Reiner Schürmann and Cornelius Castoriadis
Between Ontology and Praxis

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ABSTRACT

Every metaphysic, according to Reiner Schürmann, involves the positing of a first principle for thinking and doing whereby the world becomes intelligible and masterable. What happens when such rules or norms no longer have the power they previously had? According to Cornelius Castoriadis, the world makes sense through institutions of imaginary significations. What happens when we discover that these significations and institutions truly are imaginary, without ground? Both thinkers begin their ontologies by acknowledging a radical finitude that threatens to destroy meaning or order. For Schürmann it is the ontological anarchy revealed between epochs when principles governing modes of thinking and doing are foundering but new principles to take their place have not yet emerged. For Castoriadis it is chaos that names the indeterminationdetermination that governs the unfolding of the socio-historical with contingency and unpredictability. And yet for both thinkers their respective ontologies have political or ethical implications. On the basis of the anarchy of being, Schürmann unfolds an anarchic praxis or *ethos* of "living without why." And on the basis of his notion of being as chaos, Castoriadis develops his political *praxis* of autonomy. The challenge for both is this move from ontology to practical philosophy, how to bridge theory and practice. The key for both seems to be a certain ontologically derived sense of freedom. In this paper, I analyze and compare their respective thoughts, and pursue the question of how anarchy or chaos and the implied sense of an ontological freedom might be made viable and sensible for human praxis, how radical finitude in the face of ontological groundlessness might nevertheless serve to situate a viable political praxis.

KEYWORDS

Schürmann, Castoriadis, ontology, praxis, ontological anarchy, chaos, autonomy, letting, the open, world

Every metaphysic, according to Reiner Schürmann, involves the positing of a First—a principle or principles for thinking and doing—whereby the world becomes intelligible and masterable. Hence the question: What happens when such rules or norms for thinking and doing no longer have the power they had over our convictions, when they wither away and relax their hold? According to Cornelius Castoriadis, the world makes sense through institutions of imaginary significations. So what happens when we discover that these significations and institutions truly are imaginary, without any transcendent ground to legitimate them?

One knowledge from which we can never escape, "even if the natural metaphysician in each of us closes his eyes to it," as Reiner Schürmann puts it, is the knowledge of our natality and mortality, that we are born and we die (Schürmann, 2003: 345). Pulled between these two ultimates, we seemingly have no choice but to live our lives by realizing—discovering?, constructing?, inventing?, imposing?—some sort of meaning or value in our existence. Yet even as we try to construct meaningful lives, death as "a marginal situation" is always there looming beyond the horizon, threatening with *anomy* the meaningful reality we construct.[1] As a collective we set up institutions to deal with such marginals that occasionally invade with a-meaning our otherwise meaningful lives. Inserted and torn between the double bind of natality and mortality, we live our lives filled with contingencies, beginning with the ultimate contingency of birth and ending with that of death. Schürmann described such events of contingency as singulars in that they defy

[1] For death as *anomy* radically puts into question our taken-for-granted, "business-as-usual," attitude in regard to everyday existence. See Peter L. Berger, *The Sacred Canopy* (New York: Random House, 1990), 23, 43–44. Peter Berger opposes *anomy* to *nomos* throughout this book.

subsumption to some meaning-giving universal representation. One of the central points of his ontology is that being is a multiplicity and flux of singulars that defy the metaphysical attempt to unify and fix them steady. That is to say that singulars unfold their singularity both diachronically and synchronically, through their mutability and their manifold. If principles are what steadies and unifies that flux of multiplicity, preceding the emergence or positing of the principle or *arché* (ἀρχή), being is an-archic. Schürmann called this "ontological anarchy" (Schürmann, 1978a: 220; 1990: 10; 2010: 252). And to see being as such would be "tragic sobriety" (Schürmann, 1989: 15ff). Roughly a contemporary of Schürmann, Cornelius Castoriadis noticed in the ancient Greeks a similar recognition of the blind necessity of birth and death, genesis and corruption, revealed in tragedy. The ancient Greeks, such as Hesiod in his *Theogony*, ontologically conceived of this unfathomable necessity in terms of *chaos* (χάος). According to Castoriadis chaos is indeed what reigns supreme at the root of this apparently orderly world (Castoriads, 1991: 103; 1997b: 273) and from out of which man creates—imagines—a meaningful and orderly world.

Both Schürmann and Castoriadis thus begin their ontologies by acknowledging a radical finitude that threatens to destroy meaning or order. And to make their case they look to history: Ontological anarchy for Schürmann becomes most apparent between *epochs* when principles that governed human modes of thinking and doing for a certain period are foundering, no longer tenable, but new principles to take their place have not yet emerged. For Castoriadis chaos is a name for the coupling of indetermination-determination that governs the unfolding of what he calls "the socio-historical" with irreducible contingency and unpredictability.

What are we to make of this—anarchy and chaos? Their ontologies have political implications. Both thinkers are interested in deriving some sort of an *ethos* or *praxis* from out of their respective ontologies. On the basis of the anarchy of being, Schürmann unfolds an *ethos* of "living without why" (Schürmann, 1978a: 201; 1978b: 362; 1990: 287; 2001: 187) that he calls anarchic praxis. Castoriadis, on the other hand, uses the term *praxis* to designate his explicitly political project of autonomy, which he bases upon his understanding of being as chaos. The challenge for both thinkers is precisely how to make that move from ontology to practical philosophy, from thinking about being to a prescription for acting. One common though implicit link that bridges theory and practice, ontology and politics, for both, I think, is some sense of freedom with its ontological significance. How can ontological freedom, with the recognition of no stable ground—anarchy or chaos—be made viable and sensible for human praxis? This is the question I want to pursue in this paper. I intend, ultimately, to develop an understanding of that freedom in a spatial direction, as *opening*, that perhaps may hold relevance for us in today's shrinking globe that paradoxically expands the world. I will begin with explications of Schürmann's and Castoriadis' respective ontologies and then their respective thoughts on praxis. Through a comparative analysis I seek to arrive at some understanding of how radical finitude in the face of ontological groundlessness might nevertheless serve to situate a viable political praxis.

Ontological Anarchy: The Principle of No Principle

Reiner Schürmann's ontological starting point is the singular, which he distinguishes from the particular. Particulars are determined by concepts, that is, they are conceived through subsumption to universals. Singulars on the other hand are ireducible and cannot be thought in terms of concepts or universals. But metaphysics, arising from a natural drive towards generalization and

the "need for an archaeo-teleocratic origin" (Schürmann, 1990: 204), the "want of a hold" (Schürmann, 1990: 252), attempts to conceal that which inevitably thrusts itself upon us in our finite encounters with finite beings, in our finite comprehension within a finite situation—the occurrence of singularity. The singular resists the "phantasm" that would subordinate that encounter to the rule of some overarching and hegemonic phenomenon—e.g., the One, God, Nature, Cogito, Reason, etc. According to Schürmann, if "'to think being' means to reflect disparate singulars" (Schürmann, 1989: 3), the path of traditional metaphysics that would subsume the many qua particulars under broader categories is not open. We can only mirror being in its plurality and difference. And yet we cannot so simply disintoxicate ourselves from that metaphysical temptation in utmost sobriety to think nothing but the singular (Schürmann, 1989: 15). We are caught in a conflict—Schürmann calls this a *différend*, borrowing the term from Lyotard—that can reach no settlement (Schürmann, 1989: 2–3). And this, according to Schürmann, is the "tragic condition" of humanity: to be driven to posit a grand narrative and yet to inevitably hear the demand of finitude.[2]

Taking this finitude as his phenomenological starting point, Schürmann understands being at its most originary root to be irreducibly finite, multiple, and in flux, escaping the rule of any principle or *arché*. Instead being—or the origin symbolized by *being*—is anarchic (Schürmann, 1978a: 212). It is the very multifarious emergence of phenomena around us—whereby finite constellations of truth assemble and disassemble themselves. Uprooting rational certainty diachronically and synchronically, perpetually slipping from a oneness that would claim universality or eternity, being emerges ever anew, always *other*. Being in its "radical multiplicity" (Schürmann, 1990: 148) is without destiny or reason. It plays itself out in "ever new topological multiplicities" (Schürmann, 1978a: 212). For Schürmann this means that the *archai* or principles that claim universality and eternity are not truly universal or permanent. Instead they come and go, exercising their rule within specific regions and specific epochs; they are epochally and regionally specific. Once the *arché* that has dominated a specific region for an epoch—providing the meaning, reason, and purpose for being—is no longer believable, being is laid bare in its *an-arché* as the "ceaseless arrangements and rearrangements in phenomenal interconnectedness" (Schürmann, 1990: 270). Anarchy—*an-arché*—as such is the indeterminate root of being that simultaneously establishes and destabilizes any determination of being.

