

Making a Difference *in-the-World*:
A Comparative Critique of Hannah Arendt,
Cornelius Castoriadis, and
Peter Wagner's Approaches to the
World-Altering Dimensions of Collective
Political Action

by

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*Thesis Submitted to Flinders University
for the degree of*

Doctor of Philosophy (Sociology)

College of the Humanities, Arts, and Social Sciences

27th November 2017

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SUMMARY

The contemporary challenges of globalization, depoliticization and the experience of ‘worldlessness’ have given rise to a condition of declining political creativity, collective impotence, and the exhaustion of possibilities of world-formation. This calls for an urgent rethink of the meaning of politics and of the potential for political projects to make change. In light of this situation, this thesis posed the question: ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ To address this question, two overarching tasks emerged: first, the elucidation of a notion of ‘the world’, in order to, second, analyse how collective political action alters the world.

In relation to the first point, the study leaned upon on hermeneutic-phenomenological philosophy, which takes the notion of the world as a central question in its own right. However, these approaches have not yet systematically developed an understanding of the world-altering aspects of collective political action; this project spoke to this opening within the field. I adopted two interconnected modes of ‘doing’ (broadly speaking) from hermeneutic-phenomenological debates on the human articulation of the world-horizon, which were characterised as ‘world-interpretation’ and ‘world-formation’. I argued that, alongside an understanding of the world as the under-determined and encompassing horizon of the human condition, these notions of world-interpreting and world-forming doing provide a framework through which to develop a theory of political action.

Concerning the second task, the project employed the hermeneutic-phenomenological understandings of world-interpretation and world-formation as a frame through which to analyse the political theory of Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Peter Wagner. The study employed a twofold method: critical hermeneutic reconstruction, and comparative critique. The critical comparison of the research findings was undertaken in order to reconsider collective political action as a world-altering project, which resulted in the development of a new theoretical approach to political action *in-the-world*.

The theoretical framework developed in this study offers an insight into the ways that collective political action opens the institution of the world through modes of problematisation, and alters it by giving form to the encompassing world-horizon through the articulation of new patterns of meaning and configurations of common bonds, to bring about a change in history. The hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to political theory detailed in this project helps to think through the ways in which human beings shape and reshape socio-cultural worlds via political action—to begin the world *anew*—because the overarching world-horizon always remains open to the possibility of plural interpretations and further articulations. The central argument developed in this thesis is that the inherently unfinished or incomplete character of socially instituted worlds, and their interrelation with the encompassing under-determined and inexhaustible world-horizon that always calls for further articulation, provides the preconditions for collective political action to make a difference in the world. This new theoretical approach bridges the fields of phenomenological philosophy and political social theory to clear a path for a phenomenology of political action, which offers an important contribution to emerging debates within social theory, phenomenology, and sociology that seek creative solutions to the twin problematics of globalization and depoliticization.

DECLARATION

I certify that this thesis does not incorporate without acknowledgment any material previously submitted for a degree or diploma in any university; and that to the best of my knowledge and belief it does not contain any material previously published or written by another person except where due reference is made in the text.

Date: 27th November 2017

ACKNOWLEDGEMENTS

Hannah Arendt once wrote, ‘To be in solitude means to be with one’s self, and thinking, therefore, although it may be the most solitary of all activities, is never altogether without a partner and without company’ (1998 [1958]: 76). This thesis may bear my name, but I was not without company through this study. Many thanks must be extended to all those who walked alongside me through the wilderness towards this clearing in the woods. This is certainly not the end of the road, either; it is a first step.

I am unreservedly indebted to my principal supervisor, Dr Suzi Adams. Without Suzi’s compassionate support, insightful guidance, feedback, and enthusiasm for my project, I would not have been able to bring this thesis to fruition. I am eternally grateful for the opportunities that Suzi has opened for me across my candidature, as well as the faith that she has forever maintained in me; rain, hail, or sunshine. I give deepest thanks also to my associate supervisor, Matthew Flinders Distinguished Professor in Law, Margaret Davies, for her encouragement and careful commentary on my work, especially in the crucial, latter stages of the candidature; my thesis is much better for it.

I have been lucky to be surrounded by a lively community of sociologists and social theorists during my candidature, both at Flinders and beyond. Thank you to Associate Professor Kris Natalier, for her ongoing confidence in my work and support of my progress across my candidature. I also greatly appreciate Matthew Flinders Distinguished Professor in Sociology, Sharyn Roach Anleu, and Dr Mary Holmes, for their support and feedback in the early stages of my candidature. Thanks, too, to both Andrea Rohde and Jan Sidford, for their generous assistance during difficult times late in the project; as well as the *Social Imaginaries* editorial collective for the opportunities and encouragement they have extended to me. The growing cohort of sociology postgraduate students—past and present—provided a source of comfort, comedy, and camaraderie across this journey. Particular thanks to Dr Jordan McKenzie, George Sarantoulas, Zoei Sutton, Nathan Dalton, Tristan Kennedy, Ros Wong

and Tamika Sharrad, for the years of thoughtful dialogue, laughter, and for sharing in both experiences of frustration and joy. This research also benefitted from an Australian Government Research Training Program Scholarship, which generously supported this project between 2013 and 2016.

Many extraordinary family members and friends have also walked this path beside me. Space does not permit to name all those who have supported me throughout this journey; you know who you are, and I am so thankful for your presence in my life. In particular, I am thankful for Dr (!) Stephanie Jong, my enduring source of support and sanity; Kayla Tsoutouras, my proof-reader, confidant, carer, and champion; and Carly Snoswell, my Milhouse and my rock. You three are the most wonderful humans. It is difficult to put my appreciation of you into words. I wholeheartedly appreciate everything you have done for me, and helped me through; your strength on my behalf lifted me up when I really needed it. I cannot imagine where I would be without you. And to Molly, my study buddy, thank you for the company you always provided me in those otherwise lonely research days, and for taking me for walks in the fresh air when I really needed it.

Last, but certainly not least: this project is dedicated to my remarkable parents. To my mother, Pam Carlisle; and, my father and step-mother, Murray and Terry Carlisle. I am struggling to find words that can adequately portray my heartfelt appreciation for your enduring love and support. Without you, I would be nowhere. Thank you for everything you are, and all that you have always done for me.

‘...[A]t the centre of politics lies concern for the world’.

- Hannah Arendt
(2007a: 106).

‘The philosophers have only *interpreted* the world in various ways; the point, however, is to *change* it’.

- Karl Marx
(Marx & Engels 1969 [1845]: 15).

IN SEARCH OF POLITICS IN A CONTEXT OF WORLDLESSNESS: AN INTRODUCTION

In his book, *In Search of Politics* (1999), Zygmunt Bauman argues that the homogenizing and alienating tendencies of individualist liberalism and globalization have narrowed the horizon of possibilities for collective political action to make a difference in the world.¹ The ‘growth of collective impotence’ in the face of heightened individualism and consumerist conformity forms the background of his search for public space, agency, and a vision for the contemporary world within that work (Bauman 1999: 2). In his assessment of the changing nature of politics, Bauman contends that societies are increasingly unable to crystallise private concerns into common, political issues (1999: 2-3).² ‘Spectacular, one-off explosions’ of privatised sociality release collective anxieties; however, these events ‘run out of steam quickly’, and are ineffective in instituting change (Bauman 1999: 3). Instead, actors retreat into their individualised existence, ‘while the shared world, so brightly illuminated just a moment ago, seems if anything still darker than before’ (Bauman 1999: 3).

The introduction to *In Search of Politics* speaks to the depoliticized character of the contemporary socio-political condition. In their recent work, *Depoliticization: The Political Imaginary of Global Capitalism*, Ingerid Straume and J.F. Humphrey outline three areas of depoliticization: the juridification of the political sphere, the control of the public agenda, and the waning significance of the imaginary dimension of politics (2010: 16-18); the third is the most significant for present purposes. As Straume and Humphrey put it, in short: the imaginary dimension of depoliticization represents ‘a decline in democratic, political creativity’, and ‘the lack of belief that the existing institutions can really be changed’ (2010a: 10, 18; cf. Straume 2012a: 120). Their argument leans on Cornelius Castoriadis, who earlier characterised this ‘complete atrophy of political imagination’ (1997a: 39) as the growing *insignificancy* of politics (Castoriadis 2011b: 5-6). Jean-Luc Nancy and Philippe Lacoue-Labarthe (1997), additionally, identified this trend as the ‘retreat’ of the political. According to

these debates, the exhaustion of alternatives and the condition of political *indifference* represents the greatest threat to democratic freedom and political creativity (Straume & Humphrey 2010a: 10, 12, 18).

Behind these critiques of the contemporary political condition lies an understanding of political action as the effective possibility of making a difference in the world. This notion of political doing connects to Castoriadis's elucidation of *la politique*, or 'politics' in the strong sense (1991a [1978/1988]: 159-160). For him, *la politique* refers to the explicit self-interrogation of the institution of the world by society, which clears a path for societal self-alteration through autonomous political doing (Castoriadis 1991a: 159-160; see also Adams 2014a: 1; Straume 2012b: 369). Castoriadis differentiates *la politique* from *le politique*, or 'the political' in the narrower sense; the latter concerns the configurations of authoritative power within the given institution of society (Castoriadis 1991a: 156-158; see also Adams 2014a: 7-8). This distinction is helpful in that it enables a closer analysis of *politics* as an explicit mode of collective *doing*—central to revolutionary political projects or new social movements, for example—as distinct from the particular *political form* of society, be it bureaucratic, totalitarian, democratic, or other (see Lefort 1988). Understood as 'making a difference in the world' (Wagner 2001a: 5768), collective political action in this sense refers to the initiation of effective change in the historical field via the self-alteration of institutional patterns and socio-cultural articulations of the world, in the wake of their problematisation.

Within *In Search of Politics*, Bauman characterises this form of collective political action as an expression of freedom, made possible through 'that human ability to imagine a better world and to do something to make it better' (1999: 1). Nevertheless, as noted above, Bauman contends that the tendencies of globalization and depoliticization restrict the possibilities for collective political projects to make a difference in the world. In the opening remarks to *In Search of Politics*, he protests:

[W]e tend to believe equally firmly that there is little we can change ... in the way the affairs of the world are running or are being run; and we believe too that, were we able to make a change, it would be futile ... to put our heads together to think of a different world from the one there is and to flex our muscles to bring it about if we consider it better than the one we are in (Bauman 1999: 1).

Bauman here illustrates the indifferent and indeed apathetic current political situation, as neoliberal institutions discourage imagination and promote collective impotence (1999: 1-2). For Bauman, people in this context remain preoccupied by the insecurities of a globalizing world. As he puts it, they 'lack the courage to dare and the time to imagine alternative ways of living together' (Bauman 1999: 5).³

At their worst, theoretical debates depict globalization as an 'anonymous, actorless process, against which a defensive reaction is at best possible' (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 3). For Anthony Giddens (1997: 53), and Bauman (2000: 192-193) following him, globalized modernization is a 'juggernaut' process: an inexorable movement that destabilizes cultural communities via an intensified exchange of information, migration, and a 'chaotic, high-velocity, promiscuous movement of financial' capital (Appadurai 2001: 4). Globalization moreover denotes the 'indeterminate, unruly, and self-propelled character of human affairs' across the compressed spatio-temporal global context (Bauman 2005: 59; cf. 2005: 2). In this way, globalization refers to more than simply a 'world without borders' (Appadurai 2001: 1). Globalization relates to a 'compression of the world' (Robertson 1992: 8) into '*one world ... a single commodity world* where local cultures and identities are uprooted and replaced with symbols from ... multinational corporations' (Beck 2000: 43, emphasis in original). For Nancy, in its most elementary form, globalization alters the way that human beings relate to the world. In *The Creation of the World, or, Globalization* (2007 [2002]), Nancy designates globalization as a process of world enclosure, in which the world is compressed into an indistinct totality (2007: 27-28). In so doing, the movement of globalization creates an 'un-world' or *immonde*, which, in Nancy's approach, reveals a crisis in the exhaustion of the possible meanings of the world;

‘globalization has reached its limits ... there is nothing more to be globalized, nothing more to discover’ (Meurs, Note & Aerts 2009: 35; cf. Krummel 2014: 121). Hence, for Nancy, the globalized world ‘has lost its capacity to form a world [*faire monde*]’, which confronts us with our ‘impotence’ for world-formation whilst it destroys the certainties ‘of what the world was’ (2007: 34, 35, 50; see also Meurs, Note & Aerts 2009: 35-36; Krummel 2014: 120-122).

The above debates highlight that globalization flattens socio-cultural plurality into a singular commodity world; destabilizes meaning-providing contexts and experiences of being together in the world; and, according to Nancy, exhausts possibilities of world-formation (I return to this). Leaning on Hannah Arendt, Peter Wagner contends that the contemporary trend of globalization bears the ‘risk of worldlessness’ (2005a: 51, 52, 2012: 62), as the flux of globalized reality ‘alienates’ individuals from common socio-cultural worlds. While, for Arendt, ‘world alienation’ relates to the specifically modern world-orientation inherent to modernity (Arendt 1998 [1958]; see also Brient 2000: 514, 530),⁴ ‘the modern growth of worldlessness’ refers to the dissolution of common bonds, shared meanings, and modes of togetherness in the world, as ‘the withering away of everything *between us*’ (Arendt 2007a [1956/1959]: 201, emphasis in original). In Arendt’s formulation, ‘worldlessness’ characterises the experience of living in the ‘desert world’ of modern society (2007a: 201), in which meaningful collective relationships have deteriorated to the point that nothing remains in common (see Arendt 1998: 54, 2007a: 201-204). Members of modern society have become accustomed to inhabiting the ‘conditions of radical isolation’ in the desert world, ‘imprisoned in the subjectivity of their own singular experience’ (Arendt 1998: 58). According to Arendt, the implication of this experience of worldlessness is the destruction of the common world: without the collective effort to renew the world through political action, Arendt warns the world will remain a desert (see Arendt 2007a: 201-203, 1998: 58).

Arendt’s remarks on the perceived worldlessness of the ‘desert’ of modern society precede debates surrounding globalization and depoliticization. Yet her understanding of

modern worldlessness resonates with Wagner's recent suggestion that 'globalization' indicates 'the emergence of a social constellation in which there are few phenomena of significance between the individual human being and the globe' (2015b: 110). Arendt's sketch of the rise of the 'desert', indeed, is little different to Nancy's discussion of the destructive 'death-drive' of the 'un-world' of globalization (2007: 34). The rise of political *insignificance* and *indifference* (see Castoriadis 2011b: 5-6; Straume & Humphrey 2010a: 10, 18), characteristic of depoliticization, is unsurprising in this context: as a result of globalization, individuals no longer understand the world as a meaningful space of common concern for political action. This collective detachment from and indifference to the world and society's institutions is representative of a disinvestment in the political imaginary of society (see Straume 2012a: 118). If society no longer considers itself as the source of its institutions, or that collective efforts towards change would make any difference, a 'radical ... aggressive, and ... desperate' question here arises: 'does politics still have any meaning at all?' (Arendt 2007a: 108).

The challenges posed by globalization and depoliticization call for a 'systematic rethinking' of the ways in which human beings relate to the world (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 7), and creatively form worlds through political doing. Nancy offers one such path in his differentiation of 'globalization' from *mondialisation*. For him, *mondialisation* signifies the *becoming-world* of the world, as an expanding process of 'world-forming' in the creation of the world (Nancy 2007: 39, 41, 51; cf. Raffoul & Pettigrew 2007: 1-2; Krummel 2014: 120-122). For Nancy, globalization opens the possibility of explicit *mondialisation*. He writes, 'to create the world means: immediately, without delay, reopening each possible struggle for the world' (Nancy 2007: 54, emphasis in original). The problematic 'un-world' of globalization poses the 'question of owning up to the present', in which the task is to 'ask anew what the world wants of us, what we want of it, everywhere, in all senses' (Nancy 2007: 35). Hence Nancy's argument for *mondialisation* over globalization is an urgent call to action, to choose between 'nothing less than two possible destinies of our time' (Raffoul & Pettigrew: 2007: 1)—to create

the world, rather than have the world be destroyed (see Nancy 2007: 34-35). As Nancy puts it, 'willing the world' and forming the world 'is the only way to escape the un-world' of globalization (2007: 49).

Nancy's (2007: 35) critique of the collective impotence that characterises the globalized epoch can also be levelled at the trend towards depoliticization. Likewise, but from a different angle, Castoriadis and Bauman each take issue with the contemporary inability to imagine other possibilities or to bring about change, amidst the rising tide of political insignificance (see Castoriadis 2011b: 5-6, and Bauman 1999: 4). At its core, depoliticization speaks to the collective impotence that stems from the exhaustion of imagined alternatives, and a disbelief in the effective possibility of making a difference in the world through collective political projects. Nancy's appeal to choose between the two destinies of our time—globalization or *mondialisation*—is apt for the challenge of depoliticization, too. In order to recapture the possibilities of political creativity contra globalization and depoliticization, we must choose the 'creation of the world', and 'ask anew what the world wants of us [and] what we want of it' (Nancy 2007: 54).

The globalized world has not lost its ability to form a world, nor has it exhausted all possibilities of world-formation (see Nancy 2007: 34). The task is to interrogate our collective impotence, to recapture our agency and 'open the struggle for the world' in an effort to alter it (see Nancy 2007: 54). Nancy's shift of emphasis from globalization to *mondialisation* clears a path for rethinking the meaning of politics: from this perspective, political action can be more adequately understood as an explicit world-altering and world-forming project. Indeed, in light of the so-called 'risk of worldlessness' (Wagner 2012: 62) and the exhaustion of the political imaginary in the contemporary trend toward political insignificance (see Castoriadis 2011b: 5-6; Straume & Humphrey 2010a: 18; Straume 2012a: 120), this inquiry takes on a particular urgency. Although Nancy's elucidation of *mondialisation* pointed broadly to modes of doing (specifically, the struggle for the creation of the world), he did not develop this along the lines

of a theory of political action. Given that depoliticization debates in particular draw attention to the perceived inability to bring about change, this thesis poses the question: ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ To address this question, two overarching tasks emerge. First, it is necessary to elucidate an understanding of ‘the world’ in order to, second, analyse the world-altering dimensions of collective political action.

To grapple with the first point, I turn to hermeneutic-phenomenological philosophy, which takes the world as a central question in its own right. I detail the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the world problematic in detail in Section 1.1 in Chapter 1. For now, however, the world may be provisionally considered as the under-determined and encompassing shared horizon of the human condition, through which all phenomena appear as meaningful to *anthropos*. As I will show in Chapter 1, hermeneutic-phenomenological debates highlight two interconnected dimensions of world-articulation that emerge in the anthropic encounter with the world-horizon: ‘world-interpretation’, and ‘world-formation’ (see e.g. Arnason 1989a: 28, 1992: 247-255, 1993: 89, 96; Merleau-Ponty 2002 [1945]: xx; Ricoeur 1986 [1975]: 9; see also Adams 2009b: 256, 2011c: 77, 2014b: 71). I draw on these elements to analyse the world-altering aspects of collective political action. I argue that a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach can help to think through the ways in which human beings shape, and reshape their socio-cultural worlds and engender movement in history via political action, because the world-horizon that overarches all socially instituted worlds always remains open to further articulation. A hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the inherent openness of the world-horizon thus makes possible a consideration of how collective political projects alter the world, which speaks directly to the central question that motivates this thesis (as noted above).

The second objective noted above concerns the analysis of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. Leaning on the hermeneutic-phenomenological notions of world-interpretation and world-formation (which I outline in Chapter 1), I

hermeneutically reconstruct the work of Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Peter Wagner in this study, and bring the findings into a critical comparative dialogue in Chapter 5. I justify the selection of these three thinkers in depth in Section 1.2 in Chapter 1. For now, I contend that Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner are appropriate for the present inquiry on three grounds. A notion of world-altering political doing that transpires at the collective level of sociality is central to their works; each thinker's approach to political action is informed by hermeneutic-phenomenological problematics, broadly speaking; and, the thematic of modernity forms a common conceptual background for their elucidations of collective political action.

This introductory discussion frames the present project by underscoring the need for a new theoretical approach that gives due to the world-altering, world-forming potential of collective political action. This investigation, then, goes in search of politics, in light of the challenges of globalization and depoliticization, and contemporary experiences of worldlessness. It is an important and urgent task for political theory and sociology, to 'reinvest[.] in the *meaning* of politics, and ... renew[...] the political imaginary' (Straume 2012a: 132, emphasis in original). In the next section, I outline the methodological approach undertaken in this study, which works toward a new theoretical understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action.

A Note on Method: Hermeneutic Reconstruction and Critical Comparison

In response to the question, 'how can collective political action make a difference in the world?', the aim of this study is to develop a theoretical understanding of the world-altering elements of collective political doing. To do so, I draw on the insights from the hermeneutic-phenomenological world problematic—in particular, the aspects of world-interpretation and world-formation that arise in the human encounter with and articulation of the world-horizon, beginning from the recognition of the human condition as always-already *in-the-world* (see

Section 1.1, Chapter 1). From this hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, I critically reconstruct Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's elucidations of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action (see Section 1.2, Chapter 1, for a justification of the selection of these thinkers).

The present study employs a twofold method; I outline the methodology in this section. First, this research adopts a critical hermeneutic approach for the reconstruction of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's respective political theories. Second, it undertakes a critical comparative discussion of the findings that emerged from the reconstruction. Together, these two methods facilitate the elucidation of a new theoretical framework, which will help to understand collective political action as a world-altering project. The texts for each reconstruction were selected according to their relation to the themes that motivate the present study. These include: political action, the world problematic, interpretation, critique, instituting doing or forming movement, patterns of meaning, historicity, and modes of collective agency and political creativity. (I speak to the scope of each hermeneutic reconstruction in the chapter specific to that analysis: Arendt in Chapter 2; Castoriadis in Chapter 3; and Wagner in Chapter 4.) A balance between breadth and depth of analysis was sought for each hermeneutic reconstruction. This gives due to both the span and the complex nuances of each thinker's intellectual trajectory. Additionally, this approach recognises their situatedness within—and responses to—the philosophical tradition that forms the background for their particular theoretical approaches. An analytic distance was maintained across each analysis to provide the necessary hermeneutic space for critique.

The chief methodological approach employed in this study is the critical hermeneutic reconstruction of texts. Broadly speaking, hermeneutics refers to 'the art of interpretation' (Grondin 1994: 1). Philosophical hermeneutics has a rich and diverse history;⁵ I follow Paul Ricoeur's approach to hermeneutic method in this study. Ricoeur provides a helpful working definition: 'hermeneutics is the theory of the operation of understanding in its relations to the

interpretation of texts' (1973: 112). Ricoeur's hermeneutics operates on an interpretative dialectic of explanation and understanding (1976c: 79, 86, 1981a: 218, 220). Where Martin Heidegger elucidates a notion of the 'hermeneutic circle' (1967 [1927]: 195), Ricoeur employs the term 'hermeneutical arc' (1976c: 87, 1981b: 218). For Ricoeur, the two interpretative modes—explanation and understanding—are situated along a broad hermeneutic arc, as hermeneutic analysis moves between a naïve and critical understanding of the text, and a surface-level or in-depth interpretation (Ricoeur 1976c: 87, 1981a: 218).

The specific method for critical hermeneutic reconstruction is as follows. First, the researcher objectifies the text through the mode of 'distanciation'. Taken as an object (Ricoeur 1976c: 77), the text is disconnected from the author's intentions, as well as the social, historical, and cultural contexts of its creation. This act of hermeneutic distanciation enables the researcher to uncover the 'potential horizons of meaning' disclosed by the text that go beyond the original intentions of the author, which can be 'actualized in different ways' (Ricoeur 1976c: 78; see also 1973: 122-123). As such, the 'plurivocity' of the text opens it to 'a plurality of constructions' by the researcher (Ricoeur 1976c: 77). Second, alternate to 'distanciation' is the act of 'appropriation'. For Ricoeur, to appropriate is 'to make one's own what was initially "alien"' (1981b: 185). The researcher actualises the meaning of the text via appropriation, such that 'interpretation becomes an event' (Ricoeur 1981b: 185). Appropriation is the hermeneutic counterpart of distanciation; yet, the two hermeneutic modes are in interplay in the dialectic of interpretation.

Hermeneutic reconstruction involves the interpretative and analytic movement between explanation and understanding of the parts of the text and the whole. In so doing, this method critically situates particular texts within the scholar's overarching intellectual trajectory, while recognising the socio-cultural, historical, and philosophical context of the text's production. Further, the movement toward understanding traverses three levels: from explanation of the text, to naïve, and then in-depth understanding: 'Interpreting a text means moving beyond

understanding what it says to understanding what it talks about' (Ricoeur 1976c: 88). Neither the parts of the text nor the whole can be understood in full without reference to one another; this movement of interpretation across the three levels demonstrates the irreducibility of understanding, and the 'circularity' of the hermeneutic circle. However, the hermeneutic circle never completely closes: the hermeneutic dialectics of explanation and understanding, and distance and belonging, thus appear more as a 'spiral' of interpretation (see Adams 2017a*).⁶

In sum, the hermeneutic method comprises a circular—or spiralling—movement between the parts of the text and the whole (be it the wider intellectual trajectory of the particular thinker, or the whole research project more generally), to disclose meaning and critically reconstruct the pertinent themes (both explicit and implicit) for the present research project. Texts are read and then re-read, and the findings drafted and re-drafted. Upon returning to the texts, the researcher remains both open to and critical of different hermeneutic insights, and then reconsiders the findings in relation to the secondary field of debate surrounding the work. Finally, in light of the multidimensionality and 'plurivocity' of the text, Ricoeur warns 'it is not true that all interpretations are equal' (1976c: 79). As such, references and additional detail are included throughout the reconstructions in this study to engender interpretative rigour and scholarly validity.

