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Conceptualizing the Imaginary: Castoriadis and Durand

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Abstract

Imaginary has emerged as a heuristic concept in the social sciences, attracting attention from diverse fields such as sociology, psychology, anthropology, history, and philosophy. However, its polysemic nature presents significant challenges for scholars seeking to define or operationalize it. This study aims to compare and explore the interpretations of the imaginary as presented in Gilbert Durand's "The Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary" and Cornelius Castoriadis's "The Imaginary Institution of Society." Through a narrative literature review, the research highlights key points of convergence and divergence between these two theoretical perspectives. Despite their distinct conceptual approaches, both Durand and Castoriadis critique the marginalization of the imaginary by rationalist traditions, viewing it as a driving force for human beings, societies, and history. Furthermore, both theorists reject positivist methodologies, advocating for interpretive paradigms in the study of imaginary phenomena.

Keywords: Imaginary, Social Imaginary, Radical Imaginary, Radical Imagination

Introduction

The widespread use of the term imaginary suggests that its meaning is obvious and distinct from other related terms (representations, collective unconscious, ideology, utopia, etc.). However, when the question is asked in an academic setting, researchers face difficulty in obtaining a specific definition. Thus, Imaginary is a polysemic concept with multiple meanings, often used to refer to various phenomena, sometimes carrying distinct and even conflicting connotations. Patrice Leblanc (1994) points out the complexity in studying the imaginary, noting that scholars don't treat it as a single concept but instead use it to refer to various phenomena, such as utopia, ideology, representations, and collective memory. Part of the reason for this is that the imaginary doesn't exist in a concrete form like simpler concepts (such as work, gender, or media). However, Leblanc argues that scholars do not place sufficient emphasis on defining the imaginary (Patrice Leblanc, 1994). Consequently, researchers assert that the primary challenge in studying the imaginary is defining it (Alina Şalgău Corocăescu, 2018).

Gilbert Durand (2015) highlights the confusion surrounding the meanings of terms associated with the concept of the imaginary, explaining that this confusion leads to their interchangeable use. The terms such as images, symbols, allegories, and emblems are often conflated, making it difficult to identify precise meanings for each. The importance of establishing a clear classification of terms has also been addressed in order to enhance the theoretical understanding of the imaginary, with the suggestion that there is a need for precise definitions of each term to avoid ambiguity and facilitate the academic analysis process (Gilbert Durand, 2015).

Understanding scholars' definitions of the imaginary is challenging without examining the theoretical frameworks from which these definitions originate. Consequently, any serious attempt to comprehend the concept often requires familiarity with his major theories. Relying solely on definitions quoted in articles and books is a limited approach, as it lacks the precision needed to either define the concept accurately. In this context, this study seeks to compare and explore the meanings of the imaginary within two prominent theories: Gilbert Durand's "Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary" and Cornelius Castoriadis's "Imaginary Institution of Society."

Florence Giust-Desprairies (2016) identifies two approaches that view the imaginary as a fundamental human force. The first, termed the phenomenological approach, is led by Gilbert Durand and includes intellectuals such as Bachelard and Sartre, as well as nearly all sociologists who study the imagination. Key figures in this approach include Gérard Bouchard (2014), Michel Maffesoli (2013, 2016), Patrick Legros (2006), and other scholars. In contrast, Cornelius Castoriadis heads the second approach, which Giust-Desprairies refers to as the ontological approach, asserting that the imaginary is the foundation of humanity, social life, history, and the psyche (Florence Giust-Desprairies, 2016 a).

The Concept of the Imaginary in the Theory of "Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary"

Gilbert Durand's approach (1960) focuses on two main goals. First, it aims to challenge the anti-image and anti-imagination bias that dominated European thought under the influence of Cartesian rationalism and positivism, which relegated imagination to the realm of irrationality and illusion, depriving it of any epistemic value (Martine Xiberras, 2002). Second, Durand aims to correct the perspectives of psychologists who reduced imagination solely to a libidinal dimension. Furthermore, he seeks to move beyond earlier classifications of symbols and images that relied on criteria detached from the imaginary's logic (Durand Yves et al., 2011).