Schürmann traces that ontological anarchy through a series of readings of a variety of authors[3] but he is most known for his reading of Martin Heidegger. For Schürmann, Heidegger proves exemplary in his "phenomenological destruction" (Schürmann, 1978a: 201; 1979: 122; 2010: 245) of the history of ontology that looks upon its past—the history of philosophy as the history of being—without reference to an ultimate standard for judgment and legitimation that would transcend that history. In Schürmann's view, the Heideggerian program of collapsing metaphysical posits comes at the end of an era when such posits have been exhausted, to make clear that being in its origin neither founds, nor explains, nor justifies. It simply grants beings without "why." On this basis the ontological difference thought metaphysically in terms of the relationship between beings (*Seiende*) and their beingness (*Seiendheit*)—the latter being their mode of presence universalized as principle—shifts with its phenomenological destruction to designate

[2] Joeri Schrijvers, "Anarchistic Tendencies in Continental Philosophy: Reiner Schürmann and the Hubris of Philosophy," *Research in Phenomenology* 37.3 (2007), 417–439, 420–421.

[3] This includes Parmenides, Plotinus, Cicero, Augustine, Meister Eckhart, Immanuel Kant, Martin Luther, Friedrich Nietzsche, Martin Heidegger, and Michel Foucault.

the relationship between beingness and be*ing* (*Sein*)—the latter now understood as the granting or releasing, the very *giving* to presence, or *presencing*, of beings and their beingness. Schürmann understands this move to be a temporalization of the difference between what is present (*das Anwesende*) with its mode of presence (*Anwesenheit*) on the one hand and its presencing (*Anwesen* as a verb) on the other, in other words, the historical process or perdurance (*Austrag*) of unconcealing-concealing (*entbergend-bergende*)[4] (Schürmann, 1978a: 196–97), whereby the way things are present, their mode of presence (i.e., beingness), varies from epoch to epoch. The rise, sway, and decline of such a mode is its origin as *arché* and its foundation is its origin as *principium* (Schürmann, 2010: 246). Principles (as *arché* and as *principium*) thus have their uprise, reigning period, and ruin (Schürmann, 2010: 247). Schürmann (Schürmann, 2010: 254n9) refers to Heidegger's definition of *arché* as "…that from which something takes its origin and beginning; [and] what, *as* this origin and beginning, likewise keeps rein *over*, i.e., preserves and therefore dominates, the other thing that emerges from it. *Arché* means at one and the same time beginning and domination."[5] The principle as such opens up a field of intelligibility for the epoch or the region, putting it in order, providing cohesion, regulating its establishment, instituting its public sense, setting the standard for the possible, establishing a milieu for our dwelling (Schürmann, 2010: 247). The prime example in modernity for Schürmann is the principle of sufficient reason, that "nothing is without reason," or "nothing is without why" (Schürmann, 1978a: 204; 2010: 247).[6] But at the end of an epoch, such principles become questionable and indeed questioned. Schürmann thus paradoxically calls the "principle" of the Heideggerian enterprise, the "anarchy principle," a principle without principles (Schürmann 1990: 6).

If Heidegger understands *being* in terms of on-going unconcealment (*a-lētheia*; ἀλήθεια) to human thinking, *beingness*, according to Schürmann, names the order that articulates a particular aletheiological (or: aletheic) constellation for thought. It provides the epochal principle (*arché*, *principum*) for the way being appears—an "economy of presence" that reigns for a period of history. Seen from within the domain where they exercise their hegemony, principles appear to be eternal and universal when in fact they are contingent upon the event of their presencing (*Anwesen*). Beingness (the mode of presence) as such must tacitly refer to that event. But being as that event of presencing escapes reduction to—refuses explication in terms of—those principles that rule the epochal mode of presence. In that sense it cannot refer to any ultimate reason beyond itself. The shifting motility of presencing-absencing, from which grounds, reasons, and principles spring-forth, is "only play" and "without why" (Schürmann, 1990: 179). Being in its true origin—simple presencing—is unpredictable, incalculable, singular, unprincipled, anarchic.[7] Once we thus shift our attention to *origin* in this sense of what Heidegger called *Ursprung* rather than as *arché* or principle, we find that the principles and *archai* that previously appeared to found being are confined to specific fields, epochs, as they rise and fall without warning (Schürmann, 2010: 247, 248). In the interim between epochs when constellations of presence are being

[4] Martin Heidegger, *Identity and Difference*, bilingual edition, trans. Joan Stambaugh (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 1969), 65, 133.

[5] Martin Heidegger, *Wegmarken* (*Gesamtausgabe* Band 9) (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 2004), 247; *Pathmarks*, ed. William McNeill (New York: Cambridge University Press, 1998), 189.

[6] Martin Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund* (Frankfurt: Vittorio Klostermann, 1997), 73; *The Principle of Reason*, trans. Reginald Lilly (Bloomington: Indiana University Press, 1991), 49.

[7] Making use of the Schürmannian motif of anarchy, Jean-Luc Nancy states that the *es gibt* of being in Heidegger is of the "each time" of an existing, singular occurrence that is an-archic. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Inoperative Community*, ed. Peter Connor (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1991), 105.

dismantled and reconfigured, we cannot help but shift our attention to that ungrounding origin, anarchy. In our present period then "at the threshold dividing one era from the next, ontological anarchism appears, the absence of an ultimate reason in the succession of the numerous principles which have run their course" (Schürmann, 2010: 249). Yet anarchy as such is also what has been operative *throughout* history, whereby finite constellations assemble and disassemble in ever-changing arrangements, establishing and destabilizing epochs. It is not only what appears at the end of modernity when we no longer find sufficient reasons for action. The process of presencing-absencing that brings entities into presence under the reign of specific principles, is itself without principle, anarchic.

Schürmann reminds us that traditional philosophies of action, or practical philosophy, have always been supported by a philosophy of being, an ontology (Schürmann, 1978a: 195). Traditional theories of action answer the question of "what should I do?" by reference to some allegedly ultimate norm. Metaphysics was the attempt to determine a referent for that question by discovering a principle—be it God, Reason, Nature, Progress, Order, Cogito, or anything else—to which "words, things, and deeds can be related" (Schürmann, 1990: 6), a principle that functions simultaneously as foundation, beginning, and commandment. The *arché* imparts to action meaning and *telos* (Schürmann, 1990: 5). If the realm of politics derives legitimacy of conduct from principles belonging to ontology, Heidegger's inquiry into being deprives practical philosophy of its metaphysical ground (Schürmann, 1979: 100). If metaphysics has indeed exhausted itself, the rule that would impart intelligibility and control upon the world loses its hold and practical philosophy can no longer be derived from a first philosophy and praxis can no longer be founded upon theory. The end of metaphysics and the crisis of foundations put the grounding of practice into question. We are deprived of any ground or reason for legitimating action. As the "severalness of being" uproots rational security, its "peregrine essence" uproots practical security. In other words, being in its manifold and mutability—or, in Castoriadis' terms, alterity and alteration—ungrounds. The question thus looms: when practical philosophy, including political thought, can no longer refer to a First as its norm or standard and instead faces an abyss in the lack of legitimating ground, what are we to do, how ought we act? But the suggestion is that precisely *this*—when anarchy is laid bare—is when one truly *is*. Schürmann quotes (Schürmann, 1978a: 204; 1978b, 362; 1990: 10) Heidegger's reference to Meister Eckhart via Angelus Silesius: "Man, in the most hidden ground of his being, truly is only when in his own way he is like the rose—without why."[8] The above question leads Schürmann to a novel vision of anarchic praxis.

Chaos: The Ontology of Magma

Cornelius Castoriadis' ontology of chaos in some ways runs parallel to Schürmann's ontology of anarchy in its recognition of a primal indeterminacy and fluidity. It recognizes an indeterminacy preceding determinate constellations that make being intelligible while concealing, at least for some time, their own historical contingency. History for Castoriadis is the creation of "total forms of human life," the self-creation of society in its selfalteration (Castoriadis, 1991: 84; 1997b: 269; 2007: 223). The creator is the instituting society, and in instituting itself it creates the human world (Castoriadis, 1991: 84; 1997b: 269). Every society involves history in this sense as its temporal alteration. But history as such can neither be explained nor predicted, whether on the basis

[8] Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, 57–58; *The Principle of Reason*, 38.

of mechanical causality or identifiable patterns, because—even as it determines—Castoriadis contends, it is not determined by natural or historical laws (Castoriadis, 1991: 84; 1997b: 269). The socio-historical as this complex of history and society in a perpetual flux of self-alteration (Castoriadis, 1998: 204) is thus irreducible, whether in terms of mechanical causality or in terms of function or purpose. Both society and history, according to Castoriadis, contain a non-causal element consisting of unpredictable as well as genuinely creative behavior that posits new modes of acting, institutes new social rules, or invents new objects or forms, the emergence of which cannot be deduced from previous situations (Castoriadis, 1998: 44).

On the basis of this notion of the socio-historical Castoriadis develops an ontology of human creation that refuses to reduce being to determinacy.[9] History instead resides in "the emergence of radical otherness, immanent creation, non-trivial novelty" (Castoriadis, 1998: 184). More broadly, Castoriadis explains time itself to be the emergence of *other* figures, given by *otherness*, and by the appearance of the *other* (Castoriadis, 1998: 193). Time as such is the "otherness-alteration of figures"—figures that are *other* in that they shatter determinacy and cannot themselves be determined (Castoriadis, 1998: 193). In *The Imaginary Institution of Society* he characterizes such time as the bursting, emerging, explosion or rupture of what is, "the surging forth of ontological genesis," of which the socio-historical provides a prime exemplar (Castoriadis, 1998: 201). Broadening his view of history, by the late 1990s, he more explicitly ontologizes the claim to state that *being itself* is *creation and destruction*, and that by creation he means discontinuity or the emergence of the radically new (Castoriadis, 2007: 190). Castoriadis thus attempts to construct an ontology that would acknowledge novelty as intrinsic to being itself. The social institution on the other hand, while born in, through, and as the rupture of time—a manifestation of the selfalteration of instituting society—exists only by positing itself as *outside* time, in self-denial of its temporality, concealing its sociohistoricity, including its creative self-institution (Castoriadis, 1998: 214).

