

A Study of Social Imaginaries Journal, Zeta Books

The spectrum of social science journals that are close to our *Historická sociologie* journal has recently expanded with a new title – *Social Imaginaries*. This journal is named after a quote from the book *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* by Cornelius Castoriadis. The journal, like Castoriadis's book, is based on the labyrinth metaphor, which is also a human creation, and in which new, interconnected corridors are created through which one must pass. Reason, imagination, social creation and action are needed here. The truth of the passages is recognized in fragments through discussion and articulation.

Social Imaginaries is a new project by an international editorial collective, largely based in Australia and including former students and colleagues of Jóhann Árnason. The idea of founding a journal with this title came from Suzi Adams (Flinders University, Adelaide, Australia); she then initiated the project together with Jeremy Smith (Federation University, Ballarat, Australia), and they were joined by other colleagues. Jóhann Árnason was invited as an editor at large.

Suzi Adams's conversation with Jóhann Árnason in vol. 2, no. 1, on philosophy, sociology and history outlines the interdisciplinary agenda of the journal. More specifically, what connects the journal's editorial team is, no doubt, its members' effort to follow up on the seminal but not sufficiently recognized ideas and theories of Cornelius Castoriadis which are referred to by all of the published issues and also serve as their basis. The endeavour to analyse in depth the civilizational characteristics and specificities of various cultures is another distinct trait shared by the members of the editorial team. It is now clear that the entire team bases its work not only on Castoriadis' theories, but on those formulated by Árnason as well. *Social Imaginaries* is the second English-language journal with which Árnason is associated, the first one being *Thesis Eleven*, its title alluding to Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach which says that, "The philosophers have only interpreted the world in various ways; the point, however, is to change it" [*Steinmetz 2010: 76*]. Though the journal also dealt with civilizational issues, it had a broader focus on social and critical theory. Professor Árnason left *Thesis Eleven* years ago and now publishes regularly in *Social Imaginaries*. However, the *Social Imaginaries* and *Thesis Eleven* journals aren't the only periodicals associated with Jóhann P. Árnason. *Historická sociologie* which has a long tradition and an integral connection to the humanities, is another project on which Professor Árnason is collaborating with the magazine's founder Bohuslav Šalanda. That journal explores historical, sociological, and political science perspectives, particularly in relation to long-term social processes. Its scope includes, among other things, civilization studies – the province of professor Árnason, one of the greatest experts in the field.

Works of Árnason, inspiring him to devote one of his first books, *Praxis und Interpretation* [Árnason 1988], to the former's philosophy. Árnason's research into Castoriadis' theories is vital both due to its critical connection to Castoriadis' thinking, and the persistent

effort to introduce him to the wider public [Árnason 1989: 25–45]. It can be said it was Castoriadis who made Árnason truly interested in the philosophical foundations of historical sociology. But Castoriadis was not the only one who inspired Árnason's work. Max Weber and Shmuel N. Eisenstadt, with whom he developed the idea of axial age civilizations and multiple modernities, left a big mark on his work, especially when compared to Weber's interpretation of Western modernity [Árnason 2019: 55–72]. At this time, the dimension of civilization and the civilizational aspect of human societies became Árnason's focal point. Lately, he has been attempting to connect historical sociology with phenomenology, inspired by Merleau-Ponty's philosophy and Jan Patočka's phenomenology, especially the latter's *Nadcivilizace* and both his early and late concept of philosophy of history. Thus, the focus has been primarily on the civilization-analytical approach to historical sociology [Šalanda – Šubrt 2020: 147–155]. This concept of post-transcendental phenomenology, however, brings him back to Castoriadis and the reviewed journal *Social Imaginaries* which is supposed to present a more systematic interpretation of modernity as a new civilization while emphasising the issue of communism, a distinct alternative modernity of the 20th century [Šalanda – Šubrt 2020: 113].

