

CONCEALED CHORA IN THE THOUGHT OF CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS: A BASTARD COMMENT ON TRANS-REGIONAL CREATION

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ABSTRACT: The *chora* has proven to be an obscure concept in contemporary philosophy. Cornelius Castoriadis seemed to retreat from the edge of its significance within his work, a significance that is capable of opening up another turn in the labyrinth of his thought. A clear interrogation into the presence of the *chora* in his thought has, still, yet to be elucidated. This paper proceeds with a notion of the *chora* defined for the purpose of highlighting its relevance for Castoriadis' thought, taking up his schema trans-regional ontology and imaginary creation, which lean on the anticipation of a self-altering otherness. Locating the *chora* in Castoriadis' trans-regional architectonics of being.

KEYWORDS: Castoriadis; Chora; Trans-regional Ontology; Radical Instituting Imaginary

... the other path, the tradition of Heraclitus, Democritus, and the Sophists, has more or less been set aside throughout the history of philosophy. But Plato, like Aristotle, nevertheless retained something of this Greek trace. In their ontology, there is an irreducible portion of matter, that is to say, an ultimately unknowable portion.

Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, 145

Ontology is also, necessarily, cosmology.
Castoriadis, "Done and to be Done", *Castoriadis Reader*, 362

To begin with a notion of the *chora* is to begin with a highly ambiguous space. It concerns creation at an originary level; dealing with the extension of culture as the elaboration of nature. The notion of *chora* helps us to appreciate how this relation intimately reflects ontological creation, as a space through which meaning can be formed and instituted

in a way that we are able to appreciate the disclosure of being from the natural level to the social dimension. The *chora* is a space where the sensible and the intelligible are possible, a space elucidating the limit and transformation of knowledge; including the limits of our knowledge of the natural level. As John Sallis has pointed out, “a discourse of nature required that one first turn away, that one begin in the opposite direction, in accord with *nomos* rather than *physis*”¹. As Cornelius Castoriadis would also argue, culture does emerge from nature, and in a very nuanced and reciprocal way, a way in which its beginning is, in fact, by definition, unknowable. The notion of *chora*, in so far as it concerns this very relation, involves this beginning as an essentially unknowable portion, and therefore to evoke a notion of the *chora*, to give it a name and describe it, necessarily evokes a bastard discourse—in so far as any description of the *chora* gives form to what is essentially formless. It is for this reason, as Sallis points out, that “it is of utmost importance... to prevent *chora* from settling into a determinate, stable meaning”². This is not to say that thinking of the *chora* is produced through, what might be called a negative chorology, because it holds no attributes from that which it is not, an action which in itself gives a bastard discourse. To put it in simple and narrow terms, thinking of the *chora* is thinking of a space to think creation. Furthermore, this includes creation in the physical or imaginary dimensions, and more particularly a thinking of the spaces in-between. This is precisely why there have been tumultuous debates on the very question of the form and role of the *chora* in philosophical interrogation³. It is due to this innate evasiveness of *chora* that I am approaching this work as somewhat of an aporetic experiment. For scholarly interest in Castoriadis’ work this is still an aspect of his thought that has yet to be elucidated as such. Even he himself seemed to retreat from the edge of its significance within his work, a significance that is capable of opening up another turn in the labyrinth of his thought.

The notion of *chora* owes its creation to earlier cosmological articulations of space in ancient Greek society—particularly as a common theme in pre-Socratic philosophy—and was given elaboration as the central concept for explaining creation in Plato’s cosmological dialogue, the *Timaeus*. In this text the notion is attributed with the function of world ordering, giving form to chaos. In essence, this attribute refers to an instituting function, that creates, at the same time, a proper world and society as such—the parallel with Castoriadis’ primary concern of the institution of society is obvious, particularly his emphasis on the role of the social instituting imaginary⁴. For Castoriadis, “society is creation, and creation of itself: self-creation. It is the emergence of a new ontological

1. Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato’s Timaeus*, 46

2. Sallis, *Ibid*, 21

3. Such as Derrida’s semantic concern of using a definitive article when referring to *chora* (i.e. the *chora*), arguing that it is not possible, therefore incorrect, to use a definitive article when there is no meaning upon which to refer. Rather, Derrida refers to *chora* (or, *khôra*, to be absolutely precise) as a proper name, in an attempt to specify the relation between the signifier and its referent.