Being, regardless of what the social institution may claim, nevertheless harbors within itself an indeterminacy that permits for its own creation and destruction. It is "neither a determinable ensemble nor a set of well-defined elements."[10] Castoriadis metaphorically designates this aspect of the socio-historical that is not—and can never be exhaustively covered by—a well-ordered hierarchy of sets or what he calls "ensidic" or "ensemblist" organization, *magma* (Castoriadis, 1997b: 379; 1998: 182, 343; 2007: 186–87). *Magma* characterizes the flux that becomes meaning or signification, the organization of which belongs to "non-ensemblist diversity" as exemplified by the socio-historical, the imaginary, or the unconscious (Castoriadis, 1997b: 211–212; 1998: 182). We are told that some flows of magma are denser than others, some serve as nodal points, and that there are clearer or darker areas and condensations into "bits of rock" (Castoriadis, 1998: 243–244). From out of its flow an indefinite number of what he calls "set-theoretic (ensemblist)" structures or organizations can be extracted (Castoriadis, 2007: 251–252). But the shape it takes is never complete or permanent, and the magma continues to move, to "liquefy the solid and solidify the liquid," constantly reconfiguring itself into new ontological forms (Castoriadis, 1998:

[9] See Suzi Adams, *Castoriadis's Ontology: Being and Creation* (New York: Fordham University Press, 2011), 5.
[10] Adams, *Castoriadis's Ontology*, 39.

244).[11] Rather than being a well-defined unity of plurality, the social is then a *magma of magmas* (Castoriadis, 1997b 211; 1998: 182).[12]

Despite his characterization of magma as neither a set of definite and distinct elements nor pure and simple chaos (Castoriadis, 1998: 321), Castoriadis will go on to use the characterization of *chaos*, especially in his later works, to underscore the indeterminacy of our creative nature. He defines this chaos as the irreducible inexhaustibility of being. *Chaos* designates being in its bottomless depth, the abyss behind everything that exists (Castoriadis, 2007: 240). As such, "being is chaos" (Castoriadis, 1991: 117; 1997b: 284). And the entire cosmos is a part of that chaos and begot out of it while continuing to be rooted in its abysmal depths. At the roots of the world, beyond the familiar, chaos always reigns supreme with its blind necessity of genesis and corruption, birth and death (Castoriadis, 1991: 103; 1997b: 273).

In elucidating his notion of chaos Castoriadis refers to its ancient Greek meaning as a sort of fecund void or nothingness— *nihil*—from out of which the world emerges *ex nihilo* minus the theological connotations. He refers to Hesiod's use of the term in the *Theogony* that takes *chaos* as the primal chasm from out of which emerge earth and heaven as well as other divinities.[13] But Castoriadis contends that *chaos* in addition to being the empty chasm also had the sense of disorder from which order, *cosmos*, emerges (Castoriadis, 1991: 103; 1997b: 273). For him this signifies an a priori ontological indeterminacy (Castoriadis, 2007: 240) that would account for novelty. *Nihilo* or *chaos*, one may then say, is an indeterminable complex that exceeds rational comprehension. Being at bottom is chaos in that sense as the absence of order *for man*, or an order that in itself is "meaningless" (Castoriadis, 1991: 117; 1997b: 284). It's a-meaning, the social world's *other*, is always there presenting a risk, threatening to lacerate the web of significations that society erects against it (Castoriadis, 1991: 152). In the same sense that an-archy for Schürmann accounts for the singularity of events in history, chaos for Castoriadis thus accounts for the unpredictability and novelty of events in history.

Castoriadis emphasizes however that indetermination here is not simple privation of determination, but as creation involves the emergence of *new and other* determinations. The indetermination here means that there can be no absolute determination that is once and for all for the totality of what is so as to preclude, exclude, or render impossible the emergence of the new and the *other* (Castoriadis, 1997b: 308, 369). Chaos as a *vis formandi* causes the upsurge of forms. In this creativity, being is thus *autopoiesis*, self-creating.[14] And that self-creating "poietic" (creative) element within man drives him/her to superimpose social imaginary significations upon chaos to give shape to the world. Through poietic organization humanity thus gives form to chaos—the chaos that both surrounds (as nature) and is within (as psyche). And chaos qua *vis formandi* is

[11] Also see Adams, *Castoriadis's Ontology*, 222.

[12] According to Suzi Adams, Castoriadis initially used the term *magma* to characterize the mode of being of the psyche as radical imagination—its representational flux—but in the course of writing *Imaginary Institution of Society* broadens its significance to characterize the being of the sociohistorical with its collective social imaginary. And by the final chapters of the book he broadens it further beyond the human realm and into being in general as involving the interplay of indetermination-determination (or: *chaos-cosmos*, *apeiron-peras*). He also extends its meaning specifically into nature to rethink the ontological significance of the creativity of nature itself—a rethinking which he will later in the 1980s extend further with his focus on the Greek notion of *physis* in terms of creative emergence. See Adams, *Castoriadis's Ontology*, 102, 103, 137, 147, 205.

[13] See Hesiod, *Theogony and Works and Days*, trans. M.L. West (New York: Oxford University Press, 2008), 6–7, and also see the translator's note, 64n116.

[14] See Adams, *Castoriadis's Ontology*, 149.

itself operative in this formation as the radical imagination in both the psyche of the individual and in the social collective as the instituting social imaginary (Castoriadis 1997b: 322). In other words, chaos forms itself and individual human beings as well as societies are fragments of that chaos, agencies of that *vis formandi* or ontological creativity (Castoriadis, 2007: 171). If radical creation in this sense of determining the indeterminate appertains to the human, it is because it is an aspect of being itself as a whole (Castoriadis, 1997b: 404). As we stated above Castoriadis' ontology of chaos was to account for novelty as intrinsic to being itself. But by this he means more specificially the inexhaustibility of being and its creativity, its *vis formandi* (Castoriadis, 2007: 240).

Each and every society creates within its own "closure of meaning"—its social imaginary significations—its own *world* (Castoriadis, 2007: 226). That world emerges from out of the chaos as a relative solidification of the magmatic flow. The world as we know it then is a world—to borrow a phenomenological term—"horizoned" by the constructions instituted by that particular society: "the particular complex of rules, laws, meanings, values, tools, motivations, etc.," an institution that is "the socially sanctioned … magma of social imaginary significations" (Castoriadis 1991: 85; 1997b: 269). The creative imagination, *Einbildung*, transforms the natural environment into an "order-bearing configuration of meaning"[15] —a *cosmos*—woven into the chaos (Castoriadis, 1998: 46). This formation—*Bildung*—is culture, and the form is meaning or signification, which together constitute a world, a *cosmos* (Castoriadis, 1997b: 342–43). But beyond that forming, there is no ultimate ground for the meaningfulness of the world. Prior to the construction of the socially meaningful world and always at its root, there is chaos.

Now if the creation of the world, the institution of the network of imaginary significations, as self-creation or creation *ex nihilo,* can claim no "extrasocial standard of society, a norm of norms, law of laws"—whether it be God, Nature, or Reason—that would ground or legitimate political truths, we arrive at the same *aporia* Schürmann noticed. According to Castoriadis, the recognition that no such ground exists opens up the questions of just law, justice, or the proper institution of society as genuinely interminable questions (Castoriadis, 1991: 114; 1997b: 282). The question looms if nature both outside and within us—*chaos*—is always something *other* and something more than the constructions of consciousness (Castoriadis, 1998: 56): To what extent can we intentionally or consciously realize our autonomy? How does the alterity and alteration of being (chaos, magma, indetermination) affect Castoriadis's project of autonomy? How do we realize our freedom with the knowledge that being is chaos?

Anarchic Praxis: Being Without Why

How are we to assess the political implications of these ontologies of anarchy and chaos? Both Schürmann and Castoriadis understood their own respective ontologies as having a practical, indeed political, significance. How does one derive a viable political praxis when standards for meaningful action, whether as institutions or as *archai*, are shown to be contingent upon the groundless flow of time?

The Heideggerian program Schürmann inherits excludes reference to any ultimate standard for judgment and legitimation. The on-going unconcealing-concealing of truth qua *aletheia* pro-

[15] See Adams, *Castoriadis's Ontology*, 219.

vides no stable, unquestionable, ground from which political conduct can borrow its credentials.[16] There is no ground or reason (*Grund*) to which we can refer action for legitimacy. Instead— Schürmann tells us—being as "groundless ground" calls upon existence, a subversive reversal or "overthrow … from the foundations" (Schürmann, 1978a: 201). The consequence Schürmann surmises is that human action, notably political practice, becomes thinkable *differently* in this absence of ground (Schürmann, 2010: 249).