In this context, Durand advocates for transcending the psychoanalytic school's classification of symbols based on sexual dualism, as well as rejecting Cartesian rationalism, which separates images from thought and prevents ideas from taking form. This mission follows the path of his professor, Gaston Bachelard. However, Durand's significant contribution lies in demonstrating that the imaginary possesses its own logic, encompassing epistemic insights that can uncover hidden dimensions of human beings, and Durand's aim goes beyond merely advocating for equality between imagination and reason; rather, he calls for the primacy of imagination over reason (Gilbert Durand, 2021). This idea implies that the imaginary guides and precedes reason and thought.

One aspect of the complexity of the imaginary as a concept is reflected in the density of Gilbert Durand's theory, where its hypotheses intersect with various fields such as anthropology, psychology, biology, and sociology. Furthermore, understanding it requires familiarity with several procedural concepts integral to Durand's isotopic classification of images, including archetypes, schemas, symbols, constellations, systems, and structures.

Durand used the "anthropological dialectic" as a method to bridge the gap between psychology and culture, to create his "isotopic classification of images" (Gilbert Durand, 1999). He emphasized that the representation of symbols and images originates from the interaction between human instinctual needs and their social and environmental context. In line with this approach, the theory of anthropological structures of imaginary defends the hypothesis of a close interaction between three elements: bodily movements, neural centers, and symbolic representations. This hypothesis is somewhat ambiguous; to clarify it, Durand drew on the work of psychologists such as Vladimir Bekhterev, Jean Piaget, and Carl

Gustav Jung. He aimed to illustrate his hypothesis through what he termed the “method of convergence,” which is based on classifying images and symbols found within a shared mythical, poetic, and linguistic heritage and organizing them in constellations (groups).

Gilbert Durand affirmed, through psychological theories, that the source of all images and symbols originates from the innate body movements predominant in infants, which are shared by all humans. Each type of movement generates a specific form of symbolic representations and images, which are subsequently categorized on this basis. Bekhterev’s theory of "dominant reflexes" serves as the starting point for classifying symbols and images, where Bekhterev categorizes infant movements according to fundamental reactions common to human beings. He observes the dominance of two innate reflexive movements: position dominant and nutritional dominant. The former relates to reactions associated with vertical posture, which arise when an infant’s body is lifted vertically, generating images tied to emotion and the sense of movement. The latter is linked to head movements during feeding. Durand adds a third reaction related to sexuality, which produces rhythmic representations. These innate movements in infants are the shared source of all human images, representations, symbols, and myths. Hence, the innate movements form the foundation on which Gilbert Durand builds his classification (Gilbert Durand, 2021).

Classifying symbols and images based on corporal movements resembles Jean Piaget's classification of parental sounds, as both are derived from actions generated by parents toward their infants. According to Piaget, infants interact with their environment; they form primary emotional schemata based on the sounds of their parents. Gilbert Durand integrated Piaget’s findings on these emotional images within Bekhterev's reflexive movement model, associating the father's symbolism with postural reflexes and the mother's symbolism with nutritional and digestive reflexes.

Durand's theory is based on a specific set of concepts. As previously stated, the classification of symbols and images begins with reflexive movements. Schemata, which signify a series of actions linked with each reflexive movement, serve as the connection between these movements and representations. For instance, vertical dominant corresponds to the verb "to distinguish," which gives rise to the actions: separate, mingle, fall, and rise. Copulative dominant corresponds to the action “Link,” leading to actions such as mature, progress, and return. The digestive dominant is associated with the action "mix," giving rise to actions like descend, possess, and penetrate.

Archetypes emerge from the interaction of these schemata with their social and natural environments, acting as a link between subjective acts and images obtained from the objective world. These archetypes are characterized by stability and universality, meaning they are constant and shared across all cultures, unlike symbols, which vary and differ from one human group to another. As an example, Durand notes that the stability of the verbal schemata “ascent” and his archetype “sky” is reflected in various symbols such as the soaring arrow, the high-jumping athlete, and the airplane (Valentina Grassi, 2018). Hence, the meanings of each symbol vary depending on the socio-cultural context.

In Gilbert Durand's perspective, myths are the extension of schemata, archetypes, and primary symbols. He rejects the perspective of ethnologists who view it as merely the representation of a ritual act. Instead, Durand sees myth as a dynamic system that can explain schemata by transforming into a story. This process serves as an initial rationalization, transforming symbols into words and archetypes into ideas. Just as archetypes give rise to ideas and symbols to words, myths can reinforce religious doctrines, philosophical systems, or historical narratives.

