

A Theory of Tragedy in Cornelius Castoriadis

Una teoría de la tragedia en Cornelius Castoriadis

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ABSTRACT Towards the end of his philosophical and political theorizing, the Greekborn French philosopher and thinker Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) turned his attention to the artistic representation, in particular to the Greek one, or to use the term he preferred: to the *Athenian* tragedy. The aim of this article is to analyze the role that plays his interpretation of tragedy in his understanding of democracy as a tragic regime. In order to address this interrogation, the article is divided in three parts. The first one is devoted to what Castoriadis calls the *Greek creation*. The second part offers an interpretation of Castoriadis' formulation of tragedy both as a public institution and a *window to chaos*, with an especial emphasis on its connection to democracy, autonomy and judgment. In the final remarks, I critically assess his original conception of tragedy and the political implications for Castoriadis' idea of democracy. I conclude with the suggestion of, contrary to his critics' accusation, Castoriadis does not idealize Athenian democracy, but rather, his notion of democracy as a tragic regime contains the idea that democratic action is always on the verge of the abyss, which is always intrinsically radical and tragic.

KEYWORDS Tragedy; Democracy; Tragic Regime; Castoriadis; *hybris*.

RESUMEN *En sus últimos trabajos filosófico-políticos, el filósofo y pensador grecofrancés Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) dirigió su atención hacia la representación artística, en particular la tragedia griega, o ateniense, como prefería llamarla. El objetivo de este artículo es analizar el lugar que ocupa la interpretación de la tragedia en la definición de Castoriadis de la democracia como un régimen trágico. Para abordar este interrogante, el artículo estará dividido en tres partes. La primera se centrará en lo que Castoriadis denominaba la creación griega. En la segunda se ofrece una lectura de la tragedia como institución pública y como ventana al caos, enfatizando sus vínculos con los conceptos de democracia, autonomía y juicio. En los comentarios finales, evaluaremos críticamente su original concepción de la tragedia, así como las implicaciones políticas de la idea de democracia que propone Castoriadis. Concluiremos sugiriendo que Castoriadis no idealiza la democracia ateniense, como le acusan sus críticos, sino que su noción de la democracia como*

régimen trágico contiene la idea de que la acción política está siempre al borde del abismo, que es siempre intrínsecamente radical y trágica..

PALABRAS CLAVE *Tragedia; Democracia; Régimen trágico; Castoriadis; hybris.*

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For beauty is nothing other than the beginning of the terrible.

—Rainer Maria Rilke, *Duino Elegies*.

What is it that the institution of society ought to achieve? [...]

The creation of human beings living with beauty, living with wisdom,
and loving the common good.

—Cornelius Castoriadis, *The Greek polis and the Creation of Democracy*

Towards the end of his philosophical and political theorizing, the Greekborn French philosopher Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) turned his attention to artistic representation, in particular to the Greek one, or to use the term that he preferred, to the “Athenian tragedy” (1991a, p. 117). This interest was mainly developed in his celebrated *The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy* (In the first footnote, he indicates that he presented the main ideas of this article for the first time in 1979, but that the final text was read at a lecture in 1982 at the New School, and finally published in 1983). That is a series of seminars that he delivered at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS) in Paris in the early 1980’s —published posthumously in 1991— in which he focused on the emergence, nature and functioning of Greek democracy. This idea appears especially in his 1991 essay “Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-creation of *Anthropos*” and in the 1992 lecture “Fenêtre sur le chaos” (Window into chaos), in which Castoriadis explores the significance “of the works of art as a window into chaos” (2018, p. 78). Following Andrew Cooper, in this article I claim that Castoriadis’ later reflections on tragedy, far from being *subsidiary* to his major works (Cooper, 2014, p. 88) are central to them. In fact, it is through the study of tragedy that Castoriadis further develops his project of autonomy, that is, of the radical transformation of society, and expands his understanding of democracy as self-institution and self-limitation.

The originality of Castoriadis’ project of autonomy lies in the fact that, according to him, autonomy consists in the interplay of individual (*psyche*) and collective (social) aspects. That is, an autonomous society presupposes autonomous citizens and vice versa, and furthermore it also presupposes collective participation, deliberation and judgment (Castoriadis, 1991b, pp.

164-165). Nevertheless, as Suzi Adams (2014, p. 2) rightly points out, “the concept of autonomy did not emerge fully-fledged in his thought but was rather a concept in progress.”

Intellectually, the first elaborations of this idea appeared in Castoriadis’ early writings during the 1950’s, as part of his critical engagement with Marx. As Andreas Kalyvas points out, in these first works —strongly marked by the radical tradition of economic self-management— Castoriadis relates autonomy primarily to the rule of the workers’ councils “organized in a central assembly and expressing the political power of society as a whole” (1998a, pp. 163-164). However, it was not until the publication of his ground-breaking work *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1998 [1975]), when he laid the philosophical basis of autonomy, that is, when his “efforts to open anew the question of autonomy and to revive the democratic project” gained full force (Kalyvas, 1998b, p. 161). However, Castoriadis kept thinking about autonomy arguably till the end of his life. In fact, his project entails several parts, sources and connections that can be identified, in an extremely abridged way, as the following: First, during his years in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the critical rethinking and critique of Marx’s revolution and emancipation. Second, mainly via combination of sociology and philosophy with psychoanalysis (particularly Freud), linguistic and mathematics, the development of the philosophical bases of this project (with the introduction of his most important concepts, such as radical imagination, institution but also the rethinking of individual autonomy). Third, the critique of Kant’s theory of moral autonomy; and fourth, the further elaboration of autonomy through a renewed engagement with ancient Greece’s direct democracy; and thus, his analysis of contemporary democracy.¹

This paper will be mainly concerned with the fourth part, given that Castoriadis became interested in the aesthetics and artistic representation in connection to Greece, mainly through his approach to Athenian tragedy. As Andrew Copper (2014, p. 88) has argued, recent scholarships have largely overlooked Castoriadis’ engagement with arts and aesthetics. This paper attempts to help fill this void, showing how his unique understanding of tragedy shapes his idea of democracy as a tragic regime. In what follows, my aim is twofold: first, to explore the role that the concept and meaning of tragedy plays in Castoriadis’ conception of democracy; and second, to reveal the originality of his understanding of tragedy. My guiding questions are then what is Castoriadis’ interpretation of tragedy and how it is related to

¹ For this extremely succinct presentation we have drawn on Adams (2014), although she does not mention Kant, and on Singer (2015).

democracy. In order to address these interrogations, the article is divided in three parts. The first one is devoted to what Castoriadis calls the *Greek creation*. Here, I will introduce and explain some of the author's main concepts, such as society as instituting/instituted, politics, power and autonomy. The second part offers an interpretation of Castoriadis' formulation of tragedy both as a public institution and a window to chaos, emphasizing its connection to democracy, autonomy and judgment. In the final remarks, I assess critically his original conception of tragedy and the political implications of Castoriadis' idea of democracy. I will conclude by suggesting that, contrary to what his critics accuse him of, Castoriadis does not idealize the Athenian democracy, but rather, his notion of democracy as a tragic regime contains the idea that democratic action is always on the verge of the abyss, that it is always intrinsically radical and tragic.