4. See: Castoriadis, “The Imaginary Institution of Society” and “Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary” in the *Castoriadis Reader*.

form—*eidos*—and of a new mode and level of being”⁵, this new region of being—the social-historical; society—reflects the form given to chaos, the creation of social imaginary significations, creation of its own space responding to the task of world ordering meaning. For Plato the notion of *chora* is a response to the question: ‘What nature are we to attribute to this new kind of being?’ through which he replies that it is “the receptacle, and in a manner the nurse, of all generation”⁶. In the recent philosophical context the *chora* has been treated disparately and in differing guises. The maternal overtones of its use by Plato have been identified by thinkers such as Julia Kristeva, Luce Irigaray, Judith Butler and Elizabeth Grosz⁷ to investigate early formulations of sexual difference and the figuring of the feminine in symbolic and structural order. Jacques Derrida⁸ interprets *chora* as the empty space dealing with the place of the sensible and the intelligible, remaining absolutely adamant of its role as a notion of non-determination, he analyses its place in thought and discourse while exploring whether there is principle of rhetoric inventiveness within the notion. John Sallis interprets the *chora* similarly, in that “the *chora* neither constitutes a determination, as in the case of the intelligible *eide*, nor can it be determined by an intelligible determination, as can sensible things”⁹, rather, he claims that the *chora* implodes the dyadic structure of the intelligible and the sensible¹⁰, problematising the subject/object distinction long held within the traditions of inherited metaphysics. However, Sallis differs slightly from Derrida’s interpretation, arguing for the retention of the article (the; ‘the *chora*’) as an index of a certain differentiation that still needs to be marked between the word and that to which the word is addressed, leaving open the discourse in which the word is operative (a discourse Sallis has named ‘chorology’). What interests me most, however, is how the *chora* has had a subterrestrial presence in many philosophical systems, albeit in different guises, as, I will show, is the case with Castoriadis’ thought. Take, for example, Martin Heidegger’s notion of *lichtung*¹¹, as the clearing, unconcealment or disclosure of being; Nishida Kitarô’s conception of (*muno*) *basho*¹², describing being as that which emerges from the space of nothingness; Alfred North Whitehead’s development of the concept of *extensive continuum*¹³, through which he thinks creativity; or Maurice Merleau-Ponty’s framing of the *visible* and the *invisible*¹⁴, toward developing a generative understanding of otherness. All of these aspects possess a veiled interpretation of the *chora*. This veil seems to correspond with the point where a thinker must address creation within their systematic thinking, and as such there are varied expressions are formed. I will proceed,

5. Castoriadis, “Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary”, *Castoriadis Reader*, 332

6. Plato, *Timaeus*, 213

7. See: Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*; Irigaray, ‘Plato’s Hysteria’, *Speculum of the Other Woman*; Butler, *Bodies that Matter*; Grosz, ‘Women, Chora, Dwelling’, *Space, Time, Perversion*.

8. Derrida, ‘Khora’, *On the Name*.

9. Sallis, ‘An Interview with John Sallis: Double Truths’, *Man and World*, 113.

10. Sallis, *Chorology: On Beginning in Plato’s Timaeus*, 46.

11. Heidegger, ‘The End of Philosophy and the task of Thinking’, *Martin Heidegger: Basic Writings*.

12. Kitarô, *Place and Dialectic: Two Essays by Nishida Kitarô*.

13. Whitehead, *Process and Reality*.

14. Merleau-Ponty, *The Visible and the Invisible*.

then, with a notion of the *chora* reflecting the trans-regional architecture of being and imaginary creation in Castoriadis' thought, in a way that I believe to be of his expression of this limit.