Based on the study of myths and cultures, Durand (2021) concluded that the imaginary is an organized faculty with its own inherent logic. He proposed dividing the imaginary into three distinct structures: Heroic (or Schizomorphic), Synthetic (or Dramatic), and Mystical (or Antiphrastic). The Schizomorphic (or Heroic) structures belong to the diurnal system, centered on actions of separation and division. To define the characteristics and structures of the diurnal system, Durand draws on psychopathology by analyzing the imaginative images and symptoms of schizophrenic patients. He suggests that the schizophrenic structure, included under the diurnal system, contains four parts, as illustrated in Figure 1:

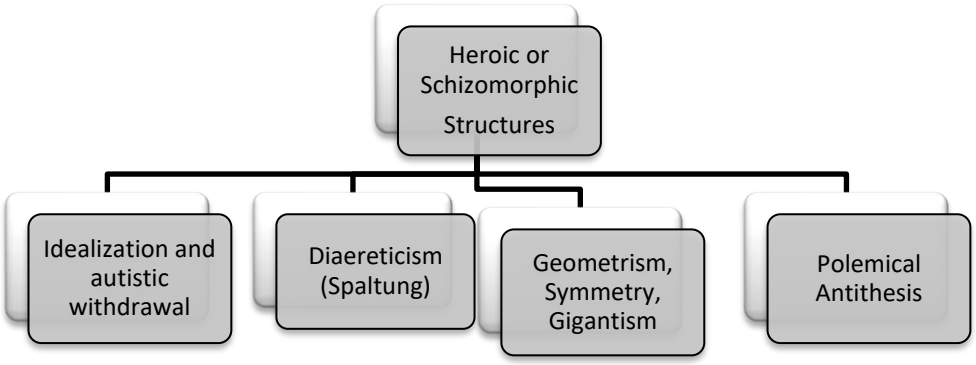

Figure 1 Durand's Heroic (Schizomorphic) Structures (1960)

Durand asserts that the Platonic and Cartesian philosophical tendency to separate matter from spirit, mind from brain, and the sensory world from the world of ideals is rooted in the diurnal system. In this context, Durand also argued that parts of epistemology and the natural sciences have been influenced by the same diurnal structure. He demonstrated that some philosophical ideas are rooted in the imaginary and adhere to its rules. This view emphasizes one of Durand's key insights: the capacity of the imaginary to shape thought.

The mystical structures of the imaginary, in contrast, belong to the nocturnal system. For Durand, mysticism implies a desire for union and an inclination toward intimacy (Durand, 1999). To determine the characteristics of the mystical structures, he examined the symptoms of epileptic patients through psychopathological analyses. Durand identified four mystical structures as illustrated in Figure 2:

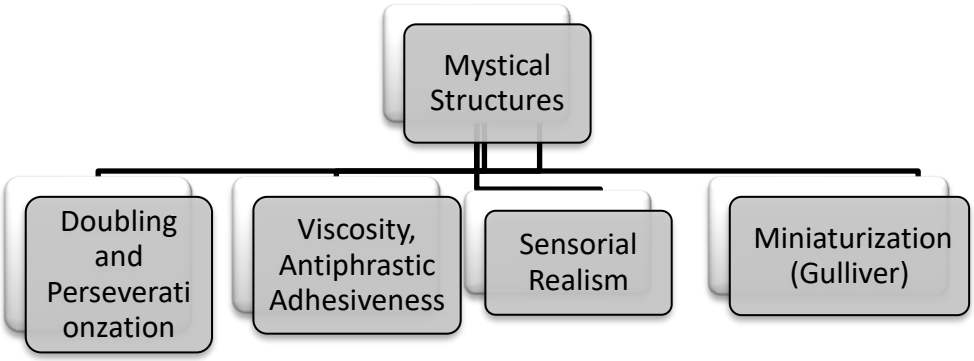

Figure 2 Durand's Mystical Structures (1960)

The mystical structures consist of inverse (or reverse) images, such as in the cases where the lower replaces the higher, the first becomes the last, or the small creature triumphs over a giant, as illustrated in folktales. Also, the mystical language tends towards softness, so falling becomes lowering, eating becomes swallowing, and darkness becomes night. The mystical structure encompasses images and icons that focus on intimacy and human associations. For example, images of social and emotional relationships, as well as icons of individuals engaging in religious experiences, belong to the mystical structures.