This study additionally undertakes a critical comparison to explore the parallels and differences between the three approaches to world-altering collective political action revealed through the reconstructions. Despite its widespread and interdisciplinary use, the critical comparative research method is often uncritically and unsystematically utilised in the social sciences and humanities (Azarian 2011: 113). Comparison is never an end in itself; the aims and purpose of the critical comparison orientate the methodological approach, which the study must clearly state from the outset. With this in mind, the present study critically compares Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's political theories from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective in order to develop a theoretical understanding of the world-altering elements of

collective political action. The critical comparison helps to detail the divergences and convergences between their approaches, while highlighting avenues for further consideration. A critical comparative method requires careful and reflective analysis, and must focus equally and comprehensively upon each aspect of the study to present a balanced interpretation. In this respect, it complements the critical hermeneutic reconstructive approach noted above. The hermeneutic reconstruction provides the conditions for a meaningful comparison between the three accounts of world-altering collective political action; in turn, the critical dimension of the hermeneutic reconstruction makes the broader critique of the three approaches possible.

Any critical comparative study begins with a certain—implicit or explicit—assumption regarding the comparability of the units for analysis (Azarian 2011: 121). This is true for the present project. Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner were chosen for analysis according to the three criteria (which I outline in depth in Section 1.2, Chapter 1). First, an understanding of collective political action as a world-altering project is central within Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's works. Second, encounters with the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition inform each thinker's respective elucidation of collective political doing. Third, the problematic of modernity forms part of the conceptual background for their reflections upon collective political projects. Other thinkers in the phenomenological movement, broadly construed—such as Claude Lefort, Jan Patočka, Paul Ricoeur, or Charles Taylor—may be seen to fit within these criteria (see Section 1.2. of Chapter 1 for a discussion of these thinkers). However, the critique of the phenomenological approaches to political action that I elaborate in Chapter 1 justifies the choice of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner; other thinkers within the political phenomenological field bypass an explicit focus on political action *per se*, specifically in its world-altering dimensions. In contrast, Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner each elucidate a notion of the world and more clearly elaborate theories of collective political action as a world-altering project, than do Lefort, Patočka, Ricoeur, and Taylor. In doing so, Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner develop understandings of political action in its interconnected

world-interpreting and world-forming dimensions (as I demonstrate across this study). This sets Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's theories apart from other political phenomenological approaches.

Additionally, the tripartite comparative critique of theories of world-altering collective political action undertaken here differentiates the present research from other analyses of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner. Of those few that have brought Arendt and Castoriadis's political thought into explicit dialogue (see Nedimović 2007: 154-177; Straume 2012b; Zerilli 2002),⁷ the thematic of collective political action remains little remarked. One exception is Straume's essay, 'A Common World? Arendt and Castoriadis on Political Creation' (2012b). There, Straume discusses Arendt and Castoriadis's approaches to political creation in broad relation to a notion of the 'common world'. Yet, the question of the world and its alteration through collective political projects were not the key themes for Straume's analysis. The present study, in turn, draws on the hermeneutic-phenomenological problematic of the world to reconstruct the political dimensions of world-interpretation and world-formation found in Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's works, in order to develop a theory of world-altering collective political action. The inclusion of Wagner as an extra interlocutor to Arendt and Castoriadis sets the current research further apart; no critical comparison of these three thinkers has yet been undertaken.

Nevertheless, this project is not without its limitations. Two are particularly noteworthy: the perceived limitations of hermeneutic interpretation, and the restriction to English-language texts in the present reconstruction. In regard to the hermeneutic method, the question of the mere replication of previous interpretations is a reasonable critique. This limitation is one that can be overcome via analytic rigour. The validity and acceptability of a hermeneutic reconstruction arises through the persuasiveness of the critical account, its evidential support, and its appropriateness to the central questions of the research. Although there are many possible lines of interpretation, a 'valid' hermeneutic interpretation is one that

is coherent, and presented as a unified and credible narrative without contradictions (Moules 2002: 16-17). This harmony of interpretations engenders interpretative credibility as the reconstruction ‘seems to make more and better sense of the text[s]’ as it continues, and in so doing ‘opens up greater horizons of meaning’ that support the research findings (Madison 1988: 15; see also Moules 2002: 16-17).

The restriction of the reconstruction of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s works to English language texts is an additional limitation to the present study; I note this in each chapter respective to their thought. Although I am unable to consider any of the original French or German language publications by the three thinkers, the key texts necessary for reconstruction were readily available in English—as either translated texts or those originally published in the English language. Translations, however, entail the inherent risk of potential inaccuracy or misrepresentation of the intentions of the author. A tri-lingual approach to the present analysis may have added further depth to the reconstruction. Yet, with no alternative available, I accept this limitation to the present investigation.

Thesis Overview

The organisation of this thesis is as follows. The study is divided into five parts, followed by a concluding discussion. Chapter 1 deals with the hermeneutic-phenomenological problematic of the world. In particular, I draw attention to the notion of the human encounter with and articulation of the world-horizon, and highlight incipient notions of ‘doing’ within hermeneutic-phenomenological elucidations of ‘world-interpretation’ and ‘world-formation’. I then set this understanding of the interpretative-formation of the world on the background of a notion of modernity. With this framework in hand, the second part of Chapter 1 contextualises the present inquiry into the world-altering dimensions of collective political action within the field of debate; specifically, in relation to political phenomenological approaches (broadly speaking), as well as attempts to bring the question of the world and politics into dialogue within sociological and social theoretical debates. After this critical analysis, I justify the

selection of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner for reconstruction in this study. As I will show in Section 1.2 in Chapter 1 (and as noted above), I focus on three criteria in particular: the centrality of a notion of political action as world-altering doing operative at the collective level of sociality; hermeneutic-phenomenological debates inform their approach; and, the problematic of modernity forms a conceptual background for their political theory.

After sketching the framework for a phenomenological approach to political action in Chapter 1, I undertake the critical hermeneutic reconstruction of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's theories of world-altering collective political action in Chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively. I concentrate the analysis on their remarks on the 'world-interpreting' and 'world-forming' elements of political action, as well as their elucidations of the question of the world. In addition to drawing out insights *vis-à-vis* their notions of world-altering political doing, each chapter develops a particular argument in relation to the specific thinker's approach. Chapter 2 highlights that Arendt's political theory is inherently anchored in her philosophical anthropological understanding of the human conditions of natality and plurality *in-the-world*. As I argue in that chapter, these dimensions of the human condition form the precondition of politics and the possibility for history for Arendt. In Chapter 3, I reconstruct an implicit hermeneutic element from Castoriadis's work that points to an interpretative notion of world-opening doing. I lean on this latent hermeneutic undercurrent to highlight a tension in Castoriadis's thought: between interpretative doing, on the one hand, and Castoriadis's later approach to creation *ex nihilo*, on the other. In light of his emphasis on the creation of worlds of meaning *ex nihilo*, I suggest that this aspect of Castoriadis's thought lends itself to a form of constructivism. It bypasses the phenomenological insight of the human condition as always-already *in-the-world*, and in so doing, posits *anthropos* as sovereign world-creators. I similarly level this contention against Wagner's work in Chapter 4, in relation to his understanding of projects of world-making. Wagner's elucidation of the world problematic after 2007 (in the wake of Nathalie Karagiannis and Wagner's sketch of varieties of world-making; see 2007a)

centres on the ‘construction’ (and reconstruction) of the social world in distinction from the natural world; the emphasis on ‘construction’, ‘reconstruction’, and ‘world-*making*’ in Wagner’s approach comprises a constructivist undercurrent. This sits at odds with the hermeneutic dimension that characterises Wagner’s work after 2000 (which I demonstrate through the analysis of his thought), which underscores the reflexive reinterpretation of the world by human beings in the present. I detail this argument across Chapter 4.

In Chapter 5, I bring the findings of the reconstruction of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s approaches to the world-altering dimensions of collective political action into critical comparative dialogue. Leaning on the hermeneutic-phenomenological framework developed in Chapter 1, the discussion focusses on three considerations in particular: opening the world via world-interpreting critique; re-creating or beginning the world *anew* via world-forming doing (which is inherently intertwined with world-interpreting action, as I argue there); and, Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s elucidations of the world problematic. By debating the convergences and divergences between their approaches, the critical comparison serves to develop a new theoretical approach—political action *in-the-world*—which I outline in the conclusion to this study. In brief, the element of world-interpreting critique problematizes the institution of the world, which, in so doing, reveals the world as a paradoxical horizon, and opens the institution onto the possibility of re-articulation. This collective interrogation of the instituted world articulates potential alternatives via the conflict of interpretations, and at the same time reconfigures common bonds through the reflexive reinterpretation of shared patterns of meaning. Here, world-interpreting doing is interlinked with modes of world-forming action, as rearticulated patterns are creatively reinstituted to alter the socio-cultural and political form of the social world. In short, this thesis contends that collective political action *begins* the world *anew* by intertwining the dimensions of world-interpretation and world-formation, following the hermeneutic-phenomenological recognition of the human condition as always-already *in-the-world*. I discuss openings for further consideration within the

concluding discussion after the elaboration of the theoretical framework and significance of the study. In particular, an analysis of the question of power and the temporality of political action will advance this theoretical programme in future.

To recap, the task of the present project is to analyse the world-altering dimensions of collective political action, in order to develop a new theoretical approach. To do this, I reconstruct the work of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner by leaning on the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the world problematic. I turn to these debates in the following chapter.

CHAPTER ONE

EN ROUTE TO A PHENOMENOLOGY OF POLITICAL ACTION: THE WORLD PROBLEMATIC AND THE QUESTION OF DOING

The introduction to this thesis underscored the need for a new theoretical approach to understand the world-altering potential of collective political action—to go in search of politics (to borrow from Bauman; cf. 1999) in light of the contemporary trends toward worldnessness, globalization, and depoliticization. Indeed, leaning on Jean-Luc Nancy (2007), the task is to choose *mondialisation* over globalization, to interrogate our collective impotence and open the struggle for the alteration of the world via political action. This study deals with the central question: ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’. As noted in the introductory discussion, two overlapping objectives emerge here: First, an elucidation of an understanding of ‘the world’, in order to, second, analyse the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. This chapter undertakes the first task by turning to the hermeneutic-phenomenological problematic of the world.

The discussion is broken into two main sections. The first deals with the hermeneutic-phenomenological world problematic. In so doing, I outline the two dimensions of ‘doing’ that intertwine within the human encounter with and articulation of the world-horizon—‘world-interpretation’ and ‘world-formation’—and sketch these elements in light of a general understanding of modernity. Section 1.1, then, serves to detail a theoretical framework that works toward a phenomenology of political action. Section 1.2, in turn, contextualises the present investigation into the world-altering dimensions of collective political action within the wider field of debate, which includes political phenomenological approaches (broadly speaking) as well as social theoretical debates that take up the question of the world. This critical analysis clears a path for the present inquiry by situating it within the field and highlighting the gap to which this study addresses. After this, I outline a justification for the

reconstruction of Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Peter Wagner's approaches to political action, which I commence after this chapter.

1.1. The Hermeneutic-Phenomenological Approach to the Question of the World and the Intertwined Dimensions of World-Interpretation and World-Formation

The question of the world is a central and enduring problematic for the hermeneutic and phenomenological movement, broadly construed (see Merleau-Ponty 2002 [1945]: vii-xxiv; Spiegelberg 1981, 1994 [1971]).⁸ Following Eugen Fink (2005 [1933]), Klaus Held recently argued that the world is the 'most fundamental theme' of phenomenological philosophy (2012: 443). Edmund Husserl identified the *Lebenswelt* as the central theme of phenomenology in 'The Crisis' (Husserl 1970 [1936]; see Merleau-Ponty 2002: viii). Yet, the world became a question in its own right with the so-called 'third generation' of phenomenology, especially through Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Jan Patočka, Paul Ricoeur, and Emmanuel Levinas. In this section, I outline an understanding of the hermeneutic-phenomenological world problematic, and, in so doing, highlight the two elements of world-interpretation and world-formation at play within the human encounter with and articulation of the world. Later, I place this notion on the background of an understanding of modernity, before clearing a path for the present investigation into the world-altering aspects of collective political action within the current field of debate in Section 1.2.

Most simply, the world—or 'world-horizon'—is the latent, under-determined, encompassing shared horizon of the human condition, through which all phenomena can appear as meaningful to *anthropos* (see Adams 2009b: 255; Arnason 2007: 23).

Phenomenological philosophy draws attention to the 'problem of our access to the world' by challenging the epistemological and ontological claims found in modern scientism and the so-called philosophy of consciousness (Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964]: 5; see also Arnason 1992: 250-251; Merleau-Ponty 2002: vii; Ricoeur 1974 [1969]: 9). For Merleau-Ponty, 'Descartes and

particularly Kant *detached* the subject' from the world, which rendered the world an external object constituted via the analytic reflection of the transcendental subject (2002: x; see also Richir 1993: 64-65). Science rests on a similar level of abstraction from the world: it lays a rationale or explanation over the world that is prior to human experience (Husserl 1970 [1936]: 48; Merleau-Ponty 2002: ix; Patočka 2015 [1936/1937]: 24; Učník 2015: 35, 38).

In contrast to scientism, phenomenological debates highlight that 'we do not witness or perceive the world as spectators' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 8). The world precedes knowledge and therefore scientific explanation: it is that 'of which knowledge always *speaks*' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: x, emphasis in original; see also Geniusas 2012; Heidegger 1967 [1927]: 251; Held 2003: 37-39; Husserl 1970 [1936]: §33, 1999, 2012 [1931]: §27-30; Merleau-Ponty 2002: viii-ix; Moran 2012: 161; Patočka 2015 [1936/1937]: 20). The world is neither an external object nor a possession of human consciousness. As Merleau-Ponty put it, 'the world is not what I think, but what I live through' (2002: xix). Both the philosophy of consciousness and scientism bypass the primal experience of 'being-already-in, being-amidst' the world (Dreyfus 1991: 244), and in so doing assert the world-constituting abilities of the conscious subject 'without a corresponding anthropological grounding' (Arnason 2016a: 130).

In turn, phenomenology takes the human condition *in-the-world* as its starting point (Heidegger 1967: 78-79, 93; see also Malpas 2006: 47; Merleau-Ponty 1968: 76, 2002: xxii; Overgaard 2004: 145-146). It is a philosophy 'for which the world is always "already there" before reflection begins—as an "inalienable presence"' that forms the ground of human experience and the field upon which all phenomena can appear as meaningful (Merleau-Ponty 2002: vii). Here, the world must be understood as a '*universal, meaning-generating field*' (Kohák 1989: 253, 247 emphasis in original), as an under-determined and inexhaustible horizon of horizons that forms the shared ground of the human condition (Adams 2009b: 255-256, 2011c: 74, 2014b: 66, 71-73; Arnason 1992: 254-255, 1993: 95; Husserl 1970: §33, §71; Rechter 2007: 36; Ricoeur 1991c: 212-213; Vanhoozer 1991: 50). As an inexhaustible horizon that

encompasses—and exceeds—all phenomena and human experience, the world is irreducible to the totality of ‘everything that is’ (see Arnason 1992: 254; Rechter 2007: 36). The overarching world-horizon forms a shared inter- and trans-cultural context, as a source of ‘unity in plurality’—yet still allows for heterogeneous and potentially conflicting interpretative-articulations of historical patterns (Arnason 2003:229, 2007: 23, 2013b: 294; Adams 2009b: 258, 263, 2011c: 75, 2014b: 72-73). Because the world-horizon is under-determined—it ‘is incomplete and inexhaustible’ (Arnason 1993: 95) and always remains ‘*unfinished*’ (Richir 1993: 68, emphasis in original)—the world always extends beyond the institution of what ‘is’ to offer further possibilities for articulation (see Ricoeur 1991a: 453). As such, ‘an interpretative surplus is involved that leads to a plurality of interpretations’ and of possible articulations of the world (Adams 2009b: 256). From this perspective, the world ‘is an open and dynamic field of possibilities’ (Adams 2014b: 76), as a ground that is ‘pregnant’ with ‘possible worlds’ and potential ‘variants of this world’ (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 250).

Thus, an understanding of the openness of the world-horizon ‘to an infinite number of possibilities’ of world-interpretation and world-formation is central to these hermeneutic-phenomenological debates (Merleau-Ponty 2002 [1945]: 527; I return to the connected aspects of world-interpretation and world-formation shortly). A hermeneutic-phenomenological approach is therefore an important and appropriate starting point for the present study because, first, it contends that the articulation of the world is central to understanding the anthropological condition as always-already *in-the-world* (as well as the ensuing ontological and epistemological implications); and second, it reveals that the world remains permanently open to potentially infinite possibilities of articulation. Together, these insights clear a path for an analysis of the world-altering dimensions of collective political projects, as per the intention of the present study. Indeed, the common condition *in-the-world* and the openness of the world to alteration provide the preconditions for collective political action to make a difference in the world.

A hermeneutic-phenomenological approach is beneficial for an elucidation of collective political action (and its world-altering elements) for two additional reasons. First, these debates take the world—as an encompassing and inexhaustible horizon of meaning, and shared ground of coexistence—as central. This problematizes subjective and intersubjective notions of action, which ‘still analytically take[.] “the subject” as its core’ (Adams 2014b: 67), and as such effectively reduce sociality to an intersubjective and dialogical level of constitution.⁹ Where Suzi Adams (2012a) leant upon the phenomenological understanding of the world to elucidate the instituting dimension of society at the *trans-subjective* horizon of cultural movement, this study similarly draws on the world problematic to capture the modes of political doing that articulate the world-horizon at the *collective* level of sociality.

Second, hermeneutic-phenomenological debates highlight that the human condition is always-already *in-the-world*. From this perspective, *anthropos* do not institute worlds of meaning in a ‘worldless vacuum’ (see Adams 2007: 49, 2011b: 241, 2013: 78), nor can *anthropos* assume an external point from which to act upon the world in a position of mastery, which reduces the world to a limited totality. The world is not an external ‘object *outside* of us that can be controlled and manipulated’ (Nancy 2007: 34; cf. Arnason 2003: 93-94). Rather, ‘we are involved with the world and with others in an inextricable tangle’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 528). A recognition of the human condition as always-already *in-the-world*, as per hermeneutic-phenomenological philosophy, enables an acknowledgement of the pre-given limits upon human doing, which, in so doing, curtails modern notions of human mastery over the world. In this light, a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach is an important foundation for a theory of collective political action because it places limits on the sovereignty of *anthropos* as absolute ‘world-makers’ (cf. Arnason 2003: 90). Although the world remains open for potentially infinite possibilities of articulation, it is irreducible to an object of control from a position of mastery; the human condition is *être au monde*, in the twofold sense of *being-in* and

being-of the world (Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964]: 224; Ricoeur 1981c: 106, 116-117; see also Adams 2015a: 140-141).

If human beings are always-already *in-the-world*, the encounter with and articulation of the world is a central component of the anthropological condition. Hermeneutic-phenomenological debates draw attention to two, interconnected dimensions of doing, broadly speaking: world-interpretation and world-formation. The key hermeneutic-phenomenological insight of the intertwining of these modes of doing (as world-interpretation and world-formation), with meaning and the world paves the way for a theory of world-altering collective political action, which is grounded in an understanding of the creative-interpretative possibilities of the anthropological condition *in-the-world*. Yet, as I will later demonstrate, a close analysis of the world-altering dimensions of political doing remains on the margins of hermeneutic-phenomenological debates. First, however, I will outline the two elements of world-formation and world-interpretation by drawing chiefly on Maurice Merleau-Ponty, Johann Arnason, and Paul Ricoeur's respective approaches. Their remarks on world-formation and world-interpretation form the analytic frame for the present investigation into the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. I must stress here that the elements of world-formation and world-interpretation are fundamentally intertwined within the doing of world-articulation; nevertheless, I distinguish between the two modes of action for the purposes of clarity of analysis, both in the present discussion and within this study overall.

Most broadly, 'world-formation' refers to the articulation of the world-horizon through patterns of meaning, which gives shape to social-historical worlds and the human condition. Indeed, each characterisation of the formation, articulation, or institution of the world in hermeneutic-phenomenological debates suggests a mode of doing (broadly speaking) at the collective and trans-subjective level of sociality. Yet, the question of action *per se* is not an explicit or systematic focus within Merleau-Ponty, Ricoeur, and Arnason's approaches. In the preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, Merleau-Ponty highlights that the meanings

attributed to all phenomena and events that appear in the world express a ‘unique mode of existing’ that relate to ‘a certain way of patterning the world’ (2002 [1945]: xx; cf. Rechter 2007: 40). For Arnason, Merleau-Ponty’s notion of a *mise en forme du monde* clears a path for a theory of culture (Arnason 1992: 255), which can be understood as an ‘interpretative patterning of the human condition’ that articulates ‘the relations between man and world’ (Arnason 1993: 89, 92; see also 1989a: 38).

Ricoeur, in turn, elucidates the formation of patterns of ‘real social life’ via the imaginary of ideology, which links broadly to modes of social doing and *praxis* (Ricoeur 1986: 9; see also Adams 2015a: 130; Helenius 2015). For Ricoeur, social life is mediated by cultural patterns (specifically, the intertwining of ideology and utopia within the cultural imagination; Ricoeur 1976a, 1986 [1975]; see also Taylor 1986) that form ‘a horizon of possibilities which constitute an environment for people’ (Ricoeur 1991a: 453), a world within which human beings *dwell*. ‘[T]o exist, to be ‘in the world’” is to be situated in ‘a concrete “there”’, within a culturally articulated socio-historical horizon (Malpas 2006: 47; see also Adams 2014b: 66). Dwelling *in-the-world* here indicates both the formation of the world through this ‘act of inhabiting’, but also having a *place* in or *belonging-to* the world (Ricoeur 1995: 38; see also Ricoeur 1981c: 106, 116-117, 1991a: 453; and Adams 2015a: 140-141; Heidegger 2001 [1954]; Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964]: 224). This mode of belonging *in-the-world* points to an elementary source of common socio-cultural bonds, as a precondition for modes of solidarity (see Karagiannis 2007b: 216, 2007c: 154-157).

More importantly, ‘formation’ in these debates refers—albeit implicitly—to a mode of doing, to the interpretative-creation of patterns of meaning and their institution, which form the ‘*dimensions* of history’ (Merleau-Ponty 2002: xx, emphasis in original). Arnason notes the connection between the ‘figurative articulation of meaning’ and the notion of ‘institution’ within Merleau-Ponty’s work (Arnason 1993: 96). The instituting act in this analysis relates to the ‘formation of patterns of determinacy, stability, and ideality that are imposed on

experience' (Arnason 1993: 96). Taking Arnason's point further, society institutes constellations of cultural meaning (which articulate the human condition in and the relation to the world) and 'impose form' onto the world via patterns of determinacy (see Arnason 1989a: 28), which gives shape to the particular society in question. Yet, as Arnason notes, these patterns of determinacy are in 'a state of constant tension with the underlying indeterminacy [or, under-determinacy] of the world' (1993: 96). This tension demonstrates that the institution of patterns of meaning, as the articulation of form onto the world-horizon, always remains incomplete. The re-institution of the patterns of the world—and hence the alteration of the world through collective political action—is an ever-present possibility precisely because the world-horizon always remains open to further articulation.

The hermeneutic-phenomenological notion of 'world-formation' is inherently intertwined with the dimension of 'world-interpretation'. Because the human condition is always-already *in-the-world*, the anthropic encounter with and formation of the world necessarily involves an interpretative element. Indeed, world-interpretation provides the precondition for secondary modes of reflective analysis, and the disclosure of the world in speech (Arnason 1992: 247-249, 1993: 86; see also Adams 2009b: 255). Together with phenomenology, a hermeneutic analysis helps to 'understand how agents are understanding the world' (Bohmann, Montero & Taylor 2014: 5), yet, interpretation is irreducible to mere understanding (Ricoeur 1974 [1969]). Hermeneutic approaches emphasise 'the interpretative aspect of the world relation' (Arnason 1992: 248), in which a hermeneutical dimension is inherent in the articulation of the world (Arnason 1989a: 40, 1993: 92-93); cultural patterns are 'as much world interpreting as they are world creating' (Adams 2014b: 71; cf. 2009b: 256, 2011c: 77). The openness of the world to manifold possibilities of articulation, moreover, indicates that the world is also open to divergent and potentially conflicting interpretations (Arnason 1992: 255, 2003: 229, 2007: 23; Ricoeur 1974 [1969]). As Ricoeur puts it, the conflict

of interpretations is ‘not so much a conflict *between* interpretations as a movement of *many* interpretations’ (1991b, 226-227 emphasis in original).

In this, the world is ‘to be understood as a space ... in which the conflict of interpretations is played out’ (Arnason 1992: 256), which forms the common ground between hermeneutic modes of distance and belonging (or, ‘world distancing’ and ‘world engagement’; see Arnason 1992: 248). Distance—or, ‘distancing’, as Ricoeur characterises it—clears a space for the possibility for critique via the differentiation of and conflict between world-interpretations (Ricoeur 1975: 249, 2008b; see also Kaplan 2003: 28-46). Critique arises on the basis of some form of pre-understanding, through belonging *in-the-world* and within a cultural pattern; nevertheless, ‘we never belong to our [cultural] horizon ... to the extent that we cannot reflect on’—and indeed interrogate or problematize—‘the limits of our understanding’ (Kaplan 2003: 38). For Merleau-Ponty, an ‘interrogative mode’ of questioning the world (1968: 103; cf. 1968: 159) reveals the world as a ‘paradoxical’ horizon (2002: xv). It is precisely because the world is a problematic or paradoxical horizon—both inexhaustible and permanently incomplete—that interpretative articulations of the human condition *in-the-world* are contestable (see Arnason 1993: 93). This hermeneutic-phenomenological insight offers a path for an analysis of dimensions of political critique, as part of a theory of world-altering collective political action *vis-à-vis* the intentions of the present inquiry.

