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The Need for an Imaginative Politics

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Gothenburg, Sweden, May through July 2020 – An Introduction of Sorts¹

Ever since the ‘birth of politics’ in ancient Greece, where philosophers and rhetoricians competed to educate the young, the importance of the social imaginary for the founding of cities and creating of societies has been both obvious and obfuscated. The logos of the philosophers was set up against the pathos and ethos of the rhetoricians; *episteme* was dubbed the objective foundation for both knowing and doing, while the world-view contained in the rhetorician’s *doxa* was relegated to the same position as other purportedly relativist delusions; something that may be useful when seducing crowds, but not a reliable foundation for society.

Today we (should) know better. The study of the *doxai* of our times has been developed and taken on new names with related specifications since antiquity – such as ideology, propaganda, and more recently social imaginaries or magmas of social imaginary significations. No matter what terms we use, these phenomena exercise a specific form of power over us, an infra-power to use Cornelius Castoriadis’s expression:

Before any explicit power and, even more, before any “domination”, the institution of society exerts over the individuals it produces a radical infra-power. This infra-power, a manifestation of the instituting power of the radical imaginary, is not localizable. It is definitely not the power of an individual or of an instance that can be pointed out. It is “exercised” by the instituted society, with the instituting society in the background; and as soon as the institution is in place, the instituting slips away, takes its distance, is already somewhere else. /.../. Still, the infra-power in question, the instituting power, is both the power of the instituting imaginary, of the instituted society and of all the history that finds its passing culmination in it. So, in a sense, it is the power of the social-historical field itself, the power of *outis*, of Nobody.²

Infra-power as the power of no-one, and therefore also a power common to all, an agency that stems from and depends on all of us, members of society. A question of how we simultaneously are made to be in our societies, and how we make ourselves. A very simple, yet telling example of the workings of infra-power in recent times is the wearing, or not wearing, of face masks. Many nations across the world have adopted strict policies to implement the wearing of masks as a measure to stop the spreading of the Covid-19 virus. The masks are obligatory on public transport, when shopping, outdoors exercising

¹ I would like to thank William Kutz and Mathilda Rosengren for good discussions on face masks and for valuable comments on an earlier draft of this text.

² Cornelius Castoriadis, “Pouvoir, politique, autonomie”, *Revue de Métaphysique et de Morale*, 93e Année, No. 1, John Rawls Le Politique (Janvier-Mars 1988), pp. 81-104, Paris, PUF 1988, p. 86. All translations from French are my own, unless otherwise indicated.

etcetera. In Sweden not so.³ Here the authorities refer to the inefficacy of the masks, that they may even be counter-productive, enhancing the viral spread instead of containing it.

This stance is supported by referring to results from scientific tests that all have – at least up until a few days ago, when the WHO changed its recommendations (I wrote this on July 1, 2020) – either been non-conclusive, or outright negative regarding the benefits of wearing masks. Hence, the Swedish political authorities reason, there is *no need at all* to recommend or implement the wearing of masks. And the Swedish citizens have taken this recommendation to heart, either explicitly emphasizing the rationality of the stance, or just enjoying not to be bothered by cumbersome textiles and plastics. As of today, the wearing of face masks is still rare in Sweden.

This example, through being somewhat mundane, tells us many things about the workings of infra-power: First, there are the authorities, who are charged with caring for the population and implementing necessary rules and behaviours in times of crisis. They interpret this responsibility very much in line with deliberative reasonableness, meaning that they refuse (not necessarily explicit) to recognize the validity of any other kind of grounding than scientifically established facts. And if such facts are scarce, contradictory, or constantly changing (they always are and have emphatically been since the start of the pandemic), the authorities opt for the responsible option of ‘leave it to the experts’ and, while waiting for the experts to find solutions, they do not recommend anything because they do not have ‘good reasons’ to do so.

Then there is the heterogenous mass of citizens. At the start of the lockdowns, many of us Swedes were anxious, scared of the virus, scared of getting sick, scared of propagating it to others, especially to elderly relatives, partners, and friends. So, we became hooked on newsfeeds, trying on a daily basis to form tenable opinions of our own out of all the contradictory messages and decisions being made in and out of the country. We discussed with friends over Zoom, Skype, Facetime, Whatsapp. Then some time passed, we started to meet *physically* again, at work or for lunch, minding our social distance. And now we see a weariness among us – things more or less look the same as before – except, of course, for those directly affected by the pandemic, those involved in medical care, as health-workers or as patients.

