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IDEOLOGY AND THE SOCIAL IMAGINARY

An Appraisal of Castoriadis and Lefort

JOHN B. THOMPSON

Since its earliest formulations, the concept of ideology has been linked to the dimension of the imaginary. In *The German Ideology* Marx compares the operation of ideology to the workings of a *camera obscura*, which represents reality by means of an inverted image of life. Even later, in *Capital*, it is the phantasmagorical character of the commodity form that underlies the fetishism of commodities and thereby occludes the origin of their value. The link between ideology and the imaginary has generally been subsumed, however, to an overall opposition between reality and ideas; ideology and the imaginary stand together on the side of ideas, constituting a sort of ethereal medium that veils the hard reality of material production. There can be no doubt that some of Marx's writings, with their positivistic and naturalistic overtones, have contributed to the latter tendency. In recent years a number of authors have attempted to rethink the problematic of ideology and the imaginary and to free it from the confines of a crude materialism. Outstanding among these authors are Cornelius Castoriadis and Claude Lefort. Their far-reaching investigations into the constitution of the social-historical world, into temporality and creativity, into social division and dissimulation, have so far received little attention in the literature outside of France. My hope is that this article will help to end such unjustified silence and neglect.

In focusing on the contributions of Castoriadis and Lefort to the question of ideology and the imaginary, I shall necessarily disregard many aspects of their work. As co-editors during the 1950s of the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, they published numerous studies on bureaucracy, democracy, and socialism, as well as detailed analyses of events and developments in Eastern and Western Europe; and in more recent years, they have written extensively on authors such as Machiavelli, Merleau-Ponty, and Freud.¹ These diverse and important

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writings will, in what follows, largely be left aside. Moreover, to discuss both Castoriadis and Lefort within the limits of a single article is to run the risk of overemphasizing their proximity. Although they worked together for many years and often acknowledged their mutual indebtedness, the final split in 1958 pointed to deep differences in their views.² Here I shall not be concerned to analyze these differences in any detail. I shall try, instead, to bring out a certain coherence and consensus in their work, to show that in certain respects their views are complementary. I begin with Castoriadis's critique of Marx and his reformulation of the dimension of the social-historical and the concept of the social imaginary. The second section presents Lefort's account of the relation between ideology and the imaginary and his analysis of ideology in modern societies. The third section offers some critical and constructive remarks on the contributions of Castoriadis and Lefort. It must be stressed, as a final clarificatory point, that my mode of presentation does not imply any sort of intellectual priority; all questions concerning the origins and originality of ideas are best left for the historian.

Critique of Marx

The development of Castoriadis's recent work must be viewed against the backcloth of his critique of Marx. The critical stance towards Marx emerged gradually in the course of Castoriadis's career. In his early writings he remained roughly within the framework elaborated by Marx, using some of Marx's ideas to formulate an original analysis of exploitative relations and bureaucratic tendencies in Russia and Eastern Europe. Serious reservations about Marx's economic analysis of capitalism began to appear, however, in 1953–54; and the decisive break finally came in 1964–65, with the publication of an essay entitled "Marxisme et théorie révolutionnaire."³ In this essay Castoriadis argues that the difficulties in Marx's work are not of a local and corrigible character, minor oversights that could be amended and brought up to date. Rather, the whole approach of Marx is misguided, for it rests on a conception of history and historical change that is fundamentally unsound. The evolutionary schema that Marx sketches in the 1859 "Preface to *A Contribution to the Critique of Political Economy*" and elsewhere involves, in Castoriadis's view, "an unjustified extrapolation to the whole of history of a process which only occurred during a single phase of this history, the phase of the bourgeois revolution."⁴ This schema is inapplicable to prefeudal societies and to non-industrialized societies outside of Europe. Moreover, the attempt to endow a single factor – the development of *technique* in the broadest sense – with a determining role in history is mistaken. Technique is not autonomous. The whole idea of applying knowledge for technical development, of regarding nature as a domain to be exploited, requires a certain attitude that is by no

means universal; and the systematic planning of research and development that characterizes contemporary capitalist societies deprives the supposed “autonomy of technique” of all sense.

The source of these difficulties in Marx’s work lies at a deeper level still. Underlying Marx’s evolutionary schema is a philosophy of history that bears the unmistakable imprint of Western rationalism. History conforms to Reason, for historical events are governed by laws that can be elucidated through scientific inquiry. Castoriadis contends that this deterministic and scientific tendency stands in radical opposition to Marx’s own emphasis on revolution and class struggle. If classes are to be real elements in history, capable of actively transforming society, then they must be able *to make a difference* in social development; and hence the latter cannot be subsumed to the rigid and preconceived categories of evolutionary theory. That these two tendencies are radically opposed is amply attested to by the history of Marxism. With the October Revolution and its subsequent degeneration into an ossified bureaucratic state, the rationalistic tendency firmly eclipsed the theme of autonomous and revolutionary action. Marxism was molded by Soviet theoreticians into a closed system describing an essentially fixed reality; whence the exclusion of the idea of revolution, which presupposes that the future is open and that its realization is something *to be done*. The implication of this argument for anyone who, like Castoriadis, wishes to remain faithful to the revolutionary impetus of Marx’s work seems clear:

Having begun from revolutionary Marxism, we reached the point where it was necessary to choose between remaining Marxists and remaining revolutionaries; between fidelity to a doctrine which for a long time has no longer animated neither reflection nor action, and fidelity to a project of a radical transformation of society.⁵

Yet if no objective analysis can demonstrate the necessity of the crisis of capitalist society and its transcendence by socialism, then upon what basis can the revolutionary project be pursued? To answer this question requires a fundamental re-examination of human action and the constitution of the social-historical world.

Revolutionary Project

The social-historical world, according to Castoriadis, is the world of human action or “doing” (*faire*). Action always stands in some relation with knowledge (*savoir*), although that knowledge is never exhaustive or absolute. Among the various kinds of action is one Castoriadis calls *praxis*. The distinguishing feature of *praxis* is that it involves taking others into consideration and regarding them as autonomous beings capable of developing their own auton-

omy. *Praxis* draws on knowledge, but knowledge is always fragmentary and provisional; nor is this merely a negative limitation, for it is the condition of the possibility of bringing about something *new*. The revolutionary project builds on the creativity and autonomous aim of *praxis*. It is the project of a radical transformation of society, “the reorganisation and reorientation of society by the autonomous action of men.”⁶ This transformation cannot be limited to the domains traditionally defined as “the economy” or “politics,” but must pertain to all levels and spheres of social life. The proletariat no longer remains the privileged bearer of the revolutionary project; more than ever, this project is the concern of everyone – a theoretical premonition dramatically confirmed by the events of May 1968.