The praxis ontological anarchy calls for however is distinct from classical forms of anarchist political philosophy. Schürmann contends classical political anarchism still remains caught within the field of metaphysics in deriving action from the referent of reason or rationality, which it substitutes for the principle of authority (Schürmann, 1990: 6). In choosing a new criterion of legitimacy anarchism maintains the traditional procedure of legitimation. With the Heideggerian destruction of metaphysics, however, any metaphysical grounding, even its rational production, becomes impossible. This breaking-down of the metaphysical schema, as Miguel Abensour puts it in his reading of Schürmann, liberates action from all submission to principles to give birth to an action devoid of any *arché*, anarchic action.[17] In this way Schürmann derives from ontological anarchy, or "the anarchy principle," a mode of action he calls *anarchic praxis*. Ontological anarchy calls for a recognition of the loosening of the grip of principles, metaphysical posits, to leave behind attachment to them, and instead to embark on a path of detachment that Schürmann, using Heideggerian-Eckhartian terminology, designnates "releasement." Releasement (*Gelassenheit*) is taken to be the Heideggerian candidate for anarchic praxis that responds to the withering away of metaphysical principles. It is an "acting other than 'being effective' and a thinking other than strategical rationality" to instead be attuned to the presencing of phenolmenal interdependence (of actions, words, things) (Schürmann, 1990: 84). Schürmann takes this to express what medieval mystic Meister Eckhart himself implied in his "life without why" (Schürmann 1990, 10). He quotes more than once (Schürmann, 1978a: 204; 1978b: 362; 1990: 10) Heidegger's appropriation in *Der Satz vom Grund* of Eckhart (*via* Angelus Silesius): "Man, in the most hidden ground of his being, truly is only when in his way he is like the rose—without why."[18] Tying this in with Heidegger's historical concerns, Schürmann asks: When is it that man can be like the rose? And he answers: It is when the "why" withers. He is referring to the withering of metaphysics at the end of modernity (Schürmann, 1990: 38).

This raises the issue of the relationship between theory and practice. Schürmann asks: What happens to their opposition once "thinking" means no longer "securing some rational foundation" for knowing and once "acting" no longer means "conforming one's enterprises … to the foundation so secured" (Schürmann, 1990: 1)? With the Heideggerian deconstruction of metaphysics, action itself loses its foundation (*arché*) and end (*telos*): "in its essence, action proves to be an-archic" (Schürmann, 1990: 4). This also means that thinking is no longer in contrast to action as mere theory. Instead a thinking that is *other* than mere theory proves receptive to the anarchy of presencing-absencing. Refraining from imposing conceptual schemes upon phenom-

[16] Schürmann (Schürmann, 2010: 245, 250–51, 253n2) thus cites Werner Marx's comment concerning "the extremely perilous character of Heidegger's concept of truth," a comment that suggests Heidegger's work may be harmful for public life by depriving political action of its ground. See Werner Marx, *Heidegger and the Tradition*, trans. Theodore Kisiel and Murray Greene (Evanston, IL: Northwestern University Press, 1971), 251.

[17] Miguel Abensour, "'Savage Democracy' and 'Principle of Anarchy,'" *Philosophy and Social Criticism* 28.6 (2002), 703–726, 715.

[18] Heidegger, *Der Satz vom Grund*, 57–58; *The Principle of Reason*, 38.

ena as they enter into "interdependence unattached to principles" (Schürmann, 1990: 85, 269), such non-representational thinking—what Schürmann here calls "essential thinking"—complies with that flux of presencing-absencing (Schürmann, 1990: 269, 289). More specifically this entails the attitude and itinerary of "without why," whereby we see things in their presencing without reference to whence or why, and whereby being itself appears as letting beings be "without why" (Schürmann, 1979: 114). In response to the purposeless flow of presencing—ontological releasement—man is called-forth to let be, to "live without why." Thinking as such does what being does, it is releasement, it lets beings be: "[T]o think being as letting-phenomena-be, one must oneself 'let all things be'" (Schürmann, 1990: 287). To think being is to follow the event (*Ereignis*) of being (Schürmann, 1990: 289). And to follow that play of why-less presencing, one must oneself "live without why" (Schürmann, 1990: 287). The mode of thinking here is made dependent on the mode of living (Schürmann, 1990: 237): to think anarchic presencing requires anarchic existence. Under the practical a priori of anarchic acting that *lets* rather than *wills*, thinking arrives at the event-like presencing that is be*ing*. For this we must relinquish the willful quest for a founding ultimate. This means be*ing* without fettering oneself to a fixed or static way of being.[19] And this may also imply, Schürmann surmises, "the deliberate negation of *archai* and principles in the public domain" (Schürmann, 2010: 252). The *theoria* and the *praxis* of anarchy are thus inextricably linked in Schürmann's thinking in the non-duality of "essential thinking" and "unattached acting" (Schürmann, 1990: 269) that simultaneously reveal and respond to the principle of anarchy.

There are three ways, according to Schürmann, in which ontological difference manifests. The turn to anarchic praxis is the consequence of the third. The first is the metaphysical difference between beings or present entities and their beingness or mode of presence universalized and eternalized as *arché*. The second is the phenomenological or temporal difference between beingness and be*ing*. Here be*ing* as a verb means the presencingabsencing of beingness. And that presencing-absencing proves to be anarchic. This revelation of ontological anarchy puts into question institutionalized authority. The third is what Schürmann in his early works of the late 1970s called the symbolic difference between what *being* might signify in its intellectual comprehension and what *being* means as existentially lived. It entails the active response to the practical summons to exist without why (Schürmann, 1978a: 207). The ontological anarchy that is revealed in the phenomenological difference becomes directly known in the symbolic difference through a particular mode of existing, anarchic praxis (Schürmann, 1978a: 220; 1979: 103). But since the destruction of metaphysics reveals being not as a self-same universal or a self-subsisting oneness but as multifarious—a many and in flux as an ever-new event—the praxis called for by being's symbolic difference would be "irreducibly polymorphous" (Schürmann, 1978a: 199). Existence without why, without *arché* or *telos*, is existence "appropriated by ever new constellations," the polymorphousness, of truth (Schürmann, 1978a: 200). Anarchic praxis as such is a "polymorphous doing" that co-responds to the field of "polymorphous presencing" (Schürmann, 1990: 279). Schürmann states that in Nietzschean terms "it gives birth to the Dionysian child" (Schürmann, 1978a: 206). In more concrete terms it means "the practical abolition of *arché* and *telos* in action, the transvaluation of responsibility and destiny, and the protest against a world reduced to

[19] In his reading of Michel Foucault from the mid-1980s, Schürmann accordingly develops his idea of a practical "anarchistic subject" who responds to that phenomenal flux that constitutes and destroys temporal networks of order, fluidly shifting into and out of their shifting fields (see CA 302).

functioning within the coordinates of causality" (Schürmann, 1978a: 216). Ultimately it means the anarchic essence of being, thinking, and doing altogether.[20] Symbolic difference, Schürmann contends, thus "allows for the elaboration of an alternative type of political thinking" in regard to a society that "refuses to restrict itself to the pragmatics of public administration as well as to the romantic escapes from it" (Schürmann, 1978a: 221).[21] And that accomplishment where thinking, acting, and being (presencing-absencing), loosened from the fetters of principles, work together in mutual appropriation (or: "enownment," *Ereignis*), Schürmann calls "anarchic economy" (Schürmann, 1990: 243, 273): On the basis of "actions—assimilating to that economy, *turning* into a groundless play without why," essential thinking "receives, hears, reads, gathers, unfolds … the anarchic economy" (Schürmann, 1990: 242–43).

Anarchic existence is also authentic existence. Schürmann reads an ateleology behind Heidegger's notion of authentic resoluteness (*eigentliche Entschlossenheit*) from *Sein und Zeit* (*Being and Time*) in the anticipation of one's own not-being—death as one's nonrelational ownmost possibility that throws one back upon one's ownmost potentiality-of-being[22]—and takes this also to be anarchic in that it escapes delimitation by both *arché* and *telos* (Schürmann, 1978a: 218). That is to say that authentic existence is without why, it exists in the face of death for its own sake, with no extrinsic reasons or goals. One wonders then, in light of our ensuing discussion of Castoriadis' project of autonomy, whether authentic existence qua anarchic existence is also *autonomous* existence, an existence that has discarded the need for heteronomous references. Understood from out of the "anarchic essence of potentiality," Schürmann suggests that the play of "ever new social constellations" becomes an end in itself. Its essence is boundless interplay without any direction imposed by an authority (Schürmann, 1978a: 219).[23] With the deprivation of ground or reason (*Grund*) the paradigm of action here becomes *play* (Schürmann, 1979: 102). For Schürmann this opens "an alternative way of thinking of life in society" (Schürmann, 1978a: 220). Instead of rule-by-one or a *telos*-oriented pragmatics then, we have practices, multiple and mutable: "The groundwork for an alternative to organizational political philosophy will have

[20] Schürmann unpacks the five practical consequences of the symbolic difference in greater detail in some key essays from the late 1970s, including "Political Thinking in Heidegger" and "The Ontological Difference and Political Philosophy" as well as "Questioning the Foundations of Practical Philosophy": 1) the abolition of the primacy of teleology in action; 2) the abolition of the primacy of responsibility in the legitimation of action; 3) action as protest against the administered world; 4) a certain disinterest in the future of mankind due to a shift in the understanding of destiny; and 5) anarchy as the essence of what can be remembered in thought ("origin") and of what can be done in action ("originary practice") (Schürmann, 1978a: 201; 1979: 122n29; and see in general 1978b).

