll respond on that point, but are there other questions?

ALAIN CAILLÉ: A moment ago, I was on the same course as Chantal Mouffe. Personally, I am quite attached to this requirement for direct democracy. It's totally disappeared from the French intellectual landscape for a very long time; one no longer hears it spoken of—except by you. Now, I believe that it's quite basic. But I, too, stumble over your formulation, for I don't think that direct democracy could substitute for a regime of representative democracy. It seems to me that it has to be reestablished, not in the place of, but as a complement to, a regime of representative democracy, for nearly the same reasons Chantal Mouffe just stated. Why is a regime of representative democracy, about which it can be said that it's not democracy, despite all necessary? This can already be seen clearly for *de facto* reasons. You alluded to the experiments of the soviets. They didn't last very long. That's so for reasons that must be analyzed and that are not a great mystery. What is the basic reason? On what did ancient direct democracy rest? It basically rested on autochthony. It rested on the fact that people had come from one and the same stock, one and the same race, one and the same culture, one and the same soil, that they started off from shared values, and that that allowed the unity of political decision. The problem that is posed for modern democracies, since the loss of relative social homogeneity—which is also indeed what is postulated by Rousseau, whose democracy is a democracy of small producers—the question of modern democracies is simple: it arises precisely when there is no more autochthony, no more unity, no more social, cultural, and economic homogeneity, and when groups that are wholly different are to be brought into contact with one another. The question is posed at a metalevel, and it is apparently no longer soluble only through direct democracy. Another dimension is required—it could be a mixed regime—another instance of authority is required. And you yourself said: In any case, one

has to have institutions that create direct democracy. Of course, but that means that *that* institution is not grounded by direct democracy. . . .

C.C.: First of all, direct democracy, the democratic regime I'm thinking about, is not paradise on earth. It's not the perfect regime, and I don't know what *perfect regime* means. It's not a regime that is immunized, by the very way it is constructed, against all error, aberration, folly, and crime. The Athenians committed some; the French in 1793, too; in North America, it's been a little less extreme, but, well . . . . Therefore, that's not what's at issue. But if this point is mentioned, one mustn't forget that errors, aberrations, follies, and crimes have been committed in superabundance by other regimes, including representative ones. The anti-Red laws, in the United States for example, were voted with complete legality by the House of Representatives and the Senate. I wrote a few years ago a sentence that is perhaps, in all that I have written, the one I prefer: "Nothing or no one can protect humanity from its own folly."[39] Not democracy, and still less monarchy, because monarchy is the folly of the monarch, it's Louis XV, it's the cabal. . . .[40]

So, what about the defense of individuals and minorities? But I'm in complete agreement. I refer you once again to "Done and To Be Done." Reinforced arrangements—constitutional ones, in the sense that revision of them is subject, for example, to more restrictive conditions, qualified majorities, if you will, longer periods of reflection—that guarantee individual liberties, what today we call *rights*, which include *habeas corpus*, rules—like the one that says, since Roman times: There is no crime or penalty without a prior law. And all that can and should be expanded upon. For, all that is insufficient. One can also formulate some

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[39] "Nobody can protect humanity from folly or suicide" ("The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy" [1983; now in *PPA*, p. 115, and reprinted in CR, pp. 282]).

[40] In French, *la cabale* may refer to any of a number of conspiracies or plots hatched under a monarchy, such as the Cabal Ministry under Charles II of England, the *Cabale des Importants* against Richelieu, etc. —T/E

arrangements for the defense of minorities, different categories of minorities, and such arrangements would be part of the Constitution. But are you proposing that one have a constitution that isn't revisable under any condition? No, of course not. For, the Constitution, even if it does not foresee it, will then be revised by force of arms. We're at least at the fifth French republican Constitution, not to speak of the intervening monarchical Constitutions; I don't know how many countries have had forty constitutions, which have all become scraps of paper. The idea of an unrevisable constitution is both concretely and logically absurd. Just as you cannot prevent the Swiss from restricting by referendum the entry of migrants, you won't ever be able to prevent the people one day—I'm going to say something deliberately ridiculous—from saying: "All individuals shorter than five feet, four inches or taller than six feet, three inches are deprived of the right to vote." As the other people are the overwhelming majority, they could very well take this step. What are you going to do? For my part, I'd be against; I'd fight to the death against such a measure, and I'd try to stir up people against it. If you grant majority rule, you necessarily grant that, despite all guarantees, there is always the possibility that people might go mad and that they might do this or that. Hitler wasn't brought to power by a majority, but it was just like he was. So, what was one going to do? Deprive the Germans of the right to vote? That's the movement of history. One can fight against, but one cannot be assured of that through legal arrangements. But what I absolutely don't see, and what seems to me truly to be like a fallacy in your reasoning and in that of Caillé, is in what sense the fact that democracy would be representative, and not direct, constitutes an additional guarantee. We now have in the United States a Congress that is preparing to do—if it dares—monstrous things. . . .[41] I believe that what you are