Although the revolutionary project is in no way necessitated by the development of capitalism, it is nevertheless “rooted” in certain features of the capitalist economy. In the sphere of production, capitalist organization is dominated by a central conflict: workers cannot participate in production, and yet they cannot not participate in it. They cannot not participate in it because, if they were reduced to mere cogs in the productive machine, capitalism would collapse immediately. That they are constantly called on to be active participants in production while simultaneously being excluded from its control is the conflict that gives rise to workers’ demands for self-management. The revolutionary project is thus “rooted” in the crisis of the capitalist enterprise in the specific sense that

the social organisation can realise the ends which it gives itself only by putting forward means which contradict them, by giving birth to demands which it cannot satisfy, by positing criteria which it is incapable of applying, norms which it is obliged to violate.⁷

Just as the revolutionary project cannot be restricted to the level of the economy, however, so too the conception of an autonomous society must go beyond the notion of workers’ control. The full sense of this conception can only be grasped by rethinking the dimension of the social and its inseparable link with history.

Institution of the Social-Historical

Castoriadis argues, in a manner reminiscent of Heidegger’s interrogation of being, that to elucidate the nature of society and history we must break with the whole tradition of thought stemming from classical Greece. This tradition, to which Marx belongs, has always situated reflection on the social-historical within an ontology of determinacy; it has always assumed that “to

be” has one sense: “to be determined”. Traditional thought thus misses the essential feature of the social-historical world, namely that this world is not articulated once and for all but is in each case the creation of the society concerned. In instituting itself society *creates* in the fullest sense of the term; it posits a new *eidos* that could not be deduced from or produced by a prior state of affairs. Just as the social cannot be conceived within traditional schemata of the coexistence of elements, so too the historical cannot be subsumed to traditional schemata of succession. “For what is given in and by history is not a determinate sequence of the determined, but the emergence of radical alterity, immanent creation, non-trivial novelty.”⁸ To conceptualize time and history one must reject the traditional ontology of determinacy. Genuine time is not merely indeterminacy but the emergence of *new* and *other* determinations. Time is the auto-alteration of what is; time “is,” as Castoriadis says, only insofar as it is “being-towards” (*à-être*).

Each society institutes a specific type of temporality that defines its specific mode of auto-alteration. What we call “capitalism,” for instance, would have been impossible outside of the specific mode of auto-alteration that, in a sense, *is* capitalism. More precisely, Castoriadis distinguishes between two layers in the capitalist institution of temporality. First is the layer of homogeneous, uniform, measurable time, the time of accumulation, rationalization, and the conquest of nature. This is the temporality *explicitly* instituted by capitalism, but it is not its *effective* temporality. The effective temporality of capitalism is the time of incessant rupture, of recurrent crises, of the perpetual tearing up of what is. This effective temporality, as Marx perceived, distinguishes capitalism from most archaic and traditional societies. In traditional societies, the explicitly instituted temporality is much closer to the effective temporality, which appears more like regular pulsations than radical ruptures. Nonetheless, a striking feature is common to all hitherto existing societies, irrespective of their particular differences. For in all hitherto existing societies, the effective temporality of alterity and auto-alteration seems to get covered over and excluded from view. Castoriadis’s account of this remarkable process is worthy of extended quotation:

Thus everything happens as if the time of social doing, essentially irregular, accidental, altering, must always be imaginarily reabsorbed through a denial of time by means of the eternal return of the same, its representation as pure usury and corruption, its levelling out in the indifference of the merely quantitative difference, its annulment before Eternity. Everything happens as if the terrain where the creativity of society is manifested in the most tangible manner, the terrain where it makes, makes be and makes itself be in making be, must be covered over by an imaginary creation ordered in such a way that the society can conceal from itself what it is. Everything happens as if the society must negate itself as society, hide its social being in negating the temporality which is first and above all its own temporality, the time

of alteration-alterity which it makes be and which makes it be as society. Another way of saying the same thing: everything happens as if society could not recognise itself as making itself, as institution of itself, as self-institution.⁹

The misrecognition by society of its own social-historical being corresponds to a certain necessity of the social institution such as we know it; that is, such as it has been instituted hitherto. Castoriadis insists, however, that this misrecognition is not an “ontological necessity”; it must not be assumed *a priori* that society could not recognize itself as instituting, as the source of its own alterity and alteration. For *that* is the question of revolution: the setting up of a society that makes and remakes itself as an explicitly self-instituting collectivity.

Social Imaginary

To acknowledge the fundamental and irreducible creativity in the institution of the social-historical is to encounter what Castoriadis calls the “social imaginary” (*l’imaginaire social*). The imaginary element of the social-historical world has, like the social-historical itself, been persistently misunderstood by traditional thought. For it has always been assumed that the imaginary is a mere reflection, a specular image of what is already there. Rejecting this assumption and the classical ontology on which it rests, Castoriadis contends that the imaginary is what renders possible any relation of object and image; it is the creation *ex nihilo* of figures and forms, without which there could be no reflection *of* anything. On the level of the social-historical,¹⁰ the imaginary accounts for the orientation of social institutions, for the constitution of motives and needs, for the existence of symbolism, tradition, and myth. Here, once again, it is worth quoting Castoriadis:

This element, which endows the functionality of each institutional system with its specific orientation, which overdetermines the choice and connections of symbolic networks, which creates for each historical period its singular way of living, seeing and making its own existence, its world and its relations to it, this originary structuring, this central signifier-signified, source of what is each time given as indisputable and indisputed sense, support of the articulations and distinctions of what matters and of what does not, origin of the augmented being (*surcroît d’être*) of the individual or collective objects of practical, affective and intellectual investment – this element is nothing other than the *imaginary* of the society or period concerned.¹¹

Marx sketched the role of the imaginary in the capitalist economy when he analyzed the “fetishism of commodities”; but this analysis must be supplemented, in Castoriadis’s view, by an account of the institutional structure that assumes an increasingly central role in contemporary society: the bureaucratic organization. This organization reveals that the modern imaginary does

not have its own “flesh,” that it merely autonomizes and valorizes a limited, instrumental rationality. The modern imaginary is thus fragile and prone to crisis, endowing contemporary society with the “objective” possibility of transforming what has hitherto been the historical role of the social imaginary.

