



International Symposium



Social Autonomy & the Radical Imaginary: 100 years from the birth of Cornelius Castoriadis

Friday 23 September 2022

Venues:

In person:

Building 3E, Room 3.5,
Claverton Down, BA2 7AY
University of Bath, United Kingdom

On-line

(Registration process to receive Zoom link):

<https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/social-autonomy-and-the-radical-imaginary-cornelius-castoriadis-tickets-385661272247>

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Introduction

Internationally renowned as the leading philosopher of autonomy, **Cornelius Castoriadis** (1922-1997) left a remarkable intellectual legacy. Co-founder of the *Socialisme ou Barbarie* political group and author of the now classic philosophical work '*The Imaginary Institution of Society*', Castoriadis' contributions to social philosophy, political theory, political economy and psychoanalysis remain a source of inspiration for both academics, political activists and social movements.

Commemorating 100 years since Castoriadis' birth, the Centre of Analysis for Social Policy at the University of Bath organizes a one-day (hybrid) symposium on Friday, 23 September 2022. This is also the inaugural event of CASP's new series of Theory Seminars.

We will be joined by academic scholars, writers and activists from the UK and abroad to critically appraise Castoriadis work on autonomy and social institutions and explore new directions of research that engage with his philosophical concepts and socio-political analysis.

Registration and venue

This is a **hybrid** event where participants can attend either in-person or online. To accommodate participants from different time zones the conference starts a little later than usual @ 10:00 am UK time.

Both in person and online participants need to register using the Eventbrite link below. This is helpful for both administrative and catering purposes.

- **In person** (venue): Building 3 East, Room 3.5, Claverton Down, BA2 7AY, University of Bath, United Kingdom. Travel advice and instructions on how to get to the city of Bath and the University campus can be found here: <https://www.bath.ac.uk/topics/travel-advice/>.
- **On-line** (Registration process to receive Zoom link): <https://www.eventbrite.co.uk/e/social-autonomy-and-the-radical-imaginary-cornelius-castoriadis-tickets-385661272247>

There is **no registration fee**.

Participants 'pack'

- All participants will have access to the final version of the programme.
- All participants will have access to any recordings and/or presentational materials that will become available to participants **after** the conference
- In-person participants will be provided with lunch and refreshments **free of charge** during the day of the conference (unfortunately, we cannot cover any accommodation or travel expenses).

We are looking forward to welcoming you to the University of Bath, virtually or in person!

Programme

9:00-10:00	Coffee and Refreshments
10:00-10:10	Welcoming words <i>Prof. Nick Pearce</i> <i>Director, Institute for Policy Research</i> <i>(University of Bath, United Kingdom)</i>
10:10-10:30	Introduction to the Symposium: Cornelius Castoriadis and the project of Autonomy <i>Theodoros Papadopoulos</i> <i>Director, Centre for the Analysis of Social Policy</i> <i>(University of Bath, United Kingdom))</i>
10.30-11:05	Time and Autonomy in the philosophy of Cornelius Castoriadis <i>Alexandros Schismenos (Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki, Greece)</i>
11:10-11:45	Power, Knowledge and Policy in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis <i>Theodoros Papadopoulos (University of Bath, United Kingdom)</i>
11:45-12:00	Break - Coffee and Refreshments
12:00-12:35	The Philosophy of Castoriadis in the Time of the Absence of a Political Proposal <i>Nikos Ioannou (Athens School cooperative, Greece)</i>
12:35-13:40	Lunch Buffet, Coffee and Refreshments
13:45-14:25	Collective Reflections - 1: Social and radical imaginary: ontological and epistemological challenges
14:25-15:00	London Solidarity & Cornelius Castoriadis: An Autopoietic Affair <i>Chris Spannos (Independent Researcher, United Kingdom)</i>
15:00-15:15	Break - Coffee and Refreshments
15:15-15:50	Castoriadis, <i>Crip Time</i> and Disability Rights <i>Prof. Ravi Malhotra (University of Ottawa, Canada)</i> <i>& Jacqueline Moizer (University of Ottawa, Canada)</i>
15:55-16:30	Political Challenges and the Crisis of Criticism <i>Yavor Tarinski (Transnational Institute of Social Ecology, Greece)</i>
16:30-17:25	Collective Reflections - 2: The project of Autonomy in the 21st century: Cornelius Castoriadis as a source of inspiration
17:25-17:30	End of the International Symposium
19:00	Dinner (<i>by invitation</i> ; Venue: 'The Architect', Bath)

Abstracts & Biographical notes (in order of appearance)

'Time and Autonomy in the philosophy of Cornelius Castoriadis' - *Alexandros Schismenos*

Abstract

Cornelius Castoriadis aspired to reinvigorate political and Philosophical thinking within the horizon of the unity of theory in action to autonomy. He criticised Marx from a revolutionary perspective, promoting the idea of direct democracy and the subordination of economics to politics, and he also criticised traditional philosophy for obscuring the indeterminacy and creativity of human imagination. Castoriadis outlined the relational and temporal dimensions of human society asserting that we create our own history collectively and proposing ways to transgress alienation through democratic self-determination. In my speech I will present the importance of temporality for Castoriadis' philosophy and the significance of free political time for the project of democracy.