The Synthetic Structures is the third type of imaginary, belonging also to the Nocturnal system. Durand (1999) unites images and symbols around the archetypes of the Denary and the Baton. The synthetic structures focus on harmony, unity, and continuity. In contrast with the diurnal Order which tends to classify and separate, the synthetic structures emphasis the integration of opposing forces to create a dynamic harmony. As Durand explains, "Synthesis is not unification as in the mystical structure. It does not merge terms but rather seeks coherence that respects distinctions and oppositions (Gilbert Durand, 1999)." Durand identifies four synthetic structures as illustrated in Figure 3:

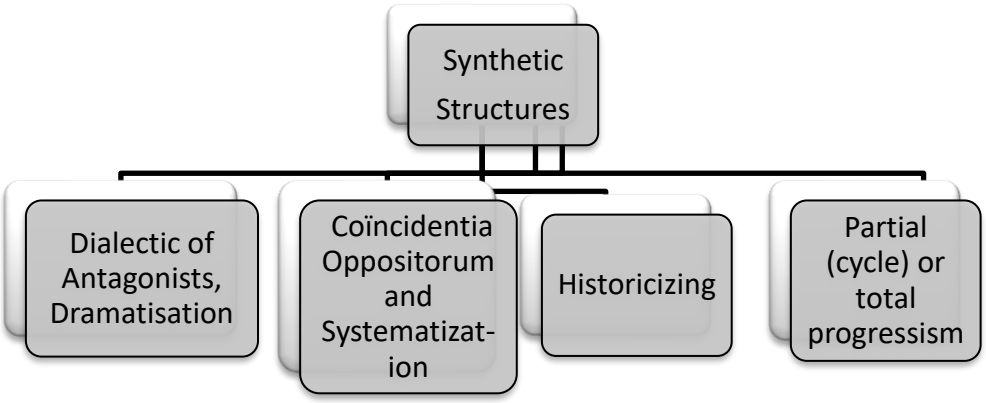

Figure 3 Durand's Synthetic Structures (1960)

The "Harmonization of Contraries" Structure is often related to musical and cosmological imagery. It tends to blend opposites and to smooth contradictions. In Durand's view, harmony means "an appropriate ordering of differences and opposites. The musical discipline of harmony is one of the aspects of the harmonizing structure of the imaginary" (Gilbert Durand, 1999). It emphasizes rhythmic qualities and cosmic patterns, reflecting the desire for connection and unity. In this structure, images and symbols strive to transcend the limits of chronological time by creating timeless and harmonious worlds. Through this analysis, Durand supposes that music is not merely an organization of sounds but a universal imaginary aspect in which every musical piece is a cohesive variation of opposites.

The dialectical-dramatic structure is driven by the interaction of contrasting elements rather than their unification. Durand describes music and theatrical drama as structured by dynamic contrasts, balancing different tempos and emotions to create a coherent form. This synthetic structure appears in literature and the arts, embodying the timeless struggle between human aspirations and fate and reflecting ancient myths where humanity confronts death and time (Gilbert Durand, 1999).

The historicizing structure engages with time through historical or cyclical narratives that tend to unite opposing forces. By framing time as a dynamic space for change and growth, this structure allows myths and historical narratives to bring together adversarial elements, creating a cohesive form. Durand illustrates this with examples like the founding of Rome, where the reconciliation of enemy forces forms a unified narrative. Philosophers such as Hegel and Marx exemplify this approach by seeing history as a sequence of dialectical transformations, where each period arises from the conflicts of the preceding one (Gilbert Durand, 1999).

The progressive (or Messianic) structure, by contrast, envisions history as a journey toward an ultimate goal, rejecting the cyclical repetitions. This structure views time as purposeful, propelling humanity towards an ideal end. Durand describes this tendency as a "hypothesis of the future," in which the future is made present and future ideals create the present actions, as seen in messianic beliefs or revolutionary visions. Religions such as Judaism and Christianity embody this progressionist tendency; they seek to control time in order to attain an ideal end. The progressive structure aligns with modernity's ambitions to direct historical progress (Gilbert Durand, 1999).