The social imaginary is expressed primarily through the medium of symbolism and signification. This expression can be seen in the operation of language, which Castoriadis regards as a particular sphere of the symbolic. Here signification is the co-belonging of a term and that to which it “refers,” both in the Saussurean sense of *signifié* and in the broader sense of “referent”. In both senses the cluster of references is necessarily open, for the referent itself is an indeterminate being. Hence “a signification is indefinitely determinable (and this ‘indefinitely’ is evidently essential), although that does not mean that it is determined.”¹² It follows that no rigorous and ultimately valid distinction can be made between the proper and the figurative sense of a word, because all language is essentially “tropical”. It also follows that any attempt to treat language as a self-enclosed system of interrelating terms, in the manner of structuralism, is at best a partial approach. Such an attempt draws on a logic implicit in all social activity, *la logique ensembliste-identitaire*, but it can never grasp the open and creative character of language. Social imaginary significations necessarily escape from the confines of a self-enclosed system, comprising a *magma* of meanings that cannot be organized into a logically structured whole. When one considers, moreover, the central imaginary significations of a society, one sees that they cannot be thought of in terms of their relation to referents, however open this relation may be; for these significations are what renders “referents,” and hence the relation to them, possible. What is the referent of the word “God,” asks Castoriadis, if not the individual representations of God created by means of the institution of the central imaginary signification that is God? The central imaginary significations of a society, so far from being mere epiphenomena of “real” forces and relations of production, are the laces that tie a society together and the forms that define what, for a given society, is “real”.

Ideology and the Imaginary

The relations between the notion of the social imaginary and the phenomenon of ideology are explored in an important essay by Lefort.¹³ Like Castoriadis, Lefort adopts a critical approach to the work of Marx, seeing it as both a source of invaluable insights and an expression of naturalistic illusions. Marx formulated, rightly in Lefort’s view, the problem of ideology in terms that precluded the reduction of ideology to the discourse of the bourgeoisie. Ideology is linked, not to a particular class, but to the fundamental feature of “social

division” – the division, that is, between the dominant and the dominated, whether this division assumes the form of kinship relations, class relations, or the relation between state and civil society. A society cannot exist, suggested Marx, without forging a representation of its unity. Whereas this unity is attested to by the reciprocal interdependence of social agents, it is constantly threatened by the separation of their activities and the temporal mutability of social relations. The representation of unity in the context of restricted and mutable social relations thus implies the projection of an “imaginary community” by means of which “real” distinctions are portrayed as “natural,” the particular is disguised in the universal, and the historical is effaced in the atemporality of essence. “The discourse inscribed in the institution,” observes Lefort,

maintains the illusion of an essence of society, staves off the double threat which weighs upon the established order by virtue of the fact that it is divided and the fact that it is historical; it imposes itself as a discourse rational in itself, a closed discourse which, masking the conditions of its own engendering, claims to reveal that of the empirical social reality.¹⁴

If the role of the imaginary was glimpsed by Marx, it was nevertheless distorted by his claim to determine, through the procedures of positive science, the nature of social reality. Marx traced social division back to the brute facts of evolution, thus failing to see that the division is essentially interwoven with the “thought” of the division; that is, with the order of the symbolic. The social division must not be confused with the empirical distribution of human beings in the process of production, for that is to succumb to the naturalistic fiction; rather, it must be seen as the “social space” instituted only insofar as it is articulated with the discourse of the social.

The phenomenon of ideology appears, in the view of Lefort, as a certain type of discourse subsumed to a specific order of the imaginary. Ideology is a type of discourse that no longer sustains legitimacy by referring to a transcendent realm, a realm of gods, spirits, or mythical figures. Ideological discourse is inscribed in the social itself; it seeks to conceal the social division and temporality without appealing to “another world”. There is thus a singular relation between ideology and “historical society”: “ideology is the linking together of representations which have the function of re-establishing the dimension of society ‘without history’ at the very heart of historical society.”¹⁵ Marx implicitly recognized this relation when he contrasted capitalism to all previous modes of production; but once again, he misconstrued the relation by assuming that ideology is a dissimulation, more or less effective, of something “real”. Lefort argues that ideology can be freed from this naturalistic assumption if it is conceived as a fold or crease (*repli*) of the social discourse on

itself, a kind of second discourse following the lines of the instituting discourse and seeking to cover over the divisions instituted therein. Ideological discourse must constantly diversify and displace its references – to past and future, to science and ethics – to sustain its attempt to justify the established order. This attempt cannot, however, succeed; the process of dissimulation is bound to fail, for ideology cannot accomplish its task without revealing itself as a discourse, and hence without disclosing the gap separating it from that about which it speaks. The ineluctable failure of the process of dissimulation determines, in part, the necessity of its perpetual modification and reorganization.

Bourgeois Ideology

The general properties of ideological discourse apply to the bourgeois ideology that matured in the nineteenth century. Whatever support it may draw from religion and traditional world-views, bourgeois ideology is governed by the ideal of positive knowledge and calls into question the reference to “another world”. Bourgeois ideology is structured by a division between “ideas” and a supposed “real”; the “other place” of religious and mythical conceptions is effaced, but the ideology operates via the transcendence of ideas: Humanity, Progress, Science, Property. These ideas, being both representation (truth inscribed in the real) and rule (conditions of acting in accordance with the nature of things), imply an opposition between the subject who establishes itself by articulation with the rule, and the “other” (*autre*) who has no access to the rule and is thereby deprived of the dignity of a subject. The opposition is expressed in a series of dichotomies: worker/bourgeois, savage/civilized, mad/normal, child/adult. Across these dichotomies emerges a “natural being,” whose image supports the affirmation of a society above nature:

Such is the artifice by which the social division is dissimulated: the positing of reference points which enable a difference to be fixed between the social and the sub-social, order and disorder, the world and the underworld (a difference which has no status in ‘precapitalism’, where the social is conceived from another place, from an order which exceeds it), in such a way that what reality withholds (*dérobe*) from discourse is identified and mastered.¹⁶

What gives force to bourgeois ideology is the fact that its discourses remain disjointed. It does not “speak” from a single place, but multiplies and divides itself in accordance with the differentiation of social institutions (the state, the business firm, the school). There is a continuous interplay of procedures of legitimation and dissimulation, brought into play here and there, so that a gap is preserved between discourse and power. The conditions that secure the

efficacy of bourgeois ideology contain, however, the seeds of its failure. The ideology is undermined by an inescapable contradiction: it relies on ideas that seek to present themselves as transcendent and beyond the social, but precisely the loss of such a “beyond” is at the origin of ideology. Bourgeois ideology is thus obliged to take hold of signs in the supposed real that attest to and support it. Claiming to provide a point of certainty from which the social can be conceived, it must nevertheless appeal to the social and hence reveal itself as contingent. What renders bourgeois ideology vulnerable is its incapacity to fix the social order “without letting its contingency appear, without condemning itself to slide from one position to another, without thus exposing the instability of an order which it is designed to raise to the dignity of essence.”¹⁷ Whence the dispersion of the discourses that comprise bourgeois ideology, a dispersion governed by the impossible quest for origins, a dispersion in principle derived of any “safety catch” (*cran d'arrêt*).