The problematic of modernity lies in the background of these considerations.

‘Modernity’ is a highly contested thematic in social theoretical and philosophical fields; here, I lean on both Arnason and Wagner to define modernity in brief. Each in their own way, Arnason and Wagner draw on Castoriadis’s elucidation of the dual imaginary significations of modernity: ‘autonomy’ and ‘the unlimited expansion of pseudo-rational pseudo-mastery’ (see Castoriadis 1991a, 1997a; see also Arnason 1989a; Wagner 2012: 22; I discuss Castoriadis’s work in Chapter 2, and Wagner’s elucidation of modernity in Chapter 3). The relation of and conflict between the modern social imaginaries ‘institutes an interpretative space that is to be

specifically filled in each socio-historic situation through struggles over the situation-grounded appropriate meaning' (Wagner 2012: 23). For Arnason, this modern 'field of tensions' forms an open, inter-cultural horizon (1989a, 1991a: 205; see also Adams 2009b: 258-261, 2011c: 76-77, 2014b: 71-73). Yet, the 'modernity' of these cultural articulations relates to a particular radicalisation of the relations between *anthropos* and the world, as a modern articulation of 'implicit or pre-given answers to questions about the human condition' (Arnason, 2003: 227; see also Adams and Arnason, 2016: 178; Arnason, 1989a: 323-324, 1993). At the core of the social imaginaries of 'autonomy' and 'rational mastery' lies an articulation of the anthropological condition *and* its world relation. As Wagner put it, modernity is 'the societal condition under which human beings realise their autonomy and, by doing so, increasingly master and control the world' (2001b: 167; cf. 2001c: 38). Indeed, the modern cultural patterns of autonomy and rational mastery both rest on an assumption of the 'shapeability' of the world (Wagner, 1994a: 175). As I noted earlier, the hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to the articulation of the world is key to understanding the anthropological condition as always-already *in-the-world*. The incipient philosophical anthropology at play within this project, then, is anchored in an understanding of modernity. In this way, political action has the 'character of a consciously chosen' relation to or 'attitude toward the world' (Arnason 2003: 93), a 'confrontation of the world' (Fuchs 2000: 79) that involves 'taking a stand in relation to the human situation' (Merleau-Ponty 2002: xxi) in order to alter it, to make a difference in the world.

The above analysis of the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the world problematic served to outline a preliminary framework for the analysis of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. From the above, the world can be understood as the inexhaustible, under-determined, and shared field of the human condition that is open to potentially infinite possibilities of articulation. That the world remains permanently incomplete and open to alternative—and plural, conflicting—articulations provides a precondition for

political action to make a difference in the world. Hermeneutic-phenomenological debates additionally link the question of world-articulation—in its interconnected dimensions of world-interpretation and world-formation, noted above—to the human condition *in-the-world*. Not only do these insights clear a path for an elucidation of the world-interpreting and world-forming dimensions of political doing, this highlights a modest approach to notions of political agency. Indeed, if the human condition is always-already *in-the-world* or *être au monde*, *anthropos* cannot assume a point of mastery over the world, nor reduce the world to an object of control. Nevertheless, political action assumes a particularly modern stance toward the world, which considers the world as amenable to alteration through collective interrogation and political instituting doing. The hermeneutic-phenomenological framework developed here thus provides the starting point from which to address the central question driving this study: ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ Yet, this is not the first such attempt to bring phenomenological problematics into dialogue with social political theory. Next, I discuss similar projects that bridge these traditions of thought in order to situate the present project within the field of debate and to highlight the gap that the present study fills.

1.2. Clearing a Path for a Phenomenology of Political Action: Openings within the Field of Debate and Justification of Approach

The above analysis sketched an outline of a theoretical starting point for a phenomenology of political action by drawing attention to the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the world and the twofold elements of world-interpretation and world-formation in the anthropic encounter with the world-horizon. I argue that this approach makes possible a notion of the world-altering dimensions of collective political doing: it helps to think through the ways in which *anthropos* shape, and reshape socio-cultural worlds and engender movement in history via political action. This speaks directly to the central question that drives this thesis: ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ This section, in turn, contextualises the present project within the wider field of debate. First, I detail other political

phenomenological approaches (broadly speaking), before considering social theoretical and sociological debates that take up the question of the world in relation to the thematic of politics. In so doing, the critical analysis of the field clears a path for this inquiry. In light of this, I outline a justification for the selection of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner for the present purpose of analysing the world-altering dimensions of collective political action.

In his recent essay, 'Towards a Phenomenology of the Political World' (2012: 442), Klaus Held contends that a 'political phenomenology' has not yet been fully established (I will debate this contention later). For him, a political phenomenology 'must recognize the world as its most fundamental theme' (Held 2012: 443). Held's 'first attempt' at developing a phenomenology of the political world in this way represents an opening for the present inquiry: he places the phenomenological question of the world at the centre in order to undertake an analysis of politics. Building on his earlier dialogues with Husserl and Heidegger (see Held 1992, 1996, 2003), Held adopts a Husserlian and Heideggerian 'interpretation of the world as horizon' as the starting point for his political phenomenology (Held 2012: 442). However, Held's approach is arguably more Husserlian than Heideggerian: it remains tied to the so-called 'Cartesian side' of Husserl's work, which emphasises the subjective constitution of the world by the transcendental *cogito* (see Richir 1993: 64). Leaning on Hannah Arendt's reconfiguration of Kant's theory of judgement (Held 2012: 451-459; see also Arendt 1992 [1982]), Held's political phenomenology focusses on the disclosure of subjective judgements—as *doxa*—which for him constitute the political world *qua* world. As he puts it:

The political world only exists insofar as it presents itself in being spoken about by the great mass of the many, the people of the citizenry ... In the language of Husserl, the political world 'constitutes itself' by advancing into appearance in being spoken through the many opinions that refer to it. [...] The appearing of the political world lets itself appear in the form of its being publicly or openly spoken through the many (2012: 454).

In this analysis, Held asserts that the political world is constituted through public speech-acts. In so doing, he reduces the world to a limited totality. Here the world is rendered

an external object, fabricated via the disclosure of subjective judgements through speech; moreover, the above quote suggests that the political world ceases to exist once it is not spoken about. With this move, Held remains within the tradition of the philosophy of consciousness. He bypasses the fundamental hermeneutic-phenomenological insight that the human condition is always-already *in-the-world*. The world is not an accumulation of speech-acts, or created via the constituting power of consciousness (see Merleau-Ponty 2002: xi), or ‘simply what appears to us as the Cartesian *artefact*’ (Richir 1993: 77, emphasis in original). The world cannot dissipate if we do not speak of it: as argued earlier, it forms the common ground and inexhaustible horizon of the human condition. Held’s approach thus remains limited. Additionally, the notion of doing at play in his elucidation of a phenomenology of the political world (Held 2012) is one of *judging*. It does not develop phenomenological account of creative political *doing*, in the sense of a project of world-alteration, with the intertwined dimensions of world-interpretation and world-formation. The extent to which Held’s political phenomenology can elucidate an understanding of world-altering collective political action hence remains unclear. Nevertheless, his argument that ‘an understanding of the political can be further developed ... from the systematic possibilities of [the] phenomenology of the world’ underscores the significance of a phenomenological approach to politics (Held 1996: 39).

As noted above, Held commenced his theorisation of a phenomenology of the political world off the back of the claim that phenomenology ‘must admit that it has not yet succeeded in producing a systematic, well-grounded reflection on the political’ (2012: 443). This point is not without criticism. For example, Bernhard Flynn (2012) characterised Claude Lefort as a ‘phenomenologist of the political’ in the same year that Held published his essay,¹⁰ the works of Jan Patočka, Hannah Arendt, Paul Ricoeur, Cornelius Castoriadis,¹¹ and Charles Taylor can also be situated within the political phenomenological field, broadly construed. However, the question of political *action* has hitherto not been a central concern for phenomenology. For those above-noted thinkers within the political phenomenological tradition (whose work I

detail in brief shortly), the problematic of political action *per se* remains on the periphery; moreover, the worldhood of political doing is rarely treated as a question in its own right. A theorisation of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action can help to address this pretermission in the field.

A so-called ‘phenomenologist of the political’ (Flynn 2012), Lefort develops an ‘anthropology of modernity’ that centres on the ‘historical origin of the political forms of modern society’ (Doyle 2003: 78; see also Lefort 1978). As Merleau-Ponty’s student, Lefort undertook critical dialogues with his thought (as debated in Howard 1988, 2011, Mazzocchi 2013, Plot 2009, 2014), and additionally edited two important, posthumous works by Merleau-Ponty: *The Visible and the Invisible* and *The Prose of the World* (see Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964], 1973a). Clearly influenced by Merleau-Ponty, traces of the world problematic lie in the background of Lefort’s analysis; however, Lefort’s work is not straightforwardly hermeneutic-phenomenological, in the sense employed in this study. That is, Lefort does not explicitly focus on world-interpretation or world-formation, nor develop a notion of collective political action in its world-altering dimensions. An understanding of ‘the *instituting and form-giving dimension* of society’ is pivotal for Lefort’s political theory (Marchart 2007: 92, emphasis in original; see also Doyle 2003: 77; ed. Plot 2013). Yet, Lefort is arguably more interested in the political *form* of society (including the ‘generative [and symbolic] principles of its “form”’; Lefort 2000: 226; see also 1986, 1988, 2005). A political form is understood as a ‘*symbolic presence*’ (Howard 1989: 8, emphasis in original) that emerges through a ‘*symbolical project[...]*’ as part of the self-institution of modern societies (Doyle 2003: 72, emphasis in original). The instituting dimensions of this symbolical project aside, it appears that Lefort differentiates the political *form* from political *action*, as encapsulated in his statement: ‘the political is thus revealed [in its form], *not* in ... political activity’ (1988: 11, emphasis added). An understanding of political action may arguably be expanded from Lefort’s discussion of the instituting aspect of the political. Nonetheless, the world-altering aspects of collective political action remain limited in

Lefort's analysis—especially within his reflections on the *form* of modern political societies, be it democratic or totalitarian (Lefort 1986).

Patočka's phenomenological philosophy likewise overlooks a systematic elucidation of political action, *per se*. In the asubjective phenomenology developed in his later work (see eds. Učník, Chvatík, et al. 2015), Patočka shifted the focus of phenomenological inquiry beyond Husserl and Heidegger: from subjectivity to the trans-subjective horizon of historical movement (Adams 2012c: 29). The world problematic permeates Patočka's philosophical project, as he challenges key debates within the phenomenological movement and the philosophical tradition more broadly; including scientism, the problem of the natural world, and philosophies of history, among others (see Učník 2015, eds. Učník, Williams et al. 2015, Tava 2016). However, Patočka is less recognised for his *political* philosophy, as such (Lom 2004: 277-278), and remains in the margins of English-language debates (Findlay 2002: 185). A Czech dissident, Patočka is known for his involvement in the foundation of *Charta 77* and dissent against the Soviet regime in the mid-twentieth century (Adams 2016a: 218; Findlay 2002: 1, 186; Tava 2015: 137-138). According to Edward Findlay (2002: 83, 85), Patočka's most important contribution to political thought resides in his elucidation of the 'problematicity' of human reality and the emergence of politics (via the Greek *polis*) as an expression of human freedom (see also Adams 2016a). Patočka seeks to reactivate a Socratic notion of political action that recognises the 'problematicity' of the world and human freedom, as manifest in the transcendence of everydayness by 'opening'—or better, *shattering*—the world through political doing (Patočka 1996 [1975]: 39; see also Adams 2016a: 223; Findlay 2002: 100-102; Ricoeur 1996: viii; Tava 2015). Questioning our situation in the world shatters the self-evident certainties of socio-political reality, which reveals the problematicity of the world (Findlay 2002: 102-107). Patočka's political philosophy develops a notion of world-opening and world-problematizing movement at the asubjective horizon of history. Yet this implicit understanding of political doing is overshadowed by his ethico-political philosophy: he

emphasises responsibility for the world and care for the soul as key modes of spiritual politics and the dimensions of freedom (Patočka 1996 [1975]; see also Chvatík 2016; Forti 2016; Findlay 2002: 51-68, 83-159; Mensch 2016; Tava 2015; eds. Tava & Meacham 2016). As such, like Lefort, the question of collective political action *per se* is not at the forefront of Patočka's considerations.

Political thematics similarly permeate each of Ricoeur and Taylor's theoretical works. Nevertheless, as with Lefort and Patočka, Ricoeur and Taylor do not explicitly develop a notion of collective political action *per se* from the hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective of the human condition *in-the-world*. Although both Ricoeur and Taylor draw on the hermeneutic-phenomenological world problematic at various points in their intellectual projects, it remains at the margins of their thinking. Ricoeur and Taylor are more appropriately situated in the emerging and heterogeneous 'social imaginaries field', alongside Castoriadis (see Adams et al. 2015: 18-25).¹² An understanding of doing—in its widest sense—operates beneath Ricoeur and Taylor's elucidations of the inventive and productive dimensions of social imaginaries, as driving projects of social change. For Ricoeur, the utopian pole of the cultural imagination motivates social change, understood as 'the imaginary project of another kind of society, another reality, another world' (1976a: 24; see also Ricoeur 1986: 16; Helenius 2015: 39-40; Iakovou 2012: 122; Taylor 1986: xix-xxx). Yet, at the same time, Ricoeur notes that 'in its most elementary forms', action 'is already mediated and articulated by symbolic systems (1976a: 23; cf. Ricoeur 1976b: 21); that is, through the cultural imaginary of ideology. Ricoeur in this way emphasises the fundamental connection between meaning (in its instituted and instituting forms), interpretation, and action—broadly construed as a field of historical movement (see Taylor 1986: xxxvi). However, Ricoeur did not systematically develop a philosophy of political action. Ricoeur's political thought instead 'consists of philosophically-informed reflection on actual political practice' (Dauenhauer 2000b: 298), such as democracy (as in Ballantyne 2007: 170-195).¹³ His philosophy additionally takes on an ethico-political

dimension via the ‘little ethics’ elaborated in *Oneself as Another* (Ricoeur 1992), as well as his remarks on fragility and responsibility (see Dauenhauer 2000b, 2000a).¹⁴ As noted earlier, Ricoeur’s hermeneutics—specifically, the conflict of interpretations—opens a path for an analysis of collective political critique as part of a world-altering political project. This insight aside, his ‘*cultural phenomenological hermeneutics*’ (see Adams 2015a: 131, emphasis in original) bypasses an explicit elucidation of political action *per se*.

Taylor (2002, 2004) similarly underscores the meaning-making and interpretative dimensions of social imaginaries, particularly in its narrative form. Emerging via his debates on modernity (such as Taylor 1992), ‘social imaginaries’ for Taylor form the background horizon of socio-cultural understandings that are embedded within and motivate social practices (Taylor 2002: 107, 2004: 25-30). Taylor does not focus specifically on the question of the world (especially in the hermeneutic-phenomenological sense, noted earlier); however, this understanding broadly informs his approach to social imaginaries as a backgrounded socio-cultural world of meaning. And, although Taylor reflects on the interconnection of articulations of meaning and their embeddedness in social practices, the question of social creativity—and more importantly for the present context, creative political action—remains on the sidelines of Taylor’s thought. In *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004), Taylor argues that the emergence of the modern social imaginary of the public sphere provides space for collective debate and opinion formation in modern democratic politics. Elsewhere, Taylor contends that critique must be directed toward the social imaginary narratives that pattern our social institutions (Bohmann, Montero & Taylor 2014: 7). Despite this, Taylor often appears more concerned with instituted forms of doing in his discussions of the political dimensions of modern social imaginaries; as such, Taylor is less interested in subversive modes of doing and ‘openings towards rupture and social change’ (Adams et al. 2015: 24). In sum, Lefort, Patočka, Ricoeur, and Taylor are each broadly informed by hermeneutic-phenomenological debates, but

none of these thinkers systematically develops an understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action from this perspective.

Other scholars in the wider social theoretical and sociological field have turned to the world problematic to theorise politics in a general sense. However, as with the above thinkers, the world-altering aspects of political doing have not been fully elaborated. For example, Jürgen Habermas appropriated the Husserlian and Schützian notion of the *Lebenswelt* in his *Theory of Communicative Action* (2004 [1984], 2006 [1987]; see also Dallmayr 1987; Geiman 1990; Habermas 1979, 1994; Harrington 1998). Luc Boltanski distinguished between ‘reality’ and ‘world’ in his important work, *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation* (2011 [2009]; see also Blokker 2014: 56), while Jean-Luc Nancy (2007) theorised world-creating doing as *mondialisation* in response to the problematic of globalization. Fred Dallmayr’s recasting of the Heideggerian *being-in-the-world* along ethical-political lines in *Being in the World: Dialogue and Cosmopolis* (2013) can also be included in this field.¹⁵ Martin Fuchs explored Arnason’s notion of ‘articulations of the world’ in relation to social movements; yet focussed on ‘social doing’ over and above an analysis of political action *per se* (Fuchs 2000). Nikolas Kompridis additionally brought Habermasian critical theory into dialogue with Dewey’s pragmatism and Heideggerian phenomenology to rethink the world-disclosing possibilities of critique, which culminated in his work *Critique and Disclosure: Critical Theory between Past and Future* (2006; see also Kompridis 1994, 2005, 2011). Finally, the recent collection of essays, titled *Phenomenology and the Political* (ed. Gurley & Pfeifer 2016), brought the themes of politics and phenomenology into explicit dialogue, yet did not develop an understanding of political action from the phenomenological insight of human condition *in-the-world* (and its connected modes of world-interpretation and world-formation). The above-discussed works highlight an emerging trend within the canon of social theory: a turn toward phenomenological debates and the question of the world in order to address political problematics.¹⁶ Indeed, the ‘relationship between phenomenology and the political’ is ‘complicated and contested’, and has not yet been fully

mapped out (eds. Gurley & Pfeifer 2016: xii). The present inquiry therefore builds on these incipient dialogues between phenomenological thematics and political theory.

In light of the gaps identified above across the phenomenological-philosophical and social theoretical field, this study advances an understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action by addressing the central question, ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ Notwithstanding the significance of each of Lefort, Patočka, Ricoeur, and Taylor in the hermeneutic-phenomenological field, broadly construed, these thinkers do not explicitly consider the question of collective political doing—especially as a world-altering project. As noted in Section 1.1, the hermeneutic-phenomenological world problematic clears a path for an analysis of the world-altering aspects of collective political action. These debates emphasise the human encounter with the world via the interconnected elements of world-interpretation and world-formation, as fundamentally connected to the anthropological condition *in-the-world*. This hermeneutic-phenomenological approach makes possible a political theoretical framework that acknowledges the pre-given limits upon human doing—as *anthropos* cannot assume a point of mastery or control over the world—yet properly recognises the modern world-orientation inherent to political projects: a particular stand toward the world, in which the instituted shape of the world is alterable through human and collective action. To analyse collective political action as a world-altering project from this perspective, it is necessary to turn to thinkers that sit broadly within the phenomenological tradition and elucidate political action in its world-altering dimensions—with the combined elements of world-interpretation and world-formation.

To this end, the present study turns to the work of Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Peter Wagner. Their respective theoretical projects are appropriate for this task, based on three general criteria. First, a notion of world-altering political action operative at the collective level of sociality is central to each of their works. Second, each thinker draws on the hermeneutic-phenomenological tradition, which informs their elucidation of collective

political action, as a world-altering mode of doing. Third, the problematic of modernity forms the conceptual background for each of their reflections on political projects. Here I detail Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner by way of introduction, before undertaking a hermeneutic reconstruction of their works (see Chapters 2, 3, and 4, respectively) ahead of a critical comparative dialogue in Chapter 5.

A broad understanding of collective political action as a world-altering project is key for Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner. Each in their own way, these thinkers take up hermeneutic and/or phenomenological problematics in order to elucidate the world-interpreting, world-forming, and world-altering possibilities of political action. Although Arendt considered herself neither a philosopher nor a phenomenologist (see Arendt 1994a [1964]: 1-2; cf. Held 2012: 442), her political theory takes its cue from the Heideggerian insight of *being-in-the-world* (1967 [1927]: 78-79). Arendt reconfigures this notion to emphasise human ‘plurality’ and ‘natality’ *in-the-world* as the anthropological preconditions of and for political action (Arendt 1998 [1958]: 7-8, 2007a: 93). In her later work in particular, Arendt develops a notion of world-founding political action, as evident in modern revolutionary projects (see Chapter 2, Section 2.3). Where Arendt departed from Heidegger, Castoriadis walked a Merleau-Pontian path, as he elucidated the creative imaginary institution of worlds of meaning (see Chapter 3; and Adams 2011a). Influenced by the mid-twentieth century field of phenomenological Marxism (which included Merleau-Ponty), Castoriadis’s early work in particular highlights the creative (and I argue, interpretative; see Section 3.2 and 3.3, Chapter 3) dimensions of revolutionary *praxis* that re-institute the social-historical world, in response to the determinism inherent to Marx’s ‘historical materialism’ (Castoriadis 1987a [1964-1965]). Wagner, in turn, draws upon notions of the world from thinkers as diverse as Arnason, Arendt, Nancy, and Nelson Goodman, to elaborate an understanding of projects of ‘world-making’ as part of his ongoing reassessment of the problematic of modernity (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a; Wagner 2012).

Indeed, the question of modernity permeates each of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's theoretical projects. Leaning on Arnason and Wagner, I defined 'modernity' earlier as a particular radicalisation of the socio-cultural articulation of the anthropic relation to the world.¹⁷ As noted in Section 1.1, Wagner characterised the modern condition as that in which *anthropos* 'realise their autonomy and, by doing so, increasingly master ... the world' (2001b: 167). This portrayal of modernity rings true for both Arendt and Castoriadis, also.¹⁸ On the one hand, Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner each reflect upon modern revolutionary projects, and broadly consider these as expressions of a particularly modern mode of human and collective political autonomy. Castoriadis's elucidation of the modern project of autonomy—as a reactivation of the ancient Greek imaginary of autonomy within the modern context—is the most systematic account of the three. For him, modern articulations of autonomy emerged in Western projects of political self-determination from the 12th and 13th centuries, through to the American and French Revolutions and the socialist revolutionary projects (see e.g. Castoriadis 1996 [1993]: 121, 1997h: 86, 88). As Castoriadis presents it, the political project of autonomy is an explicit and lucid effort of societal self-alteration, following the recognition of society's self-creation (see Section 3.1, Chapter 3; see also Castoriadis 1991a [1978/1988]: 160, 167-169). Wagner utilises Castoriadis's elucidation of the modern imaginary of autonomy throughout his intellectual trajectory (e.g. Wagner 1994a: 13-14, 22, 2008a: 10, 2012: 22; see also Section 4.1, Chapter 4). The imaginary of autonomy motivates the collective political projects that bring about the succession of different forms of modernity (see Wagner 1994a), as diverse projects of 'world-making' (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a). Indeed, for Wagner, political modernity is 'a narrative of *struggle*' (2005b: 60, emphasis in original) by diverse socio-political movements that challenge the institution society via the imaginary of autonomy, such as the 1848 Worker's Movement, the 1968 Student Movement, and the South African democratization project more recently (see Wagner 1994a, 2005b, 2012; I discuss this across Chapter 4). Arendt unearths a similar emphasis on modern notions of autonomy and human agency in the world in her

analyses of the American and French Revolutions in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]). Although Arendt does not explicitly develop an understanding of the imaginary dimensions of modernity in the sense that Castoriadis and Wagner do, she nonetheless indicates that ‘the political spirit of modernity was born when men were no longer satisfied that empires would rise and fall in sempiternal change’ (2006a: 216). As in Castoriadis and Wagner’s works, Arendt here highlights the particular articulation of human agency within and toward the world in the modern condition.

At the same time, Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner each draw attention to the dimensions of mastery over the world within modernity. In Castoriadis’s work, the imaginary of autonomy is entangled and in conflict with the imaginary of ‘the unlimited expansion of pseudo-rational pseudo-mastery’ (Castoriadis 1997a: 37; see also Arnason 1989a: 323, Smith 2014a: 180-181). Embodied in modern bureaucratic and capitalist institutions, as well as techno-scientific advancements, ‘rational mastery’ is an ‘imaginary projection of the ability to intervene in the world’ and to ‘control and transform nature’ (Arnason 1989a: 331). Wagner appropriates Castoriadis’s elucidation of the modern social imaginary of rational mastery (see Chapter 4), and similarly takes issue with the totalizing, dominating and reductive tendencies of the social imaginary that posits *anthropos* as ‘in complete control over the world’ (Wagner 2001b: 168). This is likewise the case for Arendt. Her sketch of ‘world alienation’ in *The Human Condition* highlights the modern attainment of the Archimedean point that places ‘a decisive distance’ between *anthropos* and the world (1998 [1958]: 251), as the precondition for modern modes of mastery (see Arendt 1998: 248-257).¹⁹

In sum, Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s political theories each advocate a reactivation of particular forms of political action as a possibility of altering the world in light of a socio-cultural and historical situation that they find problematic. This is no-less true for the present project. Indeed, the challenges of depoliticization, globalization, and the contemporary experience of worldlessness call for an urgent rethink of the potential for collective political

projects to make a difference in the world. Drawing on the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the intertwined interpretation and formation of the world elaborated through the above discussion, the next chapter turns to Arendt's political theory. The following chapter is the first of three critical hermeneutic reconstructions: I deal with Arendt's approach to the world-altering elements of collective political action in Chapter 2, before analysing Castoriadis's work in Chapter 3, ahead of an elucidation of Wagner's implicit political theory in Chapter 4. Chapter 5, in turn, undertakes a critical comparison of the understandings of the world-altering elements of collective political doing elaborated in the three reconstructions, in light of the hermeneutic-phenomenological framework sketched in this chapter. The critical comparison serves to expound a new theoretical approach—which I term: political action *in-the-world*—as well as highlight avenues for further consideration, such as the problematic of power. First, however, let us turn to Arendt's political theory.