[41] Clearly, it is a question here of the efforts of the Republican majority in Congress to impose, in 1994-1995, a strict balanced budget on the Clinton Administration, with a major reduction in social welfare benefits and medical coverage for the most destitute. [Actually, the 104th U.S. Congress did not begin its term until January 4, 1995. —T/E]

saying falls within an ideological tradition of reinterpreting Antiquity that has been one of the two traditions between which the West has oscillated and that has consisted in presenting the Athenian *dēmos* in moments of folly, condemning the Arginusae generals[42] or making some other monstrous decision, while forgetting all the other decisions this same *dēmos* had made over one hundred years that culminated in a certain number of wonders with which we are all familiar. The *dēmos* of the Athenians had some moments of folly, but there have been elected, representative chambers that also have had some and that have made bad decisions. . . . I don't see how, and I ask you to reflect on this, a regime based on representation would guarantee individual liberties more. Representatives do not guarantee individual liberties; constitutional arrangements do. And if the Constitution holds, if we are certain that, for example, in the United States or in France, the restoration of slavery is impossible or—nothing is impossible—extremely improbable, that's not because the Constitution says so—there, we'd be cretins; it's because we know that, if there were a proposal to restore slavery, an overwhelming majority of the people would be ready to fight to make sure that such a restoration would not take place.

You link me with Rousseau, and so does Caillé. Now, I have nothing to do with Rousseau in this matter. While it has often happened that I quote the phrase where Rousseau criticizes representative democracy, I am absolutely not in agreement with his conceptions about the general will, the banning of factions, and so on. I have nothing to do with all that. . . . But I believe that there is nevertheless something in what you say that is very important and that is worth the trouble to clarify—and here, there's a difference between modern democracy, between modern regimes and the ancient regime. This involves the conception of representatives as representatives of particular interests. This aspect is indeed modern, and in a sense I am against it. This would involve a

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[42]See *CFG2*, pp. 204, 207-8. [Castoriadis makes many mentions of the Battle of Arginusae and its aftermath, when the "generals" (admirals) were put to death for having failed to rescue some sailors subsequent to this Athenian naval victory. See, e.g., *ASA(RPT)*, p. 193 and n. 4. —T/E]

very long discussion, but I'll bring back up an example I like a lot. There was a measure in the Athenian laws mentioned by Aristotle in the *Politics*,[43] I believe, that said that, when the people's assembly is to decide whether or not to make war against an adjoining city, the citizens inhabiting the border regions do not have the right to participate in the vote. Why? Because they cannot vote honestly, or else they are placed in a double bind that leads to psychosis. Either they vote as citizens while forgetting the fact that their olive trees are going to be destroyed, their homes burned down, etc., and that's something that hurts, or they vote as homeowners, owners of olive trees, etc., and they scorn the interests of the city. Now, it's the latter case that constantly comes true in contemporary society. It is said of representatives that they are the representatives of the people. . . . But that's not the case. Look at what happens in reality; you really need to do some concrete political sociology. What are these American Congressmen? What are these French Deputies? What do they defend first? They defend the sectional interests of their electors. The American Congress will say that funds have to be maintained at Boeing because it's Seattle, Washington, that such and such a base has to be kept in Texas, because it provides work for ten thousand people in the region, and so on. And there one speaks of the good people, but there are also more substantial interests. . . . Behind present-day representation, there is a recognition of conflictual interests in society and the idea that, through representation, through this regime of indirect democracy, interests can negotiate among themselves some compromise solutions. What's the result? It's the present-day situation, in which there are indeed compromises or some give-and-take—"Yes, agreed, you'll get this increase in agricultural subsidies provided that you accept that." And it's total political impotence on the part of members of Congress, which is the reason why no decision is made and all politicians go on and on about the reforms that are necessary and those reforms never happen.