The virus has for many become nuisance and an abstraction, difficult to take seriously when summer is here. And many of us start to behave accordingly, forgetting not to shake hands or hug when we meet; forgetting the importance of not forming large crowds, forgetting the importance of the actions of each and every one of us. The result today (and this result is, I know, a very premature and preliminary one, due to change many times and probably in all directions) is that Sweden is one, if not the one, of the ‘developed countries’ that has been most severely hit by the virus. Our death toll per 100.000 citizens is high; many are infected, and the spread has diminished but not ceased.

³ This is still the case today, August 7, 2020. But there are signs that also Sweden will eventually give in to the mounting pressure from more and more ‘scientific evidence’ showing the benefits of mask wearing in the fight against the spread of the Covid-19 virus. (The fact that the only type of arguments relevant to the authorities in Sweden still are the ‘scientific’ ones, proves the point I am trying to make in this paragraph.)

I would argue that Sweden is in this situation – which may still, in the long run, turn out to be not quite as bad as it looks right now – because the political authorities relied, and still relies, to heavily *only* on deliberatively sound decisions and did not, and do not still, pay heed to the importance of the symbolic, the imaginary and the imaginal dimensions in society.

Social meanings are formed by a multitude of micro decisions and actions, including how we move, speak, dress, and interact. To implement the wearing of face masks would have been to act on this level of social meaning, even if there are no decisive ‘scientific’ facts for or against. The meaning of the wearing of masks, its social significance, is that something is out of joint; that something is not working as it should, and that it is serious enough to make people massively change their appearance in public. Moreover, wearing a mask suggests an active attempt to take responsibility for the common situation, as well as for oneself, regardless of the individual reasons for putting on the mask in the first place. It thus becomes an act of citizenship, a visible social action taken for the good of the community.

This interpretation of the meaning of mask wearing is of course situated in, imbued with and formulated from a specific social imaginary horizon (i.e., to be very quick, a Western European, Swedish, academic and thus more or less liberal horizon). Seen from a generic Asian perspective, for example, the act of wearing a face mask would probably be understood along other parameters, such as putting the wellbeing of the collective in the first room, whereas some reactions in the USA suggest that at least part of the population see the meaning of wearing face masks primarily in terms of a threat to the personal integrity.⁴ It is obvious that the social imaginaries of our times are riddled with political as well as existential tensions and contradictions. Hence the topicality and importance of the special issue of *Social Epistemology— Conceptualising the political imaginary*, that I will now turn to.

Masking Myself with Bottici and Diehl

In their joint introduction,⁵ Craig Brown and Paula Diehl write:

the imaginary is a collective structure that organizes the imagination and the symbolism of the political. Against this background, it becomes evident that traditional concepts of political science and sociology have difficulty explaining how the political is constituted, since these disciplines have not, by and large, addressed the question of how the political is imagined. (393)

I find this to be true, and not only regarding political science and sociology. Also, in my own discipline, Rhetoric, we suffer from a lack of attention to the imaginary aspects of politics. This is no mere coincidence; rhetoric and politics share not only a more or less mythical birthplace in the *poleis* of ancient Greece; they also share an investment in human *logos* (in its

⁴ For a variety of articles on different aspects of face mask wearing, mostly from an American (USA) perspective, see <https://theconversation.com/us/topics/face-mask-87169> (last visited August 27, 2020 at 10.35 CET)

⁵ *Social Epistemology* 2019, Vol 33, No 5; *Conceptualising the political imaginary* All page references in the following refer to this issue.

many different forms) as the tool for founding societies and shaping human fate. This investment has, as is well known, carried over into and been emphasized by the academic and disciplinary history of all the disciplines mentioned.

So, I could not agree more when the editors continue, a few lines further down, that “[i]t is increasingly becoming clear that in order to understand substantial changes in politics and society, a conceptualization of the political imaginary is necessary.” (394) I have tried briefly to show one aspect of this need in the first part of this text. In this part, I would like to engage more directly with the ideas presented by Chiara Bottici and Paula Diehl, and see how they may help in deepening our understanding of the face mask example, and perhaps also how this confrontation may help to develop their important ideas a bit further.

Both Bottici and Diehl structure their texts around dichotomies – “the social *versus* the individual” (436) in the first case, and the “social norms manifested through symbolism and social practices on the one hand, and the normative horizon of democracy drawn by the political imaginary” (418) on the other. But while Bottici tries to move beyond the dichotomy of individual imagination versus social imaginary towards a transindividual theory of the imaginal, Diehl tries to show that the tensions between the ‘normative horizon of democracy’ and the different symbolic practices current in a society can, perhaps, be used as tools for understanding and identifying how and when a society changes from democracy into something other.