Biographical note

Alexandros Schismenos was born in Athens, Greece, 1978. He holds a Ph.D. in Philosophy from the University of Ioannina and he is currently a post-doctoral researcher in the Aristotelian University of Thessaloniki. He has authored four books in Greek and several articles regarding social autonomy and political philosophy. He is also the co-author of *Castoriadis and Autonomy in the Twenty-First Century* (Bloomsbury 2021) and *Common Futures: Social Transformation and Political Ecology* (Black Rose Books, 2021)

'Power, Knowledge and Policy in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis' - Theodoros Papadopoulos

Abstract

This paper critically explores how operational governance and the role of expert knowledge in public policy making are approached in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis (CC). This is a rather under-researched aspect of CC's work which, however, is of central importance with respect to the operational/practical dimension of the project of autonomy. Based on CC's published seminars on Plato's 'Politicus' (Πολιτικός) and his essays in the book 'Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy' the paper (a) sketches CC's approach to the perennial issue of the relationship between means and ends in politics and policy; (b) explores CC's understanding of the role of knowledge and expertise in radical democratic prefigurative politics and (c) highlights the affinities, as well as differences, with a number of other radical approaches. It is argued that while on the formal aspect of governance (the content of policies) CC's radical democratic analysis is lucid, powerful and eloquently argued, when it comes to the operational aspect of governance (the process of policy making that includes implementation) CC's analysis is under-theorized, rather weak and opaque. In fact, it is further argued that some of the theorists of classic anarchism (like M. Bakunin, Proudhon) seem to have intuitively understood more clearly this aspect of governance and its role in reproducing (and well as altering) structures of domination and heteronomy. The paper ends with a number of tentative recommendations for strengthening the prefigurative aspects of the project of autonomy and complementing CC's contribution on these issues.

Biographical note

Theodoros Papadopoulos is Director of the Centre for Analysis of Social Policy, in the Department of Social and Policy Sciences at the University of Bath (UK). His teaching and research areas include the comparative political economy of welfare, public policy design and governance analysis. His recent publications focus on the social politics of austerity in southern EU countries; the ordo-liberal character of EU's economic governance; the role of the family in semi-peripheral welfare capitalism. He has been a visiting professor in Maastricht School of Governance (the Netherlands), University of Shandong (China) and University of Turku (Finland). E-mail: T.Papadopoulos@bath.ac.uk

'The Philosophy of Castoriadis in the Time of the Absence of a Political Proposal' - Nikos Ioannou***Abstract***

Although we are living in a new era in the field of social movements worldwide, the idea of a political proposal is completely absent. On the one hand the defeat of the «revolution» in all its versions, on the other hand the loss of institutionalized functions that expressed it, made the idea of political change with concrete proposals an idea without impact. Thus the revolts of the first two decades of the 21st century, while raising the question of the constitution (real democracy, direct democracy), did so as if they were merely formulating a demand, with the result that they failed to exert the necessary pressure for institutional changes that could lead to constitutional change. The global character of the largest of these uprisings, the Occupy movement, seemed to embody some important elements from Cornelius Castoriadis' political thought regarding the universality of the possible emergence of a new political movement. Unfortunately, no attempt was ever made to exit from the status quo. Today, with the unprecedented experience of the pandemic for modern humanity and the aggression of authoritarian states such as Russia and China, a new type of conservatism is emerging and threatening to regress. At the same time a new non-national urban imaginary, a modern global urban imaginary that transcends national geography and geopolitics is making its appearance. The city becomes the focus of interest. Are there fields in the global social movement of the grassroots in which political-democratic proposals beyond national forms of life could be cultivated? Will we succeed in overcoming the critique of the ideologies of the past and make room for ideas of individual and social autonomy? These are some of the questions I will address in my presentation.

Biographical Note

Nikos Ioannou was born in Agrinio, Greece, 1964. He practices and teaches carpentry at Athens School cooperative. He is the co-author of two books in Greek and several articles regarding contemporary politics. He has been a social and ecological activist since the late 1970s. He is the co-author of *Castoriadis and Autonomy in the Twenty-First Century* (Bloomsbury 2021).