CHORA AND PHYSIS

To lean on Thomas Rickert's interpretation, the *chora* has "no real qualities itself; its odd passivity marks it as fundamentally indeterminate"¹⁵. As Rickert further elaborates, "the implication is that while a beginning requires a place, the generative or choric aspects of that place remain indeterminate, or... give nothing to what emerges"¹⁶. The *chora*, by virtue of its bastard character, can only be hypothesised through a speculum of apparent marks or traces. The notion is definitively generative and intuitively recognised through the vitality of emergent and transformative meaning. To radicalise the concept from its Platonic roots, its function as a metaphor does not imply a giving (that is; the hand of the demiurge) but a natural emergence of *otherness* as a condition of self-creation. While Castoriadis remained explicitly unengaged with the *chora* he did refer to its formulation by Plato, in the *Timaeus*, as the beginnings of a deterministic time, reduced to the production of *difference* in *space*, which was firmly instituted in Western inherited thought and formed a large part of his critique of the inherited tradition. His stance on the *chora*, however, did seem to soften in the early nineties, hinting—in his seminars on Plato's *Statesman*—at the usefulness of the metaphor in recognising the fact that there is "a huge portion of indeterminateness in what is"¹⁷. Regardless, at least in his published work, he still kept a wide berth from addressing this notion in any concentrated detail with respect to his own philosophy.

An early formulation whereby the *chora* becomes relevant to Castoriadis' thought is found in his notion of the *first natural stratum* as an ontologically distinct mode of being from the more porous regions of society and the socialised subject. As Suzi Adams points out, he introduces the notion of *étayage* derived from the Freudian sense of *anlehnung*, a 'leaning on' the *first natural stratum*, which for him is "an attempt to come to grips with the modality of the social-historical in its elaboration of partial aspects of the first natural stratum in a selective and non-determined way"¹⁸. For Castoriadis, these two regions of being emerge in a dynamic relation that was developed into a philosophy of being and creation that elaborated a circular motif of *nomos* and *physis*¹⁹. The trajectory of his philosophical thought can thus be seen to develop this relation, of *étayage*, toward a more creative *physis*. The *chora*, in this sense, is involved in the operation, the activity, or the doing, of creative *physis* involved in the passage of nature and culture. In trying to think of the *chora* in this way we approach the height of its ambiguity, for it can only be known at

15. Rickert, 'Toward the Chora: Kristeva, Derrida, and Ulmer on Emplaced Invention', *Philosophy and Rhetoric* 56.

16. Rickert, *Ibid.*, 56.

17. Castoriadis, *On Plato's Statesman*, 145.

18. Adams, *Castoriadis' Ontology: Being and Creation*, 54.

19. For a reading of Castoriadis' work along these lines see, Adams, *Castoriadis' Ontology: Being and Creation*.

the limits of the unknown, revealing its essence as the creative emergence of sense from non-sense. In defining the nature of what is essentially outside the limits of knowability, or, in trying to comprehend creation as a reflection of Beginning, the act doubles over itself, the attempt realises its constitution from its constituent level and can go no further. This means that the present evocation of such a notion can only be understood through its utilisation to constitute something to be known. Therefore the essence of the *chora* is bestowed through the nature of what emerges in evoking it. We can only know the *chora* as a forming and generative capacity pertaining to a cosmological, or ‘natural’, import, which is responsible for constituting the mode of being of the social-historical domain but not necessarily the constitution of it. It undertakes, what Julia Kristeva names, an “objective ordering”, whose limits are indissociable from that which arises through the social-historical region. Maria Margaroni describes Kristeva’s account as the “*transverbal* (moving through and across logos) and *transhistorical* (alongside, opposite to and in the margins of history)”²⁰. The paradox involved in identifying the activity of ‘objective ordering’ that occurs outside the limits of representation is that we can only encounter and comprehend it within the symbolic realm—as Sallis has pointed out, one must work in accord with *nomos* to see *physis*. In regards to the impossibility of ever conceiving of the beginning, as reflected in the architectonics of the *Timaeus* doubling over to ‘begin again’, Castoriadis, too, develops this orientation within the architecture of his trans-regional ontology, perceiving the flux of *physis* in relation to *nomos*; a natural feedback echoing from the primal level of the *first natural stratum* through all regions of being. The differentiation of space and time is, therefore, critical for revealing the *chora* in Castoriadis’ thought. As will be further elaborated, this allows the conditions of, both, movement (as *alloiōsis*—pertaining to a qualitative change relating to sensation, which Castoriadis radicalises to further describe the alterations of *physis*) and permanent conflictuality to become essential for the trans-regionality of being. These conditions are reflected within and across the ontological regions through the schema of *nomos* and *physis*. In declaring space as *not* reducible to time Castoriadis inadvertently bursts the containing, receptacle, nature of the *chora* as receptacle, which serves to radicalise the Platonic conception from the omnipotence of the Demiurge toward undetermined cosmological creation—in turn, opening up his project of autonomy. In this respect, Castoriadis re-activates a trace leading back to the tradition of Heraclitus, Democritus and the Sophists²¹. By locating space as separable, yet, indissociable from time, Castoriadis opens the *chora* to the plurality and alterability of time. *Chora*, then, truly comes to encompass *physis*, lending a true vitality and indeterminateness to *nomos*. The nexus of subjective and social-historical meaning is therefore not fixed in one place or at one time and creation is unbounded from determinate logic.