I find both texts to be rich, rewarding and exciting attempts to articulate an up-to-date understanding of the workings of social imagination in global politics. Nevertheless, I believe both authors put too much faith in their respective dichotomies, creating unnecessary problems in the articulation of the contemporary political imaginary.⁶ I will use the example of wearing/not wearing face-masks to clarify what I mean.

Normative Horizons Versus Localized Practices?

My first comment relates to Diehl’s usage of “different temporalities within the democratic imaginary.” (417)

Following Claude Lefort, Diehl talks about a first temporality consisting of an “emancipatory space” that can be seen as the “normative foundation of democracy”. While this may be true for a contemporary understanding of liberal democracy – with its insistence on legal equality of all citizens, on the respect of universal human rights, the generalized right to vote etcetera, I am not convinced that the same can be said of democracy *tout court*. For example, in ancient democracies the right to participate in political decision making, that is to be counted as part of the *demos*, were conditioned on place of birth, gender, fortune

⁶ Both authors read, use, and let themselves be inspired by Cornelius Castoriadis’s work in the process of working out their respective positions. I find this to be very fruitful, even if my own interpretations of certain aspects of Castoriadis’s work sometimes differ from both Diehl and Bottici’s readings. Some of my disagreements may emerge in what follows, but, as I find the issues at stake in both texts to be highly relevant and important, I hope not to let differences concerning minute details in the understanding of Castoriadis’s work overshadow my fundamental agreement both Diehl and Bottici.

etcetera.⁷ Here we do not find the *same* normative horizon as the one Diehl is pointing to in her text, even though it may be argued that this normativity is present, as a *seed* (Castoriadis), in the very notion a self-governing people. The implied idea that (ancient) democracy and liberal democracy, together with its more or less successful implementations in what we today call ‘liberal democracies’ or liberal democratic countries, developed under say the last 150 years, convey the same normative imperatives and tensions does not seem to be really helpful.

And, of course, Diehl is aware of this. I am *not* saying that Diehl naively poses the normative horizon as an ever-present part of the concept of democracy. But I do think the conflation of *democracy* and *liberal democracy* matters for her understanding of the political imaginary, and her assumption of its temporalities.

Let me focus on just one aspect of Diehl’s argument. Briefly put, as I see it, there just is no given tension between, as Diehl puts it, “symbolism and social practice on the one hand, and the normative horizon of democracy drawn by the political imaginary on the other” (418). The normative and the practical aspects (i.e. the normative meaning of x and the practical meaning of the same x) of all social meanings stick together and cannot be separated, at least not in a strict general way (I will give my reasons for this claim in a moment); hence I do not think it is a good idea to postulate a normative horizon as distinct from and in tension with symbolic social practices – not even as a heuristic attempt to create conceptual tools for analysing social meaning. I would rather have Diehl talk about different aspects of democracy, involving specific normativity as well as symbolic practices, but not set up against each other. And here I think Diehl could have used Castoriadis’s notions of *magma* (and perhaps also *seed*) even more than she does.⁸

It is true that a specific magma of social imaginary significations, and the institutions, rituals, habits, and language in which it is embodied, may be, and often is, permeated by social struggles and normative conflicts. It is also true that it may close in upon itself in the same way as a dominant ideology might do. However, contrary to a common (typically Marxist) understanding of ideology as false consciousness, there is no way in which the citizens of a society simply can eradicate the dominant magma of social imaginary significations and replace it with a new one, supposedly more ‘just’ or ‘truer’.

⁷ Diehl writes: “The political imaginary of democracy is structured by the primary reference of popular sovereignty and is deeply dependent on the principle of human rights and therefore on the principles of equality and liberty.” (417)

⁸ Magma is originally a geological term, signifying the molten rock under the surface of the earth. Magma contains many different materials of diverse viscosity and temperature, making magma into a layered stratified constantly changing phenomena. When magma erupts through the crust of the earth it is called lava. All these different properties are relevant for Castoriadis’s metaphorical use of the term. (I have presented the following arguments relating to Castoriadis’s notion of *magma* before, in the later part of my contribution “On academic responsibility, chaos and border” in *Can a person be illegal? Refugees, migrants and citizenship in Europe*, URS; Uppsala, Sweden, 2017. Accessible here: <https://www.litvet.uu.se/forskning/publikationer/urs-sru/urs-sru-6/>)

The only way to change the magma of a society is to change it from within, through a combination of intellectual conceptual critique and collective action, to alter and transform the institutions of a society. To talk of a magma of meanings is to speak about a specific evolving phenomenon with no clear-cut borders, but still with an ever-evolving and changing unity. Thus, the concept of magma allows for the inertia, as well as the transformability of the institutions of society. Magma, both as metaphorical concept and as social phenomenon, is elastic, constantly changing, merging with and harbouring ever new and other magmas within its own strata. And importantly, a magma of social meanings does not support, or conceptually imply, the establishment of strict borders between different magmas – nor, for that matter, clear-cut distinctions such as between ‘our’ and ‘their’ magma.

