BRILL

CULTURE AND DIALOGUE 7 (2019) 87-104

Culture and Dialogue

brill.com/cad

Sociohistorical Self-Choreography: A Second Dance with Castoriadis

Joshua M. Hall
Department of Philosophy, William Paterson University, USA
halljj38@wpunj.edu

Abstract

Twentieth-century Greco-French philosopher, economist, psychoanalyst and activist Cornelius Castoriadis offers a creative new conception of imagination that is uniquely promising for social justice. Though it has been argued that this conception has one fatal flaw, the latter has recently been resolved through a creative dialogue with dance. The present article fleshes out this philosophical-dancing dialogue further, revealing a deeper layer of creative dialogue therein, namely between Castoriadis' account of time and choreography. To wit, he reconceives time as the self-choreography of the sociohistorical, in which performance the sociohistorical plays two dancing roles simultaneously, both choreographer and choreographed dancer. More precisely, as interpreted by Castoriadis in a late essay, the creation and emergence of forms in time consists of a poetic "scansion" or "scanning" of time. Thus, the sociohistorical is both choreographer and dancer, poet and reader, reinterpreting the poetic text of time as the music for its evolving dance.

Keywords

Castoriadis – dance – social justice – imagination – performance – choreography

1 Introduction

Among its many virtues, Castoriadis' creative new conception of imagination is uniquely effective in promoting social justice. As the Black sociologist Patricia Hill Collins argues, developing her new concept of "visionary pragmatism," one

 | DOI:10.1163/24683949-12340058

criterion we should use to evaluate political theory is that it ought to energize those who are suffering and fighting for justice. Applying this criterion herself, Collins affirms Stoetzler and Yuval-Davis' concept of "situated imagination," the foundation of which is Castoriadis' conception of imagination.[1] The present article attempts to flesh out the dialogical connection between Castoriadis and dance.[2]

Before getting into the details, however, it might be helpful for readers unfamiliar with Castoriadis to begin with an overview of his philosophy. Castoriadis' most concise summary of the latter, perhaps, is found in his late essay, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Socio-Historical Domain."[3] As this title hints, the historical as such is central to Castoriadis' philosophy and his concept of imagination, but the essay begins metaphysically. He starts by defining "Being" as "abyss, or chaos, or the groundless" – albeit an abyss that possesses "a nonregular stratification."[4] In other words, for Castoriadis, metaphysical being is a partially self-organized chaos, composed of qualitatively different layers. This picture, though, is incomplete. Because, all these strata notwithstanding, "being is time," or, "{Or else: Being is essentially to-be.}" (*sic*)[5] In other words, being's strata are sewn from the same fabric, and that fabric is the sewing that is temporality. Thus, space is derivative from the primacy of time.

At the social stratum of being-time, Castoriadis continues, "individuals and things are social creations."[6] These society-forms and individual-forms are the creations of the imagination, here at work at the center of the social, which Castoriadis seems to regard as the principal stratum of being. More specifically, societies and individuals for Castoriadis are products of what he terms "the 'magma' of *social imaginary significations* that are carried by and

1 Marcel Stoetzler and Nira Yuval-Davis, "Standpoint Theory, Situated Knowledge, and the Situated Imagination," *Feminist Theory* 3(3): 315-333.

2 For more on my method of dance-like dialogues with historical philosophers, see Joshua M. Hall, "Dancing-with: A Theoretical Method for Poetic Social Justice," *Philosophy and Dance*, ed. Rebecca Farinas, Craig Hanks, and Julie C. Van Camp (New York: Bloomsbury, forthcoming). And for a few applications of this method, see Joshua M. Hall, "Religious Lightness in Infinite Vortex: Dancing with Kierkegaard," *Epoché: A Journal of the History of Philosophy* 23(1): 2018, 125-144; Joshua M. Hall, "St. Vitus' Women of Color: Dancing with Hegel," *Comparative and Continental Philosophy* 9(1): 2017, 43-61; and Joshua M. Hall, "Reattaching Shadows: Dancing with Schopenhauer," *PhaenEx: Journal of Existential and Phenomenological Theory and Culture* 9(1): 2014.

3 Carlos Castoriadis, "The Imaginary: Creation in the Sociohistorical Domain," *World in Fragments: Writings on Society, Politics, Psychoanalysis, and the Imagination* (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1997), 3-18.