20. Margaroni, ‘The Lost Foundation: Kristeva’s Semiotic Chora and Its Ambiguous Legacy’, *Hypatia*, 84.

21. Castoriadis, *On Plato’s Statesman*, 145.

CHORA AND RADICAL IMAGINARY

In order to think of the *chora* in Castoriadis' philosophy the psychic life of a person needs to be situated within the overall chorology of the social-historical domain. Castoriadis theorises the nexus between psyche and society—which is at the heart of the gap in-between nature and culture—through his notion of *radical imagination*, which he describes as the source of perceptual *qualia* and of logical forms, that is, the source of the sensible and the intelligible, the ('truly Heraclitean') "flux of representations *cum* affects *cum* intentions"²² of the psyche; it is "what makes it possible for any being-for-itself (including humans) to *create for* itself an own [or proper] world (*eine Eigenwelt*) 'within' which it also posits itself"²³. The process of socialisation can, therefore, be envisaged as an incommensurable opening to the *chora*. The social-historical mode of being, as such, needs to be regarded as exceeding the limits of subjectivity. This is where the *chora* should play a decisive role in Castoriadis' theory of society as its definitive feature is that it takes into account what is outside the limit of the *eigenwelt* as the propensity to an *otherness* that becomes subject to an alteration of the self. The *eigenwelt*, the *qualia* of our inner world, or self-world, can only be intelligible in contrast to the *umwelt*, the broader cosmic world, a world stratum within which the mythic structures of the social-historical are a part. Both are rife with the tensions of chaos and objective ordering. The *eigenwelt* and the *umwelt* create their own space and time, thus being is indissociable from the creation of space or time. Suzi Adams has noted that, "unlike Heidegger, who sees only one temporality as authentic, Castoriadis sees a plurality of possible authentic times—be they cosmic or subjective. Yet the question of overarching time and being remains open"²⁴. In Castoriadis' thought creation takes place through the alteration of time and space, and the multiplicity that this entails in the social-historical domain is the ontological situation of the anthropic regions of being; as such, the essence of the *chora* is revealed, in some sense, as the open question of overarching time.

This relation is evoked in the excess of the limits of subjectivity within the social-historical domain. The *chora*, when thought with the altering flux of *physis*, is indissociable from the possible otherness accumulated in residual excess. In fact, Castoriadis' notion of the social-historical thrives on residual excess, whereby society, as instituted through a self-altering flux, that is continuous with the world of discrete objects, necessarily involves the historical past. This is, in many ways, already developed within Castoriadis' notion of the *radical imaginary*, which is the *instituting social imaginary* of the social-historical region of being. The *radical imaginary* is involved in the creation of "institutions and, of course, first and foremost, of language"²⁵, operative at the level of social imaginary significations, and in turn, their institution. The trans-regionality, inherent in the notion of *chora*, is evident in that the *instituting social imaginary* gives form to the world of the sensible and the intelligible, and does so through instituting society as a totality attempting to account for