CHAPTER TWO

HANNAH ARENDT: WORLD-DISCLOSING AND WORLD-FOUNDING POLITICAL ACTION

This study works toward a theoretical understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political doing by addressing the question, ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ As noted in the introduction and in Chapter 1, the hermeneutic-phenomenological world problematic offers a frame through which to analyse the world-altering aspects of collective political projects. These debates emphasise the encounter with the world at the collective level of sociality via the interconnected elements of world-interpretation and world-formation, as fundamentally connected to the anthropological condition *in-the-world*. Leaning on the hermeneutic-phenomenological framework outlined in Chapter 1, this project then analyses the world-altering aspects of collective political action by hermeneutically reconstructing Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Peter Wagner’s political theories. These thinkers are apt for this undertaking, as hermeneutic-phenomenological thematics inform their elucidations of the world-interpreting and world-forming elements of political doing, and their work develops through an understanding of the modern condition.

The present chapter commences this investigation by critically reconstructing Arendt’s phenomenological and anthropological approach to the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. Johanna ‘Hannah’ Arendt (1906-1975) characterised herself as a ‘political theorist’, not a philosopher. In her words, she wanted ‘to look at politics, so to speak, with eyes unclouded by philosophy’ (1994a [1964]: 1, 2). In her youth, Arendt was interested ‘neither in politics nor in history’ (1994a: 4). As a German Jew, however, the rise of Nazism in Germany and her forced migration to the United States of America following internment in northern France in 1940 permanently transformed her state of political indifference.²⁰ Arendt’s work took on a particularly political character after the Second World War, as evident in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958 [1951]), through to *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]) and *On*

Revolution (2006a [1963]). Arendt's work was also fundamentally shaped by her lengthy and critical debates with central thinkers of the Western philosophical tradition, including Marx, Kant, Nietzsche, Aristotle, Montesquieu, Heidegger, Augustine, Hegel, and Plato (e.g. Arendt 1981 [1971], 1992 [1982], 1990 [1954], 1994b [1946], 1994g [1954], 2002 [1953], 2007d [1953]). Through these philosophical encounters, Arendt debated the problematics of history, time, knowledge, modernity, the human condition, and modes of human action.

A reconstruction of Arendt's political theory is an appropriate path for addressing the question, 'how can collective political action make a difference in the world?', because her work speaks to the three criteria outlined in Chapter 1 (and noted in the introduction). First, as this chapter demonstrates, Arendt's political thought centres on an understanding of the world-disclosing and world-forming aspects of political action. Arendt develops this approach, second, in dialogue with the phenomenological tradition and the problematic of the world; particularly with the work of Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers, both of whom were her teachers (see Arendt 1994b [1946], 1994g [1954]).²¹ As I suggest in this chapter, Arendt details a philosophical anthropology that posits the human condition *in-the-world* as the precondition of and for political action. Third, the problematic of modernity forms an important part of the conceptual background for Arendt's political thought. Arendt is highly critical of the modern condition of 'world alienation' (1998: 248-257) and the passivity of human beings in 'the social' (or, modern mass society), which for her is characterised by a tendency toward control, violence, and the possibility of totalitarianism (see e.g. Arendt 1958, 1970, 1998: 38-49, 248-326, 2006a: 49-107). At the same time, a notion of modern political autonomy operates within Arendt's thinking, especially in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]). As she notes in that work, 'the political spirit of modernity was born when men were no longer satisfied that empires would rise and fall in sempiternal change'. Rather, the revolutionaries sought to 'establish a world' through explicit political doing (2006a: 216). From the above, Arendt's phenomenological and

anthropological approach to the question of world-altering collective political action is thus an appropriate starting point for the present study.

The focus of this reconstruction is Arendt's understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action, approached from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective. This stands the present inquiry apart from other readings of Arendt's work. The debates surrounding Arendt's thought can be sorted into five general fields. First, and most significant for present purposes, are the debates surrounding political action and public space (I return to this shortly; see e.g. eds. Calhoun & McGowan 1997). The second field concerns Arendt's reflections on the totalitarian phenomenon, violence, and human rights (Birmingham 2006; Breen 2007; Canovan 1995, 2000; Dallmayr 2001; Dietz 2000; Finlay 2009; Hirsch 2013; Kateb 1984; King & Stone 2007; Lechte & Newman 2012; Parekh 2008; Söllner 2004; Swift 2013; Tolle 1982; Villa 1999; Whitfield 1980). The third relates to her critique of modern society as 'the social' (such as Feher 1987; Freitag 2002; Pitkin 1998); while feminist scholars reject Arendt's relegation of women to the private sphere within a fourth field of debate (including Benhabib 1993; Dietz 1991, 2010; ed. Honig 1995; Pitkin 1981, 2010).²² Finally, the fifth field pertains to Arendt's place in the philosophical tradition: from forms of Athenian classicism to modern republicanism (Celermajer 2010; Euben 2000; Pangle 1990; Taminioux 2000; Tsao 2002; Vetlesen 1995), through to modernism and postmodernism (Benhabib 2003; Eccel 2013; Isaac 1989; Villa 1992b, 1997), among others.

Noted above, Arendt's elucidations of political action and public space are the most widely debated in the secondary literature. Two perspectives predominate in particular. The first concerns an expressivist and communicative understanding of political action, which centres on Arendt's discussion of 'The Disclosure of the Agent in Speech and Action' in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]: 175-181; see Benhabib 1992: 90-95, 2003: 199-202; Buckler 2011: 94; Canovan 1995: 130-135; d'Entrèves 1989: 320-322, 2002: 64-100; Habermas 1977: 7-8; Hinchman & Hinchman 1984: 168; Honig 1993; Hull 2003: 55-56; Jay & Bostein 1978: 353;

Mewes 2009: 32). A focus on this particular section on ‘Action’ in *The Human Condition* is problematic: it overlooks the other—and arguably more significant—notions of political doing that Arendt develops across her wider project, such as the notion of revolutionary world-founding action that she sketched in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]), for example.

The second dominant field of debate concerns the aesthetic or performative aspects implicit within Arendt’s elucidation of action (such as Beiner & Nedelsky 2001; Bickford 1997; Cascardi 1997; Curtis 1997, 1999; Fry 2001; Markell 2014; McCarthy 2012: 74-76, 145; Plot 2014: 61, 68-71; Sjöholm 2015; Tavani 2013; Villa 1992a). These scholars connect Arendt’s discussion of the ‘space of appearances’ in *The Human Condition* with her politicised revision of Kant’s third *Critique* (published posthumously as the *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy*, Arendt 1992 [1982]; see e.g. Beiner 1992, 1994). This reading concentrates on Arendt’s use of metaphors that depict the theatricality of appearances and presence of spectators in action in *The Life of the Mind*, such as: ‘Nothing and nobody exists in this world whose very being does not presuppose a *spectator*’ (Arendt 1981: 19, emphasis in original; cf. McCarthy 2012: 74-76).

Together, these fields of debate surrounding Arendt’s work emphasise the performative dimensions of self-disclosure in public space. However, these arguably subjectivist approaches bypass Arendt’s central anthropological claim that the human condition is *in-the-world* and always with others in the mode of plurality (see Arendt 1998: 7-8, and Sections 2.1 and Subsection 2.2.1, below). Properly speaking, political action in Arendt’s work ‘is thoroughly *nonindividual* ... the point is first and foremost community formation’ (Glaeser 2009: 82, emphasis added). The emphasis on the performative revelation of *the self* as an *appearance* hence obfuscates Arendt’s remarks on the creative potentiality of spontaneous new beginnings that begin the world anew via political action (which I develop in this chapter; see Subsection 2.2.2 and Section 2.3).

An understanding of Arendt’s elucidation of world-altering collective political action must pay close attention to her roots within the phenomenological tradition, which many

secondary debates often overlook. The influence of (particularly Heideggerian) phenomenology upon Arendt's thinking has been widely noted (such as Allen 1982; Benhabib 2003: 50-51; Canovan 1995: 3, 5; Hinchman & Hinchman 1984; Kattago 2013; Lederman 2014: 333-334; Melaney 2006: 469-473; Taminiiaux 1997; Tchir 2011; Villa 1995; Wolin 2003). Some have taken up Arendt's phenomenological notion of the common world to respond to ethico-political (Cioflec 2012; Myers 2013) or human rights debates (Parekh 2004; Samnotra 2014), while others consider Arendt's revision of Kant's theory of judgement via her phenomenological elucidation of 'common sense' (Biskowski 1993; Borren 2013b; McClure 1997). With a focus on Arendt's understanding of the common world, Marieke Borren (2010) developed a hermeneutic-phenomenological method from Arendt's integration of historical analysis, political philosophy, and phenomenology. In turn, other recent approaches analyse Arendt's notion of the world as the 'world of things' or of cultural artefacts (such as Czobor-Lupp 2008: 455-458; Janover 2011: 27-28), or consider the world as the phenomenological dimension of experience (Allen 1982; Hinchman & Hinchman 1984: 201-202, 1991: 438-444; Hull 2003: 47, Nedimović 2007: 14, 110). Yet these analyses do not pursue Arendt's understanding of the alteration of the world as a collective political project, *vis-à-vis* the intention of the present study.

Some have noted openings for a phenomenological analysis of action in Arendt's work, however these insights into her political theory have not yet been fully developed. In his sketch of a phenomenology of action, Jacques Taminiiaux draws attention to Arendt's 'destruction' of the traditional hierarchy of action in the philosophical tradition of metaphysics via her theorization of the *vita activa* in *The Human Condition* (see Arendt 1998: 79-247; cf. Taminiiaux 1986: 207-211, 1997: 24-28). As I will discuss in Subsection 2.2.1 below, Arendt distinguishes between the modes of doing inherent to the human condition—labour, work, and action—in *The Human Condition* in order to develop a philosophical anthropology, as the starting point for her political theory that acknowledges human 'plurality' and 'natality' as the elementary

aspects of the human condition *in-the-world*. Taminiiaux highlights that, for Arendt, ‘the only activity which corresponds fully to the world and to those two human conditions—plurality and natality—that are correlative to it is *action* properly speaking, or *praxis*’ (Taminiiaux 1997: 28; cf. 1986: 209-210). Despite this insight into the interrelation of the human condition, the world, and *praxis*, Taminiiaux does not pursue a phenomenology of the world-altering dimensions of *praxis* as a dimension of political action. Instead, he concentrates on metaphysical philosophical debates regarding modes of human doing, broadly speaking, in light of Arendt’s categorization of labour, work, and action (see Taminiiaux 1986, 1997: 30-52).

Many others have noted in passing that Arendt’s thought opens onto an understanding of *world-making* or *institution-building action* (Calhoun 1997: 239; Czobor-Lupp 2008: 447, 457, 2014: 1-14, 69; Glaeser 2009: 83; Nedimović 2007: 80; Straume 2012b: 373),²³ as well as a notion of *world-opening doing* (Zerilli 2005a: 141). These important insights into Arendt’s incipient phenomenological notion of world-forming political action necessitate further development. A reconstruction of Arendt’s sketches of world-altering collective political doing is possible through a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to the world problematic. To this end, I critically reconstruct Arendt’s thought in this chapter via an analysis of the interconnected dimensions of world-formation and world-interpretation within her theory of collective political doing from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective.

The purpose of this reconstruction is to analyse the world-altering aspects of collective political action. As such, the works selected for examination have a particular thematic focus: political action, the world problematic, world-interpretation, world-formation, and Arendt’s philosophical anthropology (especially her central categories of ‘natality’ and ‘plurality’ *in-the-world*).²⁴ In her important reconstruction of Arendt’s political thought, Margaret Canovan argues that although *The Human Condition* is ‘generally regarded as [Arendt’s] *magnum opus*’, ‘Arendt did *not* present’ the work ‘as a systematic statement of political philosophy’ (1995: 99, emphases in original). Indeed, on my reading, this work more specifically details a political

anthropology of the human condition *in-the-world* and a critique of modernity, than it outlines a treatise on political action *per se*. Hence, it is important to expand the scope of analysis beyond *The Human Condition* to properly elucidate Arendt's encompassing theory of world-altering collective political action. Indeed, 'one cannot understand one part of [Arendt's] thought unless one is aware of the connections with all the rest' (Canovan 1995: 6). The scope of the following reconstruction spans 1929 to 1965. This incorporates her 1929 doctoral thesis (later published as *Love and Saint Augustine*, 1996 [1929/1964]) and the significant early essay 'What is Existential Philosophy?' (1994b [1946]), and culminates with *On Revolution*, originally published in 1963 and revised in 1965.²⁵ As Canovan also points out, Arendt theorized 'in a way that records trains of thought instead of presenting a theory' (Canovan 1995: 6); her unsystematic approach justifies the use of smaller, exploratory essays as well as major works within this reconstruction. In this analysis, I reconstruct both the explicit and implicit elements of Arendt's thought, without giving precedence to any particular text. Although Arendt wrote in both German and English, I rely on English-language publications and translations of Arendt's work in this reconstruction due to language restrictions. Finally, one note must be made regarding the prevalence of 'male-centred language' in Arendt's writing (Hull 2003: 5). Like Margaret Hull, I consider Arendt's use of the male-gendered use of 'men' and 'man' out of step with contemporary scholarly parlance. As such, I follow Hull's (2003: 5) method in this research: unless it is a direct quotation, I employ gender-neutral terms when discussing Arendt's work, where appropriate.

The following reconstruction takes the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the anthropic encounter with the world-horizon—with its intertwined dimensions of world-interpretation and world-formation—as its starting point, to analyse Arendt's theorisation of world-altering collective political action. Two interconnected notions of political action emerge from Arendt's work when reconstructed from this perspective, which I differentiate in this discussion for the purpose of analytic clarity: *world-disclosing* doing, as a form of world-

interpretation revealed through speech; and, *world-founding* action, as a mode of world-forming doing manifested in revolutionary events, which mark a ‘new beginning’ in the historical field. Yet, Arendt does not so much theorise the world-altering dimensions of political action *per se*, as she elucidates the ‘predicament from which politics must start’ (Canovan 1995: 99-100). In contrast to the aforementioned readings of Arendt’s work that focus on a subjectivistic expressionist notion of action, the central argument of this chapter is that, for Arendt, the human conditions of natality and plurality *in-the-world* form the precondition of and for political action. In Arendt’s work, our anthropological condition *in-the-world* forms the ground of political doing and the very possibility for history. Political action, in this sense, rests upon a twofold relation: to the world as the horizon of our coexistence, and to the human condition, as inherently plural or in-common. With these key arguments in mind, I begin the reconstruction of Arendt’s work below.

This chapter comprises four main sections. In Section 2.1, I reconstruct Arendt’s thinking between 1929 to 1950. This includes her doctoral study, *Love and Saint Augustine* (1996 [1929/1964])²⁶ and her important essay ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ (1994b [1946]), both of which appeared prior to the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958 [1951]). Section 2.2 considers Arendt’s works from 1950 through to the publication of *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). Arendt sketches her twofold notion of political action in this period, with the interconnected dimensions of ‘world-disclosing’ action as interpretative understanding, and creative ‘new beginnings’ in the world as ‘world-forming’ or ‘world-founding’ doing. These two elements are intertwined within the movement of political action; however, I keep the two analytically distinct for ease of understanding, and discuss the two in separate subsections (2.2.1 and 2.2.2, respectively). In Section 2.3, I analyse Arendt’s writings after *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]) through to *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]). The interpretative form of world-disclosure recedes from Arendt’s considerations in this later stage of her thinking. In contrast, the ‘world-founding’ dimension of political action *qua* new

beginnings moves into focus. An incipient understanding of the institution of the world via world-founding doing emerges in Arendt's thought surrounding *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]). There, Arendt links the formation, or in her words, 'foundation', of the world to a rearticulation and reconfiguration of power, which, for her, reshapes the historical field as a 'new beginning'. Finally, I gather the insights of the chapter together in a concluding discussion of Arendt's elucidation of world-altering collective political action in Section 2.4.

2.1. Arendt before *The Origins of Totalitarianism*: First Developments of her Philosophical Anthropology and Phenomenological Approach Prior to 1950

In a lecture in memory of Arendt, Ricoeur argued that Arendt's understanding of politics 'presents... traits which one can all transhistoric' (2000 [1987]: 6), as they are anchored in an anthropological understanding of the human condition *in-the-world*. Arendt took steps toward her philosophical anthropology before turning to the problematic of politics proper in the 1950s. I trace this early line of Arendt's thinking as it develops prior to *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958 [1951]) in this section. In particular, I focus on Arendt's early formulations of the anthropological conditions of 'natality' and 'plurality' and her encounter with phenomenological and philosophical debates. In this section, I reconstruct Arendt's doctoral study, *Der Liebesbegriff bei Augustin: Versuch einer philosophischen Interpretation* (1929), later published as *Love and Saint Augustine* (1996 [1929/1964]), and her essay 'What is Existential Philosophy?' (1994b [1946]). The analysis revealed two important insights into Arendt's early thinking, which paved the way for her anthropological approach and theory of political action. First, Arendt sketches a notion of the historicity of the human condition *in-the-world* with the connected dimensions of 'beginning' and 'origins'. In so doing, Arendt develops an understanding of the formation of historical worlds via modes of human doing, which, at the same time, reveals the world as *changeable*. Second, Arendt begins to elucidate her philosophical anthropology—with its dimensions of natality and plurality—in this early part of her intellectual trajectory, in dialogue with key debates from the philosophical tradition.

Arendt traces ‘natality’ in her encounter with Saint Augustine in her doctoral study, while she details the condition of human plurality via critical interpretation of the philosophical tradition, including Kant and Heidegger. The reconstruction of Arendt’s early work here therefore reveals her developing anthropology and understanding of the human formation of the world. This paves the way for her later theorisation of political action, which she advances in particular after 1950 (which I turn to in Sections 2.2 and 2.3).

Leaning on Heidegger and Jaspers (the latter of which was her supervisor), Arendt debates Augustine’s notions of ‘neighbourly love’—*caritas* or *cupiditas*—which denote the relation of *anthropos* to God, the other world of the afterlife, and this world of human experience (Arendt 1996: 17-18; cf. Scott & Stark 1996: 154). Although the work is not political in focus, traces of an anthropology of the human condition *in-the-world* emerge in Arendt’s thinking in ‘Part Two: Creator and the Creature: The Remembered Past’ in particular (1996: 45-97). Additionally, Arendt begins to articulate her notion of ‘new beginnings’ (which is significant for her theory of political action, as I will show in Sections 2.2 and 2.3) in *Love and Saint Augustine* through her remarks on the historicity of the human condition. In this way, Arendt’s doctoral study foreshadows her later elucidations of the anthropological precondition for political action in ‘natality’, as the potential for creative new beginnings in the world inherent within each human birth into the world.

Arendt sketches an understanding of the formation of the world via human activity—in contrast to God’s creation of heaven and earth—in her reconstruction of the different modes of worldliness in Augustine’s philosophy (Arendt 1996: 57-58, 65-69). Arendt follows Augustine’s distinction between ‘world’ and ‘universe’. For Arendt, the world ‘is understood as the human world constituted by men’ (1996: 58), whereas ‘universe’ denotes the everlasting *cosmos* created by God (Arendt 1996: 58-65). In contrast to the everlasting *cosmos*, the world (or *mundus*, drawn from Augustine) is ‘the place where things happen’, which on Augustine’s account, are enacted “‘partly by divine agency and partly by our [human] will’” (Arendt 1996: 65). Leaning

on Augustine, Arendt notes that “what ‘happens by our will’ ... turns heaven and earth into the world” (1996: 66). Even in this theological understanding of the human condition *in-the-world*, the world is not fully determined by God; instead, human activity gives form to the world. Here, Arendt hints at an notion of the formation of the world into historical worlds via human doing (see 1996: 104-112). Through her reconstruction of Augustine, Arendt contends:

it is from the divine fabric (*fabrica Dei*), from the pre-existing creation, that man makes the world and makes himself part of the world ... What happens by our will ... turns the world, the divine fabric, into the self-evident home of man (1996: 66).

Arendt reiterates this point slightly later the work when she writes that this moment of historical world formation ‘takes place on the ground of the divine fabric, that is, on the ground of the world found in existence’ (Arendt 1996: 74). In Arendt’s analysis, *anthropos* this has ‘a hand in founding the world’, as ‘events in the world are partly constituted by man who inhabits the world’ (1996: 74, 65-66). Arendt’s remarks here highlight a developing understanding of the formation of the world through human doing. Nevertheless, she does not systematically elaborate this insight further in *Love and Saint Augustine* (see Scott & Stark 1996: 156). Arendt’s ostensible ‘silence’ on this point ‘is remarkable since this notion of world [as formed through human action] is much more akin to her abiding concerns with foundation, community, and political action than is the idea of the ... cosmos’ as the everlasting universe (Scott & Stark 1996: 156). Yet, as noted in the introduction to this chapter, Arendt turned to political problematics in the lead up to *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958 [1951]); that is, well after the completion of her doctoral study in 1929. *Love and Saint Augustine* (1996 [1929/1964]) instead more specifically outlines Arendt’s developing philosophical anthropology, which, as I argue in this chapter, forms the starting point for her theorisation of political action.

Arendt first articulates her understanding of the anthropological condition of natality in *Love and Saint Augustine*. In Arendt’s work, natality refers to the potential for ‘new beginnings’ inherent to each new human birth into the world, which forms the anthropological precondition for creative political action in and as history (see Arendt 1994e: 321, 1998: 177,

2006a: 203; cf. Bowen Moore 1987: 138; Canovan 1995: 130; Durst 2004: 791-792). Arendt's early remarks on natality in *Love and Saint Augustine* relate in particular to her emerging philosophical anthropology and understanding of the historicity of the human condition; she does not yet elucidate the political implications of natality in this period. In *Love and Saint Augustine*, Arendt sketches the historicity of the human condition in its twofold dimensions of 'remembering' and 'beginning'. Or, as she puts it, respectively: '*whence* I came' and '*whither* I shall go' (Arendt 1996: 48, emphasis in original). Together, the two aspects of historicity for Arendt reveal the mode of 'becoming' as inherent to the anthropological condition of 'natality'.

Arendt takes her first steps toward elucidating 'natality' via Augustine's distinction between *anthropos* and the creation of the *cosmos*, both of which refer to kinds of 'beginning'. Augustine denotes the creation of the *cosmos* by God as *principium*, which, for Arendt, 'refers to the creation of the universe' as the absolute *beginning* (1996: 55). The other mode of beginning is *initium*, as the 'beginning of "souls"' or *anthropos* (Arendt 1996: 55). Arendt develops her notion of human natality *qua* beginning by citing Augustine's dictum: 'this beginning [*initium*] did in no way ever exist before. In order that there be such a beginning, man was created before whom nobody was' (Arendt 1996: 55; cf. Arendt 1994e [1954]: 321, 1998 [1958]: 177, 2006a [1963]: 203). From Arendt's reading of Augustine, *anthropos* was created into the world in order to 'begin', 'to act as a beginner and enact the story of mankind' (1996: 55). She writes, leaning on Augustine, the creation of *anthropos* into the world 'prevented time and the created universe from turning eternally in cycles about itself ... without anything new ever happening' (1996: 55). It is on this basis that Arendt argues that 'Everything that began exists in the mode of becoming' (1996: 52), and through this movement, the world and *anthropos* 'change and alter' (1996: 52).²⁷ Arendt's elucidation of the human condition of natality via her reconstruction of Augustine challenges Heidegger's formulation of *Dasein* as '*being-toward-death*' (1967 [1927]: 285-311), which functions on a determinist understanding of human

mortality. Contrary to Heidegger, the condition of natality as birth *into* the world in Arendt's work rests on an anthropology that is inherently creative: each new birth *into-the-world* represents untold possibilities for novelty and change, as the precondition of and for history (Arendt 1996: 55, see also Arendt 1998: 177, Durst 2004: 792). Natality, in this way, is 'the crucial political moment' (Bottici 2014: 87).