4 Ibid., 3.

5 Ibid.

6 Ibid., 5.

embodied in the institutions of the given society and that, so to speak, animate it." Examples of these imaginary significations include "spirits," "nation," "interest rate," "taboo," "virtue," and even "man/woman/child, as they are specified in a given society."[7] Put differently, each historical society "*establishes, creates its own world*, within which, of course, it includes 'itself'."[8] In short, "Society is self-creation deployed as history."[9]

The problem here is as follows: How can the sociohistorical be both merely one stratum of being-time, and yet create itself (to use Castoriadis' privileged phrase) *ex nihilo*? Although he insists that (a) the imagination is the fundamental power of the soul/psyche, and (b) the imagination's creations are genuinely *ex nihilo*, he also claims that (c) both the soul/psyche and society are somehow dependent on nature. Depending on how this dependency is unpacked, it could easily contradict the claim that the imagination (and thereby humans) are radically causally free. Given its gravity, this problem also dominates the only two English-language monographs on Castoriadis, by Jeff Klooger and Suzi Adams. Despite their many interpretive differences, both scholars object to Castoriadis' appropriation of Sigmund Freud's concept of "leaning-on" to describe this relationship of dependency of the psyche and society on nature.[10]

It is here that dance explicitly entered my first creative dialogue with Castoriadis. Circumventing Freud's *Anlehnung*, I returned to the Greek word it translates, *anaclasis*, which I translate directly (without the German intermediary) as "bending back." Examples of bending-back in vernacular Western dance include the following: (a) dancing bodies bending back to the ground, (b) the dancing psyche bending back onto its body, and (c) the choreographer bending back onto the onto the bodies of the dancers – all for the creation and implementation of choreographic art. Going one step further, the expanded idiomatic phrase, "bending over backwards," recalls (d) society "bending over backwards" to meet the bodily needs of its citizens (much like a choreographer does when compromising on idealized movements for the sake of their dancers' bodies), (e) dancers "bending over backwards" to help the choreographer asymptotically approach a vision, and (f) dancers' bodies "bending over backwards," at macro- and micro-levels, simply in order to dance.[11] It is to flesh out

7 Ibid., 7.
8 Ibid., 9.
9 Ibid., 13.
10 Jeff Klooger, *Castoriadis: Psyche, Society, Autonomy* (Leuven: Brill, 2009); and Suzi Adams, *Castoriadis' Ontology: Being and Creation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011).
11 This is not to say, of course, that these are the only ways that dancers can "bend back," nor that every instance of bending back amounts to a kind of dependency. Instead, I am

this bending back that this second creative dialogue Castoriadis' turns to his concept of time and choreography.

The steps in this article's choreography are as follows: section one introduces the problem which Castoriadis' imagination-centered philosophy is intended to solve, namely the lack of autonomy and political freedom, and thereby social justice, in modern societies. Section two identifies the biggest obstacle to a solution to this problem, namely a deterministic perspective that Castoriadis refers to, interchangeably, as logicism, determinism, the identitary, and the ensidic (short for ensemblist-identitary). Section three highlights the complementary and equally vital dimension of reality obscured by this determinism, which Castoriadis refers to as "the imaginary," or "radical imagination." Section four breaks the imagination/imaginary down to its constitutive bodies, which Castoriadis calls "figures." Section five explains how these figures perform in Castoriadis' division of societal time into the times of "social representation" (*legein*) and "social doing" (*teukhein*). Section six explains how sociohistorical being uses social representation and doing to choreograph itself, like Plato's Demiurge choreographs the world through the *chora*. And section seven presents Castoriadis' final view, "Time and Creation," according to which the sociohistorical choreographs itself like a poet "scanning" a poem, in a creative dialogue between self as choreographer and self as dancer.

2 The Problem: Modernity's Lack of Autonomy, and thereby Social Justice

If the cosmos is fully determined metaphysically, then there is no metaphysical room for creativity, and if the world is overwhelmingly believed to be fully determined, then there is no psychological or political room for the creativity that is autonomous action. We must have some wiggle room, some space in which to exercise our own originating powers within the causal sequence of the cosmos. Imagination is related to this problem in two crucial ways for Castoriadis. First, the dominant view of imagination – in the history of Western philosophy and today – as merely reproductive or imitative (Aristotelian) sense, is for Castoriadis a key symptom of the dominance of this deterministic view. Second, the minority conception of imagination as productive or creative is a necessary condition for our being able to take autonomous action, since when

merely observing that there are many common examples of dependent bending back in dance, all of which I have experienced in my own career as a choreographer and dancer.

we act only according to reproductions or imitations we conform to existing, predetermined options based on past actions.

It is easy to misunderstand Castoriadis here. Thinking along the dichotomous lines favored by logicism or "the identitary," the reader may be tempted to imagine freedom, on this conception, as the diametric opposite of determination, and thus of autonomy as an absolutely different or alien force. Castoriadis rejects this view, claiming in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (hereafter, *IIS*) that "the autonomy of the other is not absolute fulguration and sheer spontaneity."[12] Far from being a hindrance, this is instead precisely the reason why "intersubjective action is actually possible," and why "there can be a politics of freedom" (rather than our being "reduced to choosing between silence and manipulation").