Totalitarian Ideology

The contradiction inhabiting bourgeois ideology is reflected in the phenomenon of totalitarianism. Lefort uses “totalitarianism” as a generic term to encompass fascist regimes, as well as those called “communist”. Such regimes are characterized by a discourse that claims to express universal knowledge and to secure thereby the unity and homogeneity of the social field. Totalitarian discourse effaces the oppositions that bourgeois ideology employed to dissimulate the social division; it obliterates the distinction between state and civil society, seeking to diffuse, by means of the mass party, the presence of the state throughout the social space. This attempt to fuse the political and the nonpolitical presupposes the unfolding of a system of articulations by means of which power can be exercised without being divided. This system, appearing as a manifestation of human *logos* and drawing support only from itself, nevertheless forms itself around a *center* that possesses knowledge and power and from which social life is organized. So whereas the discourse of totalitarianism is structured in such a way that anonymous knowledge governs the thought and activities of social agents, it “supports itself only by a constant reference to the authority in which the decision is concentrated. It is on this double condition that the contradiction of bourgeois ideology is ‘overcome’ in the concept of the total State.”¹⁸

In overcoming the contradiction of bourgeois ideology, the discourse of totalitarianism engenders a contradiction of its own. The two elements of anonymous knowledge and authoritative center hold together only insofar as oppositions of power within the bureaucracy are ignored and as the masses are excluded from the power apparatus. Whereas bourgeois ideology pre-

served a gap between discourse and power and could therefore oppose itself without destroying itself, totalitarian discourse must identify itself with power and with those who hold it. Hence oppositions cannot be tolerated: they must be absolutely rejected or, if not, discourse gives way to terror. “In a general way,” explains Lefort,

the contradiction of totalitarianism stems from the fact that power doubly masks itself therein, as the representative of the society without divisions and as the agent of the rationality of the organisation, while on the other hand it appears there, as in no other society, as an apparatus of coercion, the bearer of naked violence.¹⁹

The bureaucratic organization is governed by a principle of instability that constantly threatens to expose this contradiction, and with it the mechanism of domination. All kinds of events occur, economic and cultural, which escape the prediction of the leaders and are capable of displaying an organizational failure. One way of defusing these potentially disruptive events is to *exclude* them, to treat them as representatives of the “outside” (*dehors*) of a society claimed to be homogenous. But this exclusion cannot succeed; the event or agent returns, haunting the bureaucratic world with insecurity and threatening to betray totalitarian discourse as the mere mask of oppression.

Invisible Ideology

The key features of bourgeois and totalitarian ideologies are integrated and transformed in the new ideology that, according to Lefort, prevails in contemporary Western societies. As in totalitarianism, this new ideology seeks to secure the homogenization and unification of the social; but this project is severed from the affirmation of totality, is rendered latent, implicit, and “invisible”. In this way, the project of homogenization is reconnected to the key principle of bourgeois ideology, which required the displacement of imaginary formations, which tolerated their conflict and constantly worked out compromises.

Cover over the distance between the representation and the real, which engenders bourgeois ideology, renounce the fulfilling of the representation in the form of the totalisation of the real, which engenders totalitarian ideology: such is, in our view, the double principle which organises a new logic of dissimulation.²⁰

The new ideology depends crucially on the mass media, by means of which the implicit homogenization of the social field is achieved. The broadcasting of debates and discussions dealing with all aspects of life, from science and politics to art, cookery, and sex, creates the impression that the social relation is fully reciprocal, that speech circulates without internal obstacles and

constraints. The word of the expert appears as anonymous and neutral, expressing and diffusing objective knowledge; but at the same time it singularizes itself, assumes the attributes of the person to reach an audience that, in spite of its mass and dispersion, is brought together by the very proximity and familiarity of the one who speaks. Therein lies the imaginary dimension of communication: it provides the constant assurance of the social bond, attests to the permanent presence of the “between-us” (*entre-nous*), and thereby effaces the intolerable fact of social division.

The efficacy of the new ideology presupposes the “scientificity” and “objectivity” of discourse. In this regard, it is similar to bourgeois ideology; but whereas bourgeois ideology exploits a discourse on science to discuss the social, the new ideology is not an application of science but an embodiment of it. The modern organization appears as a perfectly rational structure that functions by itself, independently of the desires and decisions of human beings, who are themselves transformed into “organization men”.²¹ The cult of scientificity and objectivity also marks a point of comparison with totalitarian ideology; but unlike totalitarian ideology, the new ideology does not and need not represent knowledge as closed. Rather, it takes hold of the signs of novelty and incorporates and cultivates them to discharge the threat of history. “Invisible once again is the operation which defuses the effects of the institution of the social, which tries to preclude the question concerning the sense of the established order, the question concerning the *possible*.”²² In this perspective Lefort interprets Baudrillard’s provocative analysis of the consumer society.²³ What is consumed is always “new,” but this novelty is a mere difference in time that signals the eternal return of the same. The consumer is presented with a world in which everything can be grasped; the new ideology thus establishes a closed universe, but renders this closure invisible by the very absence of a totalizing discourse. This does not mean, however, that the contradictions that disrupt the bourgeois and totalitarian ideologies are comfortably resolved in the new ideology. On the contrary, insists Lefort, the more this ideology seeks to coincide with the social itself — the more “invisible” it seeks to become — the more it runs the risk of losing the function ideology has assumed hitherto: the legitimation of the established order. It creates the conditions for a contestation that, in the East and the West, may lead beyond particular expressions of power and domination and bring to reflection the general question of the social and of being.

In the foregoing sections, I have sketched some central themes in the recent writings of Castoriadis and Lefort; I should now like to offer a few critical and constructive comments on their work. I believe many aspects of their work are wholly justified and highly suggestive: their critical analyses of Marx and

Marxism, their emphasis on the spatial and temporal constitution of the social-historical world, their concern with the interconnections between signification, ideology, and the imaginary. In these and other respects, the work of Castoriadis and Lefort deserves to be more widely read outside of France and to be compared with the major contributions of contemporary social thought. It is by means of such comparison that one can begin to see, however, that the writings of Castoriadis and Lefort are unsatisfactory and incomplete at a number of crucial points. I cannot, within the confines of this article, pursue all of the reservations to which this comparative and critical reflection has given rise. For the sake of clarity, I shall therefore focus my comments on the following four themes: cohesion and fragmentation; discourse and domination; ideology and the imaginary; rationality and the revolutionary project.