This notion of 'beginning' plays a greater role in Arendt's later political theory than the other dimension of the historicity of the human condition, noted above: 'remembering'. Yet, Arendt spends more time elucidating the so-called 'faculty of remembrance' or 'memory' in *Love and Saint Augustine* than she does the creativity of beginnings'. Arendt links the mode of 'beginning', which is oriented toward the future, to a notion of 'remembering', which is tied to the past or historical 'origins' (see 1996: 48, 55). In Arendt's analysis, 'the very fact that man has not made himself but was created [into the world] implies that the meaningfulness of human existence both lies outside of himself and antedates it' (1996: 50). Arendt here sketches an understanding of historical meaning as patterns of common 'memory', which gives shapes to human existence in the present. For Arendt, 'the function of memory' is to "'present" (make present) the past and deprive the past of its definitely bygone character' (1996: 48). She reiterates this in her essay, 'Augustine and Protestantism' (1994a [1930]), where she writes, 'only in memory does the past take on an everlasting meaning; only in memory is the past ... preserved for all time' (Arendt 1994a: 26). Through memory, the past remains a constant presence in the 'sempiternal "today"', which articulates a common socio-cultural horizon of expectation upon the present world and onto the future (Arendt 1996 [1929/1964]: 56). Arendt hints at an understanding of historical articulations of meaning that pattern 'common' worlds through forms of memory that recall shared 'origins' in these remarks, which she arguably carries through to her later formulation of the common world or 'public realm' in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]: 50-58). Despite these insights, Arendt does not explicitly develop a theory of socio-cultural meaning across her trajectory.

The above reconstruction of Arendt's reflections in *Love and Saint Augustine* revealed her developing philosophical anthropology—with its dimensions of natality and historicity—which pave the way for her later theory of political action. On the one hand, her account of the condition of natality as birth *into* the world in this work highlights the anthropological precondition of and for historical movement—and hence the alteration of historical worlds through action or 'beginning'. On the other, to be born into the world is to enter into a world that is always-already patterned by history. Together, these insights reveal an understanding of the formation and re-formation of historical worlds through human doing, which outlines a notion of the world as *changeable*. Arendt makes this point in passing in her 1930 essay 'Philosophy and Sociology', where she writes that through action, 'the historical world into which [*anthropos*] is born appears to him not as immutable but ... as changing and changeable' (1994d [1930]: 39). As I show later in this chapter, this becomes particularly significant in Arendt's theorisations of political action as 'new beginnings', as well as her reflections on 'world-founding' action in *On Revolution* (see Sections 2.2 2 and 2.3, below).

Arendt furthers her philosophical anthropology after *Love and Saint Augustine* through a critical dialogue with key thinkers of the Western philosophical tradition. To trace this line of Arendt's thought, I focus on her important early essay, 'What is Existential Philosophy?' (1994b [1946]). In this text, Arendt furthers her philosophical anthropology via a reconfiguration of key problematics of the so-called 'existential philosophical' tradition, which, for her, begins with Kierkegaard, following Kant and Schelling, and continues through Heidegger and Jaspers. Two of Arendt's arguments in this essay are particularly significant. First, Arendt takes steps toward articulating her understanding of the human condition of plurality through her critique of the 'world alienation' inherent to the modern philosophical tradition.²⁸ Second, Arendt sketches a notion of spontaneous freedom as the actualization of human existence. Although she does not fully develop the second insight in 'What is Existential Philosophy?', it highlights a continuation of Arendt's thinking in relation to the

human condition of natality. In this way, as Sophie Loidolt similarly highlights (2013: 339-341), ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ anticipates Arendt’s political philosophical approach in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]), especially around the questions of the world and history.

One of the central themes of ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ is the concern with the self within the modern philosophical tradition. Arendt begins to develop her anthropology of human plurality through this critical dialogue with modern, so-called ‘existentialist’ thinkers. In so doing, Arendt sketches her understanding of ‘world alienation’, which she would later articulate in *The Human Condition* (see 1998 [1958]: 248-257). She opens ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ with the declaration that ‘existence’ in this tradition ‘denotes simply the Being (*Sein*) of man, independent of all the qualities and capabilities that any individual may possess’ (1994b [1946]: 163). In the wake of Kant’s refutation of the ontological proof of God’s existence (see Arendt 1994b: 168-169), ‘man was cut off from the absolute’ and ‘left in the midst of a world where he had nothing left to hold onto’ (1994b: 169). In Arendt’s words, Kant effectively ‘destroyed the idea of a pre-established harmony between man and the world’ (1994b: 170). As such, modern existential philosophers since Kant and Schelling remain concerned with individualism in an absolute, radical sense (1994b: 169). This gave rise to a philosophy of *nothingness*, as evident within Kierkegaard, Nietzsche, Heidegger, and Sartre’s works (see Arendt 1994b: 173-188). For Arendt, this emphasis is problematic for two connected reasons. On the one hand, the condition of absolute individualism is a withdrawal from the world into the self: the ‘basic mode of being-in-the-world is alienation’, reflected in the experience of ‘not-being-at-home in the world’ (1994b: 179). On the other, a focus on the individual self ‘leaves the individual existing independent from humanity’, which, for Arendt, bypasses that human beings ‘inhabit[...] a given world common to them all’ (1994b: 181, 186). These conclusions pave the way for Arendt’s contention in *The Human Condition* that ‘World alienation, and not self-alienation as Marx thought, has been the hallmark of the modern age’ (1998 [1958]: 254). Arendt turns to Jaspers late in ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ to respond

to the individualism and world alienation inherent to these philosophical debates. Leaning on Jaspers, Arendt contends that ‘Existence itself is, by its very nature, never isolated’; rather, ‘Existence can develop only in the shared life of human beings’ within a common world (1994b: 186). Arendt does not fully elaborate her anthropological notion of human plurality in ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ (1994b [1946]; cf. Loidolt 2013: 343). Nevertheless, her reflections in this essay clearly pave the way for her later proclamation in opening pages of *The Human Condition* that ‘the human condition of plurality’ resides in ‘the fact that men, not Man ... inhabit the world’ (1998 [1958]: 7).

Arendt also turns to Jaspers in ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ to sketch an understanding of the existential conditions of spontaneous freedom. Although Arendt does not explicitly connect this analysis to her developing anthropology of natality and notion of action as ‘new beginnings’ (see Sections 2.2 and 2.3 below), her discussion hints at these thematics in her sketch of the contingency or ‘uncertainty’ of history. Arendt notes that the philosophical tradition following Hegel ‘threatened to degenerate into speculation on the possibility that some kind of inherent law was manifested in history’ (1994b: 166). Arendt contends that in Hegel’s wake, philosophical approaches conceived of the self as ‘the master of Being’ (1994b: 177; cc. 167). In contrast, Arendt proclaims that ‘man is not the creator of the world’ and hence cannot assume the position of Creator; moreover, the historical field for Arendt is ‘uncertain ... and unpredictable’, and is not ‘determined through laws of causality’ (1994b: 167). Turning to Jaspers late in the essay, Arendt characterises human existence as ‘a form of human freedom ... in which “man [is] potential spontaneity”’ or, ‘possible existence’ (1994b: 183; see also Jaspers 1971 [1938], 1997 [1935]). Spontaneity, as potential human freedom, is only possible through the contingency of the world (see Arendt 1994d [1930]: 31). As Arendt ‘paradoxically’ puts it: ‘Only because I have not made myself am I free. If I had made myself, I would have been able to foresee myself and therefore would have become unfree’ (1994b: 184). Through this analysis, Arendt rejects determinist notions of the human condition and history.

The unpredictable and uncertain character of the reality of the world is, for Arendt, ‘the backdrop’ of human freedom’, ‘the stuff from which it takes fire’ (1994b: 183-184).

Spontaneous human freedom and new beginnings are possible because *anthropos* does not ‘fabricate’ the world and history as a sovereign creator. Arendt advances this insight in her later political writings, which centre on the possibility of new beginnings through the human condition of natality (see Sections 2.2 and 2.3, below); however, she does not extrapolate this idea further in ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ (1994b [1946]).

Although Arendt’s thinking in the works under consideration here were not specifically political in character, the reconstruction demonstrates that *Love and Saint Augustine* (1996 [1929/1964]) and ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ (1994b [1946]) outline the starting points for her philosophical anthropology and later elucidations of political action. Two key insights emerged from the foregoing reconstruction that are significant for the present task of elaborating Arendt’s theorisation of world-altering collective political action. First, Arendt sketches an understanding of the formation of historical worlds through human doing. This was particularly evident in *Love and Saint Augustine*, in which Arendt detailed the two dimensions of historicity: ‘beginnings’, and ‘remembering’ or ‘origins’. Arendt introduces a notion of historical patterns via her discussion of ‘remembering’ and ‘origins’ in *Love and Saint Augustine*, but does not fully develop this idea. Instead, Arendt more explicitly advances the aspect of ‘beginning’ via a notion of the historical world as *changeable* (or, as in ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’, contingent and unpredictable). Arendt furthers this elucidation of the formation of the world *qua* history and new beginnings after 1950, which I consider in the following sections.

The second insight pertains to Arendt’s developing philosophical anthropology. Through *Love and Saint Augustine* and ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’, Arendt took steps toward articulating her anthropological approach, with the twofold conditions of ‘natality’ and ‘plurality’. In *Love and Saint Augustine* in particular, Arendt revealed the anthropological

precondition for and possibility of history inherent in human natality. Leaning on Augustine, Arendt rendered *anthropos* as *initium* or ‘beginners’. This is significant for her later political theory. Yet Arendt’s critical dialogue with the philosophical tradition in ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ made possible an understanding of plurality as the complementary dimension of the human condition *in-the-world*, alongside natality. Plurality, as the above highlights, forms the additional precondition for politics precisely because the human condition *in-the-world* world is fundamentally shared *in common*. Together, these key insights—the historicity of the human condition and the elements of natality and plurality—point to an understanding of the anthropological preconditions of and for history, and political action. Arendt’s early work hence forms the foundation for her later political theory, which becomes more explicit after 1950. I analyse Arendt’s emerging political anthropology and turn to political problematics between 1950 and 1958 in the next section.

2.2. From *Origins* to *The Human Condition*: Arendt’s Developing Political Anthropology and Theories of World-Disclosing and World-Forming Political Action Between 1950 and 1958

Although Arendt’s thought prior to *The Origins of Totalitarianism* was not specifically political in focus, the above reconstruction of her early work (Section 2.1) revealed Arendt’s emerging philosophical anthropology—with the two dimensions of natality and plurality—as well as an incipient understanding of the formation of the world into historical patterns through human doing. In this section, I trace Arendt’s philosophical anthropological approach and theorisation of political action as it develops after the publication of *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958 [1951]) through to *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). In addition, I reconstruct a cluster of Arendt’s important essays from this period, including ‘Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)’ (1994e [1954]), ‘Concern with Politics in Recent European Thought’ (1994g [1954]), ‘Socrates’ (2007b [1954]), and ‘Introduction *into* Politics’ (2007a [1956/1959]). By focussing on Arendt’s philosophical anthropology and notion of political action from the perspective of the hermeneutic-phenomenological world problematic, the

reconstruction reveals two modes of political doing within Arendt's thought: world-disclosure, which stems from the condition of plurality *in-the-world*; and, world-formation, as a possibility of the condition of natality and mode of action as 'new beginnings'. In comparison to 'world-disclosure' (which Arendt eventually sidelines from her thought; see Subsection 2.2.1 below), the aspect of world-forming political doing predominates Arendt's thinking over time and paves the way for her elucidation of revolutionary projects in *On Revolution* (as shown in Sections 2.2.2 and 2.3, below). For ease of understanding, the discussion of Arendt's work between 1950 and 1959 in this section is broken into two subsections, which I differentiate according to her elucidations of the conditions of plurality (Subsection 2.2.1) and natality (2.2.2), respectively. Although I distinguish between these dimensions for the purpose of analytic clarity, Arendt's overarching political theory combines both modes of doing as the possibilities for and of politics through her focus on the anthropological condition *in-the-world*.

2.2.1. The Anthropological Condition of Plurality *in-the-World* as the Precondition for Politics and Starting Point for Arendt's Unfinished Theory of Political Action as World-Disclosure

The task of this subsection is to reconstruct Arendt's anthropological approach to plurality *in-the-world* as the precondition for politics, as well as her—ultimately unfinished—sketch of interpretative 'world-disclosing' political doing. I focus on Arendt's writings from 1950 to 1950 in this analysis, culminating with her important work *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). The reconstruction of Arendt's implicit notion of 'world disclosure' challenges readings of Arendt's work that otherwise focus on the expressivist or performative disclosure of *the self* in public space (e.g. Buckler 2011: 89-90; Canovan 1995: 132-135; d'Entrèves 1989: 320-322).²⁹ As noted in Section 2.1 above, Arendt takes issue with philosophical approaches that concentrate on the self: their radical isolationism rests on an understanding of absolute individualism, which bypasses the condition of plurality and detaches the human condition from its situation *in-the-world* (see Arendt 1994b [1946]). Arendt furthers her philosophical anthropological understanding of the condition of plurality *in-the-world* through the 1950s, and reconfigures

plurality into a *political* problematic. As I will show, Arendt's reflections on plurality highlight the anthropological ground for the possibility of politics; additionally, Arendt sketches an implicit understanding of 'world-disclosing' action, which rests on an understanding of the world as a common horizon of coexistence and open interpretative space. Nevertheless, Arendt does not develop this incipient hermeneutic understanding of action. Instead, the notion of political action *qua* new beginnings in the historical field (which stems from the anthropological condition of natality) moves to the forefront of Arendt's considerations. Before turning to natality and 'new beginnings', however, I trace this implicit, hermeneutic line of Arendt's thinking in this subsection. First, I consider Arendt's elucidation of plurality as the precondition for politics, before, second, reconstructing the latent notion of world-disclosing doing.

After 1950, Arendt advances her understanding of the anthropological condition of plurality through further dialogues with the philosophical tradition. Her essays, 'Socrates' (2007b [1954])³⁰ and 'Concern with Politics in Recent European Thought' (1994g [1954]) build upon her earlier critical analysis of this field in 'What is Existential Philosophy?' (1994b [1946]; see Section 2.1 above) by engaging with the work of the Greeks—chiefly, Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle—and that of the modern philosophical tradition—from Hegel through to Heidegger and Merleau-Ponty. Arendt articulates her understanding of the anthropological condition of plurality through these dialogues; for her, plurality forms the precondition for politics. Arendt argues in 'Concern with Politics...' that 'politics could not even be conceived if men did not exist in the plural' (1994g: 443). Arendt develops this insight via Heidegger in 'Concern with Politics...' (1994g [1954]). She writes, 'because Heidegger defines human existence as being-in-the-world', he gives 'philosophic significance' to the elementary understanding of the human condition as both *in-the-world* and 'being together with others' (Arendt 1994g: 443). Out of Heidegger's overarching philosophical project, his notion of *being-in-the-world* holds the most 'political relevance' for Arendt, although she notes that Heidegger did not develop the

specifically political implications of this insight (Arendt 1994g: 446, n.5; cf. 1994g: 447, n.25, 443).

Arguably, Arendt herself took up this task. She opens ‘Introduction *into* Politics’ (2007a [1956/1959]) with an explicit definition of politics.³¹ In the first sentence, and in response to her self-posed question ‘*what is politics?*’ (2007a: 93, emphasis in original), Arendt writes: ‘Politics is based on the fact of human plurality’ (2007a: 93). Arendt again criticizes philosophical and theological approaches that consider ‘*Man*’ in the absolute singular and which assume ‘there is something political *in* man’ as an inner faculty or essence (Arendt 2007a: 94, 95, emphasis in original). Contrary to these debates, Arendt contends that human plurality forms the precondition for politics because ‘Politics deals with the coexistence and association of *different* men’, and ‘arises in what lies *between* men and is established as relationships (2007a: 93, 95, emphases in original). She carries through this understanding to *The Human Condition* (see 1998 [1958]: 7). There, Arendt opens the first chapter with a proclamation that plurality ‘is specifically *the* condition—not only the *conditio sine qua non*, but the *conditio per quam*—of all political life’ (Arendt 1998: 7, emphases in original). The condition of plurality *in-the-world* hence forms the very ground for the formation of a common world (Arendt 2007a: 114-115; cf. Loidolt 2016: 52-53).

It is through this understanding of anthropological plurality—as the precondition for politics—that Arendt differentiates between ‘action’, ‘work’, and ‘labour’ in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]) and contemporaneous works (e.g. 2007a [1956/1959]: 154-157, 2007c [1953]: 79-80). This distinction forms the background for Arendt’s elucidation of action *qua* world-disclosure; as such, it is helpful to define these terms here. Arendt draws on her anthropology of plurality *in-the-world* to differentiate action from the categories of labour and work on two connected grounds: ‘action’ has the character of worldliness, and ‘action’ has ‘the basic condition’ of plurality (Arendt 1998 [1958]: 175).³² For Arendt, ‘labour’, or the condition of *animal laborans*, corresponds to the maintenance of the biological processes of the living

body, as well as the reproduction of the human species (1998 [1958]: 7-8, 96-101; cf. Arendt 2002 [1958]: 285, 2006a [1963]: 49-50, 2007a [1956/1959]: 154-157, 2007c [1953]: 80; see also d'Entrèves 1991: 84; Canovan 1995: 122-127; Pitkin 1998: 132-134). Where labour refers to activities 'devoted to keeping one's self alive' (Arendt 1998: 12), 'work' in the mode of *homo faber* produces 'things', as 'objects for use' constructed via 'the work of our hands' in the manner of fabrication (Arendt 1998 [1958]: 8, 136, 139; see also Canovan 1995: 127-130; Markell 2011; Taminiaux 1986: 208-209).³³ Through its inward focus on the body, labouring doing is withdrawn from the world. Work, in turn, 'fabricates the sheer unending variety of things whose sum total constitutes the human artifice' (Arendt 1998: 136); as such, work produces the 'things' of the world. The worldliness of work separates the category of work from labour—but, like labour, fabrication does not have the condition of plurality: this doing is possible in isolation (see Arendt 1998: 188). Both *animal laborans* and *homo faber* in this way bypass the element of human plurality *in-the-world*. On this basis, neither mode of doing is the appropriate condition for politics, if politics is understood as 'the coexistence and association of *different* men' in a common world of historical relationships (Arendt 2007a: 93, emphasis in original; cf. 2007a: 95).

Arendt's emerging philosophical anthropology paves the way for her political theory; indeed, as noted above, politics is inconceivable without the precondition of plural human beings sharing a world in common (Arendt 1994g [1954]: 443, 2007a [1956/1959]: 93-95, 1998 [1958]: 7, 175). In this, Arendt's notion of plurality underscores the anthropological precondition for politics. Unlike her reflections on 'natality' as the possibility for historical creation via political action (see Sections 2.2.2 and 2.3 below), Arendt does not specifically detail a theory of action *per se* via the notion of plurality. Instead, plurality relates to 'the basic structure of political intersubjectivity', as the ground for the constitution of a 'We' as being-together in the world in common (Loidolt 2016: 47, cf. 52-53). Nevertheless, as Arendt details her understanding of human plurality and its condition *in-the-world*, an interpretative notion of

world-disclosure is implicit in her thinking. I reconstruct this latent element of Arendt's political theory below. As I will show, Arendt's twofold elucidation of plurality and the question of the world are demonstrably phenomenological; she emphasises the openness of the world to plural interpretations, which, at the same time, forms a common horizon of coexistence. Ultimately, however, this world-disclosing aspect of political action remains unfinished: Arendt sidelines the hermeneutic element of world-disclosure in favour of an analysis of the world-forming dimension of political action *qua* 'new beginnings', as a possibility of the anthropological condition of natality.

The implicit account of world-disclosing action develops through a cluster of Arendt's essays from the early 1950s *en route* to *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). As Arendt outlines it, 'world-disclosing' doing incorporates hermeneutic dimensions of interpretation, understanding, and disclosure. A short sketch of the notion of 'understanding' in her essay 'Understanding and Politics' (Arendt 1994e [1954]) represents the first step along this path. The totalitarian phenomenon forms the background of Arendt's reflections here, which for her 'deprived us of our traditional tools for understanding' (1994e: 310). In this essay, Arendt presents 'understanding' as a mode of doing: an effort or process, a task, the action of, or quest for understanding (1994e: 307-308, 312-313, 324 n.8). As such, 'understanding' refers to an 'unending activity' in 'constant change', through which 'we reconcile ourselves to reality' and 'try to be at home in the world' (1994e: 308). This act of so-called 'true' understanding draws on the imagination to articulate unprecedentedly new phenomena in the world—which for Arendt includes the event of totalitarianism (see 1994e: 309-312, 325, n.8). Arendt here highlights an interconnection between the imagination and the act of understanding (see 1994e: 323). Late in the essay, Arendt contends that the imagination:

enables us to see things in their proper perspective ... to put that which is too close at a certain distance so that we can see it without bias and prejudice, to be generous enough to bridge abysses of remoteness until we can see and understand everything that is too far away from us as though it were our own affair (1994e: 323).

This ‘act’ of understanding incorporates hermeneutic modes of distance and belonging. Or, as Arendt puts it: ‘The distancing of some things and bridging the abysses of others is part of the dialogue of understanding’ (1994e: 323). ‘The result’ of this collective act of understanding, Arendt argues, ‘is meaning’ (1994e: 309).³⁴ In an insightful (albeit brief) endnote, Arendt contends that ‘without this kind of imagination, and the understanding that springs from it, we would never be able to take our bearings in the world’ (1994e: 327, n.22; cf. 1994e: 323). Despite this insightful passage into the interrelation of imagination and interpretation in the doing of understanding, Arendt leaves the question of the imagination—especially its creative dimensions—largely underdeveloped in her broader intellectual project.³⁵

Yet, expanding on Arendt’s analysis, the imagination plays a twofold role in the act of understanding. On the one hand, imagination enables phenomena in the world to be interpreted from the perspective of others. The question of the world is implicit in Arendt’s thinking here in ‘Understanding and Politics’: the dialogue of understanding—with its hermeneutic dimensions of belonging and distance—is premised upon a notion of the world as a common horizon that is open to plural interpretations. On the other, interpretation and imagination intertwine within the act of understanding in the articulation of patterns of common meaning, such that the community can ‘come to terms’ with and understand their shared situation. Although Arendt hints at the interconnection of imagination and interpretation in her sketch of the act of understanding, she does not pursue this analysis beyond ‘Understanding and Politics’ (1994e [1954]).

The implicit aspects of understanding and interpretation resurface in an essay from 1954 titled ‘Philosophy and Politics’, later published in expanded form as ‘Socrates’ (2007b). Significant in this essay is Arendt’s connection of the possibility of interpretative understanding to the anthropological condition of plurality. Through this analysis, Arendt elaborates her incipient notion of the world as open to plural interpretations, which in turn forms the precondition for political debate. In her dialogue with Socrates, Plato, and Aristotle in this

essay, Arendt considers *doxa* as the articulation ‘in speech of what *dokei moi*, that is, “of what appears to me”’. Put otherwise, *doxa* refers to a ‘comprehension of the world “as it opens itself to me”’ (2007b: 14; cf. 2007b: 15). Hence, *doxa* for Arendt represents the disclosure of the world via speech. This formulation rests on the assumption that ‘the world opens up differently to every man according to his position in it’ (Arendt 2007b: 14). At the same time that the world offers plural interpretations, the commonness of the world ‘resides in the fact that the same world opens up to everyone ... despite all differences between men and their positions in the world’ (Arendt 2007b: 14). Arendt here sketches a phenomenological understanding of the world as the common horizon of the human condition that is open to a plurality of interpretations. As a mode of world-disclosure, *doxa* enables *anthropos* to ‘see[...] the world ... from the other fellow’s point of view’ (Arendt 2007b: 18). According to Arendt, this ‘kind of understanding’ is ‘the political kind of insight *par excellence*’ (2007b: 18): collective world-disclosing *doxa* discloses plural interpretations of the world, which intersect to reveal the world as a common horizon. Arendt’s elucidation of world-disclosing *doxa* suggests an understanding of the world as an open interpretative space that offers a source of unity in plurality. From Arendt’s thinking here, the anthropological condition of plurality and the openness of the world to plural interpretations together form the precondition for politics. Although Arendt does not fully consider this insight along the hermeneutic-phenomenological line of the conflict of interpretations (see Section 1.1, Chapter 1), her discussion of the disclosure of the world in ‘Socrates’ (2007b) broadly aligns with these debates in this respect.

Arendt returns to the hermeneutic notion of world-disclosing doing in her posthumously published essay, ‘Introduction *into* Politics’ (2007a [1956/1959]). There, Arendt undertakes a lengthy analysis of the ancient Greek *polis* and the meaning of politics (2007a: 114-134), and then outlines two dimensions of political action: ‘beginning’ (I return to this in Section 2.2.2, below), and ‘speaking’ (2007a: 126-129). Arendt furthers her understanding of world-disclosure and the elucidation of the openness of the world to plural interpretations

through her discussion of ‘speaking’ in ‘Introduction *into* Politics’. As she develops the notion there, speech articulates an interpretation of the appearances of the world, which in so doing, discloses one’s standpoint *in-the-world* to others (Arendt 2007a [1956/1959]: 128-129). World-disclosure, in this way, simultaneously articulates world-interpretations and the condition of plurality. Arendt writes, ‘no one can grasp [the world] in its full reality all on his own, because the world always ... reveals itself to him from one perspective, which corresponds to his standpoint in the world’ (2007a: 128). On close reading, Arendt’s sketch of world-disclosure says more about the problem of the world than it does about ‘speaking’ as a mode of political doing. In addition to the above quote *vis-à-vis* the grasp of the world articulated in speech that corresponds to one’s standpoint *in-the-world*, Arendt contends:

Only in the freedom of our speaking with one another does the world, as that about which we speak, emerge in its ... visibility from all sides. [... The world] lies between them, separates and links them, show[s] itself differently to each and [is] comprehensible only to the extent that many people can talk *about* it and exchange their opinions and perspectives with one another, over against one another (2007a: 128-129, 128, emphasis in original).