Put differently, it is because we are not completely self-determining that we are able to work together in a way that does not reduce the freedom of any of us. Aptly, Castoriadis then restates this point as an echo of another text on freedom, Simone Beauvoir's *Ethics of Ambiguity*. Writes Castoriadis, "one cannot want autonomy without wanting it for everyone."[13] Put in dancing terms, instead of either remaining silent or else using verbal manipulation, we can choose a third way: dancing together, with the dancing gestures of our creative nonverbal dialogue empowering each other's relational autonomy.

3 The Obstacle: The Illusion of Unimaginative Rationality

If all we need for political freedom and social justice is the restoration of autonomy, then granting Castoriadis' claim that autonomy requires creative imagination, the reader might wonder what is standing in the way of us reintroducing creative imagination (or might at least wonder how we allegedly got to this imagination-deprived era of modernity). Succinctly put, while the pre-moderns made a home for the imagination in myth and religion, in the modern era the imagination continues to retreat before the sciences' apparent imperialism of rationality. This is not to say that Castoriadis has any sympathy for religion (in fact, his hostility is arguably problematical). On the contrary, the problem is that society's relationship to science continues to be unjustifiably religious, overextending falsifiable empirical claims into timeless metaphysical truths – without, crucially, acknowledging its own creative

12 Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, trans. Kathleen Blamey (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press), 107.

13 Simone de Beauvoir, *The Ethics of Ambiguity* (New York: Citadel, 2000).

imaginative work in producing this overextension. By contrast, in the Athens of the fifth century BCE and the Europe of the Enlightenment, the societies in question self-consciously engaged in this creation and owned up to its imaginative nature, taking responsibility for their collective self-creations.

On this central subject of historical time, Castoriadis claims that this identitary conception of time has been particularly counterproductive. In *IIS*, he criticizes this "logicist" conception of time, in contrast to what he terms "true time," parsing the latter as "the time of radical otherness."[14] The logicist conception undermines this dimension of radical otherness, claims Castoriadis, because it frames history as the "unfolding" of a necessary series of steps, the endpoint of which is rationally-foreseeable. In other words, the logicist historian projects the determinism of formal logic onto time, and thereby obscures and misrepresents time's indeterminacy. (Hegel, for Castoriadis, is the privileged example of this logicist conception).

Put simply, the central difference between the modern and premodern eras is not that we moderns are less free or less imaginative (because all societies are equally imaginative whether or they realize and embrace it or not, and because only classical Athens and Enlightenment Europe were relatively free). Instead, the difference is that moderns misrepresent our imagination as the loss of imagination in the glare of rationality's supremacy. In Castoriadis' words, "what seems to us to be the *specific* feature, and the most profound one, belonging to the modern imaginary, full of consequences but also full of promise" is that the modern imaginary "has no *flesh of its own*, it borrows its substance from something else" (namely, "the rational").[15]

Put in terms of Castoriadis' primary contrast between the "identitary" (or formal logical) dimension and the "imaginary" dimension of the cosmos, modernity increasingly imagines the world as merely identitary, exalting the figure of "rationality" as the ultimate representational counter-choreography. More precisely, moderns misrepresent our social doing as the mere unfolding of some allegedly essential rationality, instead of recognizing the creative handiwork of our own imaginations. In dancing terms, we are choreographers who do not realize we are dancing, nor that this dance is our own making, in a creative dialogue between society as choreographer and society as choreographed dancer.

14 Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution*, 173.

15 Ibid., 159 and 160.

4 The Obscured Dimension of Modern Reality: The Imagination/Imaginary

Consistent with his emphasis on temporality and history, and on a radical break between the premodern and modern eras, Castoriadis introduces his concept of imagination in the same way that he developed it: by presenting its history. He focuses on three influential philosophers in this history, namely Aristotle, Kant, and Freud. According to Castoriadis, all three thinkers discover – only to immediately paper over – the radical freedom of the imagination, attempting to constrain it under deterministic categories. Foremost among these categories, for Castoriadis, are what he terms "the institution of *legein*, the ineffaceable component of language and of social representation, and the institution of *teukhein*, the ineffaceable component of social doing."[16] It is through these two "institutions," for Castoriadis, that society imaginatively creates itself. Moreover, this self-creation takes place within, and helps constitute, the aforementioned "true time" of radical otherness. Put in terms of Castoriadis' final definition of time from *IIS*, in society's being continuously "to-be," it participates in the self-alteration of being itself, which self-alteration is – by logical substitution from Castoriadis' definition – simply time itself.