Cohesion and Fragmentation

Let me begin with Lefort's discussion of the "invisible ideology" that, according to him, currently prevails in the Western societies. This ideology effectively integrates the key principles of bourgeois and totalitarian ideologies while defusing their contradictions; it realizes the totalitarian project of unifying the social field by the bourgeois method of tolerating conflicts and working out compromises. Social division and temporality are dissimulated by the incantation of familiarity and the management of novelty. The proximity of this analysis to the well-known work of Marcuse, to his superlative critique of "one dimensional society,"²⁴ is evident and is acknowledged by Lefort himself. Moreover, Lefort's contention that the new ideology does not succeed in resolving all contradictions but that, on the contrary, it runs the risk of failing in its task of legitimating the established order — this contention bears an unmistakable resemblance to the recent work of Habermas and Offe.²⁵ It is by comparison with the work of Habermas and Offe, however, that the account offered by Lefort begins to appear questionable. Whatever difficulties there may be in Habermas's theory of "legitimation crisis," he has rightly emphasized the question of crisis; he has rightly attempted to elucidate the mechanisms and processes by which the ideological defense of the contemporary capitalist order is constantly threatened and potentially undermined. One cannot help feeling, by contrast, that Lefort's cursory treatment of the "contradiction" inherent in the new ideology is very inadequate.

The criticism must be pressed further. Not only is Lefort's treatment of the "contradiction" inadequate, but his whole analysis of the new ideology seems to overemphasize the phenomena of homogeneity and unification. This overemphasis follows directly from his methodological assumption that the new ideology incorporates, albeit in a different form, the totalizing project of

totalitarian discourse. It seems to me, however, that the stress on homogeneity and unification presents a misleading view of the factors involved in the sustaining of stability in contemporary capitalist societies. For such stability seems based not so much on an underlying consensus concerning values and an apparent absence of social barriers, but on the lack of consistent commitment and the propagation of social divisions.²⁶ Not so much homogenization and unification, but fragmentation and differentiation, are responsible for the social cohesion that exists in Western liberal democracies. Perhaps the principal division in this regard is the insulation of the economy and the polity, which prevents questions of industrial organization from appearing as political issues. This division is ramified by a differentiation in levels of skill and qualification, as well as by deep divisions concerning gender and race. The overall effect of this fragmentation is the canalization of class conflict into localized struggles for the redistribution of scarce economic rewards; wider issues pertaining to the control of the enterprise and of society as a whole are excluded from view, obscured by the very multiplicity of apparently divergent interests and groups. There seems little reason to suppose that the fragmentation of the social order is being steadily effaced by the mass media, which may reinforce rather than eradicate the existing forms of differentiation. In emphasizing the phenomena of homogenization and unification, Lefort gives insufficient attention to these considerations and fails to appreciate their significance for the analysis of ideology.²⁷ Lefort's emphasis also results in a neglect of the continuing importance of classes and class conflict, which are hardly mentioned in his discussion of the "invisible ideology". No attempt to analyze the nature of ideology in contemporary capitalist societies can disregard the question of class. An analysis confronting this question more directly would prepare the ground for the study of the ways in which the prevailing ideology is essentially contested, its universe of meaning constantly disrupted, and its claim of legitimacy incessantly challenged by the irrepressible actions of agents enmeshed in the existing system of domination.

Discourse and Domination

I wish now to consider Lefort's account of ideology at a more general and abstract level. According to Lefort, the concept of ideology is inapplicable to "precapitalist societies," wherein the social division is dissimulated beneath the representation of "another world". The emergence of capitalism undermines this transcendent reference and creates the conditions for the formation of ideology. The distinctive characteristic of ideology, in Lefort's view, is that it is implicated in the social division it serves to dissimulate; that is, the division is both represented and concealed *within* the world of production, and no longer with regard to an imaginary "beyond". Lefort is surely right to

emphasize the radical break effected by the emergence and development of capitalism, a break that stands in considerable tension with Marx's evolutionary theory of history.²⁸ Nevertheless, Lefort's restriction of the concept of ideology to the types of society ushered in by this break seems questionable. On the one hand, it seems misleading to maintain that social division in "pre-capitalist societies" is dissimulated by reference to another world, as if this dissimulation were not also implicated in "effective social relations". The work of Bourdieu and Godelier, among others, has shown that relations of domination in what might be called "precapitalist societies" are sustained by everyday social practices that are permeated by power.²⁹ Nourished by kinship relations and tradition, these everyday social practices play a vital role in the stabilization of the social order; explicit discourses of legitimation, in "precapitalist" and capitalist societies, are probably of greater significance for integrating the ruling elite than for stabilizing the society as a whole.³⁰ On the other hand, it seems equally misleading to contend that social division in capitalist societies is dissimulated within the world of production, as if this dissimulation were entirely freed of "transcendent reference". With the differentiation of the economy and the polity that characterizes the development of capitalism, the task of dissimulating relations of domination within the economy appears to be borne, at least in part, by the projection of an "imaginary unity" within the political sphere. This imaginary unity, linked to the pervasive if ill-understood phenomenon of nationalism, could be seen as a "transcendent essence" by reference to which the divisions and transformations of the present are effaced.³¹ If these considerations are sound, then it seems that Lefort has failed to provide a convincing case for restricting the application of the concept of ideology to types of society introduced by capitalism.

The concept of ideology cannot be extended in its application without broadening the conceptualization of ideology itself. Lefort tends to regard ideology as a specific type of discourse that was instituted at a particular time; and whereas ideological discourse, or ideological discourses, have undergone complex transformations since their time of instauration, nevertheless their identity as a type can be discerned. I wish to defend a different and more general view of the concept of ideology.³² According to this view, to study ideology is primarily to investigate, not a particular type of discourse linked to a particular type of society, but the ways in which language is used to sustain a system of domination. Insofar as the use of language is a form of action interwoven with other activities, ideology is always "immanent" in "effective social relations"; ideology is not only, nor even primarily, to be found in the discourses of the ideologies. From this it does not follow, however, that the fall from transcendence is at the origin of ideology. On the contrary, I want

to suggest that the study of ideology must incorporate what may be called a “transcendent dimension”. The use of expressions to sustain relations of domination is accompanied by a “splitting” of the referential domain: the expressions refer, not only to an explicit or readily recognized object, but also to an “ulterior referent” that can be disclosed through the process of interpretation.³³ Barthes’s celebrated image of the black soldier on the cover of *Paris-Match*, which signifies not merely a particular individual but also the general context of French imperialism, is exemplary in this regard.³⁴ It may be that the “ulterior referent” of an ideological expression is not always “another world,” an ethereal realm of gods and spirits, to which Lefort links the forms of dissimulation in “precapitalist societies”; but the referent is nevertheless *other*, elsewhere, beyond what is immediately given. Only by means of this “transcendent” character is ideology able to dissimulate the system of domination and to endow the mark of legitimacy on what it conceals.³⁵

Ideology and the Imaginary

To speak of dissimulation and concealment is to raise once again the key question of the imaginary. Castoriadis and Lefort have returned this question to the center of social and political thought; and whereas the role of the imaginary has been discussed in other domains,³⁶ such discussions do nothing to diminish the originality with which it is treated in their work. Even in the writings of Castoriadis and Lefort, however, the concept of the imaginary has a plurality of meanings that must be carefully distinguished. For Castoriadis the imaginary is to be conceived of primarily as the *creative core* of the social-historical and psychic worlds, as the element that creates *ex nihilo* the figures and forms rendering “this world” and “what is” possible. Whereas Lefort appears to accept some such conception, nevertheless he tends to emphasize the *dissimulatory dimension* of the imaginary. It is by means of a specific form of the imaginary that ideology carries out its task of dissimulating the social division, a task that was accomplished in “precapitalist societies” by other forms of the imaginary. There are passages in which Castoriadis also speaks of dissimulation; but what is imaginarily dissimulated in Castoriadis’s sense is not the social division, but rather the creative imaginary itself.³⁷ The concept of the social imaginary thus has at least three distinct meanings in the writings of Castoriadis and Lefort: creative core, dissimulation of the social division, and dissimulation of the creative imaginary.