Based on Gilbert Durand's perspective, the imaginary can be defined as a set of organized structures rooted in the individual and collective representations. These structures emerge in cultural productions and human activities. From this perspective, the imaginary functions as a shared cultural bond, connecting individual identity to collective identity by embedding the mythical representations of groups within individuals. In another definition, Durand acknowledges that the imaginary can be identified as "a museum of all images... present everywhere and can appear to us in dreams, hallucinations, and visions... it appears in more specific forms: in myths, in artistic creations... and today, in cinematic production" (Anne-Pauzet, 2005). This definition asserts that imaginary, as a collective museum of images, is implanted in the individual's unconscious, manifesting through dreams, hallucinations, and visions.

Durand succeeded in proving his main hypothesis: that the imaginary is the primary force guiding thought and history. He demonstrated that even the most rational philosophies—those most opposed to imagery, icons, and sculpture—have roots in the imaginary. Another significant contribution of Durand's theory is the epistemological shift he introduced by showing that the imaginary has its own internal logic and holds essential epistemic value, enabling a deeper understanding of humanity, after imagination had long been dismissed as lacking cognitive worth (Durand Yves et al., 2011). Jean-Jacques Wunenburger (2011) cites that this imaginary categorization of images into regimes and structures, there emerges a logic, an axiomatics, an epistemology, a theory of knowledge, and ultimately a general bio-anthropology of Homo sapiens.

The Concept of the Imaginary in the Theory of "The Imaginary Institution of Society"

Castoriadis conceptualization of the imaginary fundamentally relies on Aristotle's conception of phantasma. Through Castoriadis' analysis of Aristotelian ideas, it becomes clear that, according to Aristotle, imagination is not merely a means of perceiving sensory images but rather a creative faculty that enables the intellect to grasp the abstract forms of objects independent of their material substance. Consequently, Castoriadis views Aristotle as a pioneer in understanding imagination as a creative force. In this perspective, imagination serves as a crucial mediator between the sensory and the intellectual. Castoriadis thus draws on Aristotle to affirm the importance of imagination as the foundation of human knowledge and thought (Cornelius Castoriadis, 1975).

Castoriadis first used the concept of the "social imaginary" in 1964 (Nicolas Poirier, 2003), a full decade before his theory fully developed in his book "The Imaginary Institution of Society," published in 1975. Given his intellectual background and the broad range of his theory, it is difficult to classify it into a particular scientific subject; furthermore, his theory cannot be isolated from his political engagement.

Castoriadis was a Marxist activist from the age of fifteen within the Greek Communist Party; then he joined the Trotskyist Party. Faced with threats arising from ideological differences, he decided to escape to France (Giust-Desprairies, 2016, b). Alongside his Marxist political activities in France, he prepared his doctoral thesis in philosophy—with a sociological touch—on the ideas of Max Weber (Poirier, 2003). He then worked as an economist for the Organization for Economic Co-operation and Development (OECD) before turning to psychoanalysis, eventually becoming a research director at the École des hautes études en sciences sociales (Giust-Desprairies, 2016, b).

Cornelius Castoriadis used the concept of the imaginary to address questions related to the foundation of human societies. His theory is built from different disciplines (philosophy, economics, psychology, sociology), which have been connected to produce a new ontological conception of societies. The primary aim of his approach is to challenge the linearity, determinism, and causality inherent in rationalist and Marxist traditions. Castoriadis redefined the concept of the imaginary, distinguishing it from previous interpretations while avoiding any overlap with earlier definitions. Thus, his approach differs significantly from that of Gilbert Durand. Castoriadis conceptualizes the imaginary as follows:

What I have called "the social imaginary" since 1964 [...] it has no relation to the representations that commonly circulate under this title. Especially, it has nothing to do with the "imaginary" as mentioned in some currents of psychology: "the specular" which is obviously just image of and reflected image [...]the imaginary does not start from the image in the mirror or in the gaze of the other[...]the imaginary I am talking about is not an image of. It is an incessant and essentially indeterminate creation (social-historical and psychic) of figures/forms/images from which only it can be a matter of “something" **(Cornélius Castoriadis, 1975).**