The *Greek Creation*, or the Project of Autonomy

The Ancient Greek tragedy or the Athenian tragedy plays a central role in Castoriadis' understanding of what he called the *Greek creation*. Therefore, in order to get a better approach to his reading of tragedy, it is necessary to understand what he means by Greek creation, as well as the importance that he pays to the establishment of democracy in Athens from the eight to the fifth century BCE. However, grasping these topics requires to take a step back and analyze his distinction between the instituting and the instituted society, since, as Kalyvas puts it, it is "in their interstices [where] he articulates an innovative theory of autonomy" (1998b, p. 173).

According to Castoriadis, society is the totality of institutions. And like every other social institution, it is instituted and instituting at the same time (1997, pp. 8-9), created and recreated through the actions, roles and practices of the members of society. In this sense, and against the idea that society creates individuals who, in turn, create society, Castoriadis states:

History is creation: the creation of total forms of human life. Social-historical forms are not "determined" by natural or historical "laws." *Society is self-creation*. "That which' creates society and history is the instituting society, as opposed to the instituted society. The instituting society is the social imaginary in the radical sense. (Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 84.).²

² The highlight is mine

Society is the work of the “instituting imaginary,” which corresponds to the creative formgiving power of the radical social imaginary (Kalyvas, 1998b, pp. 10-11). In other words, all societies institute themselves by creating their own political forms, their individuals, language, norms, values, ways of life and death, and meanings, in one word, their magma of social imaginary significations. By *creation*, Castoriadis meant “the positing of a new *eidōs*, a new essence, a new form in the full and strong sense: new determinations, new norms, new laws” (1991a, p. 84). According to him, then, the cause, the origin, the foundation of society is nothing more than the society itself (Castoriadis, 1993, p. 14) —which also implies, as we will see, the possibility of its alteration.

However, Castoriadis continues, although all societies create their own institutions and significations, most of them have failed to recognize themselves as the source of their own laws, habits and meanings. Castoriadis calls these the *heteronomous* societies, as opposed to the *autonomous* societies. A heteronomous society is unable to recognize itself as the creator of itself, of its own social imaginary significations and, on the contrary, it “believes itself to be grounded in something other than itself” (Abaffy, 2012, p. 35). As Smith points out, *heteros* means *other* (2015, p. 13). It conceives its laws —its origin, sense and meaning— as being predetermined by an external or *extra-social* source, such as God (religion), nature, reason or history, which answers any questions that might be formulated. Castoriadis defines *extrasocial* as “external to the actual, living society: gods or God, but also founding heroes or ancestors who are continually reincarnated in the newborn humans” (1991b, 153). Heteronomy, then, is “the denial and the covering up of the instituting dimension of society thorough the imputation of the origin of the institution and its social signification to an extra-social source” (Castoriadis, 1991b, p. 153). It is a “self-occultation of society,” a lack of recognition of “its own being as creative and creativity” that allows it “to present its institutions as out of reach, as escaping its own actions” (Castoriadis, 1993, p. 15). Castoriadis calls this a “closure of meaning” (1997, p. 4), given that all the questions a society poses find an answer only within its imaginary significations. Consequently, heteronomy pushes the basis of institution outside the realm of human action, occluding the creative character of human history and masking the self-institution of society (Singer, 2015, p. 148-149).

What is, then, autonomy? As Castoriadis points out, the word autonomy comes literally from the two Greek words *αὐτός* (*autos*, which means *self*) and *νόμος* (*nomos*, which means *law*), that is, “to give to oneself one’s laws” (1991b, 164). Nonetheless, Castoriadis’ definition of autonomy is stronger:

it presupposes the explicit and lucid recognition of the self-institution of the society. An autonomous society recognizes itself as its own origin, it self-reflexively creates its own institutions and remains open to call them into question, reevaluation and reformation, because it knows that the significations through which it lives are neither necessary nor contingent (Smith, 2014, p. 14). Furthermore, an autonomous society is inconceivable without autonomous individuals (and vice versa), that is, without individuals who are not only physically free, but also fully aware about the fact that their laws are human creations (that they are *nomos*, human convention, and not *physis*, nature) in which they have participated in their formulation and position, so, consequently these can always be discussed, collectively disputed and potentially changed. As it can be noted, Castoriadis' definition of autonomy is highly demanding. In an extremely controversial claim, he affirms that the situation of heteronomy was only "shattered twice in human history," and even then, only partially: in the Ancient Greece and in Western Europe at the end of the Middle Ages, with the onset of European modernity, which began in the thirteenth century and continued, arguably, into the present (although he remains ambivalent about this second project) (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 8).

Here lies Castoriadis' interest in Greece, or most precisely, in Athens, the *locus* where the project of autonomy emerged. For Castoriadis, Greece is neither an "eternal model," a paradigm inaccessible to us, nor a specific type of society among others. According to this author, thinking about Greece is not the same as thinking about any other culture, because only in the case of Greece "we are reflecting and thinking about the social and historical conditions of thought itself—at least, thought as we know and practice it" (1991a, p. 83). Castoriadis (1991a, p. 84) conceives Greece not only as a part of Western and European history, culture and tradition, but as its origin, or to use his own term, its *germ*. With the word *germ*, our author seeks to emphasize, on the one hand, the connection between the Ancient Athens and Western European societies, and on the other hand, the idea that autonomy is an ongoing project.