[21] On the other hand, if we are to reserve the term "political philosophy" for theories of "collective functioning and organization," Schürmann agrees that we ought then to abandon this title for the practical consequences of thinking the symbolic difference (Schürmann, 1979: 122).]

[22] See Martin Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer Verlag, 1993), 250; *Being and Time*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: SUNY Press, 1996), 232).

[23] One is reminded here of an example for non-authoritarian association often used by political anarchists, the spontaneous collective play of the dinner party, without any need for externally imposed rules or calculations, where people get together and enjoy company "without why." See Stephen Pearl Andrews, *The Science of Society* (Weston, MA: M&S Press, 1970); Hakim Bey, *T.A.Z.: The Temporary Autonomous Zone, Ontological Anarchy, Poetic Terrorism* (New York: Autonomedia, 1991, 1985), 140–141. Also see the talk given by Banu Bargu, "The Politics of Commensality," delivered at a conference on The Anarchist Turn held at the New School for Social Research in 2011 and included in the online special virtual issue of *Anarchist Developments in Cultural Studies* (2011) at www.anarchist-developments.org 29/24. Here any *nomos* of a collective would be engendered spontaneously—autonomously—and not imposed from any extrinsic source. Taking anarchy as autonomy in this sense of such self-engendered spontaneity might also resonate with the Chinese sense of "nature," *zhiran* (□□), which has the literal sense of "self-so" or "self-engendering."

to be so multifarious as to allow for an ever new response to the calling advent by which being destabilizes familiar patterns of thinking and acting" (Schürmann, 1979: 115). The political consequence is "radical mutability in accordance with an understanding of being as irreducibly manifold" (Schürmann, 1978a: 221). Can we concretize this further in Castoriadian terms as an opening to alterity and alteration—what Schürmann calls manifold and mutability— that might approach Castoradis' project of autonomy?

Surprisingly Schürmann, at one point, invokes "direct democracy" as what the critique of metaphysics sustaining "contract theories … government contracts and the mechanisms of representative democracy" moves towards (Schürmann, 1984: 392). Yet undeniably one gets the impression from his overall project that his primary concern is an existential-ontological hermeneutic of anarchy as a way of life, "life without why," that is, a mode of existence broadly construed. This certainly has political and revolutionary implications as he suggests himself but he never elaborates on this or develops this into an explicitly political program.[24] Miguel Abensour, nevertheless, interestingly suggests a proximity between Schürmann's principle of anarchy and Claude Lefort's notion of "savage democracy" or the "savage essence" of democracy[25] that evokes the spontaneous emergence of democratic forms, independent of any principle or authority and refusing to submit to established order, whereby democracy "inaugurates a history in which people experience a fundamental indeterminacy as to the foundations of power, law, and knowledge, and … of … relations … at every level of social life"—an experience of the *loss of foundation* which is also an experience of the *opening of being*.[26] Abensour states that Schürmann's thesis of the "principle of anarchy" curiously connects to the question of democracy.[27] For the decline of the scheme of reference obliges us to formulate the question of politics otherwise than in terms of principles and their derivations. Lefort's "savage democracy" thus has something in common with anarchy in that it manifests an "action without why."[28]

Schürmann's point appears to be that the contingency and finitude revealed in tragic sobriety is at the same time liberating. It liberates us from dead gods and ineffective idols. The deconstruction of foundations and the refusal of the metaphysical project is the liberation from ideals or norms projected as heteronomous authorities. This clears the way for an origin that no longer dominates and commands action as *arché* but which, as manifold and mutability, *liberates action*.[29] Schürmann's contemporary, Jean-Luc Nancy, has taken such ontological anarchy to thus mean freedom: "The fact of freedom is this deliverance of existence from every law and from itself

[24] Could this be out of fear that such an elaboration might fall into the trap of a metaphysic that yet again posits norms and principles claiming universality?

[25] Both phrases express a paradox: "anarchy destroys the idea of principle, the savage overthrows the idea of essence" (Abensour, "'Savage Democracy' and 'Principle of Anarchy,'" 717). One might also bring into the mix Jean-Luc Nancy's designation of the an-archy and singularity of being that refuses subsumption to any essence, as its "inessence" that "delivers itself as its own essence." See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, trans. Bridget McDonald (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 1993), 16.

[26] Claude Lefort, *Democracy and Political Theory*, trans. David Macey (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1988), 19. And also see Abensour, "'Savage Democracy' and 'Principle of Anarchy,'" 707, 708, 710.

[27] Abensour, "'Savage Democracy' and 'Principle of Anarchy,'" 711.

[28] Abensour thus asks whether its "savage essence" makes democracy a special form of the political that is distinct from traditional political systems and, if so, what relationship it might have to the principle of anarchy. See Abensour, "'Savage Democracy' and 'Principle of Anarchy,'" 714. Needless to say, he has in mind Schürmann's thesis that the Heideggerian destruction of metaphysics opens an alternative way of thinking the political.

[29] See Abensour, "'Savage Democracy' and 'Principle of Anarchy,'" 715, 716.

as law."[30] According to Nancy, Schürmann, without really analyzing freedom, supposes or implies freedom throughout his book on Heidegger.[31] And another contemporary, Frank Schalow, reads Schürmann to mean that the deconstruction of epochal and normative principles, shifting our attention to the vacillation of truth between its arrival and withdrawal, opens up a new spacing for divergence.[32] By enduring the interplay of unconcealment-concealment, presencing-absencing, the zone of their strife becomes for us a creative nexus that can engender new meanings and reconfigure a political space for alternatives in thought and action. This permits a reciprocal mosaic of human forms of dwelling in the experience of freedom as "letting-be" (or releasement). The suggestion is that the ontology of freedom—anarchy—as letting-be provides an a-principial guidance for co-being within the larger expanse wherein we may cultivate our place of dwelling. Schalow thus wonders whether anarchic praxis might enable the rescue of the diversity of human origins from domination under the contemporary rule of technology.[33] In our attempt to conceive of the relevance of ontological anarchy in our globalized existence today we might thus focus on its aspect of *freeing* that opens a space for alterity and alteration, manifold and mutability.

Praxis: The Project of Autonomy

Castoriadis' ontology of creation is intimately linked with his project of autonomy. Castoriadis calls this activity which aims at autonomy *praxis* (Castoriadis, 1991: 76). And *politics* for Castoriadis is "the activity that aims at the transformation of society's institutions to make them conform to the autonomy of the collectivity … to permit the *explicit*, reflective, and deliberate self-institution and self-governance of this collectivity" (Castoriadis, 1991: 76). This political project, while there are differences, in certain aspects resonates with Schürmann's protest against the technologically administered world accompanied by calculative (*telos*-oriented) thinking. For a similar sort of target in Castoriadis's project is the "empty phantasm of mastery" that accompanies the accumulation of gadgetry that together mask our essential mortality, making us forget that we are "improbable beneficiaries of an improbable and very narrow range of material conditions making life possible on an exceptional planet we are in the process of destroying" (Castoriadis, 1997a: 149). For Castoriadis this phantasm is a manifestation of what he calls "ensemblistic-identitary logic-ontology," and his political project is to break its hold to make possible the realization of an autonomous society: the point is that we make our laws and hence we are also responsible for them (Castoriadis, 1997b: 312).[34] We can be genuinely autonomous only by facing our finitude and taking responsibility for our lives in the face of contingency.

[30] Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, 30, and also see 13. Jean-Luc Nancy has expressed sympathy towards Schürmann's philosophy of anarchy on many occasions.

[31] Nancy, *The Experience of Freedom*, 187n3.

[32] Frank Schalow, "Revisiting Anarchy: Toward a Critical Appropriation of Reiner Schürmann's Thought," *Philosophy Today* 41.4: 554–562, 555– 556. Schalow takes this more concretely to mean a letting-be that enables human beings "to cultivate their place on earth and respond to the welfare of others" (555). Such cultivation of a place for dwelling is certainly never made so explicit in Schürmann himself.

[33] Schalow, "Revisiting Anarchy," 560.

[34] The sense of responsibility we find here in Castoriadis is obviously distinct from the sense of responsibility Schürmann attacks in his explication of the symbolic difference. For Castoriadis, in refusing to posit a heteronomous *nomos* for our laws we take responsibility for our laws through the explicit recognition that "we" (society) creates them. The "responsibility" that Schürmann targets is really the claim of a grounding in a principle that would legitimate action, which in Castoriadian terms would be a projected *hetero-nomos*.

So how exactly does Castoriadis' political project of autonomy relate to his ontology of chaos? Just as his ontology was inspired by the ancient Greek notion of chaos, Castoriadis looks to the ancient Greek *polis* as an inspiration for his project of autonomy.[35] The Greek vision that the world is not fully ordered and that *cosmos* emerges from *chaos*—a vision of disorder at the bottom of the world, whereby chaos reigns supreme with its blind necessity of birth and death, genesis and corruption—allowed the Greeks, Castoriadis claims (Castoriadis, 1997b: 273–274), to create and practice both philosophy and politics. If the world were sheer chaos, there would be no possibility of thinking, but if the world were fully ordered, there would be no room for political thinking and action. Instead it was the belief in the interplay of chaos with cosmos that proved favorable for the emergence of democracy and autonomy in ancient Greece.