From this, speech reveals the world as a common horizon of plural world-interpretations (Arendt 2007a: 129). Although Arendt places emphasis on the anthropological condition of plurality as the precondition for politics (see 2007a: 93-95; cf. 1998: 7), her remarks here indicate that the horizon of the world forms the complementary condition for political doing. As Arendt presents it, the world is the common horizon of coexistence, and, at the same time, the world is an interpretative space of appearances that facilitates the disclosure of plural world-articulations. ‘[D]espite its oneness’, Arendt writes, the world ‘appears in a great many views’ (2007a: 168); the human condition of plurality *in-the-world* makes it possible ‘to truly see topics from various sides—that is, politically’, as the precondition for political debate (2007a: 167, emphasis in original). Notwithstanding these insights, Arendt subordinates this interpretative understanding of world-disclosure over time in favour of a more explicit analysis of political action as ‘new beginnings’. In this, she relegates world-disclosure to a *precondition*

for politics through the disclosure of plurality; as such, Arendt bypasses an understanding of the creative dimensions of the conflict of world-interpretations, as a form of political doing.

Nevertheless, Arendt's reflections in 'Introduction *into* Politics' (2007a [1956/1959]) clarify her later elucidations of disclosing action and the question of the world in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). As noted earlier, she opens the first chapter of *The Human Condition* with the proclamation that action 'goes on directly between men [and] corresponds to the human condition of plurality' (1998: 7). However, Arendt increasingly sidelines her understanding of the specifically world-disclosing dimension of speech—which stems from the condition of plurality—in this work. Her discussion of the 'Disclosure of the Agent in Speech and Action' in *The Human Condition* (1998: 175-181) obscures the world-disclosing element of action that was more central in her earlier essays, as discussed above. Yet, Arendt is less concerned with the disclosure of *the self* in a performative sense, and more interested in the disclosure of *plurality* via speech in *The Human Condition*. For Arendt, speech reveals the inherent plurality of the human condition *in-the-world*, through which 'Men distinguish themselves' as agents to others, 'instead of being merely distinct' (Arendt 1998: 176). She notes that within speech, 'most words and deeds are *about* some worldly ... reality in addition to being a disclosure of the ... agent' (1998: 182, emphasis in original). Despite these statements, Arendt marginalises the *world-disclosing* aspects of action in *The Human Condition* and in her works thereafter, in favour of a closer consideration of the anthropological condition of plurality and the related notion of the common world.

As noted above, Arendt sketches an understanding of the world as the common horizon of coexistence and space of plural interpretations in 'Introduction *into* Politics'. She carries much of this formulation over to *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). Two connected notions of the world emerge through Arendt's unsystematically developed remarks in these works. The first relates to the common 'space of appearances', while the second refers to the formation of a common world via the 'web of human relationships'. Late in *The Human Condition*, Arendt

argues that ‘the space of appearance comes into being whenever men are together in the manner of speech and action’ (1998: 199). The intersection of this common space of appearances ‘constitutes reality’ (Arendt 1998: 50): ‘the presence of others who see what we see and hear what we hear assures us of the reality of the world and ourselves’ (1998: 50). Although she does not fully develop her earlier contention of the openness of the world to plural interpretations from ‘Introduction *into* Politics’, this understanding underlies her later statement:

The reality of the public realm relies on the simultaneous presence of innumerable perspectives and aspects in which the common world presents itself ... For though the common world is the common meeting ground of all, those who are present have different locations in it. [Hence,] being seen and heard by others derive their significance from the fact that everybody sees and hears from a different position (1998: 57; cf. 199).

‘Worldly reality’ can therefore only arise through the human condition of plurality, which reveals the world as a point of ‘sameness in utter diversity’ (Arendt 1998: 57). As a common horizon of appearances, the world and the condition of plurality make possible ‘innumerable perspectives’. Nevertheless, Arendt does not return to her earlier-noted notion of world-disclosing action, nor further this point toward an understanding of the conflict of interpretations as a form of political doing in this analysis.

Arendt more explicitly defines the world in *The Human Condition* as the common realm, which is related to ‘the human artefact’: that is, the ‘affairs which go on among those who inhabit the... world together’ (1998: 52; cf. 183-184). For Arendt, this refers to the world *qua* history. While the condition of plurality forms the precondition for *politics*, *political action* properly speaking has a closer ‘connection with the human condition of natality’, and ‘creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history’ (1998: 9). To turn to the notion of the world *qua* the formation of historical worlds is to move away from the concern of the present discussion: Arendt’s elucidation of the anthropological condition of plurality and her implicit

notion of world-disclosing doing. I consider the world-forming dimensions of political action and the anthropological condition of natality in the next subsection (2.2.2, below).

The foregoing reconstruction of Arendt's writings from 1950 to 1958 centred on her emerging philosophical anthropology of plurality and her incipient, interpretative notion of world-disclosure. Arendt's elucidation of the condition of plurality incorporated an understanding of the world as a common horizon of coexistence and open space for plural interpretations. As demonstrated in the first part of this subsection, Arendt advanced her anthropological notion of plurality via critical encounter with the philosophical tradition, which built upon her earlier dialogue in 'What is Existential Philosophy?' (1994b [1946]; see Section 2.1, above). The fundamental insight that emerged from this analysis is that, in Arendt's work, the human condition of plurality *in-the-world* forms the precondition for politics (while natality provides the condition for political action and the possibility of history; see Subsection 2.2 and Section 2.3, below). The world forms the shared space of human coexistence, yet the world is an open interpretative space which opens up differently according to plural interpretative perspectives. From this analysis, speech—whether as *doxa* or forms of understanding—discloses the world as a unity in plurality. At the same time, the reconstruction revealed a hermeneutic undercurrent in Arendt's thinking in the 1950s. This includes her remarks on the dialogue of distance and belonging in 'Understanding and Politics' (1994e [1954]), and the incipient notion of world-disclosing *doxa* in 'Socrates' (2007b [1954]), which reveals the world an open horizon for plural interpretations. Nevertheless, this theorisation of world-disclosure ultimately remains unfinished. Arendt sketches this notion in some essays, but leaves the question of world-interpretations and their disclosure via speech aside in favour of a more explicit analysis of political action *qua* new beginnings (see Subsection 2.2.2 and Section 2.3, below). She does not develop the creative dimensions of world-disclosing or world-interpreting doing into an understanding of political critique. This part of Arendt's work remains limited as a result.

Arendt's political theory undoubtedly centres on her philosophical anthropology, with its twofold conditions of plurality and natality. This chapter develops the argument that, for Arendt, these anthropological conditions form the precondition of and for political action. The present subsection advanced this contention. As demonstrated above, the condition of plurality forms the ground for politics because the human condition is *plural*—which forms the possibility for worlds to emerge *in common*—and, because the common horizon of the world is open to *plural* interpretations. In the next section, I turn to Arendt's reflections on the condition of natality from her writings from 1950 to 1959, which appear alongside her considerations of anthropological plurality. Over time, Arendt sidelines the above-noted idea of 'world-disclosing' doing. In so doing, she more explicitly develops an understanding of political action as 'new beginnings', as the creative world-forming possibility inherent to the condition of natality. As I show in the next section, this line of Arendt's thought increases in significance in the mid to late 1950s in particular, and moves to the centre *en route* to *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]). I turn to this developing aspect of Arendt's political theory in Section 2.2.2, below.

2.2.2. On New Beginnings: Arendt's Philosophical Anthropology of Natality as the Possibility of Forming Historical Worlds

I have argued in this chapter that Arendt's philosophical anthropology, which centres on the conditions of 'plurality' and 'natality' *in-the-world*, forms the preconditions for political action and the possibility of history. The previous subsection (2.2.1) highlighted that the condition of plurality constitutes 'the predicament from which politics must start' (Canovan 1995: 99-100). The above reconstruction of Arendt's work from the 1950s unearthed an implicit hermeneutic undercurrent within her reflections on the anthropological condition of plurality. Because the human condition is inherently *plural* and always-already *in-the-world*, the world forms a common space for coexistence, at the same time that it remains an open interpretative space for the disclosure of plural world interpretations. Nevertheless, as argued in Subsection 2.2.1,

Arendt ultimately leaves the question of world-disclosing doing unfinished; she marginalises this implicit understanding of action over time. Arendt's elucidations of the anthropological condition of natality and of action as 'new beginnings' eventually overshadow the incipient idea of world-disclosing doing. In this, Arendt fails to develop an understanding of the creative elements of world-interpretation, as per hermeneutic-phenomenological debates (see Section 1.1, Chapter 1; cf. Adams 2009b: 256; Arnason 1989a: 40, 1993: 92-93).

I trace Arendt's shift of focus in this subsection. I reconstruct the same period of Arendt's thinking as in the previous analysis: 1950 to 1958. This spans *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958 [1951]) and *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]), and includes the essays 'The Tradition of Political Thought' (2007d [1953]), 'Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)' (1994e [1954]), and 'Introduction *into* Politics' (2007a [1956/1959]). The reconstruction reveals an understanding of the anthropological condition of natality as the precondition of and possibility for the formation of historical worlds through political doing. For Arendt, *anthropos* are 'beginners', who shape history and begin the world anew via political action. I detail this line of Arendt's thought by dividing the following discussion according to two key ideas: the human condition of natality, which elucidates an understanding of *anthropos* as 'beginners'; and, the (re-)formation of the world through political action, as a 'new beginning' in history. As Arendt puts it in the opening chapter of *The Human Condition*, 'Action... engages in founding and preserving political bodies', which 'creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history' (1998 [1958]: 8-9). This latter insight in particular paves the way for Arendt's analysis of world-forming revolutionary political action, which centres on the explicit foundation or institution of historical worlds (I consider this part of Arendt's thought in Section 2.3, below).

The first key point for consideration is Arendt's continued elucidation of the anthropological condition of natality. Arendt first sketched her anthropology of natality in *Love and Saint Augustine* (1996 [1929/1964]), which developed an understanding of *anthropos* as the

'beginners' of history (see Section 2.1 above). Born into the world 'to act as a beginner and enact the story of mankind', *anthropos* 'prevent[.] time... from turning eternally in cycles about itself... without anything new ever happening' (Arendt 1996: 55). This line of thinking resurfaces in *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958 [1951]). In the chapter, 'Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government' (1958: 460-479),³⁶ Arendt argues that totalitarian tyranny attempted to 'eliminate' the 'very source of freedom which is given with the fact of the birth of man', which 'resides in his capacity to make a new beginning' (1958: 466). Arendt here connects the anthropological condition of natality with the possibility of creating 'new beginnings', which introduce novelty into the world. She writes, 'With each new birth, a new beginning is born into the world', through which, Arendt adds, 'a new world has potentially come into being' (1958: 465; cf. 466). Although Arendt does not develop this point further in *Origins*, these continued reflections on the condition of natality and historical world formation assumes a central position across her thinking in her political theory thereafter.

Arendt's consideration of the intertwining of beginnings and the field of history via the anthropological condition of natality reappears in 'Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)' (1994e [1954]). In Section 2.2.1, above, I reconstructed the implicit hermeneutic undercurrent in Arendt's reflections on the doing of 'understanding' in this essay. The question of 'new beginnings' is far less developed in comparison. Arendt gives only indications of the historical and anthropological dimensions of beginnings late in the essay. There, she recalls the Augustinian dictum, '*Initium ergo ut esset, creatus est homo, ante quem nullus fuit*' ("That there might be a beginning, man was created before whom nobody was")' from her doctoral study (Arendt 1994e [1954]: 321; cf. 1996 [1929/1964]: 53). Arendt analyses Augustine's declaration of the 'beginning' or *initium* of *anthropos*:

If the creation of man coincides with the creation of a beginning in the universe (and what else does this mean but the creation of freedom?), then the birth of individual men, being new beginnings, reaffirms the *original* character of man ... the very fact of the memorable continuity of these beginnings in the sequence of generations

guarantees a history which can never end because it is the history of beings whose essence is beginning (1994e: 321, emphasis in original).

Arendt here develops an understanding of *anthropos* as creative beings. She adds, ‘man not only has the capacity for beginning, but is this beginning himself’ (1994e: 321). The endnotes to ‘Understanding and Politics’ in particular reveal Arendt’s thinking regarding the creative capacities of the anthropological condition of natality and the character of action *qua* beginning. In a note, Arendt argues that each new birth interrupts ‘the so-called chain of happenings’ because it brings ‘a new beginning into the world’ (1994e: 326 n.18). Following the indented quote above, the sequential birth of new generations into the world forms the history of beings who are ‘beginners’; action *qua* beginning thus appears as an ‘event’ that interrupts the historical field to reshape it. The endnotes to ‘Understanding and Politics’ again highlight Arendt’s ideas concerning ‘beginnings’, arguably more than the essay itself. There, Arendt portrays the ‘event’ as the emergence of ‘something inescapably new’ through political action, ‘in its majestic irrevocability, originality, and abundance of meaning’ (1994e: 326 n.14). Arendt adds in a later note that a ‘beginning’ is properly such if it crystallises from factors that ‘lie[...] in the realm of human freedom’ (1994e: 326 n.16; cf. 321); in this way, ‘beginnings’ are irreducible to ‘cause and effect’, and cannot be derived from pre-existing elements.

Arendt’s sketches of the notions of natality and new beginnings in ‘Understanding and Politics’ further her earlier reflections from *Love and Saint Augustine* and *Origins*. In particular, Arendt highlights that the origins of the formation and movement of history stem from the anthropological condition of natality. As ‘beginners’, *anthropos* create historical patterns, and guarantee the continuation of history via each birth into the world across successive generations. Although Arendt does not advance the notion of ‘the event’ beyond this essay, the thematic resurfaces in her analyses of the ‘act of foundation’ in *On Revolution* (I return to this in Section 2.3). Indeed, Arendt connects political action to the ‘act of foundation’ in passing in

‘Understanding and Politics’, as ‘the conscious beginning of something new’ (see Arendt 1994e: 321; cf. 320-321).

Arendt continues her elucidation of the source of ‘beginnings’ in the anthropological condition of natality in ‘The Tradition of Political Thought’ (2007d [1953]: 59), ‘Introduction into Politics’ (2007a [1956/1959]: 126-127), and *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). Yet Arendt adopts a different perspective in the latter two works: she rethinks natality and new beginnings along the lines of ‘miracles’. To my knowledge, ‘Introduction into Politics’ contains Arendt’s earliest sketch of ‘beginnings’ as ‘miracles’, which resurfaces in *The Human Condition* (I return to this shortly). In ‘Introduction into Politics’, Arendt strips the notion of miracles of its religious associations (see Ricoeur 1983: 72), and defines it in short as an act that ‘breaks into ... the natural course of human affairs’ (2007a: 111). Arguably, Arendt recasts her earlier understanding of the unprecedented creativity of the ‘event’ as a ‘miracle’ in this analysis. This becomes clear as she adds, ‘whenever something new occurs, it bursts into the context of predictable processes as something unexpected, unpredictable, and ultimately causally inexplicable—just like a miracle’ (Arendt 2007a: 112). What is significant is that Arendt attributes the capacity for enacting miracles and creative freedom to *anthropos*. Indeed, Arendt portrays *anthropos* as ‘miracle workers’: as she puts it, ‘man ... has a most amazing and mysterious talent for working miracles’ and for beginning something new (2007a: 113).

An understanding of the creativity of *anthropos*—with the capacity *to begin*—is implicit in Arendt’s analysis here. At the end of her brief discussion of the miraculous character of beginning in ‘Introduction into Politics’, Arendt adds in a passing remark that the capacity for beginnings as a mode of freedom relates to the Kantian notion of ‘spontaneity’ (see Arendt 2007a [1956/1959]: 113).³⁷ ‘Spontaneity’ resurfaces later in ‘Introduction into Politics’, after a detour through the ancient Greek *polis* experience. There, Arendt links the idea of ‘beginning’ with Kant’s understanding of ‘spontaneity’, as ‘the ability of every human being to initiate a sequence, to forge a new chain’ (Arendt 2007a: 126). Arendt reiterates the Augustinian

distinction between *principium* and *initium* (see 1996 [1929/1964]: 55; and Section 2.1 above) in this analysis to underscore the creative potential of the human condition of natality, as the birth of a ‘beginner’ into the world (Arendt 2007a [1956/1959]: 126). Arendt highlights the ‘extraordinary political significance of a freedom that lies in our being able to begin anew’ in ‘Introduction *into* Politics’ (2007a: 126). However, she does not fully pursue an understanding of the source of this creativity—arguably, the imagination—beyond a sketch of Kant’s notion of spontaneity and the Augustinian characterisation of *anthropos* as ‘beginning’ in the sense of *initium*, here.³⁸

Arendt returns to the thematics of ‘miracles’ and ‘beginnings’ in relation to the *initium* inherent to the anthropological condition of natality in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). There, Arendt reaffirms her understanding of natality by reiterating her oft-cited Augustinian dictum: ‘that there be a beginning, man was created before whom there was nobody’ (1998: 177), and adds shortly after that the ‘impulse’ for ‘beginning something new’ springs from human ‘initiative’ (Arendt 1998: 177). *Anthropos*, in this sense, are ‘beginners’. As she put it in *Love and Saint Augustine*, ‘it was for the sake of *novitas*’—or, novelty, newness—‘that man was created’ (1996 [1929/1964]: 55). Arendt repeats this notion of the unexpected, and indeed ‘miraculous’ character of creative human action in its appearance in the historical field in *The Human Condition*. This understanding of *anthropos* as the enactors of ‘miracles’ becomes clear when she writes:

It is in the nature of beginning that something new is started which cannot be expected from whatever may have happened before. This character of startling unexpectedness is inherent in all beginnings and in all origins. [...] The fact that man is capable of action means that he is able to perform what is indefinitely improbable (Arendt 1998: 177-178).

Or, in more explicit terms: ‘the new therefore always appears as a miracle’ (1998: 178). For Arendt, then, the capacity for enacting miracles is human, not divine (see Ricoeur 1983: 72). By actualising the creative potential inherent to the anthropological condition of natality, new

beginnings interrupt the cyclic and repetitious movement of the world to alter the path of history (I return to the world-forming elements of beginnings shortly; see Arendt 1998: 246-247; Ricoeur 1983: 72). In its 'startling unexpectedness', the creativity of action *qua* 'beginning' appears as if 'from nothing' to introduce alterity into the historical field—to begin the world anew. These insightful statements reveal the creativity of human beings as the 'beginners' of the unexpected in the world via the actualisation of the anthropological condition of natality (1998: 178). Nonetheless, Arendt fails to systematically develop these ideas in *The Human Condition*. Although she makes note of 'spontaneity' in relation to beginnings and action (see 1998: 230, 231, 235 n.75), Arendt does not fully extrapolate the role the imagination plays in the anthropic capacity for beginning, which, for her, forms the precondition of and possibility for the formation of history (see Arendt 1992: 8-9).

It is through this understanding of the spontaneous element of 'beginning' as the actualisation of the anthropological condition of natality that Arendt differentiates *action* from the category of *work* in *The Human Condition* (I detailed Arendt's notions of 'work' and 'labour' in Subsection 2.2.1, above). Arendt contradistinguishes the two by juxtaposing the forms of determinism inherent to these modes of human doing. For Arendt, 'beginnings' are startlingly unexpected in their appearance in the world; hence Arendt's portrayal of the miraculous character of action (see Arendt 1998: 177-178, 246-247; cf. 2007a: 113). As such, 'action' *qua* 'beginning' is irreducible to a predetermined *telos*. In contrast, Arendt contends that labour (as *animal laborans*) is 'forced upon man by necessity'; *anthropos* are determined to this life process of doing, 'without ever transcending or freeing itself from the recurring cycle of its own functioning' (1998: 119, 115). While the category of 'work' (in the mode of *homo faber*), in turn, operates on a rational 'means-end' teleology its mode of fabrication (Arendt 1998: 153-159). The doing of fabrication follows a predetermined process to achieve the objective or 'end' (Arendt 1998: 140, 143). Indeed, 'the process of making itself is entirely determined' by its 'end', and, as such, this form of doing is merely a means to achieve the projected 'end' (Arendt

1998: 143; cf. 140-143). The model that guides fabrication lies ‘outside of the fabricator’ (1998: 140)—thus ‘work’ does not actualise the anthropological condition of natality as an inherent capacity of human creativity. Because ‘action’ creates the conditions for history, action can only be a beginning: ‘action’ in this sense does not have a clear or predictable end (Arendt 1998: 144, 233; cf. 2007d [1958]: 46).³⁹ Arendt sketches an understanding of the underdeterminacy of both action and history via this emphasis on ‘beginnings’. As Arendt puts it in ‘Introduction *into* Politics’:

what stands in opposition to all possible predetermination and knowledge of the future is the fact that the world is daily renewed through birth and is constantly dragged into what is unpredictably new by the spontaneity of each new arrival (2007a [1956/1959]: 127).

The above reconstruction of Arendt’s developing philosophical anthropology highlights that the condition of natality forms the precondition of and for history, on two grounds. On the one hand, the ongoing birth of successive generations *into* the world points clearly to the historicity of the human condition. Yet, on the other hand, Arendt’s anthropology of natality goes one step further in her characterisation of *anthropos* as *beginners*, as the initiators and thus creators of history. Although Arendt does not fully expand on the role the imagination plays in the ‘spontaneous’ freedom of ‘new beginnings’, she nonetheless underscores the creative element of ‘beginning’ in the formation of historical worlds. At the end of the section on ‘Action’ in *The Human Condition*, Arendt writes that ‘The miracle that saves the world, the realm of human affairs, from ... ruin is ultimately the fact of natality, in which the faculty of action is [anthropologically] rooted’ (1998: 247). This unexpected and un-predetermined form of creative action interrupts the cyclic repetition of time to inaugurate change and begin the world anew; thus, action appears as a miracle in the world.

Until now, the properly *political* dimension of Arendt’s elucidation of ‘new beginnings’ and the anthropological condition of natality have remained on the sidelines of the present discussion. I now turn to the second key point that emerged from the reconstruction of

Arendt's thinking from the 1950s: alongside 'natality', Arendt developed an understanding of the (re-)formation of historical worlds via political action. In this, I extrapolate a notion of world-forming doing from Arendt's reflections on the 'act of foundation', as the creation of a 'new beginning' in history. This paves the way for her later analysis of modern revolutionary projects in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]), which I consider later in Section 2.3.

Arendt traces the outlines of the notion of world-forming new beginnings and the act of foundation in 'The Tradition of Political thought' (2007d [1953]) and 'Introduction *into* Politics' (2007a [1956/1959]), in particular. I noted earlier that in 'Understanding and Politics', Arendt hinted that the political 'event' or 'act of foundation' referred to 'the conscious beginning of something new' (1994e [1954]: 321); however, she did not expand on this brief remark. *The Human Condition*, in turn, contains only traces of the world-forming aspects of political action as an act of 'foundation'. Arendt writes in the opening chapter, for example, 'Action, insofar as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history' (1998 [1958]: 8-9). This statement indicates that the institution of political 'forms' or bodies is, at the same time, the political creation of historical worlds and patterns of remembrance. The notion of 'remembrance' from *Love and Saint Augustine* (1996 [1929/1964]; see Section 2.1 above) resurfaces in Arendt's thinking here in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). She does not develop an understanding of the institution of historical worlds and patterns of meaning in either work, however. Later in *The Human Condition*, Arendt contends that 'history is a story of events', which appear in their 'tangible unexpectedness' (1998: 252; cf. Ricoeur 1983: 67-68). Although Arendt sporadically employs the term, 'foundation', in the sense of the act of forming history or as an 'event' across that work (see 1998: 24, 25, 62 n.57, 196, 228), she does not systematically develop the notion as an understanding of collective world-forming political doing.

Arendt deals with the question of the acts of foundation and world-formation most explicitly in 'The Tradition of Political Thought' (2007d [1953]) and 'Introduction *into* Politics'

(2007a [1956/1959]). In the earlier essay, Arendt argues that, in comparison to the Greeks, the Roman political experience ‘plays hardly any role in the history of political thought’ (2007d: 47). In her analysis, the Roman mode of political action ‘consists in the foundation and preservation of a *civitas*’ (2007d: 47 [1953]). Arendt contrasts the Roman act of foundation against the pre-*polis* Greek political notion ‘of action as starting a new enterprise’ (2007d: 60). Arendt thus draws on the Romans—not the Greeks (see Maggini 2015; Taminiaux 2000)—to elucidate an understanding of the political act of foundation and the formation of historical worlds.⁴⁰ Although Arendt does not systematically extrapolate a theory of world-forming, world-founding political action in ‘The Tradition...’, her remarks, however, reveal an understanding of the act of foundation as the ‘beginning of their [Roman] history’ (Arendt 2007d: 48). The act of foundation hence refers to the creation of the ‘eternal political foundation of the [Roman] world’ (Arendt 2007d: 53). The term ‘foundation’ may arguably be understood as ‘institution’ (see Arendt 2007a: 123), which in Arendt’s work relates broadly to the creative institution of political *forms* (or, ‘bodies’, as per her quote in *The Human Condition*, noted earlier; 1998: 8-9), patterns of meaning, and, as I will show in Section 2.3, configurations of power. Arendt highlights this in ‘The Tradition...’, when she discusses the institution of the nexus of religion, tradition, and authority in the Roman political act of foundation.⁴¹ The trinity of these socio-cultural and political elements instituted a ‘sacred binding force of an authoritative beginning to which one remained bound through the strength of tradition’ (Arendt 2007d: 50). As Arendt put it in *The Human Condition*, this institution of a binding force of tradition in the act of foundation creates the condition for remembrance—for history (see 1998: 8-9). Arendt here traces an understanding of the political act of foundation as the institution of historical worlds and patterns of socio-cultural meaning or ‘remembrance’. Nevertheless, Arendt does not develop this idea further in ‘The Tradition of Political Thought’.