22. Castoriadis, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", *Castoriadis Reader*, 327.

23. Castoriadis, *Ibid*, 326.

24. Adams, *Castoriadis's Ontology: Being and Creation*, 211.

25. Castoriadis, "Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary", *Castoriadis Reader*, 329.

other regions of being, through which, in not being able to truly achieve this, the process doubles over itself in the act of its own definition. This is due to unavoidable excess of society as an imaginary institution ‘leaning on’ *other* regions of being, which is a ‘leaning on’ what is outside and unknown. It is in this regard that residual excess is not in rigid opposition to intelligible objects or categories; rather the world of flux is continuous with the world of discrete objects, in dialogue and in movement with them—this is important in terms of time and the social-historical, in saying that with each present moment the whole past is carried with it. To paraphrase Bergson; ‘every moment of the present brings with it the past’²⁶. This idea is radicalised in Castoriadis’ conception of social-historical creation, by virtue of creation being *ex-nihilo*. A creation that is new, that creates new axioms and therefore can’t be grounded, in this sense, as Castoriadis has elaborated, “a creation is neither deducible nor producible: that’s the true meaning of the new. If it is deducible and producible, it isn’t new; it exists potentially within the prior system”²⁷. The inherited tradition of Western thought, even through Bergson, occluded this radical dimension of the imagination, creation *ex-nihilo* “was covered up by the idea of ‘degrees of being’—of ‘intensity of existence’—linked very rapidly with the criteria of *duration*”²⁸, marking ‘true being’ with determinate characteristics, “so that everything belonging to the Heraclitean flux became disqualified”²⁹. The markings of identity time, through creation *ex-nihilo*, can be seen vividly from the point of view, that “the time that is instituted as identity is time as the time of mark-makings, as time-marking and the time of markings”³⁰. This marking is also indissociable from imaginary time, which is the time of signification, or significant time, as the emergence of time as an instituted creation.

The philosophy of Nishida Kitarô contains interesting parallels with Castoriadis. Nishida takes up the notion of continuity between intelligible and sensible forms in his conception of *basho*, which bears semblance to the notion of *chora*, particularly in the sense of its trans-regional nature. Nishida places a strong emphasis on this aspect in subsuming the subject/object distinction into the enveloping matrix of *basho*, placing the subjective characteristic of life within an *absolutely contradictory self-identity*. His trans-regional architecture closely resembles that of Castoriadis, as David Dilworth has outlined, Nishida begins with “the physical world, which is to him the most abstract matrix of interacting forces. He builds up from this level to the biological, and finally to the human (historical-existential) worlds”³¹. Each of these ‘worlds’, ‘fields’, or ‘*bashos*’ reflect the separable and, yet, indissociable regions of being as considered by Castoriadis. Dilworth further explains that the modes of being of these ‘worlds’ presuppose and exhibit “the contradictory identity of objectivity and subjectivity, indicating the

26. See: Bergson, *An Introduction to Metaphysics*

27. Varela, in, Castoriadis & Varela, “Interview: Cornelius Castoriadis & Francisco Varela”, *Postscript on Insignificance*, 210-211.

28. Castoriadis, “Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary”, *Castoriadis Reader*, 321.

29. Castoriadis, *Ibid*, 321.

30. Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, 209.

31. Dilworth, in, Nishida, *Last Writings: Nothingness and the Religious Worldview*, 16.

respective places of object logic and transcendental logic in a transpositional structure that progressively unfolds its own “concrete logic” and its most adequate exemplification in the historical-existential world”³². Here lies a striking resemblance to Castoriadis’ theory of ensemblistic-identitarian (*ensidic*) logic, which is the term given to account for the structure and constitution of social-imaginary significations. It is a logic that defines the social-historical region of being, by which the individual is socialised and through which the *radical instituting imaginary* is given. Nishida, too, had seen this transience of being, however, in order for the architectonics of these trans-regional ontologies to operate, both thinkers had to relate this architecture within a space whereby creation, even the various regions themselves, were to emerge from an ‘absolute’ or ‘overarching’ space, a *chora*. The truly choric space for Nishida is the enveloping *muno basho*, the place of nothingness, for Castoriadis this space is resolved via recourse to ‘the chaos, the abyss, the groundlessness’³³, upon which we must create forms out of the chaos of the abyss and meaning from the groundless indeterminacy of being. There is also a parallel in Castoriadis’ conception of continuity, particularly concerning ‘contradictory identity’ within the self; both thinkers turn away from Hegelian synthesis, instead, Castoriadis draws from psychoanalytic resources. Melanie Klein’s influence concerning issues to do with conscious and unconscious regions of the psyche is significant in this respect. Indeed Castoriadis praises Klein’s work in that “the ambivalence of affects, incompatible properties of representations, the conflicts of desires are in fact posited as original and essential characteristics of the psyche”³⁴. These characteristics are also fundamental for Kristeva’s understanding of a *subject-in-process*, through which the constant semiotic inconsistencies of the drive-laden unconscious are fed into sensible and intelligible symbolic representations. The *semiotic chora* gives movement to Kristeva’s subject in the same way that the *radical imagination* gives movement to Castoriadis’ subject. This is well reflected in Kristeva’s relation of body and space, reminiscent of Castoriadis’ rupture of the monadic core: “the drives that extract the body from its homogeneous shell and turn it into a space linked to the outside, they are the forces which mark out the *chora* in process”³⁵. Interestingly, while Kristeva makes use of developing the notion of *chora* in theorising the creation of meaning³⁶, the notion remains concealed in Castoriadis’ theorisation of this level within the broader architecture of trans-regional being.