To explain autonomy, Castoriadis contrasts it with heteronomy. All societies make their own imaginaries (institutions, laws, traditions, beliefs, behaviors, *nomoi*). But in heteronomous societies, members attribute their imaginaries to some extrasocial authority (i.e., God, ancestors, historical necessity, etc.). In autonomous societies, by contrast, members are aware of this fact—the socio-historical creation of their imaginaries—to participate in the explicit self-institution of society. Autonomy as such is the capacity of human beings, individually or socially, to act deliberately and explicitly in order to modify their laws or form of life, *nomos* or *nomoi* (Castoriadis, 1997a: 340). *Auto* (αὐτο) means "oneself" and *nomos* (νόμος) means "law." *Auto-nomos* (αὐτόνομος) is thus to give oneself one's laws, "to make one's own laws, knowing that one is doing so" (Castoriadis, 1991: 164). Autonomy must be of both individuals and of society in that while an autonomous society can only be formed by autonomous individuals, autonomous individuals can exist only in and through an autonomous society (Castoriadis, 2007: 196). One cannot want it without wanting it for everyone (Castoriadis, 1998: 107). *Nomos*, law is necessary for society, and human beings cannot exist without it. For society, autonomy then entails acceptance that it creates its own institutions without reference to any extra-social basis or extrinsic norm for its social norms (Castoriadis, 2007: 94). An autonomous society sets up its own laws without resorting to an illusory nonsocial source or foundation or standard of legitimation. This means that it is also "capable of explicitly, lucidly challenging its own institutions" (Castoriadis, 2007: 49). The legitimation of its own existence will be through its own accomplishments evaluated by itself, through its own instituted imaginary significations (Castoriadis, 2007: 49).

Castoriadis asserts that it is the *ekklēsia* (ἐκκλησία), the democratic assembly ("people's assembly"), that "guarantees and promotes the largest possible sphere of autonomous activity on the part of individuals and of the groups these individuals form…" (Castoriadis, 1997b: 411). Social autonomy as such implies democracy, meaning that the people make the laws of society. The democratic movement, he states, is this "movement of explicit self-institution," i.e., autonomy (Castoriadis, 1997b: 275).[36] But the tragic dimension of democracy is that there is no extrasocial

[35] In light of our earlier reference to Jean-Luc Nancy as a contemporary philosopher who makes use of Schürmann's notion of anarchy, it may be interesting to note here that Nancy points to the Greek city as *autoteleological* in the sense that it refers to no signification external to its *own* institution. Its identity is nothing other than the space of its citizens' co-being with no extrinsic (extra-social) grounding for this collective identity. See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Sense of the World*, trans. Jeffrey S. Librett (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 1997), 104.

[36] As periodic and transient realizations of social autonomy, in addition to the ancient Greek *ekklēsia*, Castoriadis points to the town meetings during the American Revolution, *sections* during the French Revolution and the Paris Commune, and the workers' councils or *soviets* in their original form—all of which have been repeatedly stressed by Hannah Arendt herself (see Castoriadis, 1991: 107). We might mention that Schürmann mentions these as well in his discussion of Arendt. To the list Schürmann adds the attempted revival of the Paris Commune in May 1968, the

benchmark for laws. Democratic creation abolishes all transcendent sources of signification—there are no gods to turn to—at least in the public domain. Castoriadis thus contends that democracy entails we accept that we create meaning *without ground*, that we give form to chaos through our thoughts, actions, works, etc., and that this signification has *no guarantee* beyond itself (Castoriadis, 1997b: 343–344). Yet this "tragic dimension of democracy" is also "the dimension of radical freedom: democracy is the regime of *self-limitation*" (Castoriadis, 2007: 95). As in Schürmann, tragedy and freedom belong together. Revolutionary praxis begins by accepting being in its profound determinations— that is, indeterminate determinations—and as such, Castoriadis argues, it is "realistic" (Castoriaids, 1998: 113). Autonomy then is not a given but rather emerges as the creation of a project—of lucid self-institution in the face of contingency, chaos (Castoriadis, 1997b: 404). Such sobriety means humility and a weary eye that looks out for the totalitarian impulse.

To what extent then can we be deliberate, intentional, lucid, in instituting our own laws when the very source of our creativity, our *vis formandi*, as *chaos* is never completely rationalizable or determinable? If significations and their institutions are imaginary creations of the instituting imaginary whose creativity is a *vis formandi ex nihilo* or out of chaos, a creativity irreducible to reason or determinable causes, we cannot exhaustively comprehend that creative process. In what sense can we be autonomous then in our self-institution? To what degree is the *nihil* of the *ex nihilo* one's *own* (*auto*) and not an *other* (*hetero*), constitutive of one's autonomy and not heteronomy? Castoriadis is aware of this issue. He suggests, for example, that the unconscious can never exhaustively be conquered, eliminated or absorbed, by consciousness (Castoriadis, 1997b: 379; 2007: 196). We can neither eliminate nor isolate the unconscious. He tells us that we can be free only by "establishing a reflective, deliberative subjectivity" in relation to the unconscious, whereby one knows, *as far as possible*, what goes on in it (Castoriadis, 2007: 196). The world as well, "with its chaotic, forever unmasterable dimension" is also something that we will never master (Castoriadis, 2007: 149). What Castoriadis means by autonomy then cannot be a completely rational endeavor, for it remains inextricably intertwined with the imagination in its creativity that springs *ex nihilo*, from the unintelligible and unpredictable chaos within and without. The lucidity of a creativity that is autonomous would have to be the sort that is not necessarily explicable in terms of rationality.[37] Castoriadis' reverses Freud's psychoanalytic maxim, "Where id was … ego shall come to be" (*Wo Es war, soll Ich werden*)[38] with: "Where the ego is, id must spring forth" (*Wo Ich bin, soll Es auftauchen*) (Castoriadis, 1998: 104). He explains that desires, drives, etc.—namely, the irrational elements that are not always intelligible or determinable—are also a part of one's self that need to be brought to expression. Autonomy does not mean clarification without remainder nor the total elimination of the unconscious (the discourse of the other). He tells us that it is the establishment of a different kind of relationship to alterity, *within and without*—an elaboration rather than its elimination (Castoriadis, 1997b: 180, 182; 1998: 104, 107). An autonomous discourse then would be one that "by making clear both the origin and the sense

German *Räte* (councils) at the end of the First World War, and the latter's momentary revival in Budapest of 1956—all as exemplifying the absence of governance, anarchy (see Schürmann, 1989: 4). Can we add to this list the Occupy Wall Street movement of 2011?

[37] Would artistic creation provide a model for this sort of creativity, where one acknowledges the power of that creative indeterminacy sounding from an abyss?

[38] This is at the end of the thirty-first lecture, "The Dissection of the Psychical Personality," in Sigmund Freud, *The Complete Introductory Lectures on Psychoanalysis*, trans. James Strachey (New York: W.W. Norton, 1966), 544.

of this discourse, has negated it or affirmed it in awareness of the state of affairs, by referring its sense to that which is constituted as the subject's own truth" (Castoriadis, 1998: 103).[39] Perhaps autonomy then requires a sense of authenticity, or coming to terms, in regard to the source of one's situation— opening rather than closing one's eyes to it. Only by accepting mortality and finitude—chaos, including the uncon-scious—can we start to live as autonomous beings and does an autonomous society become possible (Castoriadis, 1997b: 316).

Autonomy as such designates for Castoriadis a new *eidos*, a new form of life, which involves "unlimited self-questioning about the law and its foundations as well as the capacity, in light of this interrogation, *to make*, *to do*, and *to institute*" in an endless process (Castoriadis, 1991: 164). Its requirement is that we learn to accept the limit to rationality and intelligibility and the fact that there is no supra-collective guarantee of meaning other than that created in and through the social context and its history, or the socio-historical. Once it is recognized that there is no extrasocial standard or ground given once-and-for-all, not only the forms of social institution but their possible ground can be put into question *again and again*. And in this process of creating the good under "imperfectly known and uncertain conditions" (Castoriadis, 1997b: 400) self-institution is made more or less explicit, whereby we are responsible for our creations so that we cannot blame evil, for example, on Satan or on the original sin of the first man. As an ongoing open-ended project this means that "explicit and lucid self-institution could never be total and has no need to be" (Castoriadis, 1997b: 410). Autonomy is not the utopia of a completed, perfect, society. We cannot rid ourselves of the risks of collective *hubris*, folly, or suicide, nor the element of arbitrariness (Castoriadis, 1991: 106, 115; 1997b: 275, 282). The project of autonomy requires the recognition of contingency, ambivalence and uncertainty.