In this sense, Castoriadis explains that autonomy was born around 682 or 683 BC with the establishment of the *annual* election of the *thesmothetai* (θεσμοθέται) and the affirmation of the rule of *nomos*, which subsequently led to the establishment of a direct democracy 175 years later in 508 BC. Castoriadis, however, is not interested in the procedures of direct democracy established in Athens. What is important in the Ancient Greek political life is what he calls the "historical instituting process," that is, "the explicit (even if partial) self-institution of the *polis* as a permanent process" (Castoriadis,

1991a, p. 105). The Athenian *polis* never stopped questioning its own institutions, and kept, explicitly and relentlessly, interrogating and modifying the rules under which they lived, collectively struggling around the change of its institutions. In this sense, Athens is the society where *the* political question *par excellence* was posed for the first time: “the question of judging and choosing between different institutions of society” (Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 101). The acts of judging and choosing were, then, created in Greece and they became the core of the Greek imaginary, which gave way—and this is central in Castoriadis (1991a, pp. 101-102, 1991c, p. 124)—to the simultaneous creation—or common birth—of politics and philosophy, together with democracy and linked among them.

Therefore, how does Castoriadis define *politics* and *philosophy*? What is their relation to democracy? In a similar vein to other contemporary thinkers, such as Jacques Rancière (1998) or Chantal Mouffe (2005), Castoriadis distinguishes between *the political* (*le politique*) and *politics* (*la politique*). Yet, he indicates that while all societies have instituted the political, only a few have instituted politics:

Now, “politics”—*la politique*—does not exist everywhere and always; true politics is the result of a rare and fragile social historical creation. What does necessarily exist in every society is *the political sphere in a general or neutral sense*, “*the political*”—*le politique*—, the explicit, implicit, almost ungraspable dimension that deals with power, namely the instituted instance (or instances) that is (are) capable of issuing sanction-bearing injunctions [such as] a judicial power and a governmental power. (Castoriadis, 1993, p. 1. See also: 1991b, pp. 154-156).

Castoriadis is emphatic in this distinction. He clearly states that *the political* pertains to everything that concerns the *explicit power*, which is always present in society, in its modes of access, managing and exertion, that is, the arrangements, decision making and legislative organs and patterns of power within a particular society (Adams, 2014, p. 8). By explicit power, he does not mean the State, which is a historical creation and an instance separated from the collectivity, but those instances in charge of formulating jurisdiction and decisions, as well as the modes of access to power. This dimension is instituted in all societies.

Politics—and this is what he seeks to make clear—was created by the Greeks, because it was the first time in history when a community deliberated explicitly about its own laws and the alteration of these same laws. In this sense, Castoriadis defines politics as “the reflective and lucid collective activity

that aims at the overall institution of society” (1991b, p. 159). In other words, politics is “the explicit putting into question the established institution” —and institutions— of society, and as such, it “pertains to everything in society that is participable and shareable.” (1991b, p. 169). The second element of this Greek creation is, as we have already stated, philosophy, which also entails its own questioning. He defines it as the unlimited interrogation of the instituted representations of the world (1997, p. 125), of “what Bacon called the *idola tribus*, the collectively accepted representations” (1997, p. 4). According to Castoriadis’ definition, philosophy and politics are two practices that, as Ingerid Straume points out, “represent a rupture with the traditional state of heteronomy by probing and questioning the nature and limits of the social institution” (Straume, 2014 p. 198). The central feature of this rupture is the rejection of any source of meaning that is not the activity of human beings, it is the rejection of all authority.

However, a question still remains unanswered: What is the link between politics and philosophy with *democracy*, the third element of this Greek creation? For Castoriadis, politics and democracy are like two sides of the same coin, because the activity of politics “necessarily transforms institutions in a democratic direction” (1991b, p. 164). By democracy, Castoriadis does not understand a specific kind of constitution, State form or set of institutions. Democracy, he specifies, is neither the reign of law, nor the equality of all citizens, but rather “the emergence of the questioning of the law (institutions) in and through the activity of the community” (Castoriadis, 1991b, p. 164). As he asserts in one of his last and most important articles, “Democracy as a procedure and democracy as a regime,” democracy is “the regime of explicit and lucid self-institution, as far as possible, of the social institutions that depend on explicit collective activity” (1997, p. 4). A democracy, then, is the regime of autonomy, the regime where all questions can be raised, the incessant activity of self-institution.

However, as Castoriadis well perceives, there is another side to democracy: the lack of foundation and thus, of limits. As we have stated above, for Castoriadis, democracy is the power of the *demos*, which has no foundations and does not receive any limits from the outside. But, if laws are not given or inherited and if there are no grounds of substantive political truths, then nothing can intrinsically set the limits of political action. A democratic society recognizes itself as the source of its own norms, and as such, it also recognizes that there are not —and cannot be—, ultimate foundations or external limits in the political domain. The direct implication of this latter assertion is that in

the autonomous *polis*, citizens are —and have to be— free and responsible for their choices. But who or what guarantees that they are so?

Castoriadis's answer to this question is that “all that can be hoped for in deliberation and judgment is that everyone acts responsibly and care for the common weal” (Straume, 2014, p. 198). However, what happens if —or when— that fails? After all, the Athenian defeat in the Peloponnesian War, as Thucydides showed, is an example of how freedom can lead to destruction. Being aware of this, Castoriadis characterizes democracy not as the reign of the unlimited, but rather, as that of self-limitation:

In a democracy, people *can* do anything —and must know that they *ought not* to do just anything. Democracy is the *regime of self-limitation; therefore*, it is also the regime of historical risk—another way of saying that it is the regime of freedom— and a *tragic* regime. The fate of the Athenian democracy offers an illustration of this. The fall of Athens [...] was the result of the *hubris* of the Athenians. (Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 115).³

At this point, the pressing questions of our paper finally arises: What does Castoriadis mean by *tragic* regime? And how is tragedy related to democracy? What is *hubris*? In order to answer these interrogations, we must first understand Castoriadis' conceptualization of tragedy.

Tragedy and Democracy, or Staging Chaos and *Hybris*

Castoriadis conceives tragedy, first and foremost, as a public institution deeply connected to the rise of the democratic *polis* in 5th century BC in Athens. As it has been stated in the introduction, according to Castoriadis there is no such thing as “Greek tragedy”: there is only Athenian or Attic tragedy because only in Athens could tragedy, instead of mere theater, be *created*. The reason he adduces is tragedy's close link to the democratic process of self-institution that we described in the previous section, a process that goes on and reaches its climax only in Athens —not in the whole Greek world.