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[43] Aristotle *Politics* 1330a20. [Actually, Aristotle says only that such laws exist "in some places" and does not mention Athens specifically. —T/E]

So, I'm in agreement with you in saying that one cannot ignore the existence of particularities in society, that one cannot speak in terms of a unified society, that a means has to be found so that those rights are safeguarded as much as is reasonably possible. But one has to maintain—and on this point I'm absolutely intransigent—the unity of the political body *qua* political body that has in sight the general interest of society and not, for example, that of the southern French wine growers. The southern French wine growers are quite respectable, they must be protected, but one cannot set them above the interests of the collectivity as a whole.

CHANTAL MOUFFE: Quickly . . . I'd like to specify what I meant, because I completely agree with your answer. I don't want at all to defend the system of representation such as it exists today, because certainly what is at stake are particular interests. But I was thinking of a future representative democracy. And so, what precisely would this future democratic regime be that one wants to struggle for? I myself believe that it would, as a matter of fact, not be a regime of direct democracy, but rather a regime of representative democracy where the question around which conflict would be played out would not be the conflict of interests but instead the conflict over different interpretations of the common good. For, I believe—and this is what Alain was saying, too—the great difference, in my opinion, between the situation today and the Greek situation is the question of homogeneity, the question of pluralism, and one cannot take it as obvious—*self-evident*, as one says in English—that there is one single or same interpretation of the general interest that is more just than another one. I am completely in agreement with you as concerns the critique of present-day society. But I believe that the society one wants to struggle for would be a society in which parties would, as a matter of fact, play a different role, would not be representatives of particular interests, but in which the question would play out around different interpretations of what the common good is. There isn't a single just idea of the general interest, and one must leave room as a matter of fact for conflict around these different interpretations. Therefore, it would be a representative democracy, which doesn't exist, of course.

ALAIN CAILLÉ: A representative democracy that doesn't exist, and a direct democracy that doesn't exist, either. . . .

C.C.: That's perfect; we're heading in the right direction since we're talking about what is to exist and not miserable present-day reality! But what is called *the general interest* or *the common good of the political body* . . .

CHANTAL MOUFFE: It's not definable; it's a horizon. . . .

C.C.: Certainly, it's not definable by a philosopher, by a Plato, or by a Niklas Luhmann writing a theory of social systems,[44] and still less by a computer; we're completely in agreement. But it *can be discussed* by citizens, and citizens alone can discuss about it and then settle the matter. We therefore have to ask ourselves: What are the questions that pertain to the general interest and therefore to political decision? And what are the ones that concern, for example, only the private sphere and are not political in the strong sense of the term? Take homosexuality. In the United States, at least in certain states, it is considered a crime, for the law leans on a measure that is, I believe, in Leviticus.[45] But when Napoleon had to deal with homosexuality, he thought it pertained to people's private lives and that politics didn't have to legislate on that subject. That is, of course, also my opinion. Take another example: Is the question of the equality of men and women a question of general interest? For me, yes, incontestably so. It's therefore a political question. And how does one settle a political question? By political decisions. You can go on repeating the words *pluralism* and *cultural difference*; you'll still really have to set the limits beyond which such pluralism no longer holds. I'll take once

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[44]The German sociologist Niklas Luhmann (1927-1988).

[45]"If a man also lie with mankind, as he lieth with a woman, both of them have committed an abomination; they shall surely be put to death; their blood shall be upon them" (20.13). [Castoriadis is thinking of the 1986 U.S. Supreme Court decision, *Bowers v. Hardwick*, which upheld Georgia's antisodomy law (see in CR, p. 411). The Court finally overturned that decision in *Lawrence v. Texas* (2003). —T/E]

again a caricatured example—that's my habit, and it was that of my ancestor, Socrates. Is the right to kill those who don't please you a matter of cultural difference? Does the society in which we live accept as honorable the activity of headhunters, which is quite honorable among certain tribes?

A VOICE: Among the Dayaks.

C.C.: Among the Dayaks, yes, in particular. We'll say, and this is a political decision: No, this isn't a cultural difference; or: It's a cultural difference that can't be tolerated. In our society, it is forbidden to kill. Now, as I've already said jokingly, one can imagine a society rich enough to set aside a certain number of uninhabited Pacific islands for people who want to live as headhunters or as in *The 120 Days of Sodom*; perfect, let them freely go kill one another.

ALAIN CAILLÉ: You'll furnish the victims at the same time?