With this recognition, we are to look out for the hubristic drive. Can autonomy then be *willed* without hubristic selfdelusion? Castoriadis states that the "will is the conscious dimension of what we are as beings defined by radical imagination, that is, … as potentially creative beings" (Castoriadis, 2007: 117). The suggestion is that willing is positing, creating. Should autonomy then be *willed*? If the source of creativity is not completely rational, hence not masterable, how are we to avoid the will's degeneration into a totalitarian drive that would institute heteronomy? The prevention of totalizing hubris seems to call for humility vis-à-vis finitude. One wonders then whether the Schürmannian attitude of *letting* vis-à-vis freedom might be the more appropriate mode of existential comportment than *willing* freedom? Castoriadis tells us that autonomy is really an ontological *opening* that goes beyond the "informational, cognitive, and organizational closure characteristic of self-constituting, but *heteronomous*, beings." To go beyond this closure means altering the existing system and constituting a new world and a new self according to new laws, the creation of a new *eidos* (Castoriadis, 1997b: 310). If willing as positing tends to closure, one might add that such opening then requires a *letting*, a lettingbe of the manifold and mutability, opening a space for alterity and alteration.

[39] Nevertheless there is here a complex set of issues concerning self and other, consciousness and the unconscious, rational and irrational, the nature of their distinctions and relations, the nature of reason, the nature of the self, the degree to which reason is the self or not, the degree to which the irrational is the self or not, and what all of this means in terms of autonomy vs. heteronomy.

Willing or Letting: Autonomy and Releasement as Opening

Both Schürmann and Castoriadis set their respective ontological inquiries with a deconstructive critique of traditional metaphysical assumptions—assumptions of an absolute ground or foundation of meaning and norms. The toppling of grounds however, in both cases, is paradoxically freeing. It frees a space for a new mode of being. In both the manifesting of an ontological indeterminacy is intrinsic to their political projects that aim to undo obtrusive paradigms and structures and opens the possibility of overcoming their historically perpetrated organizational schemes. For Schürmann ontological anarchy is the source of man's tragic condition, and yet tragic sobriety vis-à-vis this condition signals *release* from epochal constraints in anarchic praxis. For Castoriadis, the recognition of chaos or the magmatic flow behind the instituted order of the world as the source of creativity makes possible an autonomous as opposed to a heteronomous mode of institution. Anarchy in Schürmann accounts for the singularity of events in history that escape epochally established intelligibility; and chaos in Castoriadis accounts for novelty in history that can neither be predetermined nor predicted. Both then recognize in history an indeterminacy—anarchy, chaos—that refuses reduction to, or subsumption under, grounds or reasons or causes that ultimately are human-made intelligibles contingent to that very process of history. Both thinkers thus call for an authenticity vis-à-vis groundlessness and finitude in human existence, including knowing and doing, due the fact that we are imbedded within the unfolding play of historicity, time. And to recognize and accept this fact in present times when epochal principles have exhausted themselves, for Schürmann, opens up the possibility of anarchic praxis as a life of releasement, "life without why." In Castoriadis' case, the lucid awareness of the contingency of heteronomous institutions that restrict our freedom, opens the possibility of the praxis of autonomy as a political project. Castoriadis' project of autonomy by comparison with Schürmann's anarchic praxis is explicitly and unabashedly political. But even Castoriadian praxis is predicated upon the recognition and acceptance of—or in Heideggerian terms authenticity in comportment towards—finitude vis-à-vis an ontological excess irreducible to human rationality or institutions.

In Schürmann's case, however, such authenticity that is freeing is predicated upon the existential comportment of *letting*. It is the relinquishing of voluntarism with its hubristic positing of norms that accompanies the displacement of metaphysics and an opening to being in its singularity, multiplicity, and mutability. Freedom in the sense of Schürmannian anarchy then is not the freedom of the will, but the freedom of, or in, releasement. The suggestion here is that the activity of the will posits and reifies and thus tends toward metaphysical paradigms. From Schürmann's perspective, "if positing is no longer the paradigmatic process of ontology, there are neither speculative positions … for thinking to hold nor any political positions that may ensue" (Schürmann, 1979: 113–114). In that case *to will* freedom may undo its own project.

Can we reinterpret Castoriadian autonomy as a creative act of its *own nomos for itself—autonomos*—in light of anarchic praxis, and in terms of releasement, in its refusal to posit—*will*—a heteronomous *nomos* or *arché* to legitimate its origin? The imagination, just as it escapes reduction to reason, cannot be reduced to volition. The *vis formandi* behind the imagination's formation of the world and its institution of meaning exceeds the rational and the volitional. If willing means constructing heteronomous grounds for legitimation, autonomy vis-à-vis that free creativity, one might argue, entails released action, an atelic or ateleological praxis that is the spontaneity of

play. I refer to the example popular among some anarchists of the dinner party[40] wherein norms spring spontaneously and immanently without reference to any transcendent and legitimating *nomoi* or *archai* or *teloi* or principles. Instead of willing the fun, it is *allowed* to happen. In enjoyment of its own being, the party as play simply *is* without why. And in opening the space for manifold and mutability, alterity and alteration, the play—one might say—is interplay. Furthermore the potential scope of that opening of/for interplay today is global.

Conclusion: Opening the World

The world continues to become complex as social imaginaries, or regions, each with its own "world," interact, collide, merge and intermix with one another. This is not irrelevant to our discussion of Schürmann and Castoriadis as the contemporary situation makes evident more than ever the contingency of—the chaos or anarchy behind—alleged absolutes previously taken to be universal and eternal. Under a globalized paradigm where consumption is the thin veneer of meaningfulness concealing its own emptiness, the world globalized becomes one giant mall. Tragic sobriety, on the other hand, that refuses to be enthused by its jingles and ever new line of techno-gadgets for consumption, in seeing its emptiness, might also see therein a freeing of space with liberating potential.

Both Schürmann, inheriting Heideggerian terminology, and Castoriadis himself repeatedly make use of the metaphor of opening or openness. Both the praxis of autonomy and anarchic praxis are *opening*. Taking their ontological premises, can we conceive of that opening of anarchy and chaos, explicitly *spatially*, as the opening of the world? Schürmann for the most part inherits Heidegger's focus on the event-character, *Ereignis*, of ontological anarchy. But that verbal nature of be*ing*, even in Heidegger, can also be found to be place-like, as in the spatial motifs of clearing, open, region, etc., all of which have the sense of a withdrawing that makes room.[41] Schürmann himself occasionally made use of spatial metaphors. For example, he makes the point that when anarchy strikes the foundation stone of action, "the principle of cohesion … is no longer anything more than a blank space deprived of legislative, normative, power" (Schürmann, 1990: 6–7). When freed from the constraint of principles and posits, beyond the horizon of our willing projections, phenomena appear under the mode of letting, as released within an *open expanse*, whereby they show themselves to be "emerging mutably into their … mutable 'world'" (Schürmann, 1990: 280). He describes this freeing as a *translocation* "from a place where entities stand constrained under an epochal principle to one where they are restored to radical contingency" (Schürmann, 1990: 280). May we understand that *blank space* that is the location of radical contingency as an opening for difference, plurality, co-being without the hegemony of a normative or normalizing oneness? Schürmann characterizes that open clearing or region as a "field of phenomenal interdependence" (Schürmann, 1990: 278).[42] The abyss is a gaping chasm that engulfs, enfolds, and unfolds interdependent fields of interdependence.

[40] See note 25.

[41] See my articles on this topic: "The Originary *Wherein*: Heidegger and Nishida on 'the Sacred' and 'the Religious,'" *Research in Phenomenology*, 40.3 (2010), 378–407; and "Spatiality in the Later Heidegger: Turning— Clearing— Letting," *Existentia: An International Journal of Philosophy*, XVI.5–6 (2006): 425–404.

[42] This association of interdependence or interconnection, place or field, being/nothingness, and mutability that we find throughout Schürmann's works also occurs in East Asian Mahāyāna Buddhism. There was a period in Schürmann's younger years, as a student studying in France, when he avidly practiced Zen meditation under Sōtō Zen

We already discussed Castoriadis' reference to Hesiod's *chaos* (*χάος*), but we ought to underscore here its spatial significance. For *chaos*, which in Hesiod means "chasm," derives from the verb *chainō* (*χαίνω*) for *opening*, with the root *cha-* (*χα-*) implying "yawning," "gaping," "opening," "hollow."[43] In Hesiod, the earth and the heavens emerge from out of the dark emptiness that is *chaos*, to in turn engender the *cosmos* of divine beings (Castoriadis, 2007: 239).[44] Although Castoriadis himself does not pursue the implied connection between primal spacing and primal undifferentiatedness even when he discusses *chōra*, we might pursue a reading of Castoriadian *chaos* from out of which the world of imaginary significations is articulated or defined in the spatial direction as that *wherein* the world is established. Everything happens in relation to everything else, near and far, in its contextual implacement. Things are predicated upon the space wherein they belong, their concrete place—the world that gives them significance. But those environing or contextualizing conditions continually recede the further we inquire after them, without ever revealing any absolute *reason* for the way things *are*. The clearing continually recedes into the darkness of in-definition, to reveal *chaos* as the chasm wherein *archai* and *nomoi* are established and toppled. The world in its naked immanence, with nothing beyond, no heteronomous model or extrinsic principle or end, we might say, is this origin as chaos from out of which being and meaning arises.