To elaborate on this process, Castoriadis writes that "Society is not" (contra the Idealists favored by Klooger and Adams) "a thing, not a subject, and not an idea – nor is it a collection or system of subjects, things and ideas."[17] Instead, Castoriadis claims, any "articulation of social life" is "in every instance the creation of the society in question."[18] As for the precise meaning of "creation" here – which has become the subject of considerable interpretive debate in the secondary literature on Castoriadis – he elaborates as follows:

> [creation is] a genesis that is not a mere becoming, generation and corruption, engendering of the same by the same as a different exemplar of the same type, but is instead the emergence of otherness, ontological genesis, that brings about beings as *eidos*, and as the *ousia* of *eidos*, another manner and another type of being and of being-a-being.[19]

Note the assertion here. Creation for Castoriadis is not becoming, as it is for Friedrich Nietzsche and Gilles Deleuze. Nor is creation the mere arising of new

16 Ibid., 175.
17 Ibid., 178.
18 Ibid., 180.
19 Ibid., 181.

organisms, as it is for Aristotle. Instead, creation is being's creation of itself – that is, its creation of different kinds of being, and of ways of being. Creation is, in short, the evolution of the being of being. Put more concretely, in 1800 there were objectively more ways to be than there were in 1799 (and far more ways to be than there were in 300 BCE), simply because being itself has continually expanded itself, creating new aspects (as it always will).

With this radicalness in mind, one can appreciate why Castoriadis claims that "*what* the social is, and the way in which it is, has no analogue anywhere else."[20] The closest one can get to an analogue to society – and it is in this context that Castoriadis first introduces his famous metaphor or figure – is "a *magma*, and even as a *magma* of *magmas*." To clarify, this magma is "not chaos," but rather "the mode of organization belonging to a non-ensemblist diversity, exemplified by society, the imaginary or the unconscious." In short, the fact that being is a magma means, for Castoriadis, that "each region of beings unveils another sense of: being."[21] This begins a pattern of choreography- resonance in Castoriadis' discussion of this point, which I will now briefly rehearse.

In this first instance of this choreographic pattern, the rhetoric of "veils" calls to mind the legendary "dance of the seven veils," as well as the veil-dance of modern dance pioneer Loïe Fuller. The second choreography resonance occurs two pages later, in Castoriadis' description of the concept of causality implied by Aristotle's definition of the syllogism. Beginning with the original definition of the syllogism, Aristotle writes that it is "a discourse in which, some things being posited, another thing … necessarily goes with them (*ex anankes sumbainei*) by reason of the being of the former."[22] Having thus quoted Aristotle's definition, Castoriadis then offers an alternate translation of the Greek verb that describes the relationship of belonging between premises, namely *sumbainen*, as "to walk together." To this, I add that "to walk together" aptly describes a near-universal component of choreography, perhaps most famously in the case of ballet's *pas de deux* (a "step of two," or duet). And in the third choreography resonance from this section – which, unlike the prior two instances, makes the connection to dance explicit – Castoriadis suggests, two pages later, the following: "change the scale of time, and the stars in the heavens will step to a dizzy dance."[23] Circling back to the magma, dance is also suggested in Castoriadis' later discussion thereof, where he claims it "never ceases to move,"

20 Ibid., 182.
21 Ibid., 183.
22 Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution*, 184.
23 Ibid., 186.

adding that "it is because the magma is such, that man can move himself."[24] That is, being itself behaves like a dancer, which makes it possible for humans to be essentially dancers too.

To summarize this fourth section of my investigation, for Castoriadis the imagination starts with history, then focuses on the history of society in particular, then pivots to society per se, which requires a novel figure (magma), the elaboration of which figure moves the entire account – and thereby imagination itself – into close proximity to the central sub-art (choreography) that organizes the history of the art in which sociality and temporality intersect most vividly (dance). In other words, to understand imagination, one must approach it from a perspective of aesthetic social temporality, which I argue is most vividly condensed in choreographing dance.

It is precisely because of this central importance of a specific figure (magma) at the heart of Castoriadis' conception of imagination, along with the fact that the art of dance seems so helpful in articulating it, and the fact that dance too is centrally concerned with figures – both literal and figurative – that I focused elsewhere on the concept (and figure) of "figure." Though I will not rehearse that analysis here, it will be helpful to consider the ways in which the concept of figure interacts synergistically with the present investigation's focus on the concept of choreography.

5 The Constitutive Bodies of the Imagination/Imaginary: Figures

An intriguing and central feature of Castoriadis' introduction of figures in *IIS* is his reliance on both (a) the concept of "figure," and (b) literal figures (capital "A" and "B"). Using the latter figures as mathematical variables, Castoriadis temporarily assigns the value of Dante's "*Divine Comedy*" to A, and the value of Homer's "*Odyssey*" to B. Castoriadis then describes the relationship between the two figures as being "other than" each other, which in his terminology is opposed to the concept of being "different from" each other. For an example of otherness, *The Divine Comedy* "cannot be deduced, produced or constructed on the basis of what is 'in'" the *Odyssey*.[25] For a contrasting example, of (mere) difference, the number 4 is merely different from the number 2; they are not other than each other, because they are constituted by numerically identical quantitative units. Thus, Castoriadis concludes, "from A to B, there is *essential*

24 Ibid., 244.

25 Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution*, 195.

indetermination," or freedom.[26] In other words, A does not limit B's freedom, which is to be figured otherwise than A, because B is free to determine itself independent of A.[27] Put in choreographic terms, Loïe Fuller's abovementioned veiling dance, though perhaps inspired by the dance of the seven veils, cannot be deterministically reduced thereto.