C.C.: Yes, those who would really like to be victims. Reread Jean Paulhan's preface to *Story of O,* voluntary slavery, etc. Those people will go live over there. And if they are lacking in victims, the torturers and executioners will massacre one another. But let's get back to the main point, to political decision. Now, contrary to what Plato thinks, there is no political *epistēmē*; it's a domain that pertains to *doxa*, to opinion. And that's especially so in democracy: all the *doxai* freely confront one another there, and majority rule alone allows one to settle matters legitimately among them. This isn't emphasized enough: The sole foundation for majority rule is that, in politics, all the *doxai* are equivalent. And there is no procedural way out, of the sort: Now the discussion stops; all the opinions are placed in a hat and lots are drawn. No, the number of opinions in favor of such and such a decision has a weight and creates a presumption of soundness. But whether this majority is obtained by referendum or by the vote of representatives, at that level I don't see the difference. The representatives will say: Headhunters are not tolerated among us. And the majority of the people will say the same thing. I don't see how you can draw an argument from that for representative democracy as against direct democracy. So, let's improve the measures for protecting minorities, of course, but we'll have to find a majority to define what

minorities can legitimately claim the aforesaid protection. And I hope that we are in agreement: women are not a minority from this standpoint; the problem is raised elsewhere. . . . But time is advancing and if we want . . .

ALAIN CAILLÉ: We're not forced to hold to the entire program!

C.C.: So, we stop here? . . . Please, go ahead.

ANNE-MARIE FIXOT: You say that what is to be set above is the general interest alone and that it can be discussed by citizens. But the difficulty is that citizens have to be placed in a position to do so, or at the very least they must be connected to the discussion. And this is what poses a problem for me today, because I notice, as you said a moment ago, that many people are losing interest in it and are indifferent; but also that some, through their socioeconomic condition, don't succeed in assuming their place in the direction of the general interest. What is to be done? How is one to conceive this future democracy? What is the role of information, of day-to-day education, not just for children but also for ourselves? And above all, what types of citizen relationships can one think of that would succeed in having the general interest really taken into account by the whole body of citizens and not simply by a few, even in the case of direct democracy?

C.C.: Here we have the fundamental problem. I'm completely in agreement with you. The participation of citizens, at all levels of society, is not something where it suffices to await a miracle; it has to be worked at intensively, introducing institutional arrangements that facilitate such participation. The central feature, I repeat, is *paideia*, education, school being only a small part thereof. Even Plato knew that, when he said that "the walls of the city educate the citizens." That's utterly true, but it's so little put into practice. . . . Now, when you mention socioeconomic conditions, I fear that we'll have to set up another meeting, because we'll never get to finish today. One would have to deal with the huge problem of the way society is structured economically and in production, as well as the objectives of economic activity.

ANNE-MARIE FIXOT: Many of those who don't participate in political life say: We're so excluded, how could we even think of the general interest?

C.C.: Of course, there's exclusion. But there is also the concrete apathy of many people. . . . And even if some people were interested in politics, they wouldn't really have the time to deal with it in an active way: the entire structure of society tends to prevent them from participating, and that goes from the structure of work all the way to what is called *the law*. "Ignorance of the law is no excuse." You must have thought of the amusing paradox that this saying so ill conceals. In a court, you are therefore supposed to know everything, and, at the same time, if your case is just a little bit complicated, you have to hire a lawyer, someone who, after four or five years of study, has specialized for another three or four years in maritime law or in this or that other kind of law. . . . It's an absurd situation, which can be contrasted with the ancient system, where all the laws were written on marble and displayed; everyone knew how to read and could become acquainted with them. Our society is too complex for everyone to be able to do so. . . . But why should this complexity be suffered as an inevitability? What really matters to us? Why would it be necessary to take as inevitable what the evolution of history has given us as a, let us say, spontaneous product: this late twentieth-century capitalism, with its enormous legislative complexity, which, in the United States, allows lawyers to earn more money than the industrialists they are defending? And what about the aberrant modes of production, the walls covered with ads, television as it has been imposed on us? All that, can it never truly be called back into question? And why not turn things around and say, "We want a system of law, such that every citizen might understand it and get by with it; we want an economic system and a system of production, such that all the producers might participate in one way or another in the management of production"? See what I mean? What divine decree would force us to have factories where 50,000 workers, ground down [*abrutis*] by their labor, as Constant said, produce in such and such a fashion such and such a type of products? What about a market economy that, in order to operate well, needs a level of unemployment that can climb as high as 12 to 15 percent of the population? We can turn all that around and begin by saying: We want a society in which all citizens

might participate in common affairs. And in the face of that requirement, there are practically no more givens that would be indisputable. Our legal system is contestable because it is antidemocratic; our system of production is contestable because it is forced upon us while grinding down laboring people for forty or more hours per week, after which it is ridiculous to believe that they will have a Sunday of political activity. Perhaps one needs to turn the problem around, radicalize it, and ask oneself what society one truly wants.