Arendt’s discussion of the Roman act of foundation in ‘The Tradition of Political Thought’ points to a twofold understanding of political action as ‘beginning’. The act of

foundation firstly refers to the collective institution of a new beginning—or articulation of a new world—via the formation of political and cultural institutions (in the nexus of religion, tradition and authority) and the configuration of common bonds. This is an *explicit* and unprecedented beginning—the formation of a new historical world via political action. Yet, at the same time, Arendt develops an understanding of beginning *anew*, through which political action ‘preserves’ and recreates the instituted foundation of the historical world (see 2007d: 47). For Arendt, ‘religious and political activity were considered to be one’ in the Roman experience through the sanctification and *renewal* of the foundation, which served to re-form the institution of their historical world (2007d: 49; cf. 2007d: 48-50). Indeed, Arendt notes that the preservation of the foundation was a ‘holy duty’ for the Romans, in order to ‘preserve whatever had been handed down from the ancestors’ (2007d: 49) and to maintain the thread of tradition (which for Arendt relates to patterns of ‘remembrance’: history). This twofold understanding of beginning—as the foundation of a new history, and its creative rearticulation—continues through Arendt’s thinking to *On Revolution*, as I will show in Section 2.3. The dimension of beginning *anew* in particular comprises an interpretative element to the rearticulation of the historical world. Yet, Arendt does not consider this interpretative dimension of the creative preservation of the world in her discussion.

The twofold understanding of ‘beginning’ resurfaces in Arendt’s brief discussion of the Greeks and the Romans in ‘Introduction *into* Politics’. Yet again, however, Arendt does not systematically develop the notion of the world-forming act of foundation that essay. In a section titled ‘The Meaning of Politics’, Arendt contrasts the Greek and Roman experiences of political action once more (2007a: 116-121). For Arendt, the Greek articulation of the ‘freedom’ of action meant both ‘starting anew and beginning something’; similarly, the Romans linked ‘being free and beginning something’ in her view (Arendt 2007a: 126). In the Roman case in particular, the enactment of freedom *qua* beginning also referred to beginning *anew*, in which the thread of tradition was renewed through creative action: ‘the freedom of the

Romans always had to be traced to this founding—*ab urbe condita*—where a beginning had been made’ (Arendt 2007a: 126). From Arendt’s analysis, the foundation of Rome was *the* beginning, as the unprecedented creation of a new historical world via political action. At the same time, political action *qua* new beginnings renews the institution of the historical world, to alter history and *begin* this world *anew*.

Arendt pursues a more explicit analysis of the collective political act of foundation in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]), which builds upon her earlier essays ‘What is Freedom?’ (2006f [1960]) and ‘What is Authority?’ (2006e [1959]). I turn to these works next in Section 2.3, below. Arendt hints at the creative potential of revolutionary projects in ‘Introduction *into* Politics’ (as ‘direct experiences ... of the possibilities inherent in political action’; 2007a: 143), but she does not fully consider this understanding in the 1950s, as shown in the above discussion. The previous subsection (2.2.1) traced Arendt’s philosophical anthropology of plurality, and, in so doing, revealed an implicit notion of world-disclosing doing. As argued previously, the condition of plurality forms the ground for politics because the human condition *in-the-world* is plural: different *anthropos* inhabit the world, and hence articulate the world differently. In Arendt’s earlier analysis, then, the world forms the shared horizon of coexistence and a space open to plural interpretations. The present subsection, in turn, focussed on Arendt’s developing anthropology of natality and the complementary formulation of action as ‘new beginnings’, as she advanced these notions through 1950 to 1959.

Two key insights emerged from this reconstruction. The first concerned Arendt’s elucidation of the anthropological condition of natality. Arendt reaffirmed her understanding of *anthropos* as *initium* or ‘beginners’ from *Love and Saint Augustine* (1996 [1929/1964]; see Section 2.1) in her writings in the 1950s (e.g. Arendt 1958 [1951]: 465, 1994e [1954]: 321, 1998 [1958]: 177, 2007a [1956/1959]: 126). In short, each new birth into the world is a potential beginning because *anthropos* have the capacity *for* action, to start something new, and to enact ‘miracles’. Arendt links this anthropological condition of natality and understanding of action

with the possibility of and for history. On the one hand, each successive generation born into the world guarantees the continuation of history. On the other, however, 'a new world has potentially come into being' with each new birth (Arendt 1958 [1951: 465]). Arendt here attributes *anthropos* with a world-forming creativity, through which human beings can 'work miracles' and creatively alter historical patterns (see 2007a [1956/1959]: 111-114). A connection may here be made between Arendt and Cornelius Castoriadis's elucidation of creation *ex nihilo*, which refers to the creation of radical otherness in the social-historical field which appears as if *from nothing* (1997b: 370; see also Adams 2005, 2011a: 2; Klooger 2011; Mouzakitis 2014a).⁴² Like Castoriadis, Arendt's approach to creative new beginnings is, at the same time, grounded on an understanding of the under-determined character of history. It is on this basis that Arendt differentiated 'action' properly speaking from the categories of 'labour' and 'work' in *The Human Condition*, as noted above. The reconstruction of Arendt's anthropology of natality also highlighted implicit notions of the imagination via her remarks on 'spontaneity'. Arendt does not flesh out the role the imagination plays in the creative formation of historical worlds, yet this problematic permeates her thinking about 'new beginnings' and the creative potential inherent to the human condition of natality.

The second important insight concerned Arendt's reflections on the 'act of foundation', as a world-forming 'new beginning' in history via political action. The notion of the 'act of foundation' built upon her earlier remarks on 'the event' from 'Understanding and Politics' (1994e [1954]), which she characterised as the emergence of something 'inescapably new' in the historical field, in its 'majestic ... originality' (1994e: 326, n.14) and 'startling unexpectedness' (1998 [1958]: 178). By tracing Arendt's reflections on the world-forming political act of foundation, the reconstruction additionally revealed a twofold notion of 'beginning'. While the act of foundation referred to an *explicit* beginning—the beginning of a historical world via political action (see Arendt 2007d [1953]: 48)—Arendt also sketched a notion of beginning *anew*, in the 'preservation' and re-creation of the institution of the

historical world. Arendt does not consider the interpretative dimensions at play within this conceptualisation of action as beginning *anew*. In this analysis, action creatively alters the historical field whilst maintaining the thread of tradition—this political act of world re-formation is likewise an act of world reinterpretation. Yet, because Arendt anchors her understanding of the formation of historical worlds in her philosophical anthropology of natality, she does not consider the act of foundation as the creation of a historical world *ex nihilo*, as in Castoriadis’s later, ontological approach (which I discuss in Chapter 3). Rather, for Arendt, the anthropological conditions of plurality and natality *in-the-world* form the very precondition of and for the formation of historical worlds, which, according to Arendt, is the upmost potential of political freedom. It is this understanding of the creative, world-founding potential of political action—as the actualisation of the human condition of natality—that plays out in Arendt’s analysis of the modern revolutionary projects in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]), as I will show in the next section.

2.3. The Political Act of Foundation and World-Forming New Beginnings: Arendt’s Political Writings after *The Human Condition*

The reconstruction of Arendt’s work up to this point has predominantly concentrated on her philosophical anthropology—with its conditions of plurality and natality *in-the-world*—which, in Arendt’s thought, forms the precondition of politics and the possibility for historical world formation. The formation of historical worlds via political action becomes more explicit in Arendt’s thinking after *The Human Condition*, in particular. Arendt’s reflections on the anthropological possibilities of human natality (which renders *anthropos* as ‘beginners’ and the initiators of historical movement; see Subsection 2.2.2 above) and the Roman experience of ‘foundation’ in the 1950s set up her analysis of the world-forming dimensions of modern revolutionary projects in *On Revolution* and contemporaneous essays.⁴³ I trace Arendt’s continued thinking on the formation of historical worlds and the political act of foundation through her essays ‘What is Authority?’ (2006e [1959]), ‘What is Freedom?’ (2006f [1960]),

and, *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]) in this section—the latter of which I take as the most explicit treatise on political action in Arendt's *oeuvre*.

As I will show, Arendt develops her understanding of political action *qua* 'new beginnings' in these works to theorise revolutionary political action as the foundation of a new political world and institution of a new beginning in history. This section deals firstly with 'What is Authority?' (2006e [1959]) and 'What is Freedom?' (2006f [1960]), ahead of the critical analysis of *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]). Two connected insights from the reconstruction of 'What is Authority?' and 'What is Freedom?' warrant particular attention: Arendt's continued elucidation of the Roman act of foundation, with its twofold dimensions of political action as 'beginning' and 'beginning anew'; and, the resurfacing of the notion of 'miracles', which Arendt ties to the creation of historical worlds as an expression of collective freedom. Indeed, as Arendt puts it, because human beings 'have received the twofold gift of freedom and action' via the anthropological condition of natality, they can 'establish a reality of their own' (2006f [1960]: 169). Arendt's thinking in these essays thus paves the way for her discussion of revolutionary acts of foundation and world-formation in *On Revolution*.

Arendt's discussion of the Roman experience of foundation in 'What is Authority?' (2006e [1959]) and 'What is Freedom?' (2006f [1960]) echoes much of her earlier argument in 'The Tradition of Political Thought' (2007d [1953]; see Subsection 2.2.2, above). In 'The Tradition...', Arendt characterised the Roman act of foundation as the creation of the 'eternal political foundation of the [Roman] world' and 'beginning of their [Roman] history' (Arendt 2007d: 53, 48). The twofold conception of beginnings—the beginning and beginning *anew*—that Arendt detailed in 'The Tradition...' resurface via her discussion of Rome in 'What is Authority?' and 'What is Freedom?' The Roman foundation was a 'beginning' in the sense of the explicit foundation of their political and historical world. In 'What is Authority?', Arendt contends that 'the foundation of the new body politic... became to the Romans the central, decisive, unrepeatable beginning of their whole history, a unique event' (2006e: 120; cf. 138).

In turn, Arendt notes in ‘What is Freedom?’ that ‘freedom *qua* beginning became manifest in the act of foundation’ (2006f: 166; cf. 165).

Late in ‘What is Freedom?’, Arendt connects this understanding of beginning to the anthropological condition of natality and the capacity for enacting ‘miracles’. In this, Arendt furthers her thinking of ‘miracles’ from ‘Introduction *into* Politics’ (2007a [1956/1959]: 111-114) and *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]: 177-178, 246-247; see Subsection 2.2.2 above), in which she argued that *anthropos* had the ability for creating miracles by beginning ‘something unexpected’ to alter the field of history (2007a: 112). ‘What is Freedom?’ echoes this contention. There, Arendt again leans on Augustine to detail her notion of ‘natality’ (2006f [1960]: 165-166). Via Augustine, Arendt learns that ‘God created man in order to introduce into the world the faculty of beginning: freedom’ (2006f: 166; cf. Arendt 1996 [1929/1964]: 55). Arendt here contrasts her understanding of freedom as *political* freedom (which is foremost a collective act of historical creation) from philosophical approaches that render freedom an inner dimension or faculty of mind (2006f: 142-145). For Arendt, the assertion of inner freedom is ‘by definition politically irrelevant’ because it occurs in isolation and is withdrawn from the world (2006f: 145). Inner freedom does not—indeed, cannot—create a new beginning in the world in the Arendtian sense of introducing the inexplicably new into the historical field. It is in this vein that Arendt also characterises the capacity for miracles as ‘within the range of human faculties’ (2006f: 168), rather than as ‘performed by a divine agent’ (2006f: 166). Yet, in a step beyond her earlier discussions of the ‘miracle’ of political beginnings, Arendt remarks late in ‘What is Freedom?’ that such miracles of political action create historical realities. She writes:

It is in the very nature of every new beginning that it breaks into the world as an “infinite improbability”, and yet it is precisely this infinitely improbable which actually constitutes the very texture of everything we call real. Our whole existence rests, after all, on a chain of miracles, as it were [...] the miraculous character inherent in those events ... establish historical reality (2006f: 168-169).

Arendt's reflections in 'What is Authority?' and 'What is Freedom?' further her elucidation of the notion of beginning as the actualisation of the anthropological condition of natality. It is because *anthropos* are beginners and have the freedom to *begin* that, for Arendt, human beings 'can establish a reality of their own' (2006f: 169). As the explicit and miraculous historical 'event' that unexpectedly appears in and hence alters the field of history, this understanding of 'beginning' underlies Arendt's emphases on the 'beginning' inherent in the Roman act of foundation (noted above). 'Beginning' in this sense refers to an explicit formation of a new historical world via political action.

This link between political action *qua* 'beginning' and world-formation is implicit in the closing paragraphs of 'What is Authority?', where Arendt quotes Machiavelli in relation to the 'effort of "initiating a new order of things"' via revolution (Arendt 2006e: 140; see also Machiavelli 1992 [1532]).⁴⁴ Arendt notes the 'new order of things' across *On Revolution* (e.g. 2006a [1963]: 30, 34, 37); however, she fails to clarify whether this 'new order' refers to the foundation of the body politic, and/or the simultaneous articulation of new socio-cultural patterns of meaning and configurations of power (I return to this). As such, Arendt does not systematically develop this notion of the miraculous, world-forming aspect of political beginnings in 'What is Authority?' and 'What is Freedom?' Nonetheless, it sets up her analysis of modern revolutionary projects in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]).

At the same time that Arendt details the explicit *beginning* of Roman history and the miraculous character of this form of political freedom, she sketches the complementary dimension of *beginning anew* in 'What is Authority?' and 'What is Freedom?' In fact, Arendt deals with the question of the 'preservation' and 'augmentation' of the foundation to a greater extent than the strong notion of 'beginning' in these essays. Arendt writes in 'What is Authority?', 'to be engaged in politics meant first and foremost to preserve the founding of the city of Rome' (2006e [1959]: 120; cf. 121). Beginning anew in this sense relates to 'adding to the original foundation' (2006e: 120), by re-forming or altering the historical world via political

doing whilst, at the same time, maintaining the thread of tradition. Arendt reiterates this in brief in ‘What is Freedom?’ There, Arendt notes that the specifically Roman experience of freedom was ‘bequeathed by the founders of Rome to the Roman people; their freedom was tied to the beginning their forefathers had established by founding the city ... and whose foundations they had to “augment”’ (2006f [1960]: 165). From this analysis, political action gives form to political institutions and historical patterns, at the same time that it recreates or re-forms them. As she puts it, ‘political institutions ... depend for [their] continued existence upon acting men; [and] their conservation is achieved by the same means that brought them into being’: political action (Arendt 2006f: 152).

Here the historicity of the human condition, with its dimensions of ‘origins’ and ‘beginnings’, resurfaces in Arendt’s thinking (see Arendt 1996 [1929/1964]: 48-55). As noted earlier in Section 2.1, Arendt learnt on Augustine in her doctoral study to sketch an understanding of the historical dimensions of the human condition and her anthropology of natality. In *Love and Saint Augustine*, she wrote, ‘Since man can know... and remember his ‘beginning’ or his ‘origins’, he is able to act as a beginner and enact the story of mankind’ (1996 [1929/1964]: 55). The preservation and re-formation of the foundation of the historical world via ‘beginning anew’ thus creates the condition for remembrance—for history, as the collective memory of common origins and new beginnings (cf. Arendt 1998 [1958]: 8-9). Arendt advances this understanding of beginning anew in ‘What is Authority?’ (2006e [1959]) by drawing on the Roman institution of the nexus of tradition, religion, and authority (which she discussed in ‘The Tradition of Political Thought’, 2007d [1953]; see Subsection 2.2.2, above). The foundation of the trinity of tradition, religion, and authority within the political institution articulates a ‘binding power’ (2006e: 121) from the present to the past ‘origin’. In Arendt’s analysis of Rome, this binding power tied ‘every act back to the sacred beginning of Roman history, adding, as it were, to every single moment the weight of the past’ (2006e [1959]: 123; cf. 120-124). Arendt’s point, therefore, is that each act of beginning *anew* remains tied to the

foundation, as the 'origin' or beginning of the particular history in the foundation of the body politic. As noted previously, Arendt argues in *The Human Condition* that 'Action, in so far as it engages in founding and preserving political bodies, creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history' (1998 [1958]: 8-9). From Arendt's analysis, then, political action refers to the formation (beginning) and re-formation of the world (beginning anew) through the creative actualisation of the anthropological condition of natality, which begins *in-the-world* to begin the historical world anew, whilst remaining tied to common 'origins'. This understanding of the creative beginnings of political action necessarily comprises interpretative elements in the rearticulation of historical patterns; Arendt, however, does not consider the hermeneutic dimensions inherent in this theorisation of political action as beginning the world *anew*.

The above reconstruction traced Arendt's elucidation of the twofold character of world-forming political action (as 'beginning' and 'beginning anew') within the act of foundation, which, for Arendt, appears as a 'miracle' in its alteration of the historical field and expression of freedom. Political action, in this sense, is an actualisation of the anthropological condition of natality via the beginning of historical worlds and their re-formation. Both 'What is Authority?' (2006e [1959]) and 'What is Freedom?' (2006f [1960]) in this way clear the path for her analysis of the American and French Revolutions in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]). For Arendt, revolutions are the political events 'which confront us directly and inevitably with the problem of beginning' (2006a [1963]: 111), through which 'men began to be aware that a new beginning could be a political phenomenon' (2006a: 37). The reconstruction of *On Revolution* reveals two key insights in regard to Arendt's theory of world-forming political action. First, Arendt's elucidation of the act of foundation in *On Revolution* outlines a tripartite understanding of power: the 'act' itself manifests power; the foundation of the body politic is configured through mutual promises and bonds, which Arendt terms 'constitution-making'; and, the act of foundation involves the simultaneous rearticulation of patterns of power in the trinity of religion, authority, and tradition. Second, the twofold understanding of 'beginning'

and ‘beginning anew’ resurfaces in Arendt’s analysis in *On Revolution*. Yet, in a step beyond her earlier discussion of the ‘miraculous’ character of ‘beginning’, Arendt highlights the contextual character of revolutionary acts of foundation: the beginning of the new history leans upon pre-existing elements to begin the world anew. An interpretative undercurrent operates in Arendt’s reflections here, which she does not fully recognise. After the analysis of *On Revolution* in this section (2.3), I bring together the insights of the chapter in a concluding discussion (Section 2.4).

For Arendt, the common element between the American and French Revolutions was the act of foundation: the formation of a new body politic and historical world. Arendt argues that this arose through modes of ‘constitution-making’ (2006a: 132-139). Arendt understands the term ‘constitution’ in the sense of the laws and institutions that are, in the case of revolutions, ‘the result of the deliberate attempt by a whole people at founding a new body politic’ (2006a: 136; see also Kalyvas 2008: 202). In this way, ‘constitution-making’—or better, ‘foundation-forming’—refers to both the ‘creation of new foundations for a novel societal order’ and the modes of political doing or ‘collective self-constitution’ that brings the new political and historical world into form (Blokker 2017: 184, 186; cf. Arendt 2006a: 136, 145, 150, 196). Despite the apparent significance of this notion of ‘constitution-making’ for her elucidation of the act of foundation, Arendt does not systematically develop this part of her theory of world-forming political action in *On Revolution*.

The reconstruction, however, reveals the role of power in the political act of foundation. Arendt remarks late in the work that the lesson of the American Revolution is that ‘this revolution did not break out [in violence] but was made by men in common deliberation and on the strength of mutual pledges’ (Arendt 2006a: 206). She adds, ‘the foundations were laid ... by the combined power of the many’ via the ‘interconnected principle of mutual promise’ (2006a: 206). This proclamation recalls notions of power and the ‘promise’ from *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). In that work, Arendt argues that a form of power is ‘generated’

through collective action (1998: 244; cf. Ricoeur 2010: 25); at the same time, ‘What keeps people together after the fleeting moment of action has passed ... [and] they keep alive through remaining together is power’ (1998: 200). This mode of power is ‘kept in existence’ through the ‘force of mutual promise’, as the configuration of common bonds in the institution of the historical world and body politic (Arendt 1998: 244-245). In *On Revolution*, Arendt contends that the constitution of bonds via mutual promises form the ground of the new political community (2006a [1963]: 161-167). As in *The Human Condition*, Arendt underlines the central role of power in the act of foundation in *On Revolution*. She writes:

binding and promising ... are the means by which power is kept in existence; ... when men succeed in keeping intact the power that sprung up between them during the course of any particular act or deed [especially revolutionary action], they are already in the process of foundation, of constituting a stable worldly structure to house, as it were, their combined power of action (Arendt 2006a: 166).

Arendt does not systematically develop her notion of ‘constitution-making’ as part of her understanding of the political act of foundation via revolutionary doing. These remarks, however, point to the role of power in the institution of the historical world via the configuration of common bonds, as well as the form of power established through the constitution of laws and institutions of the new body politic via mutual promise (Arendt 2006a: 166-167).

At the same time that the act of foundation institutes a new configuration of power via ‘constitution-making’, the revolutionary project rearticulates patterns of authority. The reconstruction here reveals an additional understanding of power that emerges in Arendt’s thinking in *On Revolution*: a cultural interpretation of the source of power in the foundation of the historical and political world. Arendt, again, does not fully develop this point. Arendt draws on her earlier reflections on the Roman institution of the nexus of tradition, religion, and authority—which, as she put it in ‘What is Authority’, formed the ‘groundwork of the world’ (2006e [1959]: 95)—in *On Revolution* to analyse the American and French attempts at

establishing ‘an entirely new system of power’ via revolutionary ‘constitution-making’ (2006a [1963]: 138). For Arendt, both the American and French Revolutions reconfigured formerly religious sources of authority and political legitimacy (see 2006a: 145-153), from an other-worldly source of divine origin to a mode of authority in *this* world: the people. This shifted ‘God’ (and the representative of the divine on earth—the monarch) from the place of power, which, in so doing, ‘put the people into the seat of the king’ (Arendt 2006a: 147).⁴⁵ While the French Revolution articulated ‘the people’ as the origin of laws and source of power, Arendt argues that the American Revolution differentiated between these two sources of authority: ‘The seat of power to them was the people, but the source of law was to become the Constitution’, which ‘remained binding for the body politic to which it gave birth’ (2006a: 148). This part of Arendt’s analysis of the American and French Revolutionary projects highlights the reconfiguration of cultural and political patterns of power within the political act of foundation. The above reconstruction of Arendt’s elucidation of the political act of foundation in *On Revolution* reveals a tripartite understanding of power: manifested in the power of collective action and the binding power of mutual promises, the foundation of the historical world (as a political institution) also comprises a reconfiguration of the source and origin of authority.

Alongside this incipient understanding of the tripartite understanding of power that emerged through Arendt’s sketch of ‘constitution-making’ and the act of foundation, the second key insight revealed through the reconstruction of *On Revolution* pertains to the problematic of ‘beginning’, in the twofold sense of ‘beginning’ and ‘beginning anew’. The foundation of the American republic, for example, was the beginning of a new history that began ‘only with the revolution and the foundation of the republic’ (Arendt 2006a: 204). The French institution of the revolutionary calendar took this ‘beginning’ one step further, as it marked the start of historical time—the year 0—to coincide with the revolutionary event (Arendt 2006a: 19; cf. 27). However, Arendt’s reflections on these revolutionary events place

more emphasis on the notion of beginning *anew*. For Arendt, the American and French Revolutions were intended initially as ‘restoration’ movements (2006a: 32-37). That is, they did not seek ‘the definite end of an old order of things’ and the ‘birth of a new world’; rather, the revolutions ‘wanted to revolve back to old times when things had been what they ought to be’ (Arendt 2006a: 32, 34). The explicit, creative new beginning thus arose through the collective act of restoring the institution of the world, on the basis of the reinterpretation of a situation deemed problematic.

By drawing attention to the original intention of the restoration or re-establishment of the form of the world, Arendt’s thought comprises an implicit understanding of the interpretative element of creation. Indeed, to begin *anew* is to interpretatively and creatively rearticulate and re-form the world, to introduce a new beginning into the historical field. Arendt hints at the contextual character of political creation on a number of occasions in *On Revolution*. Arendt contends, for example, that the success of the American Revolution in part lies in the fact that the foundation of the republic arose ‘out of a country which was articulated from top to bottom ... into duly constituted bodies’ (2006a: 167). Arendt also makes this point in the closing passage of ‘What is Authority?’ There, she argues:

the act of foundation, namely the colonization of the American continent, had preceded the Declaration of Independence, so that the framing of the Constitution, falling back on existing charters and agreements, confirmed and legalized an already existing body politic rather than made it anew. Thus the actors in the American Revolution were spared the effort of ‘initiating a new order of things’ altogether ... (Arendt 2006e [1959]: 140).

The new beginning in the political foundation of a new world is, therefore, contextual creation; it actualises pre-existing elements in the world in order to alter it. Indeed, for Arendt in *On Revolution*, the Romans took up already-articulated cultural elements and historical ‘origins’ within their act of foundation (2006a [1963]: 202). ‘In the language of Virgil’, Arendt argues, ‘the foundation of Rome was the re-establishment of Troy’ (2006a: 200). Hence, the preeminent Roman act of foundation was ‘already a re-establishment ... a regeneration and

restoration' (Arendt 2006a: 200). If the 'greatest event in every revolution is the act of foundation' (2006a: 214), Arendt's discussion of the contextual character of revolutionary projects indicates that this is not the creation of an *absolutely new* beginning in the sense of a radical rupture. Rather, acts of foundation rearticulate the institution of the world by leaning on instituted configurations and historical traditions to begin the world *anew*. Yet in contrast to the Roman foundation, the American Revolution was a new beginning due to its modernity. The Americans did not seek to institute 'Rome anew', but rather sought to 'found a "new Rome"' (Arendt 2006a: 204). The thrust toward novelty inherent in this self-understanding for Arendt reveals the specifically modern character of the revolutionary 'spirit of the new' born through the revolutions (2006a: 214; cf. 18-19, 214-216).