Castoriadis then explains the same point in a different way, recalling his definition of time earlier in *IIS* as "the emergence of other figures," to which he now adds – creating, one might say, a new definition indeterminately free of its predecessor – that time is "logical-ontological genesis."[28] Put differently, time is the creation of new logical and metaphysical figures, or of both new forms (logic) and new content (ontology). In still other words, "true time, the time of otherness-alteration, is a time of bursting, emerging, creating" and its present "is here explosion, split, rupture – the rupture of what is as such."[29]

This bursting, rupturing self-choreography of being is most vivid in its sociohistorical stratum, which Castoriadis goes on to define as follows: "radical imaginary, namely the incessant originating of otherness that figures, and figures itself, is in figuring and in figuring itself, giving itself as figure and figuring itself to the second degree ('reflexively')."[30] The sociohistorical, in other words, is a figure that exists by creating itself and creating other figures, which figures it presents self-consciously as being for its sake. Otherwise expressed, the sociohistorical is like a choreographer creating a dance for their dancing self, as well as for other dancers, to whom the choreographer assigns supporting roles in their *corps de ballet*. To get clearer on this social self-choreography, I will now return to the central roles performed therein by the dancing figures of the imagination: in the times of social representation (*legein*) and social doing (*teukhein*).

26 Ibid., 199.

27 Relatedly, Castoriadis also identifies as similarly groundless the posited distinction between the "literal" and the "figurative." "There is," he asserts, "no proper meaning"; instead, "there is simply an identitary *use* of meaning" (ibid., 347). Put informally, meaning can be used logically/ rationally, but its foundation is creativity/imagination. Thus, Castoriadis claims, what we call "figures of speech" are in fact "merely particular tropes or second-order tropes" (ibid., 348). Importantly, this implies that so-called "literal" speech is better understood as consisting of first-order tropes. In short, "*all language is the abuse of language*" (ibid., 348).

28 Ibid., 200.

29 Ibid., 201.

30 Ibid., 204.

6 The Figures' Performances: The Times of Social Representation and Doing

As noted above, Castoriadis divides society into the two fundamental institutions of *legein* (social representation) and *teukhein* (social doing). On this basis, Castoriadis also divides societal history into the following two different kinds: the time of social representation and the time of social doing (corresponding to *legein* and *teukhein*, respectively). I will now explore these in detail.

Regarding the time of social representation, Castoriadis first subdivides it into three dimensions: (1) "identitary time," or "calendar time," which is the analogue in time of formal logic; (2) "imaginary time," examples of which include "Christian and Moslem eras, 'ages' (golden, silver or bronze), eons, great Mayan cycles, etc."; and (3) "what might be called the *quality* of time as such, what time is 'brewing' or 'preparing', what it is 'pregnant' with: the time of Exile for the Jews in the Diaspora, the time of trial and of hope for Christians, the time of 'progress' for Westerners."[31] Castoriadis then adds that this "quality of time," which I will term "ambient time," is "correlative to the magma of instituted imaginary significations," and that, although this ambient time "may appear to be derived from" these SIS, "it would be more correct to say, risking an improper use of language, that [ambient time] is the essential '*affect*' of the society considered."[32] This ambient time, I interpolate, is perhaps the closest of these three (subtypes of the time of social representation) to choreography, since the latter is less concerned with (1) a strict division of time into beats or steps and (2) qualitative periods within time, and is instead more concerned with (3) the ambience of each moment in the time of the dance.

Turning from the time of social representing to the time of social doing, Castoriadis begins by noting that the latter "is based on markings from the calendar of identitary time," which markings "are posited primordially and essentially in so far as they permit the instrumentations" of social doing/ *teukhein*.[33] In other words, social doing is what originally prompts and structures the logical dimension of the time of social representation. This power of the time of social doing, Castoriadis continues, is based on its "leaning on the natural level, as is obvious in natural labour or in war." In this leaning, however, "the time of social doing presents itself and exists as internally differentiated, organized, unhomogeneous, inseparable from *what* is done in it."[34] Put differently, the

31 Ibid., 210 and 211.
32 Ibid., 211.
33 Ibid.
34 Ibid., 212.

time of social doing does not take its divisions exclusively from nature; rather, it introduces into nature new internal divisions of its own. Moreover, the time of social doing also contains "the critical moment, the singularity which does not exist 'objectively' and which will become so only by means of and for the appropriate doing." Such a singularity, he elaborates, is "what the Hippocratic writings call *kairos*," defined as a "propitious instant or crucial interval, the opportunity to take a decision." Thus, the "time of social doing must be instituted so as to contain singularities that are not determinable in advance, as the possibility of the appearing of what is irregular, of accidents, of events, of the rupture of repetition." Put otherwise, the time of social doing is fractured by, or pregnant with events, entirely novel and unpredictable phenomena and states of affairs which bring fundamental, even metaphysical change to the cosmos. For this reason, Castoriadis asserts that the time of social doing "is much closer to true temporality than the time of social representation."