In the magma of the world, all the different strata are related to one another through what Castoriadis talks about as *An-lehnung*, a leaning on, a co-existence, a frictional involvement with one another. Hence each stratum, though each time specific, may transform into another stratum, or absorb another within itself – all in a constant ever-altering process. On the conceptual metaphorical level then, using the notion of a magma of social imaginary significations does not allow for a dichotomizing into ‘symbolic practices’ versus ‘a normative horizon’. If we understand our societies and cultures as ever evolving magmas of meaning in frictional co-existence, we facilitate an understanding of differences between magmas as contingent, non-essential and always fluctuating. Such an understanding would open for dissolving rather than establishing dichotomies.

So, when you chose to wear a mask, or not, you are engaging in a magmatic and meaningful praxis; setting an example to be followed, or at least indicating a sensible way to act in the world. Naturally, there is a specific temporality involved in each choice, and a specific normativity as well – but there is no way to single out the normative significations from the specific social context in which the wearing /non-wearing takes place. The different significations, interpretations and implications of porting and not porting face masks in the USA, Asia, Europe, as well as differences between specific countries on all continents today (August 19, 2020) bear ample witness to this. Any conceptual tool used in trying to clarify the current transitions of the democratic imaginary needs to take this situatedness, transformability and interlacement into account, lest the clarifications may become obscuring more than clarifying.

Individual Imagination and Social Imaginary

This brings me to my second comment. Chiara Bottici’s understanding of Castoriadis is very much in tune with my own – with a small but crucial difference: Where Bottici sees a shortcoming in Castoriadis’s thought, I see potential. In fact, I would claim the positions outlined towards the end of Bottici’s text, where she points to ways ‘beyond’ the two dichotomies structuring her text (imagination vs imaginary and individual vs society) are already present in Castoriadis’s ideas, at least as seeds to be developed by those of us who find constant inspiration in his work.

Bottici herself formulates (part of) the issue as follows, after summing up the consequences of her argument relating to imagination as individual (subjective) and imaginary as social (contextual):

This, in turn, generates a circular tension; if one starts with imagination conceived of as an individual faculty, then the problem is how to account for the decisive role of social context in the shaping of the individual imagination. If we begin with the concept of the social imaginary, then the problem is how to reconcile it with the free imagination of individuals. This problem seems unsolvable and Castoriadis' relapse into the metaphysical opposition between the social-historical and the monadic psyche is a sign that there is no easy way out from it. Castoriadis certainly paved the way for solving the issue, but we need to take it a step further. (436)

I do not think Castoriadis necessarily relapses into a barren 'metaphysical opposition'. I will try to spell out why, and show how I think Castoriadis could be even more helpful in Bottici's attempt to move beyond the social/individual divide.

Let me start by highlighting a point that Bottici herself emphasizes in her text: According to Castoriadis, individuals are created by society, and in turn create society in a constant, complicated process, involving both the above-mentioned *infra power* of the society in question and the psychic monads formed by this power. If I have understood Castoriadis correctly, we cannot presuppose a constraining and omnipresent causality, not in society, nor in history (but causality is of course present both as a category and as a phenomenon in the many of the different strata of being where the *ensidic* logic⁹ prevails, holding our world together). There are always gaps and cracks, life and commotion, both in separate individuals and in the social institution, allowing chaos to press through only to be, to use Castoriadis's phrasing, *covered over* by the creations of the radical imagination.¹⁰ He writes:

Concretely, society is only in and through the fragmentary and complementary incarnation of its institution and its social imaginary significations in living, speaking and acting individuals. /.../ The individuals are made by, at the same time as they make and remake, the society; in one sense, they *are* it.¹¹

⁹ *Ensidic* thinking or *ensidic* logic is Castoriadis' shorthand expression for the kind of thinking that he calls *ensembliste-identitaire* – thinking based on the idea that all aspects of being are specific differentiations of a determined original element, an element that therefore should be considered to constitute the unity, identity or essence of these aspects of being. *Ensidic* logic, when posited as universally valid, rejects the possibility of creation in general and, consequently, of human creation as well. *Ensidic* logic classically puts the origin of the laws of our world (natural laws as well as social ones) outside of our world and society. In this respect *ensidic* thinking is heteronomous, as it tends to mask ('cover over') the fact that man and society are inexorably autonomous – that human/society posit their own laws, natural as well as social.