The *chora*, therefore, involves the institution of a co-existent multiplicity of forms, which implies the continuity of permanently conflictual forms. In this sense, much is lost; unknowable, remaining outside, or fallen in-between, yet, much is also created, interpreted and returned. Central to Kristeva’s understanding of this characteristic of the *chora* is the notion of *anamnesis*, as a revitalising kind of remembrance. This presupposes a forgetting that Kristeva unearths in a double sense; as Margaroni presents it, this

32. Dilworth, *Ibid*, 16.

33. Castoriadis, ‘The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy’, *Castoriadis Reader*.

34. Castoriadis, *Ibid*, 281.

35. Kristeva, “The Subject in Process”, *The Tel Quel Reader*, 143.

36. Kristeva, *Revolution in Poetic Language*.

is a “forgetting of its primal scene and the forgetting of this forgetting”³⁷. To give an example, the so-called ‘return to the Greeks’ in philosophical discourse, can be seen as such a process of *anamnesis* that proposes to offer new gathering points for philosophy. In a manner that relates to the *chora*, as represented by Plato in the *Timaeus*, “the very concept of the beginning loses itself in its own proliferating doubles”³⁸, in a consistent renewal based on the *anamnesis* of what is salvaged from the forgotten, unknown excess, made latent in forgetting. For Kristeva this is the basis for permanent conflictuality, whereby the residual excess cannot be excluded from the movement of time. Castoriadis frames this through a problematic of knowing/not-knowing, which is tied up with the immortality of the soul, in a way that he begs is not “archaic, folkloric, bizarre, wild, primitive, backward or weird”—‘out there’ perhaps, but in itself an example of my previous example:

Souls know because they have seen the Ideas elsewhere, in a supracelestial place; and in becoming embodied, they are weighed down and they forget this knowledge, which nevertheless remains; it still resides within them³⁹

One way to make sense of this is to refer back to the *umwelt/eigenwelt* relation, in which the horizon of the *eigenwelt* is marked with the traces of the *umwelt*. The process of *anamnesis* is a way by which the *chora* is innate to being. In this respect, the *chora*, as the space for meaning, as the principle of self-ordering, reflects a generative capacity to form meaning from the *chaos* of permanent conflictuality. It is worth noting that in a published conversation between Alain Badiou and Slavoj Žižek⁴⁰, referring to Kant’s transcendental subject, Žižek talks of the access of this subject to the inhuman as a space of redefinition. In similar respects, this is the situation of permanent conflictuality, as a situation of continuity. The condition of residual excess presents the space whereby the subject is faced with a situation of permanent conflictuality—which is an aspect of the space of the *chora*. It is in this sense that the *chora* becomes a space for reinterpretation or redefinition.

