

## [VERSO INFOMERCIAL ON CASTORIADIS/POULANTZAS](#)

A rather silly, one-sided, and inaccurate blog post from last September was recently brought to my attention: <http://www.versobooks.com/blogs/4427-a-revolutionary-from-the-oecd-the-castoriadis-poulantzas-debate>

Are there really, still today, some radical people out there who would want to challenge Castoriadis's analyses and assessments of what he called "The French Ideology" of the 1970s or his disdain for and denunciation of Euro-Communism and other "progressivist" types of political thought that fail to make direct democracy, in the workplace and in society at large, not to mention in political organizations, the starting point for serious debate and action? Even in this blog post, one can read (in a less-than-perfect translation) what Castoriadis had to say at the time:

"That which exists today in the world, which is industrially produced in mass, are plastic 'spiritual' products, nylon 'thinking' and synthetic 'art'. Thus, for example, structuralism, various pseudo-psychoanalytic currents, Althusser, semiotics, etc. In this industry of plastic thought the French have in fact made a name for themselves, and now export, mainly to the Anglo-Saxons, these kinds of fashions, genuine Articles de Paris - as used to be [*sic* in this questionable translation] fragrances, women's dresses, etc."

Or, as Castoriadis put it contemporaneously, in "The Diversionists" (1977; now in the third volume of his [Political and Social Writings](#), p. 273), while highlighting the true political stakes involved:

To understand the function and the modus operandi of the [ruling system's] complementary ideology, one need only compare the actual problems posed for the past thirty years, the ones that have corresponded to new and profound traits in the social and cultural French and world situation, with the axes of the succeeding fashionable discourses, the questions these discourses raise and those they eliminate, the answers they provide. The clear and immediate conclusion is that these discourses have functioned to ensure that these actual problems *will not be talked about*, or so that they will be removed, concealed, or drawn away from the public's attention. American military experts call a "decoy" a missile that contains no nuclear warhead but acts as a bait drawing the enemy's antimissile fire to increase the chances that the other missiles will get through. The traditional military term "diversion," however, works just as well.

Anyone still tagging along with Poulantzas, to the effect that Althusser and Structuralism (both thoroughly ridiculed and rejected by French students already in May '68) would represent "Science"—which of course would imply that those engaged in such "Science," like Poulantzas, are by definition *the experts*, to whom all others must bow down in all matters political, economic, and social?

Amusing/amazing/appalling to read how these authors' title—"A Revolutionary from the OECD - the Castoriadis/Poulantzas debate"—one-sidedly perpetuates Poulantzas's *ad hominem* avoidance of real issues,\* especially when this blog post—**more properly speaking, a publisher's infomercial**—entices the reader, every few paragraphs, with "30% off" offers flogging Poulantzas volumes even as it continues to highlight the supposedly "'delicate' matter . . . that Castoriadis was a high-level OECD official."\*\* Nothing comparable in this infomercial's Introduction about the presuicide employment status of Professor Poulantzas—of course not, since the mad scientist Louis Althusser had argued (in the runup to May '68!) that the University was exempt from the class struggle.

For my part, I will point out that Verso had a chance to publish my translation, *A Socialisme ou Barbarie Anthology: Autonomy, Critique, and Revolution in the Age of Bureaucratic Capitalism* but then refused to follow through on their representative's promise that it would be sold, from the start, at an affordable price for the average person. As Verso's Sebastian Budgen wrote me: "I haven't been able to convince my colleagues of the commercial viability of the project (Verso runs two offices both sides of the Atlantic and thus has high overheads, with the result that the breakeven threshold on a book is quite high)." Good capitalist calculation, I suppose. This *Anthology* of writings by Castoriadis and other [Socialisme ou Barbarie](#) members is now available at cost in paperback from Eris (London) and can be downloaded, with no objection from this publisher, at: <http://soubtrans.org/SouBA.pdf>. Go figure!

David Ames Curtis (March-April 2020)  
Agora International (for identification purposes)  
E-MAIL: [contact@agorainternational.org](mailto:contact@agorainternational.org)  
Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Website  
URL: <http://www.agorainternational.org>

\*The authors of this Verso blog post (see their misleading section "The Biographer Confirms") rely on a selective reading, and apparently a bad translation, of François Dosse's "intellectual biography," *Castoriadis: Une vie*. On how unreliable the "intellectual biographer" Dosse is, read (in French) my discussion: <http://www.kaloskaisophos.org/rt/rtdac/rtfact/rtdac-dosse-remarques1.html>. Yet here Dosse's information clearly belies their conclusions, and these authors *have to place Castoriadis's name abusively within brackets* to support their falsehoods in a translation that does not correctly reflect Dosse's French original: "In a period of the far-right's resurgence in Greece, [Castoriadis'] idea that modern Greeks are direct descendants of the Greeks of antiquity can be very dangerous, leading to views of a 'chosen race.'" For starters, these authors/translators omit needed ellipses and offer "chosen race" for Dosse's "*un peuple de génies, une race supérieure* [a people of geniuses, a higher race]." Dosse was talking about a book of Castoriadis seminars published decades *after* Castoriadis' death with an opportunistic title chosen by the Greek publisher, not the late Castoriadis, to maximize sales. Rightly, Dosse states immediately afterward that—far from being "Castoriadis's" (with or without brackets added)—such an idea is "*tout le contraire* [quite the opposite]" of "the values upheld by Castoriadis." This fake quote with false attribution to Castoriadis provides a clear illustration of the, at best ham-handed, hatchet job Verso has posted in order to move some old Poulantzas volumes from their stockroom.

\*\*To set the record straight, read what Castoriadis himself had to say in the 1990 "Cornelius Castoriadis/Agora International Interview" <http://www.agorainternational.org/enccaaint> (see pp. 7, 9, 15): "It must be pointed out that I was an alien in France. I wasn't naturalized until the end of 1970. At the time, deportation of an alien from France was a purely administrative matter—an immediately executable decision by the Minister of the Interior. . . . On the other hand, there was the fact that I was working at OECD, where one's status as an international civil servant excluded participation in political activities of any sort. So, I was doubly in breach of the law, committing two offenses, a criminal twice over [*laughter*]. . . . I worked at OECD from '48 to '70. I was obliged to work, of course, in order to live, and at the same time it was very convenient because it gave me total legal cover, so long as what I was really doing wasn't known."