Of course, Castoriadis is not alone in claiming the connection between tragedy and the democratic *polis* —indeed, this has been firmly established by classicists and anthropologists alike. One of the most important arguments is that of the French anthropologists Jean-Pierre Vernant and Pierre Vidal-Naquet, Castoriadis' contemporaries and colleagues whose work, in spite of their disagreements, is decisive in shaping Castoriadis conception of tragedy.

³Whenever the term *hubris* appears spelled with “u,” I am quoting it from Castoriadis (or better said, from its English translation). In the rest of the article, I spell it *hybris*.

The main ideas of Vernant and Vidal-Naquet are contained in their influential *Mythe et tragédie en Grèce ancienne* [Myth and Tragedy in Ancient Greece], a series of essays published in two volumes in 1972 and 1986. According to these authors, as the title of their book reveals, tragedy was born in relation to myth, as a *problematization* and rejection of it.

Their central argument is that tragedy emerged towards the end of the VI century, at a particular moment in Greek culture and history, when the language of myth ceased to influence the political reality of the *polis* and faded away with the triumph of philosophy. Vernant and Vidal-Naquet (2006) assert that tragedy was an invention, a new literary genre and a new social institution set up along the political and legal institutions of the *polis*. By establishing competitions in tragedy in the same urban space and according to the same norms that the assemblies, the Athenian *polis* turned “itself into a theatre. Its subject, in a sense, was itself and it acted itself out before its public” (2006, p. 33). This does not mean that tragedy was a mirror or a mere reflection of the social reality, but rather that, tragedy called reality into question by staging it, and thus challenged and problematized society’s fundamental values. As the authors explain: “tragedy is born when myth starts to be considered from the point of view of a citizen” and “the world of the city is called into question and its fundamental values are challenged in ensuing debate” (2006, p. 33). How did tragedies do that? By putting on stage an ancient heroic legend: a legendary world that the city regarded in a past both sufficiently distant for the contrast between the mythical traditions and the new forms of political thought to be visible and close enough for the clash to have topicality. In other words, tragedy portrayed the conflict between the new emerging legal and political thought of the *polis*, on the one hand, and mythical and heroic traditions, on the other. This duality was expressed by the tension between the two elements that occupied the tragic stage, the chorus and the hero: the first one, through its fears, hopes and questions, expressed the feelings of the citizen-spectators while the second one performed the actions and values that were being put into question. The heroic figures become *the problem*, the subject of debate that come under examination before the public (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 2006, pp. 24-25). This duality was matched by a duality in *language*, that is, lyric for the chorus and prose for the hero, although this is not the only significance the authors attach to language: the tragic poets made use of legal vocabulary, and exploiting its ambiguities, fluctuations and incompleteness reveal the disagreements within legal thought itself.

Vernant and Vidal-Naquet’s approach was, as they put it, “indissolubly social, aesthetic and psychological” (2006, p. 9):

The problem does not consist in reducing one of these aspects to another but in understanding how they hinge together and combine to constitute a unique human achievement, a single invention to which there are three historical aspects: From the point of view of the institution of tragic competitions it can be seen as a social phenomenon; in that it represents a new literary genre it is an aesthetic creation; and in that introduced the concepts of the tragic consciousness and tragic man it represents a psychological mutation. These are three aspects that constitute a single phenomenon and they demand the same mode of explanation. (Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 2006, p. 9).

Stemming from the sociology of literature and historical anthropology, it focused mainly on the ambiguities, conflicts and tensions—in language, between the divine and human world, within men and within the domain of values—in order to grasp the phenomenon of tragedy in all of its dimensions. In turn, Castoriadis' approach explicitly seeks to put forward a strictly *political* perspective. Let us be clear: of course, Castoriadis recognizes tragedy as a theatrical form and is aware of its origins as a religious ritual. Indeed, in the seminar he delivered on April 25th 1984 at the *Ecole des hautes études en sciences sociales* (EHESS), compiled in *Le cité et les lois. Ce que fait la Grèce* [The City and Laws. What makes Greece] he acknowledges that tragedy is a complex phenomenon, in his words, “a total event, both a collective festival, unquestionably a religious manifestation; and also, what we now call a work of art indeed complex” (Castoriadis, 2008, p. 226). Like Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, Castoriadis considers tragedy an invention, or to use his own words, a radical creation: a creation *ex nihilo*—not *cum nihilo*. Tragedy did have antecedents in singing choruses (in Syracuse), dance and poetry, and was rooted in the Greek mythical language and background, but the Athenians invented tragedy, and with it, they created a new *eidōs*, a new form that did not exist before. For him, tragedy is “like and more than a galaxy, it is a unit of form and matter, it is an organization that carries its own meanings” (Castoriadis, 2008, p. 138).

However, what Castoriadis seeks to emphasize is that more than a literary genre or a religious ritual, tragedy was an instance of the political institution of the Athenian *polis* (Klimis, 2014, p. 205). This is the prism through which Castoriadis reads tragedy in its unique and intrinsic relation to the “Greek creation” and to Athenian democracy. And that is why, although tragedy certainly has many layers of signification, he is mostly interested in the “cardinal political dimension of tragedy” (Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 117). This political dimension does not rest, as he clarifies, in the themes staged by the

tragedies nor in the political positions expressed by the poets, since, as Stathis Gourgouris indicates, “with the notable exception of Aeschylus’s *Eumenides*, which is explainable historically, tragedy does not stage democracy in any literal sense” (2014, p. 811). For Castoriadis, the *vraie* [true] political dimension of tragedy lies in two central aspects: 1) its ontological foundations and 2) in its role as a democratic institution of self-limitation. As we will see, these aspects are closely linked, as two sides of the same reality. In the following pages, we will try to elucidate and explain what the Greco-French author means by institution of self-limitation and the ontological grounding of tragedy.