¹⁰ For Castoriadis' specific notion of chaos, see Emanuele Profumi, *Sulla Creazione Politica*, Editori Riuniti Internazionali, Roma 2013, pp 40-55 and Mats Rosengren, "True and False Chaos – the mythical origins of Creation", in *Les émigrés grecs et leur influence sur le débat intellectuel français*, eds. Lambros Couloubaritsis Servanne Jolivet, Christophe Premat et Mats Rosengren, Éditions Le Manuscrit, Paris, 2012.

¹¹ Cornelius Castoriadis, *Le Monde Morcelé*, Editions du Seuil, Paris, 1990, p. 139.

This very formulation seems also to have found resonance in Bottici's mind, as she writes: "No society could ever exist if the individuals created by the society itself had not created it". (435)

But as individuals we are not, and cannot be, completely determined by the infra powers of society. Thanks to the radical, creative imagination, which is intimately related to chaos in Castoriadis' thought, there is always (at least in principle) a possibility for an individual to want, think, act, say and do otherwise than what is prescribed by the dominant doxa of society. Even in the most totalitarian and constraining circumstances, there remains a possibility to think and act against the current.

And it is here that the inter-related notions of *being downstream* and *seed* become important. Even though we have the ability – always potential, sometimes actualized – to think and act against the general drift, we always have to start right where we are and work with the concrete as well as the conceptual tools available for us, right here and now. This is the essence of our *being downstream*. And if we, in this *downstream* position, encounter social imaginary significations like *reflexivity*, *autonomy* and *democracy*, this very discovery points to a possibility "that we should postulate as everywhere present in the human beings" even though "it is only *very rarely realised* through all the different historical societies, or through individuals in our own society."¹² It is this prospect of democracy, that Castoriadis claims to be possible to discern in the magma of social imaginary significations in western societies, that we can understand as a *seed*.¹³

Considering all this against the backdrop of what I have said above relating to the magma of social imaginary significations (i.e. the institutions, practices, ideas, ideologies etcetera upheld by and constantly forming and transforming us individuals, who in turn constantly transform the magma, in an ever ongoing process), I would say that it is at least debatable if Castoriadis 'relapses' into metaphysical dichotomies here. To my mind, it would be strange to see Castoriadis's individual and her/his imagination as opposed to the social imaginary of her/his society – they are both constitutive parts of the very same processes; hence I do not see, in Castoriadis, the stark opposition between individual and society that Bottici tries to point out. (Regarding the psyche it is a different question, though – I will return to this below.)

And, as a lemma to my argument, I would like to add something that Bottici herself emphasizes:

Most importantly, as mentioned, Castoriadis' concept of the social imaginary has the function of underlining the idea that the definition of 'reality' itself depends on the instituting and instituted social imaginary, and not *vice versa*. The fact that the word 'reality' has been conceived in so many different ways shows that all societies have somehow constituted their 'reality'. (436)¹⁴

¹² Castoriadis, *Le monde Morcelé*, *op cit*, p. 263.

¹³ Castoriadis says clearly that the idea of autonomy and democracy, in an historical sense, is a specific creation within the western cultural sphere, but he is adamant that autonomy and democracy always are humanly possible, everywhere.

¹⁴ In the quote, Bottici refers to Castoriadis, "Power, Politics, Autonomy" in *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy. Essays in Political Philosophy*, 143–174, Oxford: Oxford University Press. 1991, p. 147

All of this, I think, has repercussions on Bottici's attempt to take a step beyond the two dichotomies. As I see it, Castoriadis cluster of concepts – *magma of social imaginary significations, downstream, seed, radical imagination, chaos* – not only pave the way for the direction Bottici wants to take, but already provides the necessary tools for constructing the road to get there. As I understand Bottici's critique of Castoriadis – and her subsequent endorsement of Spinoza et al to formulate a non-dichotomist, pluralist, and transindividual position – she is striving for, to give a quick formulation, a *non-relativist but still constructionist* position. She attempts to achieve this partly through abandoning the concepts of imagination and imaginary and replace them with the *imaginal*:

The starting point is neither a subject separated from the world nor a world independent from the subject, but simply images. The reason why this is a better starting point is easy to understand; without images, there cannot be a world for us, although this does mean that we must decide a priori what is the source of such a process of imagining, whether individual or social. (437)

I am very much in favour of this approach. It allows for a necessary widening of the ability to conceptualize, from a narrow logocentric and discursive notion of concepts and conceptual thought into a wider, more inclusive and also visually oriented understanding of how meaning is made in the world. But I find this possibility already present in the notion of *social imaginary significations*. These are called *social* because they are collectively shared; *imaginary*, because they are related to the capacity to imagine, i.e. to create images in, of and for the world; *significations*, because they allow for making sense of the world, they make the world meaningful. It is the social imaginary significations that create reality; that in a very concrete sense precede the very distinction between reality and illusion – since this very distinction, and all it implies, depends on the social imaginary significations, and not, as also Bottici points out, *vice versa*. And this applies also to what Castoriadis says about the psychic monad and how it is shaped into an individual – the very notions of psyche, monad, reality, infra power etcetera are part and parcel of the magma of social imaginary significations and have no reality or existence anywhere else.

So, I think Bottici slightly misses the point when she writes that,

this complexity, which, as Castoriadis himself points out, cannot be reduced to simple relationships such as that between whole and part, or general and particular, stands at odds with Castoriadis' own idea of a complete heterogeneity between the monadic psyche and society. (436)

I would say that what Bottici here refers to as 'the monadic psyche' is in fact to be understood as the radical imagination, as *vis formandi* or even as chaos – that is as the disruptive creative force which, as Castoriadis often argues,¹⁵ must be present in Being as

¹⁵ For example, in Cornelius Castoriadis, *Figures of the Thinkable*, Stanford, Stanford UP, 2007, p. 171.

such and without which there simply would be no world at all for us to comprehend.¹⁶ The opposition between society and the monadic psyche that Boticci refers to is thus not on the same level as the opposition individual/society. The psyche understood as radical imagination, as *vis formandi*, is what creates a world, for the singular being as well as for society. In this sense, there is a ‘complete heterogeneity’ between the monadic psyche and society. But the individual psyche of the newly born is socialized into a world of already present social imaginary significations, and is shaped and formed into an *individual* long before she, in turn, is in a position to start transforming these significations. Hence, we do not find a radical heterogeneity between individual and society here, but a common process of integration, shaping and adaption of the one to the other.

Returning one final time to the face masks, we see now more clearly how they can function as tools for the social infra powers at play, primarily for the authorities who wish to implement certain behaviour as evident (the wearing of masks as part of the dominant doxa of the social field; most countries around the world), but also for those who want to show their dissent from certain policies by putting on face masks (USA and to some extent Sweden) or by those who refuse to put on masks to show *their* dissent from certain – but other – policies (again, USA).¹⁷

As I suggested above, had the authorities in Sweden paid more heed to the social imaginary aspects of face masks, their policies may have been more efficient in creating a broader social awareness of the pandemic situation. On the imaginal level, it would have been possible to combine the, in my eyes, very wise reliance on scientifically proven facts *with* a social imaginary efficient implementation of a sense of urgency in adapting a behaviour of social distancing, also in the societal groups least affected, and hence least prone, to adapt their behaviour.

So, the need for an open imaginative, or even *imaginal*, politics is obvious, since the individuals and the infra powers, present in and expressed through the magma of social imaginations, all partake in the same processes of forming and transforming the social imaginaries of our societies. And the very possibility to question, critique and dissent from what is ordained and proposed, is the always present and never completely domesticated force of the psyche, the radical imagination, the *vis formandi*, making space for the much needed creation of new ways of doing, being and thinking. In the best of worlds, this would open up for an imaginative imaginal politics beyond both pandemics and metaphysic dualities.

¹⁶ This is a complicated and many-leveled argument that I cannot develop here; please see my *Cave Art, Perception and Knowledge*, especially chapter 7, Palgrave Macmillan 2012, and my contribution on *magma* in *Cornelius Castoriadis: Key Concepts*, ed S. Adams, Bloomsbury Publishing, 2014, for developments of different aspects of Castoriadis’s position.

¹⁷For a critical take on the ‘Great American Mask Debate’, see <https://www.nbcnews.com/think/opinion/covid-19-mask-mandates-wisconsin-elsewhere-spark-my-body-my-nca1235535> (last visited 27 August, 18.20 CET)