'London Solidarity & Cornelius Castoriadis: An Autopoietic Affair' - Chris Spannos

Abstract

The London Solidarity group contributed to the re-emergence of direct-action and autonomous social struggle in the United Kingdom from 1961. The group rigorously critiqued authoritarian exploitation in the East and West, championed sexual liberation, worker self-activity and played a historic role in the 1963 "Spies for Peace" scandal which provoked a public crisis of confidence in the British warfare state by revealing its secret preparations for elite rule after nuclear war. Solidarity used direct-action as a method to achieve direct-democracy and autonomy. The group was deeply influenced by the philosophy and politics of Cornelius Castoriadis. Solidarity co-founder Chris Pallis (aka Maurice Brinton), among the world's leading neurologists in the second half of the 20th century, first encountered Castoriadis' ideas in the early 50's and they formed a close friendship until Castoriadis' death in 1997. Pallis and other "Solidarists" consulted Castoriadis over the years: hosting him in Britain for talks, debates and meetings, and making political pilgrimages to Paris. Pallis translated significant tracts of Castoriadis' work into English, adapted for a British audience. This work informed Solidarity's own critique of bureaucracy, and the group's struggle for autonomy and direct-democracy. Castoriadis' ideas, and the influence of the Socialisme ou Barbarie group more broadly, is important for understanding what I argue is an example of Autopoiesis in the Castoriadian sense: the Solidarity group evolved to instaurate its own creative base for direct-action and a radical imaginary striving to enable the emergence of autonomous people, autonomous social movements and an autonomous society in Britain.

Biographical note

Chris Spannos is author of the forthcoming Direct-action and autonomous organizing across the United Kingdom: London Solidarity (Bloomsbury Academic) and a related forthcoming Ken Weller Reader (PM Press). He is co-author of Castoriadis and Autonomy in the Twenty-first Century (Bloomsbury Academic, 2021). He was formerly Media Editor in Oxford University Press' Higher Education division, Digital Editor for New Internationalist, Editor for ZCommunications, and Editor for teleSUR English. His writings have appeared in Le Monde diplomatique, ROAR and elsewhere.

'Castoriadis, Crip Time and Disability Rights' - Ravi Malhotra & Jacqueline Moizer

Abstract

In this presentation, we explore the implications of Cornelius Castoriadis' notion of socially imaginary time for understanding the issues faced by workers with disabilities. Throughout the Western industrialized countries, workers with disabilities experience systematic discrimination and marginalization. Large numbers of workers with disabilities are excluded from the labour market and forced to survive on extremely modest pensions. Many others have never had significant labour market experience in the first place and are generally relegated to a life of even deeper poverty. We suggest that an understanding of time as experienced by people with disabilities enriches our understanding of how better to accommodate and include people with disabilities in the workplace. Disability scholars such as Alison Kafer and Ellen Samuels have developed the notion of crip time to explain the way people with disabilities struggle with balancing work, parenting, chronically delayed transportation and booking medical appointments. People with disabilities who require assistance with activities of daily living such as bathing, dressing and toileting must also schedule personal care assistants who are generally overwhelmed with clients and are often tardy. While some scholars such as Schismenos have begun to do preliminary work on Castoriadis' conception of social imaginary time, we argue that Castoriadis' contributions to the importance of radical imagination hold promise for a reconceptualization of time. We also incorporate findings from our ongoing SSHRC-funded qualitative study interviewing the experiences of workers with disabilities. Castoriadis' thought helps us in developing a new theory of crip time that may lead to better accommodation strategies for workers with disabilities.

Biographical Notes

Ravi Malhotra is a full professor at the Faculty of Law, Common Law Section at the University of Ottawa in Canada where he has taught since 2006. A graduate of Harvard Law School, he has written several book chapters analyzing the work of Castoriadis and is currently working on a manuscript on Castoriadis, time, and disability rights for Bloomsbury Academic's series on Castoriadis.

Jacqueline Moizer is a third-year English Common Law student at the University of Ottawa. Jacqueline has a background in political theory and holds a MA in Political and Legal Thought from Queen's University. She is passionate about social justice and is pursuing a career in union-side labour law.

'Political Challenges and the Crisis of Criticism' - *Yavor Tarinski*

Abstract

Castoriadis has been talking about a crisis of criticism as one of the manifestations of the general and deep-seated crisis of society provoked by the rising tide of insignificance. Criticism, he argued, is not being stifled by some kind of censorship, but by the general commercialization of all social spheres – or in other words, by the dominance of the economy over everything else. Thus, information comes and goes with an increased rapidity: following the economic logic of constant growth, one has to constantly find new information to replace the previous one. This diminishes the space for political debate that encourages citizenship, and instead, creates fertile ground for cheap sloganeering behind which mobs can form. This became evident recently with the pandemic and the Russian invasion of Ukraine. This environment poses serious challenges to our ability to reimagine the revolutionary project of Autonomy today, leading instead many to seek solutions to the crises at hand within the very same system that has created them in the first place. But all is not lost and Castoriadis' political legacy has important insights that can help social movements, communities of struggle, and activist collectives to endure the difficulties of the present and make important steps towards a democratic and ecological future.

Biographical Note

Yavor Tarinski is an independent researcher, activist and author. He participates in social movements around the Balkans, as well as in transnational organizations, dedicated to the production of grassroots knowledge. He is a member of the administrative board of the Transnational Institute of Social Ecology, of the editorial board of the Greek journal & publications *Aftoleksi*, as well as bibliographer at Agora International. He has authored several books, the latest of which is 'Concepts for a Democratic and Ecological Society' (Zero Books, 2022)