At the end of the previous section, we mentioned that Castoriadis defines democracy as the regime of self-limitation given its intrinsic proneness to excessive, or what he calls, *hubristic* behavior. We are going to postpone explaining what *hybris* means and focus on the Greek *antidotes* to this intrinsic characteristic of democracy, that can—and did—lead it to its greatness as well as to its destruction: what Castoriadis calls the institutions of self-limitation. In his seminars at the EHESS,⁴ Castoriadis explains four of these institutions of self-limitation: *graphe paranomon* (accusation of unlawfulness), *apate tou demou* (deceit of the *demos*), *nomon me epitedeion theunai* (inappropriateness

⁴ In his published texts, Castoriadis states that he will “only consider two institutions related to this problem,” namely, tragedy and *graphe paranomon*. However, in footnote 25 of “The Greek polis...” he adds two more: *apate tou demou* (deceit of the *demos*) and *nomon me epitedeion theunai* (inappropriateness of a law), which he explains in full in *La cité et les lois*. For the sake of cohesion and brevity, I focus on tragedy in the main text and explain the others here. The *graphe paranomon* is the counterpart to the possibility of each citizen to make a proposition to the *Ekklesia*. After a citizen made a proposition, it was voted and if accepted, it became *nomos*. However, a second citizen could bring the first one to trial, accusing him of *paranomos*, of having induced people to vote for an unlawful law. As a consequence, the first citizen was taken to trial: a tribunal (or popular court) made up of a large number of citizens—not of professional magistrates—was convened to judge the accused, who if guilty, had to face conviction—fine and even death penalty. The idea behind this institution was double. First, that citizens reflected carefully before presenting something on the basis of a momentary fit of popular mood. Second, that both the source and control of the law is internal: the citizenship itself. The people fund the law and they can err, but also correct themselves. In this sense, the *graphe paranomon* is the *demos* appealing against itself in front of itself. For its part, *nomon me epitedeion theunai* was applied to those who had incited the people to vote for a measure presenting false information, and *nomon mé epitedeion theunai*, had two meanings: that the law no longer applies to the cases treated or that it is no longer a good law (Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 116, footnote 25; 2008, p. 137).

of a law) and tragedy, which he considers the “most important” one.⁵ Now, the role of self-limitation is quite straightforward in the case of the first three, since they relate directly to, let’s say, *the political*. They are institutions of law that put a rein and control citizens behavior in the political ground. But, how can tragedy perform the role of self-limitation?

Castoriadis finds the answer in the ontological groundings of tragedy mentioned before: in the fact that tragedy unveils and presents for all to see that “Being is Chaos” (2008, p. 139). Since chaos is a central term in Castoriadis, we will follow his arguments closely. One of his main assertions is that the world—being— is essentially Chaos, Abyss, Groundless (1993, p. 3). Drawing from Hesiod’s *Theogony*, he explains that chaos means void, nothingness, but also, absence of order, disorder, in the sense that the world is not subject to meaningful laws. “First, there is total disorder, and then order, *cosmos*, is created,” states out author (Castoriadis, 1991a, 103). As we explained in the previous section, for Castoriadis, society has no origin, no beginning, no foundation nor cause other than itself. It is on *groundlessness* that human beings create order for themselves by positing laws and institutions, that is, by creating significations to cover over Chaos. However, and in spite of this, “at the ‘roots’ of the world, beyond the familiar landscape, chaos always reigns supreme” (Ibid). In other words, although human beings don’t—or can’t— perceive it because it is obscured by social institutions and everyday life, at the basis of the institution of society, there lies Chaos, which can never be totally covered. In the end, Chaos will always seep through “to menace us” (Abaffy, 2012, p. 57).

Castoriadis finds in art a privileged means into the unravelling Chaos. In a remarkable lecture given in January 1992 at the EHESS, later entitled “Window to Chaos,” he asserts that “art is a window into the abyss, into chaos, and the giving form of that abyss” (Castoriadis, 2018, p. 86). According to Castoriadis, the singularity of art, and paradigmatically, of tragedy is that it “constantly affirms” and reveals chaos, not in a “discursive or rational way,” but rather, by making it visible and felt by the audience (2008, p. 139). As Andrew Cooper (2014, p. 90) puts it: “For Castoriadis, tragedy is an awareness of the absence of (complete) order for humankind, entailing that institutions and the world of nomos are radically open to question.” However, what distinguishes tragedy from other forms of art? What is singular about it? In the seminar delivered on the fourth of May, 1983, Castoriadis explains that the unique feature of tragedy is that, unlike other forms of arts, the field of tragedy is that of human actions, judgments and decision (2008, pp. 138-

⁵ These transliterations and translations were taken directly from Castoriadis 1991a and 2008.

139). Castoriadis distinguishes two ways in which tragedy exhibits chaos in relation to human actions: as the absence of order *for* man and *in* man. By chaos *for* man, he means the lack of any positive correspondence between human intentions and actions, on the one side, and their results, outcomes or consequences, on the other (Castoriadis, 1991a, pp. 117-118). Tragedy, clarifies Castoriadis, presents the audience with a project of action, i.e., an expedition for the conquest of Greece (*The Persians*), an assassination (the *Oresteia*), etc. The audience is faced with heroes —almost always, heroes of traditional myths— who act and choose, with self-confident characters who, believing that their actions will restore a lost order, eventually find their own destruction, and learn that what they consider a stable ground is in fact, chaos. Castoriadis uses the example of *Oedipus Rex*, in which Oedipus sends Creon to consult the oracle in order to find how to free Thebes from the plague that had befallen it. After the oracle is revealed, the initial project turns into a desperate and unlimited desire for self-knowledge. This is what tragedy makes evident, states Castoriadis: not that the intentions and powers of human beings are destined to failure when faced with immeasurable forces, but rather, that men are not the masters of the consequences of their actions, and even less of their meaning (Castoriadis, 1991a, pp. 117-118; 2008, p. 139). This is the characteristic feature of human actions —both individual and collective: their unpredictability (Klimis, 2014, p. 209).

Tragedy also presents chaos as it unravels *in* man, within the human being: that is *hybris*. We have already mentioned this word twice, both times postponing an explanation, which has finally arrived. The term *hybris* means “excessive pride”; it was also a legal term in Greece, and a crime harshly punished by law. In Castoriadis (1991a, p. 115) words, *hybris*

Does not simply presuppose freedom, it presupposes the absence of fixed norms, the essential vagueness of the ultimate bearings of our actions. (Christian sin is of course a heteronomous concept). Transgressing the law is not *hubris*, it is a definite and limited misdemeanor. *Hubris* exists wherever self-limitation is the only “norm,” where “limits” are transgressed which were nowhere defined.