The journal *Social Imaginaries* analyses a variety of cultural patterns intertwined with constellations of power. Broadly speaking, it views society as political institutions formed in historic constellations and also as a result of cultural encounters. It also publishes submissions related to history and philosophy, as well as sociological and political science analyses. As expected from the journal, the articles are high-quality, since the authors are experts in their fields. A good example is *Religion as Conceptualised in a Roman Perspective* by Jörg Rüpke. This is a detailed exploration of ancient Roman religions which strictly rejects any reduction of ancient religions to ideological and ritual systems that strengthen a political and “civic” identity. To the contrary, Rüpke claims that “the ancient evidence demands an approach that focusses on individual actors and their situational and strategic uses of religious communication. ‘Traditions’ are shaped and modified in such acts of ‘appropriation’” [Rüpke 2017: 37].

Introduction to Castoriadis's “The Imaginary As Such” by Jóhann P. Árnason, an opening article in the very first issue, is another significant contribution, as it establishes the journal's future direction. Árnason describes and analyses Castoriadis' books and works, presenting not only an introduction to Castoriadis' *The Imaginary as Such*, but to the whole journal and its purpose. After all, the journal is entitled *Social Imaginaries* – is there any other author who could be more fitting as a subject and outline for the journal's needs? Indeed, there are not many options in this regard, especially since the journal's first issue opens with a clear explanation as to why it intends to delve into *The Imaginary as Such* and Castoriadis. “The scope and aims of *Social Imaginaries* fill an important gap in current international debates. The journal's emphasis on ‘imaginaries’ provides a major point of difference from other public fora. The term ‘social imaginaries’ points to several interrelated trends of a major shift in the humanities and social sciences towards a new approach to the question of modernity” [Editorial Collective 2015: 7–13].

Besides analysing Castoriadis' works, the journal follows up on his theories and to an extent deepens them. Authors focus on revealing modern concerns, assuming that imagination is a creative, not simply reproductive phenomenon, and involved even in modern conceptions of reason.

The idea that social changes include a radical discontinuity which cannot be understood from the perspective of any specific cause or presented as a chain of events, only as changes which occur through the social imaginary, is one of Castoriadis' most crucial theories. The journal especially points to the idea of a radical imaginary category which can be manifested only through individual radical imagination and the social imaginary.

I would particularly like to mention *Mapping the theme of Creativity in Cornelius Castoriadis's and Paul Ricoeur's Social Imaginaries* by George Sarantoulis which clarifies Castoriadis' dichotomy between instituted and instituting imaginaries, as well as the difference between Paul Ricoeur's ideological and utopic poles of cultural imagination. The article also criticises Joas' dominant sociological theories of action. Sarantoulis presents an entirely new view of creativity as an integral dimension of the human condition where social imagination of perspective is necessary in order for one to comprehend the creativity of human action [Sarantoulis 2019: 11–36].

Introduction to Marcel Gauchet's "Democracy: From One Crisis to Another" by Natalie J. Doyle is another significant contribution which deepens Castoriadis's findings. The article draws not only on the work and theory of this radical democratic intellectual, but also on the political theory of Claude Lefort, his colleague and a co-founder of the radical-socialist and anti-Stalinist group *Socialisme ou barbarie*. But the main focus is on Gauchet's discussion of the current neoliberalism as based on the works of Cornelius Castoriadis and his "analysis of the historical innovation which Greek democracy represented and which was extended with modernity" [Doyle 2015: 151–161].

Social Imaginaries, the reviewed journal, undoubtedly introduces a new comprehensive view of political institutions. It publishes debates and analyses which aim to explain the current human condition in modernity, using a multi-disciplinary method and individual articles which nevertheless follow up on another in every issue. Castoriadis' philosophical theory of the imaginary is no doubt a crucial source on which the journal is based to a significant degree. But although the journal is inspired by said theory, it definitely does not adhere to it rigidly which is only commendable as this approach leaves enough space for a genuine combination of disciplines. Individual issues thus also refer to other thinkers and theoreticians, though always referencing the still little-known social imaginaries.

Social Imaginaries is a great success among current publications as it presents an overview of the key areas in political theory and other humanities. It can clarify both the questions of historical interpretation, and problems related to current politics. Future issues are therefore highly anticipated.

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