The previous passage shows that Cornelius Castoriadis rejects two fundamental conceptualizations of the imaginary within the social sciences: those of Jacques Lacan and Gilbert Durand. Castoriadis rejects reducing the collective imaginary to a set of reflected images, citing Jacques Lacan's “mirror stage” in childhood. Jacques Lacan (1953) views the imaginary as a collection of images, fantasies, representations, and meanings that shape the ego in states of illusion (Florence Giust-Desprairies, 2016 b). In early childhood, encountering one's reflection in the mirror forms the ego, as the child perceives the image as an extension of themselves. This image represents the imaginary aspect of the ego, complemented by the real aspect, generated by corporal sensations, and the symbolic aspect, grounded in language and its symbolism (Didier Castanet, 2021). Lacan’s use of the imaginary, however, is limited to individual psychology and does not address the complex social phenomena.

Similarly, Castoriadis distinguishes his concept of the imaginary from Gilbert Durand’s perspective, which characterizes the imaginary as representations, defining it as “the essential representational manifestation and symbolic capacity from which all obsessions, hopes, and cultural achievements have sprung since the emergence of Homo erectus” (Valentina Grassi, 2018).

The roots of Castoriadis’s theory lie in his attempt to break away from Marxism (Mathieu Noury, 2011). Drawing on Max Weber’s concept of bureaucracy and analyzing the socialist experience in Russia, he argued that Marxism had produced a totalitarian bureaucratic system that intensified, rather than avoided, capitalist bureaucracy. Castoriadis concluded that Russia had changed into a society based on

exploitation rather than one that liberated the proletariat. He viewed the Russian bureaucracy not merely as an authoritarian form of administration but as a ruling class that exercised absolute control over all aspects of social life.

This break from Marxism did not signify an abandonment of his revolutionary project; rather, it marked a shift in focus toward transforming entire societies by extending beyond Marxism's emphasis on changing economic relations. To overcome the limitations of bureaucracy, Castoriadis argued for freeing the revolutionary project from the control of any ruling class, making it a collective endeavor sustained by all members of society (Nicolas Poirier, 2003). This vision led him to explore new theoretical alternatives aimed at liberating individuals and societies from the constraints of bureaucratic institutions and fostering human autonomy.

Castoriadis also criticized the historical Marxist philosophy, rejecting its causal determinism that stripped individuals of their agency, reducing them to passive, submissive beings in the face of time. If history is moving toward a predetermined end, as Marx says, the role of individuals and groups becomes limited to awaiting their inevitable fate (Cornelius Castoriadis, 1975). Castoriadis argued that Marx had merely extended the dominant imaginary schemes of the 19th century to all of history (Nicolas Poirier, 2003). Thus, he concluded that Marxist theory is simply another facet of capitalist rationality, which reduces the objective of history to technological progress and dominating nature (Mathieu Noury, 2011).

To overcome the passivity of humans in the face of the determinism, Castoriadis proposed a conceptual model that acquires independence for both individuals and societies. And here comes the role of imaginary as a pillar concept of this model. The concept of the imaginary, according to Castoriadis, was supposed to allow for an understanding of history that would no longer be operated according to the reductive schemes of causal determinism but based on the very principle of non-causality. It would actually be impossible to explain the history of societies based on a necessary cause-and-effect relationship, precisely because of the intrinsic nature of history itself, conceived as self-creation (Nicolas Poirier, 2003). According to Castoriadis, it is precisely at this level that the non-causal emerges. He states:

"It appears as behavior not only unpredictable but also creative (of individuals, groups, classes, or entire societies); not merely as a deviation from an existing type, but as the establishment of a new type of behavior, 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 production that cannot be deduced from the present situation, a conclusion that surpasses the premises or the positioning of new premises"(Cornelius Castoriadis, 1975).

Accordingly, the imaginary is a mechanism for asserting the independence of individuals and societies, expressing their desire to change their course in a free-willed way against passivity and fatalism. There is no longer any horizon to anticipate, no communist utopia or rational domination of nature, only a history that continually emerges as the self-creation. How can the imaginary achieve this? Through its ability to continuously see new possibilities within reality and transform it in unexpected ways. Imaginary is therefore the key to liberating the individual and society from fatalism and causality, as each new moment is not necessarily an inevitable consequence of the one preceding it. So, the imaginary has the power to reshape it, creating new possibilities and meanings.