Hybris, then, is the transgression of limits, but not of *any* kind of limit. Disobeying the law is an offense —and sometimes a serious one— but does not necessarily imply *hybris*. In short, *hybris* does not mean the disrespect or the lack of norms, and not even the transgression of any limits but rather the transgression of limits that were not previously defined. For him, *hybris* only exists when fixed norms are absent and the *only* norm is *self-limitation* (Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 115).

Castoriadis rightly observes that tragedy deals, above all, with the question of human *hybris*, with “the irresistible push of man towards excess and its limitations” (Abaffy, 2012, p. 47). In one of his seminars at the EHESS (May 4th, 1983), Castoriadis states that tragedy “is a constant affair with *hubris* in its different faces” (2008, p. 140) and in the essay “Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-creation,” he asserts that *hybris* is the subject of tragedy (2007a, p. 13). By staging heroes that are destroyed by their own *hybris* and/or the catastrophes it brought about, tragedy confronts the audience with the disaster resulting from the incapacity to self-limit. For instance, in *The Persians*, Aeschylus attributes the catastrophe to Xerxes’s *hybris*, and in the *Trojan Women*, Euripides enacts the *hybris* of the Greeks after taking Troy: massive killings, rapes, desecration of temples, in a word, brutality. With his play, Castoriadis argues, Euripides is telling his fellow Greeks, in particular the Athenians: “this is the monster that you are, that we are” (2007a, p. 140).}

Castoriadis is particularly interested in one type of hubristic behavior: *monos phronein*, which literally means “being wise alone.” In her entry for *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, entitled “Tragedy,” Sophie Klimis (2014, p. 209) argues that Castoriadis provides two definitions of *hybris*, namely, the transgression of norms and *monos phroneim*. Contrary to Klimis, I believe that *monos phronein* is the form in which *hybris* manifests itself in the field of judging and choosing. Like many other philosophers and thinkers before (and after) him, Castoriadis returns to Sophocles’s *Antigone*, which he considers the “most profound tragedy from the political point of view” (1991a, p. 120) in order to illustrate his assertion. Castoriadis explicitly seeks to distance himself from previous interpretations that read the play in terms of conflict, in particular G.W.F. Hegel’s and Hegelian ones.⁶ In this sense, he argues that the play has been persistently interpreted as the fight between an innocent victim, Antigone, against the tyrannical Creon, as the contradiction between ethics and *raison d’Etat*, the individual against the state (as in contemporary interpretations), or the insurmountable conflict between human and divine law, or between the *family* and the *State*, such as in Hegel (Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 118; 2007a, p. 13). Without dismissing these “standard interpretations”—he acknowledges that it is the “manifest” content of the play, Castoriadis argues that they overlook what is more important. First, they miss that, for the Greeks, burying their dead is also a human law and defending one’s

⁶Castoriadis reading of Hegel is quite mistaken, or at least, overlooks the importance of reconciliation, central to Hegel. A second issue regarding Castoriadis’ interpretation of *Antigone* is what I consider his debt to Vernant, never fully acknowledged by the author. To preserve a more fluid reading of the paper, I will address these points, albeit briefly, in the final remarks.

country is *also* a divine one. Second, that Antigone and Creon are more than representatives of abstract principles but are indeed moved by strong passions: love for her brother, in Antigone's case, and love for the city and for his own power, in Creon's case. That is, for Castoriadis, Antigone's and Creon's notions of *right* are not only *one-sided* —a term both Hegel and Vernant use— but mainly *their own*. According to Castoriadis, Antigone's alleged championing of divine law is weakened by her defense to bury Polynices because a brother, unlike a husband or son, is irreplaceable. “[N]either the divine nor the human law regarding the burial of the dead recognized such a distinction” [1991a, p.119], asserts Castoriadis, which shows that, what her famous lines express, more than anything else, is Antigone's love for her brother. In the case of Creon, although he repeats over and over that a city can't exist if laws are not respected, it is evident that this is only “the manifest discourse” and that he is interested in preserving his own power. Finally, these interpretations fail to see that Sophocles does not consider the two authorities as totally incompatible, and that therefore, the subject of the tragedy is not conflict, but *hybris* itself.

Most importantly, for Castoriadis, these interpretations miss what he considers the main political dimension of the play: the denunciation of *hybris* in the form of *monos phronein*. In the final verses, the chorus sings:

Our happiness depends
 On wisdom all the way.
 The gods must have their due.
 Great words by men of pride
 Bring greater blows upon them.
 So, wisdom come to the old.

(*Sophocles*, trans. 2013, v.1348-55, 690).

These lines have been usually interpreted as the exaltation of the divine law over the state law, of Antigone's claim over Creon's. In his re-reading of these famous verses, Castoriadis proposes that the final verses of the chorus glorify *phronein*, *being wise* over *monos phronein*, *thinking alone*. “The chorus lauds *phronein*, advises against impiety, and reverts again to *phronein*, warning against ‘big words’ and the *hyperauchoi*, the excessively proud” (Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 119).

Castoriadis also identifies two previous moments in which the denunciation of *monos phronein* is evident: 1) the hymn to the glory of man, at the beginning of the piece, and Haemon's words to his father, Creon, in the scene that Castoriadis describes as the climax of Antigone. The famous ode

to man (v. 332-75) plays a central role in Castoriadis' interpretation for two reasons. First, it celebrates both the extraordinary and terrifying ability of wo/men, "the strangest of creatures," with both the ability to build cities, control the beasts, find cures to illnesses and create institutions and the incapacity to control themselves. Its verses contain a theory of wo/men as creators and of history as a human creation: the same view that, as we saw in the previous section, Castoriadis holds for human beings, history and society. Second, the ode finishes with praise to the one who can *weave together* "the laws of the land and the gods sworn right" (v. 332-375, specifically 369 and 34).⁷ For Castoriadis, these verses anticipate the scene of the confrontation between Haemon and his father, in which he begs the latter:

So, do not have one mind, and one alone
 That only your opinion can be right.
 Whoever thinks that he alone is wise,
 His eloquence, his mind above the rest
 Come the unfolding, it shows his emptiness.
 A man, though wise, should never be ashamed
 Of learning more and must not be too rigid.
 [...]
 I'd say it would be best if men were born
 Perfect in wisdom, but that failing this
 (which often fails) it can be no dishonor
 to learn from others when they speak good sense.
 (*Antigone*, Sophocles, trans. 2013, v. 703-723, 47).