SERGE LATOUCHE: Clearly, we have the answer to your question: What society do we want? For an immense majority of us, we want cars, washing machines, refrigerators, etc. As President Bush said, "The American way of life is not negotiable."[46] Let nature perish, but the standard of living of Americans will remain what it is. . . . And consequently, we want the system to continue as it is, and at bottom we couldn't give much of a damn whether it's democratic or not. Nevertheless, we don't completely not give a damn, that is to say, we want to have our cake and eat it, too. . . . We want refrigerators, washing machines, automobiles . . . with all that this system implies in the way of the citizen being dispossessed of a political life by the technoeconomic megamachine. But cannot one, despite all, while remaining Aristotelean, have recourse to the principle of the lesser evil? It's not the same thing for this system to be managed by a totalitarian bureaucracy or for it to be managed by corrupt representatives in a parliament or congress such as they are. There's nevertheless still a relative good. . . .

C.C.: Obviously. If, with my back to the wall, I had to choose between the extension of Soviet power as it existed in Europe and the maintenance of our rotten democracies, I would even be ready to fight for the defense of those democracies. But I thought that we were talking now of what the aim of politics ought to be. . . . In May, there's going to be a presidential election {in France}. I don't believe that I'll vote . . . but if I were to vote, it would not be for Balladur, for

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[46]George H. W. Bush, father of George W. Bush. [Bush Senior made this statement at the June 1992 "Earth Summit" held in Rio de Janeiro. —T/E]

example.

ALAIN CAILLÉ: For Chirac? [*laughter*]

C.C.: Not for him, either. Nor, moreover, for Arlette![47] [*laughter*] But, well, there I'm acting in the realm of the relative, like when I want to take the shortest route to get to the countryside. . . .

SERGE LATOUCHE: There is in this entire discussion a handicap Alain had tried to remove at the start, but that was not brought back into the discussion later on and that one has a tendency to forget. It's that the whole "economicization" of society was being challenged and that, in fact, your entire way of reasoning presupposes that the economic imaginary would have been completely decolonized.

C.C.: Do you have here a copy of *Fait et à faire*? Allow me, even if it is very impolite to quote oneself, to end this part of the discussion with a quotation:

> We thus arrive at the Gordian knot of the political question today. An autonomous society cannot be instaurated except through the autonomous activity of the collectivity. Such an activity presupposes that people strongly cathect *something other* than the possibility of buying a new color television set. On a deeper level, it presupposes that the passion for democracy and for freedom, for public affairs will take the place of distraction, cynicism, conformism, and the consumer race. In short, it presupposes, among other things, that the "economic" cease to be the dominant or exclusive value. This, to respond to [Ferenc] Fehér, is the "price attached" to a transformation of society. Let us put it more clearly still: the price to pay for liberty is the destruction of the economic as central (and, in fact, *unique*) value.

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[47] Arlette Laguiller, leader of the French Trotskyist party *Lutte Ouvrière* (Workers' Struggle), ran unsuccessfully in every French presidential election from 1974 until 2007. —T/E

> Is this price too high? For me, certainly not: I infinitely prefer a new friend to a new car. A subjective preference, of course. But "objectively"? I willingly abandon to the political philosophers the task of "founding" (pseudo-)consumption as the supreme value. But there is something more important. If things continue on their present course, this price will have to be paid *anyway*. Who can believe that the destruction of the Earth will be able to continue at its present pace for another century? Who fails to see that it would accelerate further still if the poor countries were to industrialize? And what will the regime do when it no longer is able to exercise a hold over populations by furnishing them constantly with new gadgets?[48]

I believe that this text responds to your remark or at least is heading in the direction of your remark. I propose that we stop here. Everyone must be tired. In any case, I am.

JACQUES DEWITTE: A small remark, all the same, which I wanted to make a moment ago. . . . There's a text of yours that I have always much appreciated, which is for me a very beautiful text: "Development and Rationality"—which first appeared in *Esprit*, I think—and even a quite particular passage where you mention the gesture of the Greek man who planted an olive tree. . . .[49]

C.C.: A cypress tree.

JACQUES DEWITTE: I missed that. Yes . . . because in addition in the olive tree, there's obviously something . . .