Castoriadis distinguishes between three concepts in his theory: the radical imaginary, the radical imagination, and the collective imaginary. In his book The Imaginary Institution of Society, he explains the scope and meaning of each of these concepts. Castoriadis states:

"The radical imaginary is similar to socio-historical and psyche/soma. As social-historical, it is an open river of the anonymous collective; as psyche/soma, it is a flow of representative/affective/intentioned. What, in the socio-historical context, is positioning, creation, making being (faire être), we call it social imaginary in the primary sense of the term, or instituting society. What, in the psyche/soma, is position, creation, making being (faire être) for the psyche/soma, we call it radical imagination" (Cornélius Castoriadis, 1975).

As Castoriadis outlined above, the radical imaginary is the foundational source of all socio-historical productions within societies as well as of individual psychical productions, such as representations, emotions, and desires. Castoriadis suggests distinguishing within the radical imaginary between two levels: the first is the "radical imagination," which pertains to individual-psychic productions. The second is the "collective imaginary," which is related to the social dimension and forms a shared framework within society.

Thus, Castoriadis begins with the idea that both the individual and society are products of the radical imaginary, making it impossible to fully understand their existence or development independently of this imaginary, which plays a profound role in shaping them. Castoriadis underscores this notion in one of his scientific dialogues, emphasizing that the radical imaginary is not merely an additional factor in interpreting social and individual phenomena but is the fundamental basis from which all human activities originate. He states:

"Now, institutions are the work of human creativity, the work of the radical imaginary that founds every society. If the Hebrews lived to worship God and we live to increase the gross national product, it's not because of nature, the economy, sexuality, or other. Those are primary imaginary positions, fundamental ones that make life meaningful" **(Cornélius Castoriadis,2010).**

Chronologically, radical imaginary is the first source from which arises the meaning of the social world. From this perspective, social institutions, in their anthropo-sociological sense, originate from the radical imaginary. Without this radical imaginary, humans would remain as biological beings. Thus, the radical imaginary is a unique feature of humankind, distinguishing it from animals. In other words, it is the human quality that transforms humans from mere biological beings into fully social beings (Mathieu Noury,2011).

The radical imagination is the psychic mechanism that produces representations. These early representations, formed during infancy, are defined by their sexual nature, which revolves around pleasure and fantasy. At this point, the radical imagination is asocial and irrational, which means it is disorganized and unable to distinguish between desire and reality. Castoriadis compares it to a "psychic monad," as it separates human beings from reality.

Because the radical imagination cannot produce external social representations, socialization intervenes to transform the person into a socio-historical being; however, Castoriadis refers to this specific type of socialization as sublimation. This sublimation process focuses on the individual's psychical level, directing primary sexual desires and representations from the radical imagination to external social levels (work, reproduction, recognition, self-affirmation, etc.). Thus, Castoriadis describes it as a psychosocial development, similar to socialization (Cornelius Castoriadis, 1975).

Castoriadis defines the social imaginary as society's ability to autonomously generate its own meanings and values. He believes that this ability enables societies to form their identities, define their goals, and establish their fundamental beliefs, allowing individuals to unite around shared values and meanings. Castoriadis refers to this type of imaginary as the instituting imaginary (imaginaire instituant) because it

establishes societies, providing them with the essential meanings required to maintain themselves as unified entities. The social imaginary is more than just a reflection of reality or a source of material needs; it is a creative force, producing symbols and meanings. These symbols and meanings address fundamental questions that each society or group faces, such as "Who are we?" "What are our values?" and "What do we want to achieve?" (Cornelius Castoriadis, 1975). Figure 4 summarizes the constitutions of the imaginary as interpreted by Castoriadis:

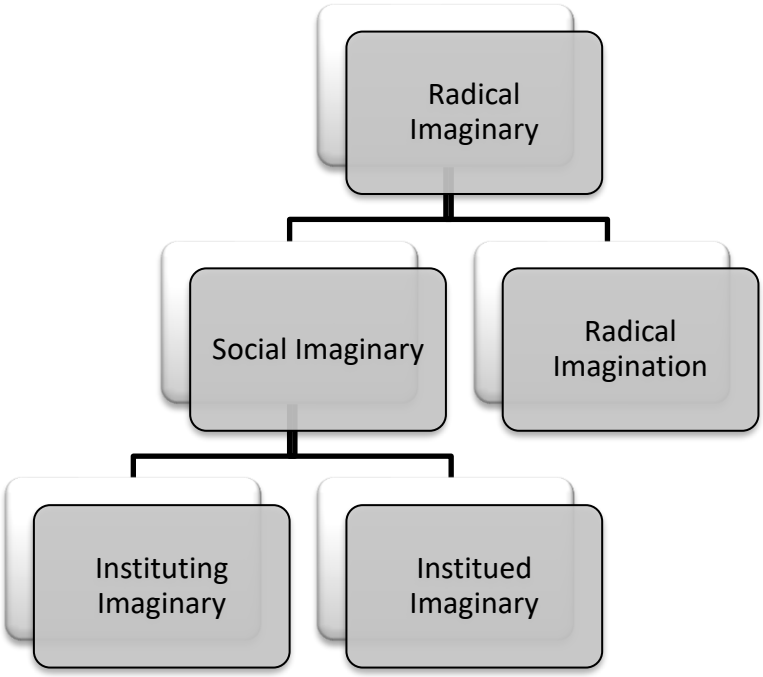

Figure 4 The Constitutions of the Imaginary According to Castoriadis (1975)

Once these meanings are created by the social imaginary, they are embodied and solidified within social institutions, which are known as the instituted imaginary (imaginaire institué). These institutions bring ideas and values to life, manifesting them in reality through systems, laws, traditions, and symbols that uphold society and affirm its identity. In summary, from Castoriadis's viewpoint, the social imaginary is what allows society to give meaning to its existence, form its unity, and distinguish itself from other societies (Cornelius Castoriadis, 1975). This is way imaginary serves as driving force of history (François Dosse, 2017).

Discussion:

The exploration of theories of "Anthropological Structures of the Imaginary" by Gilbert Durand and "The Imaginary Institution of Society" by Cornelius Castoriadis reveals the specific contributions of each scholar. Durand's work emphasizes the symbolic dimensions of the imaginary, presenting it as an organized structure with universal and cultural manifestations deeply rooted in human activities and mythical representations. Castoriadis, on the other hand, adopts an ontological perspective, defining the social imaginary as a dynamic and generative force that creates persons, institutions, societies, and drives history.

Castoriadis draws on Aristotle’s philosophical ideas about phantasma to demonstrate the creative potential of the imaginary, while Durand adopts an anthropological approach, analyzing and comparing

myths across cultures. Durand treats the imaginary as an anthropological subject, aiming to identify its elements and structures, whereas Castoriadis uses the Aristotelian concept of phantasma to develop his philosophical theory of human autonomy in opposition to Marxist determinism and objective rationality. In contrast, Durand employs an anthropological methodology, focusing on how imaginary explains human activities through myths and symbols. By analyzing these symbolic systems, Durand reveals how the imaginary mediates between universal archetypes and cultural expressions.

Gilbert Durand and Cornelius Castoriadis use the concept of the imaginary for different purposes. Durand investigates the imaginary as an end in itself, attempting to uncover its underlying principles. In contrast, Castoriadis employs the concept to develop a philosophical and ontological framework aimed at restoring human autonomy. Unlike Durand, Castoriadis does not study the imaginary for its own sake; rather, he uses it to advocate for individual and societal independence in the face of determinism.

Despite their fundamental differences, both Castoriadis and Durand agree that the imaginary is a guiding force influencing thought and human activities. Both theories view the imaginary as a force that forms the frameworks within which individuals and societies operate, providing them with a unique identity. While Durand emphasizes the structural and symbolic dimensions of the imaginary, deeply rooted in myths and archetypes, Castoriadis highlights its transformative power in creating and reshaping individuals and social institutions. Together, they reject previous philosophical perspectives that diminish the status of imagination.

Durand and Castoriadis share a similar methodological perspective, converging in their rejection of the positivist paradigm. This means that imaginary phenomena should be studied exclusively through the interpretive paradigm. Castoriadis's critique of positivism indicates his rejection of causality as a valid methodological approach. Similarly, Durand highlights the limitations of statistical and causal methods in understanding the imaginary. Furthermore, Durand's successors dismiss deductive approaches in studying imaginary phenomena, reflecting a broader consensus among social scientists to approach the study of the imaginary phenomena using inductive methods.

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