CHORA AND THE MOVEMENT OF AUTO-POIESIS

Castoriadis also addresses this issue from another angle, in his engagement with Francisco Varela, concerning the biological conception of self-organisation, of biological autonomy as *auto-poiesis*. As Varela considers, with regard to this relationship:

This rootedness of meaning in the origin of life is the novel aspect of this concept of autonomy, of auto-poiesis... that there is an excess of the imaginary that comes from this self-construction of the living being—is one of the things I learned while reading Corneille [Castoriadis]. And I would never have dared to speak of the imaginary as being at life’s origin had I not had at my disposal this sort of continuity

37. Margaroni, ‘The Lost Foundation: Kristeva’s Semiotic Chora and Its Ambiguous Legacy’, *Hypatia*, 83.

38. Margaroni, *Ibid*, 83.

39. Castoriadis, *On Plato’s Statesman*, 64.

40. Žižek, in, Badiou & Žižek, *Philosophy in the Present: Badiou & Žižek*, 73-100.

between the biological phenomena at life's origin and the social domain⁴¹

Castoriadis elaborates his version of *auto-poeisis*, proposing that “the proper characteristic of creation is to make possibilities arise that didn't exist beforehand. The first living cell that emerged created, in a sense, the possibilities of life, which previously existed only in a completely empty and sophistic fashion”⁴², framing his conception within a broader notion of living being, as a region of being reflecting self-organisation outside of the realm of meaning. This pre-supposes a trans-regional continuity between the physical and biological levels. Such a notion of *auto-poeisis*—as a concept relating to life and the living being—relies on the porosity of being, whereby the elements pertaining to creation originate from, both, inside and outside of the body—alluding to the possibilities of creation that emerge from the state of permanent conflictuality. *Auto-poeisis* is inextricably entwined with a notion of choric movement in the sense that it moves naturally through all levels of being. Castoriadis analyses movement as existing through an *auto-poietic* flux of *alloiōsis*. This Aristotelian notion presents *physis* as that “which has in itself the principle (the origin) of its movement”⁴³. By envisaging living being within the flux of *choric* movement highlights the crossroads between the cosmic and social regions of being. Castoriadis' radicalisation of Aristotelian *physis* is formulated as an eidetic *eros*, with a disposition toward *ensidic* ordering of meaning. Through the schema of *ensidic* logic, and the *magma of significations* constituting the world⁴⁴, the temporality of being is then conceived as a movement that is “*pushing-toward-giving-itself-a-form*”⁴⁵. Castoriadis, here, makes an important distinction between *teleology* and *teleonomy*, which radicalises the biological concept of *teleonomy*, concerning *adaptation*, toward a broader cosmic definition of being as *à-être*, as *auto-poietic*.

By elucidating *physis* as the movement of life Castoriadis claims that our existence as autonomous living beings instigates a process of trans-regional coherence, constituting a bridge of meaning over the abyss. Language, reflected as the appearance of *legein* and *teukhein*, is the structure of this bridge. Language mediates between self and world, the *eigenwelt* and the *umwelt*. Kristeva highlights this, in a semiological sense, noting on her philosophical project, that she is “interested in language and in the other side of language which is filtered inevitably by language and yet is not language”⁴⁶. Language, in this sense, is the visible constellation of meaning that is open to the reversibility of meaning. The *chora*, then, is precisely that cosmic metaphor for meaning that is also non-meaning and being as an ordering of dis-order. Here we see language rationalised from both sides of the bridge as the subject fuses a multifaceted interpretation of meaning.

41. Varela, in, Castoriadis & Varela, “Interview: Cornelius Castoriadis & Francisco Varela”, *Postscript on Insignificancy*, 204.

42. Castoriadis, in, *Ibid*, 211.

43. Castoriadis, ‘Physis and Autonomy’, *World in Fragments*, 334.

44. Castoriadis, ‘The Logic of Magmas and the Question of Autonomy’, *Castoriadis Reader*.

45. Castoriadis, ‘Physis and Autonomy’, *World in Fragments*, 333.

46. Kristeva, in, Kristeva & Pollock, ‘Dialogue with Julia Kristeva’, *Parallax*, 9. Interestingly, both Kristeva and Castoriadis hold the same critique of Lacan, in that he represses that indeterminate ‘other side’ of language.