The question I now want to ask is whether, and if so at what price, these basic senses of the imaginary can be reconciled. The conception of the social imaginary as the creative core of the social-historical world is formulated in

opposition to the reductionistic aspects of Marx's materialism, and more generally to the rationalistic and deterministic tendencies of Western metaphysics, of which Marx's materialism is a particular form. Just as Marx treats social change as the unfolding of "real contradictions" and thereby fails to grasp the role of social imaginary significations that constitute what "is real," so too Western metaphysics defines being in terms of determinacy and thereby precludes the possibility of creation, the undetermined emergence of something new. Without wishing to contest the interest and importance of this radical conception of the imaginary, it must nevertheless be asked how, on the basis of this conception, one can continue to speak of dissimulation. Does not the notion of dissimulation used by Lefort reintroduce a conception of "social reality" as a definite and definable "being"? For *what* is being dissimulated, if not a reality that can be specified in some sense "independently" of that which dissimulates? It may be thought that this problem can be resolved by distinguishing, along with Lefort, between the instituting discourse in which social reality is constituted, and the dissimulating discourse that, as it were, "follows the lines" of the instituting discourse and seeks to cover over the social division instituted therein. But how can one draw this distinction without presupposing some conception of what social reality *is*? How can one distinguish, that is, between the instituting discourse and the dissimulating discourse without presupposing some criterion of "the real" by reference to which the process of instituting can be circumscribed?³⁸ Perhaps these questions could be deflected by speaking of dissimulation in Castoriadis's sense; but *this* notion of dissimulation, it must be said, remains very abstract. Lost is the sense in which historically specific divisions between classes, races, and sexes may be concealed or explained away; lost is the sense in which historically specific relations of domination may be sustained by the dissimulating interplay of meaning and power. A fuller and more concrete notion of dissimulation must be preserved; and it can be preserved, I believe, only by attenuating some of the claims associated with the radical conception of the imaginary. The question is whether and how this can be done without falling back on a reductionistic form of Marx's materialism, to which Castoriadis and Lefort have rightly ruled out any return.

Rationality and the Revolutionary Project

To confront more directly the philosophical issues that have now been raised, it may be helpful to reconsider the revolutionary project outlined by Castoriadis. He rejects Marx's philosophy of history and his analysis of capitalism, arguing that they leave no room for the autonomous action of the masses. The choice, it seems, is between rationalism and revolution, and Castoriadis chooses revolution. Yet the revolutionary project, thus severed

from a rationalist philosophy of history, runs the risk of appearing groundless. If one can no longer appeal to objective laws of social development, then how is one to justify the claim that human beings should struggle for the realization of another society, rather than acting to sustain the *status quo*? In response to this question, Castoriadis observes that the revolutionary project finds “points of support” in the subjective desires of individuals and the objective tendencies of capitalist society, desires and tendencies suggesting that the revolutionary project is merely formulating clearly what contemporary society is already expressing in a confused and convoluted way. It is difficult to escape the impression that Castoriadis is here returning to a justification by means of immanent tendencies, whose “rationalist” character is thinly veiled by the claim, altogether dubious, that it is only articulating what “society” is already saying about itself.³⁹ This is not, however, where Castoriadis leaves the matter. He acknowledges that his reading of the tendencies is a *choice* in relation to a project, but he insists that this choice is not arbitrary: “If we affirm the tendency of contemporary society to move towards autonomy, if we wish to work towards its realisation, it is because we affirm autonomy as the mode of being of man.”⁴⁰ This ultimate recourse to philosophical anthropology reveals that Castoriadis’s ontology does not dispense altogether with the notion of determinacy. Just as the possibility of dissimulating the creative imaginary presupposes that the social-historical world has a *determinate mode of being* defined by the capacity of a historical society to institute itself as a self-instituting collectivity, so too the attempt to justify the revolutionary project leads to the affirmation of autonomy as the *mode of being* of “man”. Yet this very strategy of argument, whereby an epistemological question concerning justification seems to terminate in an ontological affirmation concerning “man,” leaves an uncomfortable residue of doubt. Why should this affirmation be granted a privileged status, more privileged, for example, than the “anthropological” assumptions, rejected by Castoriadis, which underlie Marx’s conception of history? And even if it were granted a privileged status, how could this affirmation support anything other than the most abstract notion of a revolutionary project and a post-revolutionary society, a notion stripped of all content concerning the conditions under which autonomous action is possible?

It may be possible to shed further light on these issues by re-examining Castoriadis’s views on language. Signification in language is a principal medium through which the social imaginary is expressed. Hence significations cannot be subsumed to the demands of determinacy; a signification is, as Castoriadis says, “indefinitely determinable”. In everyday life expressions do, of course, effectively function as univocal, that is, as sufficiently univocal for the purposes of usage (*suffisamment quant à l’usage*). Even the simplest declarative

sentence posits the *quant à* specific to it, indicating that its univocity is ephemeral, transitory, and always open to disruption and change. The *quant à* provides a point of reference that enables speakers to locate themselves in what they say, “to support themselves on the same order to create the other.”⁴¹ It is precisely here, however, that the crucial question arises: just what is this “same” on which speakers rest to create the other? In Castoriadis’s view, this “same” is to be explicated in terms of *la logique ensembliste-identitaire*, a logic of distinct wholes and definite relations already and always present in language, although it does not exhaust what language is. Yet does this appeal to a logic already and always present in language fully account for the “same” on which speakers rest in creating new meanings? Does not the activity of calling into question established meanings and creating new ones presuppose a broader conception of the “same,” a “same” that is not so much within language but, as it were, in front of it, giving sense to the very process of questioning and creating? It is my view that historically existing forms of meaning are sustained by asymmetrical relations of power; that these forms of meaning can be, and constantly are, challenged and disrupted; and that the emergent conflicts of interpretation could be, and demand to be, resolved in a counterfactual situation where the asymmetrical relations of power were suspended or dissolved.⁴² Such a situation would exemplify a broader conception of the “same” on which speakers rest, as well as introducing a wider conception of rationality that Castoriadis, for the most part,⁴³ seems reluctant to accept. And if this wider conception of rationality could allow for a certain determinacy without destroying creativity, could lend support to the revolutionary project without laws of development, could give sense to the notion of truth without arrogating absolute knowledge, then the elucidation of this conception would not be in vain.