Similar to how the viability of metaphysical principles have become questionable with the revelation of their historical contingency, so also has globalization unveiled the spatial or regional contingency of socially instituted worlds. Despite the global expansion of techno-capitalism and the universalizing claims of the global mall, an alternative space is opened up in what Jean-Luc Nancy has called mondialization.[45] Along with the temporal difference between epochal constellations that Schürmann pointed to, we are in a position to attend to the spatial difference between "worlds" now placed in tense and dynamic proximity, juxtaposition, and overlap making explicit their co-relative contingency.[46]

Being in its origin in Schürmann's terms is anarchy that refuses legitimation or ground, and in Castoriadis's terms chaos behind the congealing of magmatic flow into institutions—in both, the indetermination accompanying determination. If that anarchy be conceived spatially as the *différend* revealed in global encounters of regions of normativity or social imaginaries, exceeding each imaginary as their empty clearing and toppling heteronomous or transcendent claims to legitimacy to reveal an abyss; *and* if that chaos is indeed the yawning or opening chasm of that

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Buddhist master Deshimaru Taisen. Schürmann discusses his Zen experience in Reiner Schürmann, "The Loss of the Origin in Soto Zen and Meister Eckhart," *The Thomist* 42.2 (1978): 281–312.

[43] See Max Jammer, *Concepts of Space* (Cambridge, MA: Harvard University Press, 1970), 9, and F.M. Cornford, *Principium Sapientiae* (New York: Harper & Row, 1965), 194n1. Also see Edward Casey, *Fate of Place* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1997), 345n13.

[44] And see Hesiod, 6–7, and also see the translator's note, 64n116. One might mention here that *chaos* is also etymologically related to *chōra* that appears in Plato's *Timaeus* and which has similar connotations of a primal space that is indeterminate. It is interesting as well to notice similar connections made in East Asian thought between formlessness and space—e.g., in the Chinese word *kong* and the Japanese *kū* (⊠) which literally means sky or space but in the Mahāyāna Buddhist context means emptiness or non-substantiality; and the word *wu* (Jp. *mu*) (⊠) which means chaos as well as nothingness. In Chan (Jp. Zen) thought *kong* (*kū*) and *wu* (*mu*) become used interchangeably.

[45] See Jean-Luc Nancy, *The Creation of the World or Globalization*, trans. François Raffoul and David Pettigrew (Albany: SUNY Press, 2007).

[46] In fact Schürmann himself does occasionally speak of "region" or "regional" alongside "epoch" or "epochal" (e.g., Schürmann, 2010: 247) as if to acknowledge that in addition to epochal diachrony there is the spatial *différend* between synchronic regions or what I am here calling socially instituted "worlds."

abyss as its etymology suggests, we then have an abysmal space opened on a global scale that is a space of difference— presupposed by epochs and regions and socially instituted worlds —a space we *already* share with others and are called to acknowledge. Therein multiplicities abound. Such a space of difference is one of co-being, by necessity. To open ourselves to this clearing upon the earth is an opening to co-difference— temporally and spatially, alteration and alterity, mutability and manifold. Autonomy and liberation necessitates an appropriation or cultivation of this space—as the place of our co-being in difference—into an an-archic and autonomous *polis*, a site that is "the political," "the public conjunction of things, actions, speech" (Schürmann, 1990: 40), but where dissent may also be voiced and heard—as Abensour states, a place of *situating* "things, actions, and speech," rather than founding them.[47] Autonomy here might then also be construed in terms of the autonomy of the world itself reciprocally and co-constituted with its singular members as the empty space of their dwelling, the clearing they share as the world, the place of their co-existence or co-being and co-relations that give space to their mutual difference, and in opposition to the positing of any transcendent law (heteronomy) that would level them under its hegemony. We would need to heed the multiplicity of voices that sound within that space, and to refuse or resist closing it up. This necessitates an ongoing protest against hegemonizing and totalizing tendencies. The appropriate response to this anarchic world-space or world chaos would be to let it be *autonomous* rather than subjecting it to legitimating or grounding norms or principles. This seems to be the ethical implication of both Schürmannian anarchy and Castoriadian autonomy as praxis requiring artful navigation. In short we find two points of convergence between Schürmann and Castoriadis through: 1) a reinterpretation of autonomy as anarchic and ateleological play; and 2) a reinterpretation of both anarchy and chaos as entailing a space or openness for difference—alterity and alteration—in interplay.

Appendix: Anontological Space

Before closing I would like to respond briefly to the issue of idealism vs. materialism concerning anarchism (as found originnally in the contention between Max Stirner and Karl Marx). The issue would be beside the point for both Schürmann's ontological anarchism and Castoriadis' chaos-ontology in the sense that such dichotomies are themselves products of epochs and institutions. Furthermore it is not only the question of whether being is mind or matter that is epochal and instituted but the more fundamental distinction of being and non-being itself that issues from the epoch or the institution. In deciding that being is mind rather than matter, one is determining what is being vis-à-vis non-being. In that sense ontological anarchy or chaos as prior to that distinction is truly a *triton genos*, an "it" that gives (as in the German *es gibt*) but tolerates no name, escaping not only the designations of mind and matter, ideal and material, but also being and non-being. Corresponding to neither term of opposites, it instead provides the clearing for such dichotomies and oppositions. Schürmann, taking off from Heideggerian premises, states that being conceived in terms of beings can never be encountered among them and in that sense is *nothing* (Schürmann, 2001: 197). In recognizing the limits of language (and conceptual thought),

[47] Abensour, "'Savage Democracy' and 'Principle of Anarchy,'" 715–716.

Heidegger was often unsure about the very term "being" (*Sein*)[48] and, according to Schürmann, could no longer even hear the word "being" towards the end of his life (Schürmann, 1990: 3).[49] Heidegger struggles throughout his career to make this point: *being* is *no thing*, it has no opposite that can stand-opposed to it. As such, it surpasses even the being/non-being distinction that pertains properly to entities (beings). What escapes the duality then is a *nothing*. This is not the opposite of being but rather an excess preceding the very distinction between being and its negation. And if Schürmann's anarchy is *the nothing* from which principles emerge, Castoriadis' chaos is the *nihil* of what he calls *creatio ex nihilo*, the Hesiodian chaos as the void or empty opening (*chainō*) from which institutions of significations emerge. Schürmann at one point characterizes this originary nothingness of *an-arché* as *ontological* (Schürmann, 1990: 141). But if both principles or *archai* in Schürmann and imaginary institutions in Castoriadis govern the distinction between what is and what is not, being and non-being, along with the distinction between *nomos* and *anomy*, sense and nonsense, meaning and a-meaning, the source of their emergence and the space of their distinction can neither be said to be *ontological* nor *meontological*. Taking a clue from Heidegger's reluctance concerning the word "being" (*Sein*) and Schürmann's own warnings about stopping at a *merely ontological* (i.e., nominalized, hypostatized) notion of anarchy, we would have to take the anarchy that precedes *on* and *mēon*—being and non-being—as thus *neither* ontological *nor* meontological. Hence we might call it *anontological*. *An-on* here designates *anarché* or *chaos* as prior to, and irreducible to, principles and institutions, *nomoi* and *archai*, including those that rule the very logic of opposition—e.g., between being and non-being, affirmation and negation, etc.

For Schürmann, the *nothing* in Heidegger *also* refers to the very absencing-*spacing* of the field that permits the presencing of beings, a clearing, whereby *alētheia* "appears as the 'free space of the open'" (Schürmann, 1990: 173)—"the open" (*Offen*) that opens up to release being/s. Beyond the horizon of our willing projections, things are released or let-be in the open expanse, freed from the constraint of principles and posits, restored to their radical contingency. Therein they show themselves to be "emerging mutably into their … mutable 'world'" (Schürmann, 1990: 280). It is the space or opening that "grants being and thinking [and] their presencing to and for each other."[50] We might then say that the anarchy or chaos is the gaping abyss that spatially engulfs, enfolds and unfolds—clears the space for—presencingabsencing, coming-going, generation-extinction, *genesis-pthora*, birth-death, *Angang-Abgang*, *alētheia-lēthē*, *on-mēon*. Anarchy / chaos as such is the *anontological space* bearing the distinction between what is and is not because it bears the principles and institutions of thought and being, whereby we adjudicate or declare what is and what is not, what is meaningful and what is meaningless. That anontological space, as the clearing for such opposites, would be what makes the controversy between idealism and materialism even thinkable.[51]

[48] In the 1930s he tried using the eighteenth-century spelling *Seyn*— which has been rendered into English variously as "be-ing," "beyng," and "beon" among others—to connote a different sense than the metaphysical sense of a supreme being. He also experiments by writing "being" with a cross over it.

[49] Instead he preferred "to speak of 'presencing' [*Anwesen*], of 'world' [*Welt*], or of 'event' [*Ereignis*]" (Schürmann, 1990: 3).

[50] Martin Heidegger, *Zur Sache des Denkens* (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1988), 75; *On Time and Being*, trans. Joan Stambaugh (New York: Harper & Row, 1972), 68.

[51] For a more detailed reading of ontological anarchy in Schürmann as anontological nothing, see my "Being and Nothing: Towards an Anontology of Anarchy" in Vishwa Adluri and Alberto Martinengo, ed., *Hegemony and Singularity: The Philosophy of Reiner Schürmann* (Evanston: Northwestern University Press, forthcoming).

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