C.C.: Moreover, it was the dowry of his daughter. When she was twenty, this cypress tree was cut down to make it into a boat's mast.

JACQUES DEWITTE: What surprises me is that, in a meeting between Castoriadis and the MAUSS group, this

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[48] "Done and To Be Done" (1989), in *CR*, p. 416.

[49] "Reflections on 'Rationality' and 'Development'" (1976; now in *PPA*). [See p. 195. If this is the correct passage, Castoriadis mentions the planting, by his grandparents, of both "olive trees and cypresses." —T/E]

aspect would not be mentioned. . . . For, here, as a matter of fact, there's something like an economy that is other than rational, that is a wager for the future: the foundation of a temporality that is not immediate profitability. Now, that's how I also understand where Alain's reflections are in fact leading, with the interpretation of the idea of the gift. . . . That implies something like a transcendence, something that also goes beyond immediate interest. But then, we're engaged in a more ethical or even metaphysical discussion that would be another discussion than this one, and it's one to which I am perhaps personally more attuned. . . .

C.C.: We're engaged above all in a discussion about the ends of human life. But I am completely in agreement; I don't believe that there can be any politics without a certain position on the ends of human life. That refers us back to the question of pluralism. Today, we have our backs to the wall; one cannot continue to speak of *indeterminacy* or just of *the divergence of opinions*: the ends of human life are achieved by contemporary society in a certain form; the ends of human life, that's next year's new television set. There you have it. So, is that the reality we want? In any case, as Serge said, that is for the moment, in effective actuality, what the majority wants.

SERGE LATOUCHE: The immense majority!

C.C.: The immense majority. Even those who aren't there are running to get there: Eastern Europe, the underdeveloped countries. . . . Now, that is incompatible with a true democracy, and it even is, in my opinion, less and less compatible even with the truncated democracy we currently have.

On what you say about the traditional Greek peasant, I obviously share your opinion, since I myself mentioned, at the start of our discussion, that almost autarchic Greek village on the island of Tinos. Let's be clear: this allows us to express the core of the problem, but it couldn't be a question of purely and simply going back. I take the liberty, one final time, to refer you to another of my texts, "Dead End?"[50]—that's with

[50] "Dead End?" (1987; in *PPA*).

a question mark—reprinted in *Le Monde morcelé*. It is above all a question there of this autonomized race of technoscience, with its industrial and consumerist dimension, of course, but also with its purely technical-scientific aspect. Nearly all of that is also to be found in the interview with the doctor and biologist Jacques Testart in *Libération*. To the question: "Do you think that, in accordance with the wishes of Madame Badinter, men will one day be able to become pregnant and carry on a pregnancy?" he answered (after having resigned from those bodies that deal with artificial insemination), "I know that there are some labs in Chicago that are working on it; I cannot tell you if it will be able to happen or not; but I want to tell you one thing: If it can be done, it will be done."[51] There we have contemporary technoscience: one doesn't ask if one has a need for something, but only whether it can be done. And if it can be done, it is done; and then one finds a need or creates one.

One surely cannot continue along like that. But surely, too, one cannot simply say: We'll destroy all that and start over from scratch. We are the first society in which the question of a self-limitation of the advances in technique and knowledge is posed not for religious or other such reasons, or for political ones in the totalitarian sense—Stalin decreeing that the theory of relativity is antiproletarian . . . —but for reasons that have to do with *phronēsis* in Aristotle's sense: for reasons having to do with prudence in the profound sense of the term. And I insist on this point: I am speaking of a limitation not only of technique but also of science. For, the key thing here is the notion of feasability. And that's where the question becomes extremely difficult, including for me.

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[51]We have not been able to track down the exact date of this interview, which, in "Dead End?" (1987; *PPA*, p. 250, n. 6), Castoriadis says was published in *Libération* "a year before" a September 10, 1986 *Le Monde* interview with Testart; in his slightly different account in "Dead End?" (ibid.), Castoriadis reports that Testart said: "Don't worry; if it is technically feasible, someone will do it someday in the United States." The French feminist writer Élisabeth Badinter had envisaged the possibility of male pregnancy in her 1992 book *XY, de l'identité masculine* (Paris: Odile Jacob). —T/E

For, I would very much like for a still-more-powerful Hubble telescope to let us to know whether or not there were protogalaxies fifteen billion years ago; that's a problem that fascinates me. Now, Hubble telescopes and satellites imply modern science and technique in their totality. Where is one going to set the limit, and who is going to set it, and on what basis? Now, that's a true question.

Paris, December 10, 1994