The relationship between the times of social representation and doing are complex and important. As opposed to the time of social doing, the time of social representation, he claims, "tends to cover over, to conceal and to deny temporality as otherness-alteration."[35] Put simply, society represents itself as essentially stable, denying its constant patterns of change. In Castoriadis' paraphrase of this point, "Everything occurs as if the ground where the creativity of society is manifested in the most tangible way had to be covered over by an imaginary creation arranged in such a way as to allow society to conceal what it is to itself."[36] Thus, the time of social representation, as part of the "institution" of *legein*, is not only a representation, but "is still itself a doing," and is therefore part of "a 'making be' as presentation, a figuring and a figure."[37] More specifically, the doing of *legein* tends to cover over, disguise, and thus misrepresent the doing of *teukhein*. In dancing terms, the time of social doing choreographs society through the process of history, whereas the time of social representation choreographs a spectacle of misrepresentation (in the discipline of history) to distract from and obscure the primary choreography of social doing (i.e. the self-choreography of being). Put differently, the choreography of social representation, by trying to replace the choreography of social doing, amounts to a "counter-choreography."

This choreographic nature of time in Castoriadis is further elaborated via his analysis of signification, which as a kind of representation falls under the heading of social representation (*legein*). Specifically, this analysis emphasizes

35 Ibid.
36 Ibid., 213.
37 Ibid., 249.

the embodied figuration of every (seemingly) abstract sign. For example, Castoriadis writes, "the sign *qua* sign can exist only as an instituted figure," and "signitive co-belonging can exist only as … the figuration of figures in a manner that is, as such, unrepresentable in the egological field and literally unthinkable as such."[38] Put simply, the meaning of words evolves through history, with words retaining old (and obtaining new) meanings that are not usually apparent to a given language-deploying ego (and always beyond the ego's conscious control). Choreographically put, every sign is a dancer, occupying historically-shifting choreographed positions. But the dancing-being of the sign is incomprehensible if one analyzes the sign through the lens of egos attempting to manipulate language.

Moreover, this impotence of the ego (vis-à-vis the dancing body of the sign) suggests that the ego per se belongs to the second-order, "counter-choreography" of social representation, assigned there to play the part of helping to disguise and distract from social doing's first-order choreography. In fact, Castoriadis himself suggests as much just a few pages later, writing that "the living body is the human living body insofar as it represents and represents itself."[39] Put dancingly, while the body as a member of the species homo sapiens is choreographed by social doing's choreography, that body merely imagines (or "represents") its movements as constituting its "humanity." In this imaginative bodily process, Castoriadis elaborates, all the bodily figure's external "stimulations" and "impressions" (both are put in scare quotes by Castoriadis) "become *representations*, that is to say, they are 'put into images', and emerge as figures." Translating again to choreographic terms: the dancers, whose bodies are already moving to social doing's primary choreography, costume themselves according to the demands of social representation's counter-choreography, and said dancing bodies are thereby transfigured into the dance's narrative characters.

Having now erected an initial framework for both imagination and choreography in Castoriadis, and particularly regarding its dependence on the concept (or figure) of "figure," I can now proceed to the place in his work where the two intersect most vividly and synergistically, namely in his creative dialogue with Plato's *Timaeus* and the figure of *chora*, the root of the word *choreography*.[40]

38 Ibid., 252.

39 Ibid., 301.

40 For more on the connection between Plato's *chora* and choreography, see Joshua M. Hall, "Choreographing the Borderline: Dancing with Kristeva," *Philosophy Today* 56(1): 2012, 49-58.

7 Choreographing Time with Plato's *Chora*

Castoriadis' dialogue with the *Timaeus*' *chora* is framed as part of his answer to the question he raises, as to whether time is absolutely different from space. More precisely, Castoriadis asks why "difference or otherness is always posited, by the subject and society, as given *in* a first medium, 'space', and also *in* a second medium, 'time', *and* as separable from that in which it is."[41] Before turning directly to the *Timaeus* for an answer, however, Castoriadis demurs, claiming he is unable to give a lengthy interpretation in *IIS*. Instead, he writes, "we must simply indicate a few aspects in which the *impossibility* for inherited thought truly to think of time, a time essentially different from space, makes itself apparent."[42] In other words, Castoriadis intends to cover just enough of the *Timaeus* to show that understanding time on its own terms has been impossible for the history of philosophy.