I should like, by way of conclusion, to draw together the various sections of this article. I began by sketching some of the main themes of Castoriadis’s recent work, in particular his reformulation of the revolutionary project and his conceptions of the social-historical and the social imaginary. This prepared the way for a discussion of Lefort’s views on the relation between ideology and the imaginary and his analyses of ideology in modern societies. Lefort’s account of ideology in contemporary Western societies provided the point of departure for my critical reflection on their work; for this account, it seems to me, overemphasizes homogeneity and misrepresents the sources of stability in capitalist societies. On a more general level, I questioned Lefort’s theoretical analysis of ideology, which precludes the application of this concept to “pre-capitalist societies”. I asked how the concept of ideology can be linked to the notion of the social imaginary, when the social imaginary is regarded as both creative and dissimulatory. One can continue to speak of dissimulation, in the

fullest sense of this term, only if one is prepared to attenuate some of the claims associated with the creative imaginary and to admit that social relations have a “reality” that can be specified independently of that which dissimulates. These and similar considerations give rise to complex epistemological problems that could be illuminated, I believe, through an inquiry into the conditions of meaningful speech.

Between the lines of these critical reflections I have offered some constructive remarks on the themes concerned. These remarks do not amount to a clearly worked-out alternative: of that I am well aware.⁴⁴ A few rough and overall contours are nevertheless discernable. To study ideology is not to analyze a particular type of discourse to be found in a particular type of society, but primarily to examine the ways in which language is used to sustain a system of domination. Ideology is both “immanent” in social relations, insofar as the use of language is a social activity interwoven with others, and “transcendent” to them, insofar as expressions used to sustain domination refer beyond what is immediately given. By allowing for the fundamental creativity of language and its dissimulatory use, this approach would draw on the two senses of the social imaginary. It may be that the attempt to integrate and elaborate these senses would lead to a philosophical standpoint somewhat different from those adopted by Castoriadis and Lefort; but their rich and insightful studies would remain at the heart of any such attempt.

NOTES

1. It may be helpful at this point to add a brief biographical and bibliographical note. Cornelius Castoriadis studied law, economics, and philosophy and participated in a Trotskyist organization in Athens before arriving in France in 1945. Claude Lefort, a student of Merleau-Ponty, became a Trotskyist in 1943. In 1946 Castoriadis and Lefort founded a movement within the French Trotskyist party, the *Parti Communiste Internationale* (PCI), opposing in particular Trotsky's analysis of Russia and Stalinism. In 1948 they broke with the PCI, formed an independent group and published, in March 1949, the first issue of *Socialisme ou Barbarie*; the final issue of the journal appeared in June 1965. Most of Castoriadis's writings have been collected together and republished in eight volumes in the series 10/18 (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973–1979); among his other publications are *L'Institution imaginaire de la société* (Paris: Seuil, 1975); *Les Carrefours du labyrinthe* (Paris: Seuil, 1978); and *Devant la guerre, vol. 1: les réalités* (Paris: Fayard, 1981). Most of the essays written by Lefort between 1950 and 1980 have been collected together in four volumes: *Eléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie* (Genève: Droz, 1971); an abridged version was published in Paris by Gallimard in 1979; *Les Formes de l'histoire: essais d'anthropologie politique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978); *Sur une colonne absente: écrits autour de Merleau-Ponty* (Paris: Gallimard, 1978); *L'Invention démocratique: les limites de la domination totalitaire* (Paris: Fayard, 1981). Among Lefort's other publications are *Le Travail de l'oeuvre: Machiavel* (Paris: Gallimard, 1972); and *Un homme en trop: réflexions sur l'Archipel du Goulag* (Paris: Seuil, 1975). In June 1968 Castoriadis and Lefort published, together with Edgar Morin, a study of the events of May: *Mai 1968: la brèche* (Paris: Fayard). An overview of Castoriadis's work may be found in his Introduction to *La Société bureaucratique*, vol. 1 (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1973), 11–61. Lefort offers a reflection on the development of his work in his Preface to the 1979 edition of *Eléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie*, 7–28. English-speaking readers may wish to consult Dick Howard's general introductions to the writings of Castoriadis and Lefort:

