

“Making Sense of Corporeal Imagination in Cornelius Castoriadis”

The project of developing a philosophy of the body, or more humbly, of trying to identify something like a bundle of image-forming faculties proper to the body, starting from Castoriadis' thought may seem surprising: this question has never been the object of a substantial conceptual elaboration on his part, and moreover, there exists since the 1960s (1), a relatively well developed corpus (of which Castoriadis' work is not a part) that has made the philosophy of the body its dominant theme. However, I would like to try to argue that the expression "corporeal imagination" (2), used by Castoriadis in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1975), and which remains a hapax in his work, deserves our attention for two reasons. On the one hand, it allows us to deepen the issues relative to the status of corporeality specific to Castoriadis's work, and on the other hand, it allows us to put these issues in relation to the broader question of the philosophies of corporeality. Finally, insofar as it is amidst metapsychological reflections that the theme of corporeal imagination appears, it seems to me that its relevance for this forum shouldn't be put in question and that its connection with the work of F. Dolto in particular (3) can be fruitful. However, as I am not trained in psychoanalysis, I do not intend to elaborate it within a psychoanalytical or clinical framework but rather from the perspective of philosophical anthropology.

Notwithstanding the fact that he practised as a psychoanalyst, one cannot ignore the fact that Castoriadis is above all a thinker of political autonomy - individual and collective - ; this implies that his theoretical productions relating to his activity as an analyst must also be read as relative to a philosophical anthropology, which remains an essential component in the understanding of his philosophical work. This philosophical anthropology finds its originality in the fact that, contrary to the liberal political tradition for which the central issue is to think about the way in which the sovereign freedom of the individual can be reconciled with state governance and the social control that it implies, Castoriadis considers the social individual as "the material face of the institution (4)". Thus, the fundamental polarity from which his philosophical gesture unfolds is not that between individual and society but between psyche and social-historical. The former refers to the unlimited representational-affective-intentional flow of the radical *imagination of the psyche* which is incessantly producing forming-forms that is not bound to any end outside of itself; the latter is the field of the *social imaginary* whose productions are the primary social institutions (the institution of society as such) and the secondary ones (the set of institutions on the basis of which a society can function) that the psyche is as such absolutely incapable of producing.

The social individual, the concrete or 'material' face of the institution, is the result of the socialisation of the psyche. This socialisation has a psychogenetic and a sociogenetic aspect that are inseparable from each other. This socialisation cannot be reduced to the notion of education; rather, it must be understood as "a history of the psyche along which it alters itself and opens up to the social-historical world through its own work and creativity; and a history of the imposition on the psyche by society of a mode of being that the psyche could never bring about on its own and which manufactures and creates the social individual. (5) " If this psyche must be socialised, it is because it is originally characterised by a monadic structure with an autistic libido and by a phantasmatic, i.e. imaginary, satisfaction of its desire to remain in that state of pure self-identity which characterises the pleasure principle. This autistic libido implies that the original psychic monad ignores otherness; however, it is important to note that this psychic monad is not something locatable, formally or effectively, in the *infans*: rather, it is the *infans* understood as an inseparable psychic and somatic unity. Thus Castoriadis reminds us that the psychic monad is "a forming-formed, it is formation and figuration of itself [...] from nothing [...], it is [the] body as forming itself, figuring itself for itself. (6)"

Finally, this monad is an incessant representational-affective-intentional flow whose "components" are to be thought of as an indivisible unity. What characterizes the psychic monad is thus a radical imagination that is not bound to any external *telos*, that is ontologically autarkic to the highest degree in the sense that its being is identified with the exercise of this representational-affective-intentional flow and that this flow suffices to sustain the ontological identity of the monad. In other words, the psychic monad is pure *entelechy* (in the sense of Aristotle, i.e. in the sense of the supreme accomplishment of being); the whole paradox being that this ontological autarky of the *infans* is inseparable from the fact that it is biologically and socially absolutely not viable. Thus, it would seem that the social viability of the individual is inseparable from a socially induced incompleteness, or, dare I say, vulnerability.

Socialisation is essentially the imposition on the psyche of the schema of separation, which will allow the social individual to invest a common world and a private world that are both distinct and solidary. Such an imposition takes the form of an invasion of the psyche - the violence of which is difficult to measure - "by others as others, by means of which are constituted both a 'reality' for the subject as independent, malleable and participable, and the dehiscence (never perfectly accomplished) between the psychic and the somatic. (7)" This socialisation does not, however, result in the destruction or repression of the original monad: the imposition of the schema of difference - and by extension the imposition of the set of schemas that make up what Castoriadis calls ensemblist-identitarian thinking - renders this original monad *unrepresentable* (8). Thus, this new stratum, that of the social individual resulting of the dehiscence between soma and psyche, *leans on* (*Anhelung/s'étaye sur*) this first stratum that is the original psychic monad and the psychosomatic unity that it represents. It is this particular relationship of *leaning on* which results in the creation of a socially apt body (*Leib*) that allows the subject to participate in a common world.