For starters, Castoriadis claims that "there is neither time nor space in what Plato gives himself – gives to the Demiurge – to construct the world."[43] Instead, there are "the always being (*aei on*) and the always becoming (*aei gignomenon*)."[44] This distinction leads to infamous conceptual problems in Plato's dialogue, and the *chora* represents Plato's attempted solution. Castoriadis' first definition of the *chora* is as "'space', 'what' *receives* 'what' is-becomes, that 'in which' exists everything that is."[45] To this, he immediately adds that the *chora* is "neither intelligible" nor "sensible." To elaborate on this definition, Castoriadis announces that he will "open up a triple parentheses here."

In what appears to be the first/outermost parenthetical position, Castoriadis claims that this "separability-inseparability of the Receptacle (*dechomenon*) and of 'what' is there shows up again in contemporary physics, with general relativity."[46] Put simply, the *chora* suggests to Castoriadis a foreshadowing of Einstein's conception of spacetime, or the inseparability of space and time, or of time as a spatial dimension. At this first parenthetical step, therefore, time is inseparably bound to space. Seemingly occupying the second/intermediate parenthetical position is Castoriadis' claim that the *chora* is both an image and the "space" for images, which means that the "*topos* or *chora* is the first

41 Castoriadis, *Imaginary Institution*, 187.
42 Ibid.
43 Ibid., 187.
44 Ibid., 187-188.
45 Ibid., 189.
46 Ibid.

possibility of the Plural."[47] In this vein, Castoriadis appears to link the *chora* as *topos* to the Aristotelian imagination, specifically by way of memory. The latter, he writes, "is a *place*, a *topos* in which a multitude of memories can *co*exist without one driving out or destroying another."[48] Connecting this to the first parenthetical step, the *chora* as time is also an image for space, as well as being the figurative "place" wherein all spatial images "take place." Although the introduction of memory, which is inherently temporal, might seem to constitute the manifestation of a time independent of space – as opposed to the first parenthetical fusion of time and space – this apparent independence turns out to be a mere illusion. That is, as the metaphor of memory as storage complex already begins to suggest, there would be, within infinite space (i.e. an infinitely large storage complex), infinitely many different images – even in just one frozen moment, which would make temporal succession unnecessary. Within this second pair of parentheses, therefore, time has still not shown itself on its own. The logical ground for the latter, however, have been established. In the third/innermost parenthetical position, finally, at the climax of Castoriadis' interpretation of the *chora*, he insists that time "can exist only if there is an emergence of what is other, of what is in no way *given with* what is, what does not *go together* with it."[49]

In other words, the result of the triple parentheses is the insight that time is not space, but spacing; not posture, but posturing; not dance as product, but the process of choreography. The verbal phrase "go together with" at the end of the previous quote already suggests its choreographic relevance (by recalling Castoriadis' translation of *sumbainen* in Aristotle's definition of the syllogism as "to walk together"). Put choreographically then, a walk is not a dance, if nothing happens besides two people just walking together, with nothing *other* ever happening. "Time," Castoriadis summarizes, "is the emergence of *other* figures."[50] This rhetorical suggestion of choreography, which involves the emergence of both literal and figurative figures, is amplified further down on the same page.

"There is no 'pure' time" that is "separable from what is brought into being through time as what makes time be,"[51] Castoriadis claims. Similarly, choreography does not fill up preexisting time; instead, the choreography and its choreographed bodies create the very time that the dance manifests. Time is, in

47 Ibid., 190 and 191.
48 Ibid., 192.
49 Ibid., 193.
50 Ibid.
51 Ibid.

Castoriadis' own choreographically-resonant terms, "the otherness-alteration of figures, and originally and at its core, it is this alone."[52] These dancing figures "are other," Castoriadis elaborates, "inasmuch as they shatter determinacy, inasmuch as they cannot be determined" specifically "on the basis of determinations that are 'external' to them or that come from *somewhere else*."[53] In other words, choreography can never be independent of the body of the choreographer or the dancers. On the contrary, choreography is a self-determining *of* dancing bodies *by* dancing bodies and *for* dancing bodies. Or, in the case of a self-choregraphed solo, a self-determining of, by and for one singular body. And in the specific case of sociohistorical self-choreography, to repeat, this means the creative dialogue between society as choreographer and society as choreographed dancer.

8 Conclusion: Choreographic Scansion in "Time and Creation"

Further clarifying the choreographic nature of the sociohistorical is a brief passage in Castoriadis' late essay, "Time and Creation," specifically his deployment of the concept of "scansion." Most often used in the analysis of poetry, "scansion" (or "scanning") is a technical term in literary theory and refers to the analyzing of a line of poetry to determine its meter, or rhythm, achieved by dividing the line into "feet." Derived from the Latin verb *scandare*, "to climb," scanning could be understood as a practice wherein the poem becomes a dance, when undulating voice and breath are qualitatively organized into the steps that the reader must take to move according to the poet's choreography.