In a unique and original reading, Castoriadis characterizes Haemon as the only character who understands that neither Creon nor Antigone are intrinsically wrong, but rather, they are wrong because they *monos phronein*: they both insist on being the only one who thinks right and can make the decisions for the common good. Haemon recognizes that "the arguments of both Creon and Antigone, theorized as such, are impervious to each other and contain no logical refutation" (Castoriadis, 2007a, p. 13). Antigone is right when she says that she upholds the divine law, and Creon is too, because a city can't exist without human laws and treason and taking up arms against one's country in alliance with foreigners. In fact, Haemon knows that he cannot refute his

⁷The term "weave together" belongs to Castoriadis, who translates the word *parerein* (Castoriadis, 2008, p.143).

father — “I couldn’t find the words in which to claim that there was error in your late remarks” (Sophocles, trans. 2013, v. 685, 46)— for within the closure of his notion of right, his reasoning is sound. Furthermore, the chorus echoes him when, after his speech, it says to Creon “both sides have spoken well” (2013, v. 726, 47), referring to Creon and Haemon.

For Castoriadis, then, the catastrophe that befalls Thebes is not brought about merely by a clash or conflict, but because Creon and Antigone—each insisting fervently on their own notion of right— will not listen to the reasons of the other. Both base their judgment on a closed order of meaning, irrefutable from the outside, and refuse to accept that their own views might not exhaust all reality (Cooper, 2014, p. 112). They are both guilty of *hybris*: they transgress the limits of judgement by claiming to have the absolute ground and are incapable of interweaving the elements—as the chorus had instructed at the beginning of the play. Thus, *Antigone* makes evident that even when one thinks one is making the right decision by relying on one’s knowledge and judgment, the result can be catastrophic if one insists on being right alone because nothing, not even reason, can guarantee the *a priori* correctness of an action. In sum, by recognizing *hybris* as intrinsically human and responding to it with *phronesis* (which Castoriadis defined in 1993 as thinking correctly in concrete situations) Sophocles’ play upholds “the ultimate problem of the autonomous *anthropos*”: the necessity of collective and individual self-limitation (Castoriadis, 2007a, p. 14). As Castoriadis puts it: “Equally blindly and absolutely defending one of the two principles,” Antigone and Creon go “beyond the limits of *phronein*” and wanting “to be *monos phronein*” become *hubristes* and *apolis* (Castoriadis, 2007a, p. 14).

Now can the main question of this article finally be answered. In one of his most acute observations, Castoriadis connects democracy and tragedy through the question of *hybris* and self-limitation, the central question to both. Although for Castoriadis *Antigone* is *the* tragedy of democracy because it addresses the problem of political action and formulates the fundamental maxim of democratic politics, the necessity of self-limitation applies for tragedy in general:

Tragedy means exactly that: the question of mankind is *hubris*, there is no ultimate rule to which one can refer to escape it, no Ten Commandments, no Gospel [...] It is up to us to discover what laws to adopt. The limits are not set in advance; *hubris* is always possible. This is the subject of Athenian tragedy, that democratic institution *par excellence*, constantly reminding the *demos* of the need for self-limitation. (Castoriadis, 2007b, p. 123).

That is, tragedy and democracy are confronted by the *tragic* dilemma that, since rules are created by men —because they are *nomos* and not *physis*— there are no clear limitations or rules *out there* which men can follow. *Hybris* is intrinsic to both tragedy and democracy, as ineradicable in tragedy to be tragedy as in democracy to be democracy. In one word, both are confronted —and so is philosophy— with the fact that being is chaos, with what Castoriadis, as we saw, also calls the *abyss*: the lack of ontological foundations.

Due to their ontological similarity with democracy, tragedies are “exemplary sensors of the city’s vulnerability to *hubris*,” as Stathis Gourgouris (2014, p. 813) explains, and thus serve as a sort of *safeguard*. Tragedy broaches the impossible dangers and risks of a democratic (autonomous) politics, wherein reference to any *arche* —any fixed norms or clear limitations— to guarantee the rightness of political decisions and actions is disallowed (Sharpe, 2000, p. 113). By unveiling Chaos, tragedy puts on stage the ontological groundings of society and the instituted invisibility of limits, reminding citizens that, as the regime of autonomy, democracy is always exposed to the *hybris* of men and women and in constant need of self-limitation. In a word, tragedies show that self-limitation is *the* political action necessary in a democracy.

However, there is one more point to be made. In one of the last lectures he delivered at the EHESS in 1984 (April 25th, 1984), Castoriadis asserted that “independently of the question of self-limitation”

Athenian tragedy is above all, the self-presentation of a political community for itself and to itself: in it, the Athenian *demos* sees itself, and at the same time, negates and affirms itself. It is from this point of view that tragedy can be defined as the total manifestation of the life of this community. (2008, p. 226-227).

In the vein of Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, Castoriadis states that tragedy is more than the mere reflection of the *polis*: it is the active *putting-in-question* of its institutions and practices. Confronting the audience with its own capacity and creativity, tragedy reveals that institutions are a human creation (*nomos*) and thus radically open to examination. In this sense, by questioning the appearance of a fixed order in societies, tragedy works as a form of criticism (Cooper, 2014, p. 93). It orientates the audience to “think more...that can be comprehended,” to reexamine its own concepts and foundations, and, above all, it portrays the benefits of doing it all together (Cooper, 2014, p. 103). In this sense, tragedy shows that, in political matters there is no *episteme* but *doxa* —and mutual criticism of *doxai*, shedding light on the necessity of *phronesis*, of collective practical wisdom and communal interrogation.

The importance of tragedy for Castoriadis, then, is that it questions the appearance of fixed norms in human society, and as such, it is a mode of criticism and self-limitation. By staging the enormous creativity as well as the absence of limits of human actions, tragedy reveals that there are equal possibilities for creation (and modification) and for destruction. Hence, the *tragic* limitation is that there is no final, logical or rational reason behind human institutions. This is what *tragic* means for Castoriadis, and this is why democracy is a *tragic regime*. A democratic society, says Castoriadis, “knows, or has to know, that there is no guaranteed signification, that it lives over the Chaos, that it is itself a Chaos that must give itself its form, one that is never settle once and for all” (2003, p. 84).