The particularity of this "*leaning on*" relationship is that one stratum does not cancel out the next but, on the contrary, complicates it, becomes inseparably linked to that on which it is leaning on. Thus, the lived body is not only the result of socialisation, or rather, it can only be thought of as the *sui generis* synthesis of the *entelechy* that is the original psychic monad insofar as it is indistinctly psyche and soma, and of the requirements of the social imaginary significations that the socialised individual will have to carry in his bodily dispositions. It is only because the body itself is always this synthesis between the undivided psyche-soma that is the original monad and the socially produced body, which is the efficient condition of any relation to a common world, that the body can be a focus of creation. Indeed, it is only insofar as socialisation does not cancel the radical imagination of the psyche, and that socially produced corporeality allows the social individual to relate to the common world by providing the psyche with objects of sublimation, that there can be creation in the strongest sense of the term (i.e. the emergence of forms whose coming to be cannot be deduced from what precedes them).

Although the sublimation by which the psyche becomes capable of relating to a common world has an undeniable psychogenetic aspect, in the sense that there is sublimation only because the psyche is capable of it, one must underline that this sublimation also has an essential sociogenetic aspect in the sense that the psyche is incapable of producing the *objects* of this sublimation, which are always already part of a socially instituted world that precedes the existence of the psyche. One such object is language for example. The psychogenesis and sociogenesis of the social individual are thus inseparable, for the psyche's capacity for sublimation remains an absolutely sterile datum if it is not coupled with the fact that there is *always already* a common world that offers objects of sublimation - through which this social world can also exist (9). In sum, there is no language without a speaker, and no speaker without

the ability to replace private and solipsistic objects of investment with common objects of investment (10). Taking up Merleau-Ponty, Castoriadis thus reminds us that there is only vision because there is *always already* the visible, that there is only touch because there is *always already* the tangible; in short, that subjective existence in the full sense of the term requires the existence of a common world that interminably exceeds all that the psyche could draw from itself (11).

The social institution of corporeality then becomes "an efficient condition of the subject's activity [as long as this body is] the produced and productive union of the self and the other (or the world). (12) " In the subject *as subject*, there is the non-subject, there is the presence of a socially instituted world of things in which the body participates. The body is thus not the tomb of which speaks the *Gorgias* (13), rather, it is "a 'material' structure bearing a virtual meaning (14)", and this in at least two ways:

1) Given that the original monadic core is not destroyed but rather rendered unrepresentable, socially produced corporeality bears the trace of the radical imagination of the psyche and its representational-affective-intentional flow, which is, in this case, mediated by the objects of sublimation offered by society. In this sense, there is already a creativity that emerges from the body and whose stakes unfortunately exceed the framework of the present communication.

2) Insofar as socialisation always takes place in a particular society with its own magma of social significations, the body must be capable of assuming the spectrum of imaginary significations specific to the society to which it is called to belong. To quote Castoriadis: "each society is *this* particular institution, making *this* particular magma of social imaginary significations be and not another, in *this* way and not another, and through *this* specific socialisation of the psyche and not another. It makes it be already in the very materiality of the acts and natural dispositions of the subjects, in their vision, their hearing, their touch, already in the formation it imposes on their *corporeal imagination* (gestural, proprioceptive); throwing the boomerang [,] singing flamenco are neither instinctive nor transcultural. (The "techniques of the body"¹ are a special case of the bodily imagination, more exactly its codifiable part). (15) "

Since Castoriadis does not take the trouble to give a conceptual content to this "corporeal imagination", it seemed useful to me to cross it with other related notions elaborated by other authors in order to try to make sense of it differentially. I propose to do this by means of a quick perspective of this notion with four concepts that seemed relevant to me: those of body image and body schema as used by F. Dolto, that of body techniques as used by Marcel Mauss, and that of corporeal *hexis* as elaborated by Pierre Bourdieu. However, I would like to start by suggesting the following working hypothesis, which does not seem to betray the spirit of Castoriadis' text: the bodily imagination can be thought of as the result of the *sui generis* synthesis of the social individual *leaning on* the psyche-soma of the first stratum that constitutes the original monad. The radical imagination of the psyche thus emerges from the body of the socialised subject, but this imagination is always mediated by the magma of social meanings that have enabled the subjectivation of the psyche.

a) The body schema can be roughly described as what "specifies the individual as a representative of the species [and which] allows the objectification of an intersubjectivity, of a libidinal linguistic relation with others which, without it, without the support it represents, would remain forever an uncommunicable fantasy. (16) " Moreover, the body

¹ Note the reference to Marcel Mauss.