- "Introduction to Castoriadis," *Telos*, 23 (1975), 117–31; "Introduction to Lefort," *Telos*, 22 (1974–75), 2–30; versions of these essays appear as chapters 9 and 10 of Howard's book, *The Marxian Legacy* (London: Macmillan, 1977). A valuable discussion of Castoriadis's work may be found in a two-part study by Brian Singer: "The Early Castoriadis: Socialism, Barbarism and the Bureaucratic Thread," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 3, 3 (1979), 35–56 and "The Later Castoriadis: Institution Under Interrogation," *Canadian Journal of Political and Social Theory*, 4, 1 (1980), 75–101. Translations of essays by Castoriadis and Lefort have appeared in various issues of *Telos*, *Solidarity*, and *Social Research*.
2. Some of these differences are expressed in two very interesting interviews with Castoriadis and Lefort; see "An Interview with C. Castoriadis," trans. Bart Grah and David Pugh, *Telos*, 23 (1975), 131–55; and "An Interview with Claude Lefort," trans. Dorothy Gehrke and Brian Singer, *Telos*, 30 (1976–77), 173–92.
 3. Reprinted as Part I of Castoriadis's *L'Institution imaginaire de la société*, 11–157.
 4. *Ibid.*, 26. This and all subsequent translations are my own.
 5. *Ibid.*, 20. 6. *Ibid.*, 106. 7. *Ibid.*, 130.
 8. *Ibid.*, 256. 9. *Ibid.*, 293.
 10. There is also a specifically psychic level of the imaginary, which Castoriadis calls the "radical imagination". For Castoriadis's discussion of this level, and for his views on the psyche and on psychoanalysis more generally, see *L'Institution*, chapter VI; and *Les Carrefours du labyrinthe*, Part I.
 11. Castoriadis, *L'Institution*, 203. 12. *Ibid.*, 465.
 13. Originally published in 1973–74, "Esquisse d'une genèse de l'idéologie dans les sociétés modernes" was reprinted in *Les Formes de l'histoire*, 278–329. Another directly relevant essay is "La naissance de l'idéologie et l'humanisme," reprinted in *Les Formes*, 234–77.
 14. Lefort, *Les Formes*, 287.
 15. *Ibid.*, 296. For a discussion of the distinction between "historical societies" and "societies without history," see "Société 'sans histoire' et historicité," *ibid.*, 30–48.
 16. *Ibid.*, 302. 17. *Ibid.*, 308. 18. *Ibid.*, 314.
 19. *Ibid.*, 315. For more extensive analyses of the characteristics and contradictions of totalitarianism, see the essays brought together in *L'Invention démocratique*.
 20. Lefort, *Les Formes*, 319.
 21. The allusion here is to William H. Whyte, *The Organization Man* (Doubleday, 1956).
 22. Lefort, *Les Formes*, 327.
 23. See especially Jean Baudrillard, *La Société de la consommation: ses mythes, ses structures* (Paris: E. P. Denoël, 1970), and *Le Système des objets* (Paris: Gallimard, 1968).
 24. Cf. Herbert Marcuse, *One Dimensional Man* (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1964).
 25. See especially Jürgen Habermas, *Legitimation Crisis*, trans. Thomas McCarthy (Heinemann, 1976); Claus Offe, "Political Authority and Class Structures," *International Journal of Sociology*, 2 (1972), 73–105.
 26. This standpoint is developed in: Michael Mann, "The Social Cohesion of Liberal Democracy," *American Sociological Review* (1970), 423–39, and *Consciousness and Action Among the Western Working Class* (Macmillan, 1973); Anthony Giddens, *The Class Structure of the Advanced Societies* (Hutchinson, 1973). In criticizing Lefort from this standpoint I am indebted to David Held, who offers a similar critique of Habermas in his essay on "Crisis Tendencies, Legitimation and the State," in *Habermas: Critical Debates*, eds. John B. Thompson and David Held (Macmillan, 1982).
 27. I do not want to suggest that Lefort is unaware of processes of fragmentation and differentiation in contemporary capitalist societies (see, for example, his Preface to *Éléments d'une critique de la bureaucratie*, especially pp. 10–11). My point is rather that Lefort does not grasp the full implications of these processes for the operation of ideology. Such processes imply that the maintenance of a system of domination may depend more on internal dissensus within subordinate groups and pragmatic acceptance of institutional arrangements than on a positive commitment to dominant values. It cannot be assumed, therefore, that ideology in contemporary capitalist societies operates via a *unification* of the social field.
 28. Lefort presents a compelling analysis of this tension in "Marx: d'une vision de l'histoire à l'autre," in *Les Formes*, 195–233.
 29. See especially Pierre Bourdieu, *Outline of a Theory of Practice*, trans. Richard Nice (Cambridge University Press, 1977), and *Le Sens pratique* (Paris: Minuit, 1980); Maurice Godelier, *Perspectives in Marxist Anthropology*, trans. Robert Brain (Cambridge University Press, 1977), and "Pouvoir et langage," *Communications*, 28 (1978), 21–7.

30. This point is forcefully made by Nicholas Abercrombie, Stephen Hill, and Bryan S. Turner, *The Dominant Ideology Thesis* (Allen and Unwin, 1980).
31. Some suggestive remarks in support of this view may be found in Theo Nichols and Peter Armstrong, *Workers Divided* (London: Fontana/Collins, 1976), 142–7. It is tempting to interpret in a similar way the role of the Royal Wedding in the context of widespread strife in Britain's cities during the summer of 1981; for a brief discussion, see Helen Chappell, "The Wedding and the People," *New Society* (30 July 1981), 175–7.
32. Here, as elsewhere in this essay, I am indebted to the work of Anthony Giddens; see especially his *Central Problems in Social Theory: Action, Structure and Contradiction in Social Analysis* (Macmillan, 1979).
33. The notion of split reference and its connection to the process of interpretation is developed by Paul Ricoeur in *The Rule of Metaphor: Multi-Disciplinary Studies of the Creation of Meaning in Language*, trans. Robert Czerny (Routledge and Kegan Paul, 1978); and *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences: Essays on Language, Action and Interpretation*, trans. John B. Thompson (Cambridge University Press, 1981). I have examined some of Ricoeur's contributions in my book on *Critical Hermeneutics: A Study in the Thought of Paul Ricoeur and Jürgen Habermas* (Cambridge University Press, 1981).
34. Cf. Roland Barthes, *Mythologies*, trans. Annette Lavers (St. Albans: Paladin, 1971).
35. One may question, in this regard, Lefort's contention that in spite of Marx's allusions to religion in his analysis of the fetishism of commodities, "he comes to conceive of a mechanism of illusion which no longer makes room (except accidentally) for evasion into another world" (*Les Formes*, 254). For a different view of the role of religion in Marx's analysis, see Sarah Kofman, *Camera Obscura. De l'idéologie* (Paris: Galilée, 1973).
36. See, for example, the work of George Duby in history and that of Jaques Lacan in psychoanalysis. The theme of the imaginary is also becoming increasingly explicit in the writings of Ricoeur; see "A response by Paul Ricoeur," in his *Hermeneutics and the Human Sciences*, 32–40.
37. Castoriadis generally describes the dissimulation of the creative core of a society as "alienation" or "heteronomy"; see *L'Institution*, 148ff.
38. I do not believe, moreover, that "the real" can be defined as that which refuses to be covered over, as Lefort appears to maintain (see *Les Formes*, 292). For this definition seems hopelessly circular, merely shifting the demand for clarification onto the notion of "covering over"; and the definition seems to leave no way for approaching cases of more "successful" dissimulation.
39. It may be noted that the question of revolution is one of the key issues on which the views of Castoriadis and Lefort diverge. In the eyes of Lefort, to affirm the idea of an overthrow that would make possible the explicit self-institution of society is to reintroduce "the myth, inherited from Marx, of a society able to master its own development and to communicate with all its parts, a society able in a way to see itself" ("An interview with Claude Lefort," 185). Lefort's rejection of the idea of revolution may be more consistent with the overall attack on "rationalism"; but it is because I wish to mitigate this attack, to draw out some of the themes that cut across it, that I have chosen to focus here on Castoriadis.
40. Castoriadis, *L'Institution*, 137, 41. *Ibid.*, 473.
42. In expressing this view I indicate my debt to the work of Jürgen Habermas, whose contributions I have discussed in my book *Critical Hermeneutics* and in my essay on "Universal Pragmatics," in *Habermas: Critical Debates*.
43. There are passages in which Castoriadis appears to allow for a more generous conception of the rational; for example: "As for the enormous problem, at the most radical philosophical level, of the relation between the imaginary and the rational, of the question of whether the rational is only a moment of the imaginary or whether it expresses man's encounter with a transcendent order, here we can only leave it open, doubting moreover whether we could ever do otherwise" (*L'Institution*, 227, n. 55). See also the interesting remarks in "L'exigence révolutionnaire," an interview with Castoriadis originally published in *Esprit* (1977) and reprinted in Castoriadis's *Le Contenu du socialisme* (Paris: Union générale d'éditions, 1979), 323–66.
44. I hope to develop these remarks in a forthcoming study of language and ideology, to be published by Macmillan.

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