One side involves an encounter with knowledge that is encoded within the residual *ensidic* logic of social-historical meaning. The other is experienced through a primordial state of meaning as the emergence of *radical imagination*, from the region of living being, through the psyche. This requires an interpretation of meaning in accordance with *auto-poietic* drives, which, as Castoriadis argues, is the work of the *radical imaginary*. In this way, the interpretation of meaning resonates through the subject in an orientation that is, both, *for-itself* and *for-the-world*. This is why *interpretation* and *creation* are one in the same activity of alteration—resonating with Kristeva’s notion of the *subject-in-process*—and opening the embodied subject to the social world through the meaning-making process, which implies a cross-fertilisation of social imaginary significations and psychic drives. It is the space of this cross fertilisation that Castoriadis talks of *le social*, translated into English as the ‘social sphere’, which is a notion closely resembling a *choric* space. He refers to *le social* as, both, “space and process of creation”⁴⁷. Alluding to the choric dimension of the social-historical, as an elaboration of this space and process:

There would be no true history if there were no change, no rupture and creation. The social-historical is essentially emergence of new social imaginary significations, new meanings. Its institution, the dynamic between the instituting—the radical imagination—and the instituted—the already created institutions—is secondary with regard to this basic characteristic of human collectives that is the capacity to create new significations.⁴⁸

Castoriadis places emphasis on the *always-becoming* aspect of subjectivity between living being and the social-historical realm. The self/world relation is therefore a creative relation, conceivable as the movement of time through the *chora*, as the emergence of *otherness*. The proliferation of *difference* is not time, for Castoriadis *difference* refers to space, that is, a space of coexistence, a space of permanent conflictuality; which is the site of *radical imagination*. This distinction is crucial for Castoriadis’ unbounding of temporality from the reduction of time to space—as the inherited tradition of western philosophy would have it. For *difference* possesses multiple times. Time, in itself, is conceivable as the musicality of *alloiōsis*, of alteration, marked through the emergence of otherness and coexistent with different times.

Castoriadis has made clear many times, “no being-for-itself could ‘organize’ something out of the world, if this world were not intrinsically organisable”⁴⁹, implying that the cosmos is not simply chaotic, that there is something resembling a *chora*, by which form and meaning is able to be created and ordered. In questioning our natural disposition toward eidetic form, we turn to schemas of chaos and cosmos, order and disorder, *nomos* and *physis*—this, in every sense, is the activity that the metaphor of the *chora* intends to capture. In making this distinction Castoriadis develops the previously teleological tendency of the inherited tradition, from a transcendental being or teleological history, toward a more nuanced appropriation of a movement whereby time

47. Castoriadis, ‘Psyche and Society Revisited’, *Figures of the Thinkable (Including Passion and Knowledge)*, 371.

48. Castoriadis, *Ibid*, 371-372.

49. Castoriadis, “Radical Imagination and the Social Instituting Imaginary”, *Castoriadis Reader*, 326.

is defined through self-creation. Leading to an understanding of being, and autonomy, that pushes the limits of knowledge. This involves envisaging the role of the *chora*, not only, through the alterations of *physis*, but in the self-altering openness of *nomos*. In this sense, “everything that is must contain an ensemblistic-identitary (‘logical’, in the largest sense possible) dimension; otherwise it would be *absolutely* indeterminate, and (at least for us) non-existent”⁵⁰. This encompassing ‘logical’ dimension is precisely the space of the *chora* for Castoriadis, becoming even more evident even more so when he goes on to say, that “this, of course, by no means entails that ‘what there is’ is exhaustively determined by or reducible to ‘logic’ (not even when we consider ‘physical’ reality)”⁵¹. This is why the self-altering character of *nomos* can be seen as a quintessential character of *anthrōpos*, as it is through this self-alteration that we create meaning over the abyss; as Castoriadis remarks, “the ultimately indescribable X ‘out there’ becomes something definite and specific *for* a particular being, through the functioning of its sensory and logical imagination, which ‘filters’, ‘forms’, and ‘organizes’ the external ‘shocks’”⁵². This indescribable X is the modus of creation, existing on the outside and in-between the trans-regional architecture of our being. Castoriadis’ thought is a window to this abyss. It has exposed us to the indeterminate nature of the *chora* and in so doing has passed on the responsibility to act autonomously in the space within which we dwell, which is becoming increasingly important in the face of the rising tide of insignificance noticeably deteriorating the institutions of Western society.

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50. Castoriadis, *Ibid*, 328.

51. Castoriadis, *Ibid*, 328.

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