For anyone familiar with Maxine Sheets-Johnstone's pivotal *The Phenomenology of Dance*, this idea of scansion of the line of time may also suggest her original concept of the "dynamic line."[54] Put briefly, the dynamic line refers to the string of nonsense syllables that choreographers and dancers chant to learn and practice a given piece of choreography, assigning different syllables to different durations and types of movement. For example, "ba pi dah" might be a given choreographer's shorthand for the common tap dance sequence named "kick, ball change," in which one kicks forward with one foot, then places that foot on the ground behind the other foot, then lifts the other foot and immediately returns it to its prior position.

52 Ibid.

53 Ibid.

54 Maxine Sheets-Johnston, *The Phenomenology of Dance* (Philadelphia: Temple University Press, 2015).

Castoriadis deploys "scansion" during a discussion that contrasts difference and otherness in terms of the implications thereof for time per se. "Time is being," he writes, "insofar as being is otherness, creation, and destruction," while "[a]bstract space is being insofar as being is determinacy, identity, and difference."[55] He quickly adds the caveat, though, that there is also "poietic space, space unfolding with and through the emergence of forms," as well as "identitary time."[56] In sum, then, Castoriadis posits the following four entities: identitary time, imaginary time, identitary space, and imaginary space. Thus, one cannot, for him, say that space = ensidic logic, or that time = poetic imagination. Instead, the "essential distinction" between them "is grounded in their distinct relation to alterity and alteration."[57] That is,

> … the emergence of forms is the ultimate character of time; the before and the after is given by the scansion of creation and destruction. Along this line we can, in a sense, elucidate irreversibility. In the indifferent, ensidic dimension of time – in the measurable but reversible repetition of the identical as the successive – forms emerge, or forms are destroyed (*not*: thermodynamically disorganized!). The direction along which disorganization of the ensidic (entropy) increases *and* forms emerge and are destroyed qua forms, gives us an arrow of time.[58]

In other words, time is the medium in which forms are created and destroyed (by the creation of other forms in the "total form" of the cosmos), along the cosmos' lifespan, in continual cosmic self-creation, self-modification and (partial) self-destruction. Overall, Castoriadis suggests, this cosmic life is one of increasing chaos-within-order, which is to say more imagination in logic.

Significantly, Castoriadis then deploys the word "scans" – a more directly poetic version of "scansion" – one page after the above block quote, in a bracketed passage clarifying its central point. "{Form *as such* entails space, simultaneous multiplicity," he writes, "It does not entail time, successive multiplicity; it is its *emergence* that requires time and scans time}." (*sic*)[59] In other words, though space is big enough for infinitely many forms, it is not "big" enough to welcome those forms' alteration, otherness, creation or destruction. The latter

55 Cornelius Castoriadis, "Time and Creation," in *World in Fragments: Writings on Politics, Society, Psychoanalysis and the Imagination* (Palo Alto, CA: Stanford University Press), 374-404, 374.

56 Castoriadis, "Time and Creation," 396.

57 Ibid., 397.

58 Ibid.

59 Ibid., 398.

processes, for Castoriadis, just *are* what time is, including both logical time's quantitative passage and imaginary time's qualitative reorganization.

In other words, time is the scanning, the climbing over the hills and valleys of the rhythm of being, a (micro) cosmic dancing to the flow of (macro) cosmic poetry. More concisely, "Time is creation and destruction – that means, time is being in its substantive determinations."[60] It would be imprecise to paraphrase this claim by saying that time is the locus of creation and destruction. Instead, creation-destruction for Castoriadis simply *is* time, in its dynamic self-creation.

Put in choreographic terms, and by way of conclusion, time is not a container or receptacle in which a dance is written and bodied-forth. Instead, choreography is that which creates time, by creating the qualitative dimensions of time, by creating and destroying the gestural forms of new dances. These forms, moreover, though created as genuinely other, nevertheless recur rhythmically, as dancing "steps," "moves," "phrases," etc. "A form," in Castoriadis' words, "cannot be said to be, "unless it is identical to itself (in the broadest sense of the term 'identical'), and persists/repeats itself for a while."[61] One such "while" is that of the forms of choreography's dances, such as those of the psyche's and society's imagination. We should therefore tap into this imaginative power of our societies, engaging and sustaining ever-renewed creative dialogues of the sociohistorical with itself, and thereby empowering our further pursuit of social justice.

Biography

Joshua M. Hall is Assistant Professor of Philosophy and Liberal Studies at William Paterson University. Since earning his Ph.D. in Philosophy from Vanderbilt University, he has authored forty peer-reviewed journal articles, including in *Philosophy Compass* (2018), *Dance Chronicle* (2017, 2013) and *Philosophy and Literature* (2013), and coedited an anthology on mass incarceration (*Philosophy Imprisoned*, 2014). He has also published poetry in numerous literary journals, including *Folio* (2019), *Mayday Magazine* (2018), and *Roanoke Review* (2017). Finally, he has over twenty years' experience as a dancer and choreographer.

60 Ibid., 399.
61 Ibid., 400.