Concluding Remarks, or Tragedy and the dark side of Democracy

This paper began by suggesting that Castoriadis’ elaborations on tragedy are not subsidiary to his major works devoted to the project of autonomy, but rather, that it is *through* his ideas on tragedy that he further expands his understanding of democracy as the regime of autonomy, that is, of self-institution and self-limitation. Indeed, as we explained, Castoriadis deepened his elaborations of autonomy through a renewed engagement with the Ancient Greeks, in particular with the creation of democracy that took place in Athens between 800 and 500 BC—which gave birth, according to his reading, to both politics and philosophy. As the first section attempted to clarify, for Castoriadis, studying Greek democracy is not of historical but of political significance given that Athens is still specifically relevant for Western contemporary societies. As Ingrid Straume puts it, “instead of viewing [it] as a more primitive, undifferentiated form, [Castoriadis] finds in the case of Greece—and in Athenian democracy in particular—a critical corrective to contemporary societies” (2014, p. 191)—which he calls liberal oligarchies, not democracies (2007b, p. 122). This is, as we saw, Castoriadis conception of Greece as a *germ*: rooted in the same impulse, as two strands of the project of autonomy, Greek democracy can work as a reminder, an inspiration for the achievement of democracy in modernity.

But why is tragedy so central? What is important is that Castoriadis conceives tragedy as a political and social institution that belongs to this same democratizing movement. That is, Castoriadis considers tragedy as the privileged means to expose the ontological conditions of democracy, a connection he explains through the notions of *hybris*, chaos and *anthropos*. Let us state again that one of the main arguments of this article is that Castoriadis offers a *theory*

of tragedy. By turning to Greek tragedy, Castoriadis enters an already existing conversation with previous and contemporary philosophers, thinkers and anthropologists, of whom he is critical —although sometimes, his readings can be quite mistaken, and in others, he does not acknowledge his debt.

The former is, for instance, the case with his interpretation of Hegel, in which, too focused on the conflict, Castoriadis fails to see that in Hegel's system reconciliation is necessary (for Hegel, the essence of tragedy is the contemplation of such conflict and its resolution). And although this does not prove Castoriadis' critique wrong, he does not acknowledge that he did build —modifying it— on Hegel's notion of *one-sided* nature of *pathos*. The latter occurs with Vernant and Vidal-Naquet. I have made reference to some of the similarities in the text. Here, I would like to add the importance of language for the authors, which guides their reading of *Antigone*. Their argument is that, since the same word (*nomos*) means the opposite to Creon and *Antigone*, the function of words on stage is not to establish communication between them but to indicate the barriers between, the impermeability of their minds, the points of conflict. "For each protagonist, locked into his own particular world, the vocabulary remains opaque. For him it has one use, one meaning. This one-sidedness comes into violent collision with another." In a word, each character refuses to recognize the meaning provided by the other, and it's the chorus the one that oscillates from one to another. (Hegel, 1975; Vernant and Vidal-Naquet, 2006, p. 42-43).

Nevertheless, Castoriadis' theory of tragedy is indeed *original*, and so is his reading of *Antigone*, the play that philosophers from Hegel to Judith Butler have chosen as the paradigm of tragedy. Castoriadis turns from the notion of tragedy as conflict, which permeates studies on this matter in general, to focus on ontology through the concepts of chaos and *hybris*. In this sense, although he does not recognize it, he does rely on the notions of *one-sidedness* coined by Hegel and adopted by Vernant, but instead of focusing on the family-state (Hegel), divine-human law, or family-public religion and opaqueness in language (Vernant), Castoriadis is interested in the political message: the lack of a final source of justification for our actions and the risks and responsibility that this entails in terms of collective life. No author before him has read tragedy exclusively in terms of chaos, absence of order, and *hubristic* behavior; no one has highlighted the question of *monos phroneim* or read the final lines of the chorus placing importance on *phronein* and *phronesis*.

And if this alone is a groundbreaking interpretation *of* tragedy, Castoriadis proposes it as the thread that links tragedy and democracy. That is, Castoriadis approaches tragedy through democracy, and democracy through

tragedy. This allows him to go beyond the democratic themes of tragedy or the similarities between the theatre and the *agora*, in order to grasp that tragedy is about self-institution: about the enormous power of creativity and destruction of wo/men, the absence of limits, and thus, of self-limitation. In one word—although he never formulates it like this, that tragedy is about autonomy. In this way, Castoriadis’ conception of tragedy informs his substantive theory of democracy. Hubris, excess, is the other side of autonomy. This is what I call in the title of this section “the dark side of democracy”: the risks that are always present in the only regime that “explicitly, continually, institutes itself” (2007b, p.123). By paying attention to Greek tragedy as an institution of the Athenian *polis*, Castoriadis seeks to emphasize the creative potentiality for change of contemporary societies, but also the intrinsic dangers of democratic action. As he wrote, tragedy exhibits the uncertainty of the field of democratic action, the impurity of motives, the inconclusive character of the reasons on which we base our motives. Tragedy shows that even the “adamant will” to apply the law can turn out to be harmful (Castoriadis, 1991a, p. 120).

Therefore, just as human beings must be aware of the fact that they can and ought to change and shape their own laws and institutions, they must also internalize the fact that not *every* action or *any* decision is rightly justified. In a time when the most outrageous choices are made in the name of democracy, freedom and equality, when the most devastating and harmful actions are carried out following the law or disguised as noble motivations (let’s think about refugees, immigration, *nationalistic* claims) Castoriadis’ conception of tragedy and democracy speaks to us more than ever. If society is, and must be, aware of its autonomy, of its instituting power, of its capacity to change the laws and institutions, it must also be aware of the dangers that this entails, especially when only *a few* ultimately decide. Castoriadis emphasis on *phronesis*, *paideia*, collective deliberation and the centrality of a public space is not a thing of the past. Recognizing that society is ours and that its “fate also depends upon one’s mind, behavior and decision” is of extreme urgency today.

This is Castoriadis’ lesson. The one that tragedy taught him. And although in the last phase of his life he became more pessimistic about the possibilities of autonomy in current societies, it must be remembered that in 1997, the year of his death, he said that “as long as there continues to be people who reflect, who put into question the social system or their own systems of thought, there is a creativity to history that no one can forget” (Castoriadis, 1997, p. 104).

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