schema is what refers the body in space to immediate experience, and it can be conscious or unconscious depending on the situation. It is therefore a universal concept that applies, except in pathological cases, in the same way to all humanity. The body schema is a transcendental condition of any relation to the world; without going so far as to say that it is an efficient condition of a relation to a common world as the body is for Castoriadis, we can nevertheless say that the body schema and the bodily imagination have at least in common the fact of having to do with the modalities of putting the psyche and the common world in relation.

b) The body image is specific to each person and connotes a libido in situation, it is linked to the history of the individual and is therefore personal and evolving. Finally, insofar as it "can be considered as the unconscious symbolic embodiment of the desiring subject (17)", it is eminently unconscious and can be at the origin of neuroses and psychoses. Following our working hypothesis, the corporeal imagination, since it is the synthesis of the radical imagination of the original monad and the production of the social individual through the socialisation of said monad, can also be related to the unconscious - including in its historical aspect - and can be related to pathological behaviours (the fact that the monad becomes unrepresentable implies that it can only be related to the unconscious). However, two cardinal differences remain: firstly, the corporeal imagination refers to a differentiated production of socially sanctioned ways of existing in the public space, it allows to fill the space left by Dolto between the universality of the body schema and the singularity of the body image; secondly, the corporeal imagination establishes an explicit link between corporeality and creativity which does not seem to exist, at least not with the same intensity, in Dolto.

c) Precisely insofar as bodily imagination refers to socially sanctioned ways of existing in the common world, and even more so as Castoriadis explicitly relates this notion to that of "techniques of the body", bodily imagination can be related to the work of Marcel Mauss on this issue. Indeed, we have seen that Castoriadis insisted on the socially conditioned element of bodily imagination, and the whole issue for Marcel Mauss in *Sociology and Anthropology* (1934) is precisely to study how bodily techniques, understood as a set of efficient traditional gestures, are social and not natural facts. Thus, the habits that govern the ways in which one can use one's body "vary not simply with individuals and their imitations, they vary above all with societies, educations, conveniences and fashions (18)". These socially instituted techniques of the body govern the very appearance of the body, so much so that Mauss asserts that there isn't such a thing as a "natural" way of walking for human beings. However, the notion of bodily imagination is in no way reducible to that of bodily technique, not only because bodily techniques are only the codifiable part of bodily imagination, but perhaps especially because bodily imagination makes the imagination of the psyche an essential condition for the very existence of a common world, which does not seem to be the case with Mauss.

d) Finally, the corporeal imagination does not seem to us to be unrelated to what Pierre Bourdieu described as the corporeal *hexis* (19). In its strictest sense, it covers the enduring ways of standing and speaking which, as physical dispositions of the body in physical space, variable from one social class to another, constitute the product of an incorporation of the structures of social space as they present themselves to the subject according to the position he or she occupies in it. In this sense, bodily *hexis* appears less as the exteriorisation of the habitus than as one of the two modes of subjectivation to which the objective structures of a social space are simultaneously embodied in the subject in the form of mental and bodily schemas. Thus, the bodily *hexis* is a producer of subjectivity, as is, in its own way, the

bodily imagination. Yet, here too, the originality of the imaginary element of the Castoriadian concept must be forcefully underlined, especially since the excessively deterministic element of Bourdieusian sociology has often been criticised.

There is so much more to say, but my time is running out and I fear I will incur your wrath. Besides, I dare to believe that what I had hoped to tell you about the links between bodily imagination and political creativity emerges as a thread from the few ideas I have tried to present.

Notes

(1) Cf. Claude Bruaire, *Philosophie du corps*, Paris, PUF, 1976 ; Bernard Andrieu (dir.), *Philosophie du corps. Expériences, interactions et écologie corporelle*, Paris, Vrin, 2010.

(2) Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, Paris, Seuil, 1975 (1999), p. 485.

(3) Françoise Dolto, *L'image inconsciente du corps*, Paris, Seuil, 1984 (2014).

(4) Cf. Cornelius Castoriadis, *Sujet et vérité dans le monde social-historique. La création humaine I*, Paris, Seuil, 2002, pp. 39-40.

(5) Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, *op.cit.*, p. 438.

(6) *Ibid.*

(7) *Ibid.* p. 439.

(8) *Ibid.* p. 433.

(9) *Ibid.* p. 454.

(10) *Ibid.* p. 456.

(11) *Ibid.* p. 156.

(12) *Ibid.*

(13) Platon, *Gorgias*, trad. Monique Canto-Sperber, Paris, Flammarion, 2018, 493a.

(14) Cornelius Castoriadis, *L'institution imaginaire de la société*, *op. cit.* p. 157.

(15) *Ibid.* p. 485.

(16) Françoise Dolto, *L'image inconsciente du corps*, *op. cit.* p. 22.

(17) *Ibid.*

(18) Marcel Mauss, *Sociologie et anthropologie*, Paris, Puf, 1934, p. 350.

(19) Cf. Pierre Bourdieu, *Le sens pratique*, Paris, Éditions de Minuit, 1980.