This section focussed on Arendt's elucidation of the political act of foundation and mode of world-forming revolutionary doing from her essays 'What is Authority?' (2006e [1959]) and 'What is Freedom?' (2006f [1960]), and her important treatise on political action, *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]). These works built upon her earlier reflections on Rome and the thematic of 'beginning' from 'The Tradition of Political Thought' (2007d [1953]), 'Introduction into Politics' (2007a [1956/1959]) and *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]; see Subsection 2.2.2). The fundamental insight that emerged from the reconstruction in this section was the political formation and re-formation of historical worlds via the 'act of foundation'. For Arendt, this collective mode of political doing actualises the anthropological condition of natality to create and re-create history. Arendt's discussion in *On Revolution* in particular pointed to a threefold role of power in the political act of foundation: the foundation of the historical world manifested power through political action, which instituted power configurations through 'mutual promises' and, in so doing, rearticulated cultural patterns of authority, as the 'groundwork of the world'. Nevertheless, Arendt's remarks on the problematic of power remain underdeveloped. Indeed, this aspect of Arendt's thought necessitates further development in my view; a dialogue with the work of Claude Lefort and Cornelius Castoriadis

on this point may prove fruitful (I consider this in short in the concluding discussion of this thesis).

The second insight concerns Arendt's elucidation of the twofold character of political action as 'beginning' and 'beginning anew'. On the one hand, Arendt emphasised 'beginning' in the *strong* sense of the creation of a 'decisive beginning of [a] whole history' (2006e [1959]: 120) via political action in these works, as the manifestation of the freedom 'to begin' (see 2006f [1960]: 166). In this, the 'beginning' appears as a miracle in history, which, as Arendt argued, creates historical realities and 'constitutes the very texture we call real' (2006f: 168). On the other hand, however, Arendt underscores the character of beginning as beginning *anew* across the works under consideration. Political action in this sense relates also to the 'preservation' and 'augmentation' of the foundation of the historical world, to 'add[..] to the original foundation' and, hence, begin the world *anew* while maintaining the thread of tradition (see 2006e: 120; cf. 2006e, 2006f: 165).

Yet, Arendt shifts attention to the interpretative-creative mode of 'beginning anew' in *On Revolution*, where she suggests that both the American and Roman acts of foundation leant upon pre-existing historical articulations to create their historical world anew (2006a [1963]). Hence, for Arendt, revolutions are not radical breaks, but the 'beginning of a new story' within a broader historical field (see 2006a: 37). Arendt's sketch of beginning 'anew' comprises implicit hermeneutic elements in the interpretative rearticulation of historical worlds in their re-creation, which largely go unnoticed by Arendt herself. Instead, Arendt focusses on her understanding of the historicity of the human condition, as the framework for her notion of political action in the twofold sense of beginning and beginning anew. This is the condition of natality: each birth into the world guarantees the movement of history because *anthropos* 'themselves are new beginnings and hence [are] beginners' (Arendt 2006a: 203). In the next section, I bring the insights of the chapter together in a concluding discussion of Arendt's approach to world-altering collective political action *vis-à-vis* the intention of the present study.

2.4. Closing Remarks: On Arendt, World-Disclosure and World-Forming New Beginnings

The present study works toward a theoretical understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action by focussing on the question, ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ Drawing on hermeneutic-phenomenological debates—which emphasise the interconnected dimensions of world-interpretation and world-formation in the human encounter with the world-horizon—this chapter critically reconstructed Arendt’s political theory. In particular, I traced Arendt’s philosophical anthropology (with its two elements of plurality and natality) and the modes of political action that emerge from the anthropological condition *in-the-world*; namely, world-disclosure, and, more significantly, the act of foundation as a world-forming new beginning in history. The key argument developed from this reconstruction of Arendt’s work is that these anthropological conditions form the precondition of politics and possibility for the formation of history.

The foregoing analysis of Arendt’s thought was broken into three parts. The first section (2.1) considered Arendt’s doctoral study, later published as *Love and Saint Augustine* (1996 [1929/1964]), and her critical dialogue with the philosophical tradition in ‘What is Existential Philosophy?’ (1994b [1946]). As argued in Section 2.1, these early works were formative for Arendt’s developing philosophical anthropology. Via Augustine, Arendt sketched her notion of human natality *in-the-world*; in turn, Arendt highlighted the fundamentally plural character of the human condition, as *being-together-in-the-world*, through her analysis of modern philosophical debates. Section 2.2 furthered the analysis of Arendt’s elucidation of the anthropological preconditions of political action by reconstructing her thinking from 1950 to 1959. In Subsection 2.2.1, I traced Arendt’s reflections on the condition of plurality. The reconstruction unearthed an implicit hermeneutic dimension within Arendt’s remarks on the world and the ‘world-disclosing’ elements of human plurality. Because the human condition is inherently plural and always-already *in-the-world*, the world forms a common space for

coexistence; at the same time, the world is an open interpretative space for the disclosure of plural world interpretations. This finding challenges discussions of Arendt's thought which place emphasis on the disclosure of the self in public space (such as Buckler 2011: 89-90; Canovan 1995: 132-135; d'Entrèves 1989: 320-322). Nevertheless, as argued in Subsection 2.2.1, Arendt ultimately leaves her notion of world-disclosing doing unfinished. Despite this, the analysis demonstrated that the condition of plurality is a precondition for politics because the human condition is *plural*—which forms the ground for *common* worlds to emerge—and, because the common horizon of the world is open to *plural* interpretations. Arendt, however, does not advance this implicit understanding of world-disclosure toward a notion of political critique or the conflict of interpretations. From the hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective adopted in this study, the world-interpreting aspects of political action hence remain underdeveloped in Arendt's theoretical project.

Arendt eventually sidelined this incipient notion of world-disclosure in favour of a closer consideration of the anthropological condition of natality, through which Arendt contends the potential for new beginnings and historical world-formation is inherent in *anthropos* (see especially Subsection 2.2.2). I followed Arendt's thinking on the anthropological condition of natality from her works across 1950 to 1959 in Subsection 2.2.2, and through 1959 to 1963 in Section 2.3, culminating with *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]). For Arendt, the anthropological condition of natality forms the precondition of and for history via political action. On the one hand, each generation born *into* the world guarantees the continuation of history; as Arendt puts it, 'the world's potential salvation lies in the very fact that the human species regenerates itself constantly and forever' (2006a: 203). On the other, 'a new world has potentially come into being' (1958 [1951: 465]) with each new birth because, in Arendt's analysis, *anthropos* have the capacity to enact miracles as 'beginners'. Arendt in this way attributes *anthropos* with a world-forming creativity, as the possibility for historical (re-)creation inherent in each new birth.

Furthermore, the reconstruction of Arendt's thinking from 1950 to 1963 (Subsection 2.2.2 and Section 2.3) highlighted that, for Arendt, 'political action ... is essentially always the beginning of something new' (as 'the very essence of human freedom'; 1994e: 321). The political 'act of foundation', further, is this 'conscious beginning of something new' (1994e: 320-321): the formation of a new history and body politic. Yet the reconstruction revealed the twofold character of political action within the act of foundation—beginning and beginning anew—both of which are anchored in the anthropological condition of natality. As argued in Subsection 2.2.2 and Section 2.3, the act of foundation refers to *the* beginning of a new historical world undertaken as an explicit political project (see e.g. 2007d [1953]: 48; 2006e [1959]: 120). This beginning appears as a 'miracle' in the historical field, an unprecedented creative moment that establishes historical reality and the 'very texture' of 'the real' (Arendt 2006f [1960]: 168). Arendt tracked the dimensions of the 'beginning' in the act of foundation in *On Revolution* in particular (2006a [1963]). In so doing, Arendt sketched a threefold notion of power in the 'constitution' or foundation of the new body politic and formation of history: the power within the doing of political action; mutual binding power of promises formed in the infrastructure of the institution; and, the articulation of new cultural of patterns of authority.

At the same time, however, Arendt elucidated a notion of political action as beginning *anew* in the late 1950s and early 1960s. This relates to the 'augmentation' or 'preservation' of the foundation of the body politic and historical world via political action. From this perspective, political doing alters and adds to the foundation whilst maintaining the thread of tradition or the connection to 'origins' through the binding pattern of history (see Arendt 2006e [1959]: 120; cf. 2006f [1960]: 165). Arendt does not address the interpretative dimensions at play in this understanding of political action as beginning *anew*. Expanding upon this analysis, collective political action alters the historical field to re-create and 'preserve' the foundation; in this respect, world re-formation is simultaneously an act of world reinterpretation. Arendt sketches an additional notion of beginning anew in *On Revolution* via her argument that the

American and Roman acts of foundation leant upon pre-existing historical articulations to create their historical worlds to begin their history anew (see Section 2.3). Revolutionary projects therefore are not ‘radical breaks’ that cut the thread of history; rather, they are the ‘beginning of a new story’ within the overarching historical field (2006a: 37). This aspect of political creation again comprises interpretative elements, which go largely unnoticed by Arendt. The act of beginning the world *anew* must comprise an interpretative dimension: political action actualises the human condition of natality *in-the-world*, and begins the effort of world-alteration from within an already articulated historical horizon.

With these insights in mind, how does Arendt’s approach help to address the question, ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ From Arendt’s perspective, the question assumes that the anthropological condition is always-already *in-the-world*. As this chapter demonstrated, for Arendt, the human conditions of natality and plurality form the preconditions for politics and the possibility of historical world formation. Leaning on Arendt, the world here refers to the common horizon of coexistence that is (re-)formed into historical worlds and patterns of remembrance via collective political doing. Arendt’s elucidation of the condition of plurality highlights, moreover, that the world is always open to plural interpretations. And, implicit in Arendt’s work is the idea that historical worlds are founded or formed in such a way that the alteration of the world is a present possibility through the actualisation of the anthropological condition of natality. In this, Arendt details an understanding of the world as changeable through political action. Arendt’s emphasis on ‘beginning’ in this way rests on an understanding of the under-determinacy of the world and history. Because the world and the horizon of history are always open to different interpretations and further articulations, the world can always be begun anew via political action. Arendt would take issue with the term ‘make’ in the central question of this thesis, on the basis that it reduces action to a predetermined *telos* and to a mode of fabrication that acts *upon* the world from the outside. In contrast, Arendt’s philosophical anthropology underscores

the historicity and situatedness of political doing *in-the-world*, such that political action must be understood as ‘beginning’ or ‘starting anew’ within an already-articulated historical world.

But, on close analysis, Arendt’s approach does not clearly address the question of *how* political action enacts difference in the world. Other than her notion of ‘beginning’ and beginning history ‘anew’, Arendt does not systematically develop a theory of world-altering political action *per se*. Unlike Cornelius Castoriadis and Peter Wagner (whose works I turn to in Chapter 3 and Chapter 4, respectively), Arendt does not elaborate an understanding of the political interrogation and subsequent re-creation of institutions and patterns of meaning. Arendt’s key insight instead pertains to the anthropological preconditions of politics and the possibility for history. Although her remarks on the ‘act of foundation’ are insightful (especially in relation to the institution of power relations via promise and the rearticulation of sources of authority), her theory of world-forming political action ultimately remains underdeveloped. Nonetheless, this reconstruction highlighted openings for a theorisation of the world-altering aspects of political action as a creative-interpretative mode of ‘beginning anew’ as an exercise of political power (and its cultural rearticulation), which can be developed from Arendt’s work.

I turn to Castoriadis’s political theory in the next chapter. Where Arendt’s focus centred on the anthropological preconditions for political action, Castoriadis, in turn, centres his analysis on the institution of social-historical worlds of meaning, and their explicit alteration via the political project of autonomy. The notion of ‘creation’ is arguably the lynchpin of Castoriadis’s philosophical project. Yet, I will show in the next chapter, the reconstruction reveals a bifurcated notion of ‘world-opening’ and ‘world-instituting’ collective political doing in Castoriadis’s thought, which incorporates hermeneutic modes of critique within the creative self-alteration of the institution of the world. I commence the reconstruction of Castoriadis’s approach to the world-altering dimensions of collective political action in the following chapter.

CHAPTER THREE

CORNELIUS CASTORIADIS: THE WORLD-INTERPRETING AND WORLD-INSTITUTING DIMENSIONS OF THE POLITICAL PROJECT OF AUTONOMY

This study aims to develop a theoretical approach to the world-altering elements of collective political action by confronting the question, ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ To this end, I draw on the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the world problematic, which emphasises the encounter with and articulation of with the world at the collective level of sociality via the intertwined aspects of world-interpretation and world-formation. With this approach in mind, I reconstruct the works of Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Peter Wagner in this study, and bring the findings of the reconstructions together in a critical comparison in order to elucidate an understanding of world-altering collective political action. The previous chapter focussed on Arendt’s political theory. Arendt’s notion of collective political action in the twofold sense of ‘beginning’ and ‘beginning anew’ is anchored in her philosophical anthropology. As argued in Chapter 2, the anthropological conditions of ‘plurality’ and ‘natality’ for Arendt form the precondition of politics and the possibility for world formation, through which history can be ‘begun anew’ via collective political doing.

This chapter critically reconstructs Castoriadis’s approach to the world-altering dimensions of political action by drawing attention to his elucidation of the self-creation of worlds of meaning and their interrogation and re-institution via the political project of autonomy. While Cornelius Castoriadis (1922-1997) became ‘smitten’ with philosophy at age thirteen (see Curtis 1997: xiii), his political activism began when he joined the Greek Communist Youth at age fifteen (Curtis 1991: vi; Joas & Knöbl 2009: 401). After fleeing Athens for Paris in late 1945, he formed the revolutionary group *Socialisme ou Barbarie* with Claude Lefort and others, which published a journal of the same name between 1949 and 1964

(Curtis 1991: vi, 1997: xiii). Castoriadis's distinctive approach to political social theory was shaped through critical dialogues with key thinkers from the philosophical tradition, including Aristotle, Plato, Merleau-Ponty and Kant; the so-called 'fathers' of sociology in Marx, Weber, and Durkheim; as well as Freud and psychoanalytic philosophy. These critical encounters paved the way for Castoriadis's elucidation of the imaginary element of social-historical creation,⁴⁶ the political project of autonomy, modernity, and the creative imagination, among many other problematics.

Castoriadis's work is appropriate for the present task of developing an understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action because it speaks to the three criteria noted in the introduction to this study. First, in a 'selective radicalisation of Marx' (see Arnason: 1991b: 69), Castoriadis elucidates 'politics' in the strong sense—or, in his terms, *la politique*—as the refers to the explicit self-alteration of the institution of the social world via autonomous modes of collective political doing (Castoriadis 1991a: 159-160; see also Adams 2014a: 1; Straume 2012b: 369).⁴⁷ Second, Castoriadis's work draws attention to the self-creation of worlds of meaning as part of the self-institution or formation of society. Castoriadis elaborates an understanding of the world problematic in dialogue with—and critical departure from—the phenomenological tradition, particularly Maurice Merleau-Ponty. The Merleau-Pontian influence is implicit in Castoriadis's writings from 1964-1965 (which formed the first part of his *magnum opus*, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*; 1987c [1975]),⁴⁸ and explicit in his two dialogues with Merleau-Ponty: 'The Sayable and the Unsayable' (1984c [1970]) and 'Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition' (1997u [1978]).⁴⁹ Third, Castoriadis's political theory emerges alongside an elucidation of modernity. In Castoriadis's thought, modernity is characterised by the tension and entanglement of two social imaginary significations (which can be defined, for now, as complexes of meaning; I return to this in Section 3.1 below): 'autonomy, on the one hand, [and] the unlimited expansion of "rational mastery", on the other' (1997a: 37; cf. Castoriadis 1997b: 415; see also Adams 2012b: 322;

Arnason 1989a: 323; Smith 2010: 153, 2014a: 180-181). While the imaginary of ‘rational mastery’ reduces the world ‘to an object of control’, Castoriadis’s work also highlights that modernity is shaped by the ‘capacity to question and transform cultural patterns’ via the imaginary of autonomy (Arnason 1989a: 330, 329). Hence Castoriadis’s appropriateness for the present inquiry into the world-altering dimensions of collective political action: for him, society self-creates its world of meaning, and (re-)creates the world via the project of autonomy, to alter the world and the social-historical, or ‘history’.

The focus of the present inquiry is an analysis of Castoriadis’s implicit understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action, approached from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective. This sets the present study apart from other readings of Castoriadis’s work. By and large, the debates surrounding Castoriadis’s thought can be differentiated into four general fields (building upon Kurawawa 2000: 146). First, and most significant for the current task, are discussions of Castoriadis’s understanding of the political project of autonomy and political action (I return to this shortly). The second field relates to Castoriadis’s elucidation of the social imaginary (Arnason 1989b, 2014b; Elliott 2002; Habermas 1987a; Strauss 2006; Thompson 1982; Wolf 2013) and his ontology of creation (Adams 2005, 2011a; Ciaramelli 1997, 1998, 1999; Klooger 2005, 2009: 37-64, 2011; Mouzakis 2014a). The third concerns his notion of modernity, with its central imaginary significations of ‘autonomy’ and ‘the unlimited expansion of pseudo-rational pseudo-mastery’ (Adams 2012b; Arnason 1989a, 1990, 1991a, 2015b; Carleheden 2010; Premat 2006a; Rundell 2014; Smith 2009, 2010, 2014b; Smith JCA 2014), as well as Castoriadis’s critiques of modern capitalist and democratic institutions (Baruchello, 2008, 2013; Browne 2005, 2016: 106-116; Murphy 2014). Finally, discussions of Castoriadis’s writings on the psychical monad and the ‘living being’ make up a fourth cluster of debate (Adams 2011a: 84-92, 181-194, 2014d; Klooger 2009: 85-144; Smith 2005, 2010: 91-113, 2014c; Urribarri 2002; Whitebook 1989).⁵⁰

The political project of autonomy is a lynchpin of Castoriadis's work. First, it is helpful to provide some background to this key idea, before turning to the secondary literature surrounding this thematic. Castoriadis elucidated the notion of autonomy via critical dialogue with Marx, through which he reconsidered the socialist revolutionary project as worker's self-management and council communism across the 1950s-1960s (Castoriadis 1988 [1960], 1997l [1955], 1997m [1957], 1997n [1964]; see Adams 2014a: 1).⁵¹ Castoriadis reconfigured his understanding of 'socialism' along the lines of the project of autonomy in the mid-1960s and early 1970s (as evidenced in part one of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*; see 1987a: 71-108). Drawing on the dual birth of 'philosophy' and 'politics'⁵² in the ancient Greek *polis*,⁵³ Castoriadis furthered his notion of the project of autonomy through re-immersion with ancient Greek traditions of thought in the 1970s and 1980s. He explicitly abandoned the term 'socialism' in 1979 (1993a [1979]: 317; see Curtis 1993: xix; Klooger 2012a: 94; Ramsay 2014: 168). With this move, Castoriadis shifted his conception of the revolutionary project from the 'self-management of society' toward an understanding of the project of explicit, autonomous societal self-institution.

Given the significance of the political project of autonomy to Castoriadis's *opus*, it is unsurprising that this problematic predominates the secondary field of debate (see e.g. Adams 2005, 2014a; Breckman 2013: 96-137; Gezerlis 2001; Kalyvas 1998, 2001; Klooger 2012b; Premat 2006b; Sharpe 2002). Castoriadis contended that democracy is the appropriate regime for the project of autonomy through its emphasis on interrogation and explicit self-institution. His writings on democracy have been widely debated from this perspective (see Arnason 1990, 2012; Browne 2014; Doyle 2012; Hendley 1998; Karagiannis 2015; Karagiannis & Wagner 2012a; Klooger 2014c; Murphy 1993; Robinson 1995; Vidal-Naquet 2000). However, the question of political *action*—in contradistinction to the political *form* of democracy—notably remains marginalized in the literature. Instead, emphasis is frequently placed on democracy as an institutional political form, over and above the mode political action in the self-instituting

movement of *la politique*. Yet, although ‘doing’ is key to Castoriadis’s understanding of autonomy and his intellectual project more broadly (as he notes in the preface to *The Imaginary Institution of Society*; 1987c: 3-5), Castoriadis did not systematically develop a theory of political action *per se* (Arnason 1991b: 69). Prior to his ontological turn in the second part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987b [1975]), *praxis* and doing (often interconnected as *faire*, or ‘making/doing’) assumed a central position in Castoriadis’s reflections on the revolutionary project (see: Adams 2012a: 30; Klooger 2009: 84). Nevertheless, as some have noted, Castoriadis sidelined the question of ‘doing’ in favour of an analysis of ‘social imaginary significations’ after his ontological turn (Adams 2011b: 107, 229 n.2, 2012a: 30, 2013: 77-78, 87-88; Arnason 1991b: 74, 76, 2014b: 38, 2015a: 56; Klooger 2014b: 119; Smith 2009: 161).

Castoriadis’s marginalisation of doing in his later thought may explain the limited analyses of his notion of political doing in the secondary literature. Hans Joas briefly noted Castoriadis’s broad understanding of the creativity of action, which, for Joas, relates to ‘the creation of institutions and to the world as a sphere of possibility for action’ (1989: 1189). Despite this intriguing insight, Joas did not pursue the interconnection of the creativity of doing and the world in this essay, nor in his work, *The Creativity of Action* (Joas 1996).⁵⁴ While others suggest the creative and imaginary dimensions of democracy (such as Browne 2014; Karagiannis & Wagner 2012a; Klooger 2014c), the world-altering dimensions of collective political action in Castoriadis’s thought have not yet been fully elaborated.

Three thinkers have recently linked forms of political doing with the question of the world in their analyses of Castoriadis’s work: Ingerid Straume, John W.M. Krummel, and Suzi Adams. Straume (2012b) debates the Arendtian and Castoriadian versions of political action in relation to a ‘common world’. Straume, however, focusses more directly on Arendt’s theorisation of political action than on Castoriadis’s account of political doing *per se* (which Straume notes only in passing; 2012b: 370). Straume does not consider their approaches to world-altering political action from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, as I do in

this study. Krummel, in turn, rethinks *praxis* as an ‘opening’ of the world through the interplay of ‘being’ and ‘chaos’ in Castoriadis’s thought (2013: 58-59). Yet, Krummel does not pursue an analysis of the ‘doing’ of *praxis* as a mode of world-altering collective political action in his essay.

Adams’s recent article ‘Castoriadis and the Non-Subjective Field: Social Doing, Instituting Society and Political Imaginaries’ (2012a) is the most significant step toward elucidating the worldhood of political doing from Castoriadis’s work. Adams has undertaken numerous reconstructions of the hermeneutic-phenomenological world problematic within Castoriadis’s thought (see Adams 2007, 2009a, 2011a, 2011b, 2011c, 2012b, 2013). In ‘Castoriadis and the Non-Subjective Field’, Adams builds on the latent hermeneutic dimension that she uncovered in Castoriadis’s work to reconfigure his incipient notion of doing as ‘cultural movement’ at the trans-subjective level of the world-horizon. In so doing, Adams bridges Castoriadis’s thought with Arnason’s culturological approach and Jan Patočka’s asubjective phenomenology (see also Adams 2009b, 2014b). Adams’s essay provides an opening for the present reconstruction of Castoriadis’s theory of political action *in-the-world*, as she outlined the connection of Castoriadis’s elucidation of the phenomenological world problematic to his account of socio-political doing. The reconstruction of Castoriadis’s understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political doing undertaken here does not focus on the trans-subjective level of movement, as Adams does. In contrast, the present analysis considers political doing at the collective level of sociality, to analyse how collective political action can make a difference in the world. This point differentiates the present study from Adams’s discussion of doing *qua* trans-subjective cultural movement. Hence, this reconstruction builds upon Adams’s opening onto the question of doing and its world relation, yet departs from it on this basis.

The purpose of this reconstruction is to analyse Castoriadis’s approach to the world-altering elements of collective political action, to address the question, ‘how can collective

political action make a difference in the world?’ To this end, the works selected for analysis have a specific thematic focus: political action, the political project of autonomy (or the revolutionary project), *praxis*, interrogation, interpretation, the world problematic, the imaginary institution of society, and the social-historical, among others. With considerations of space in mind, I limit the scope for the reconstruction of Castoriadis’s work to the period of 1964 to 1989. While the early date is representative of Castoriadis’s developing revolutionary writings within his more broadly ‘phenomenological’ period of thought, the latter date corresponds to his masterful reply to his critics, ‘Done and to be Done’ (1997b [1989]), which indicates a culmination of his mature thought. Castoriadis’s work has been published in a number of languages, including French, Greek, German, Japanese, Spanish, and others; however, the present reconstruction is limited to English-language publications.⁵⁵ Castoriadis’s psychoanalytic writings (such as those on the psyche and the faculty of imagination) lie outside of the present scope. As such, I do not consider these works here.

The following analysis takes a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to the articulation of the world-horizon—in its intertwined dimensions of world-interpretation and world-formation—to reconstruct Castoriadis’s notion of world-altering collective political action. When considered from this perspective, Castoriadis’s work elucidates a twofold understanding of political action, as both ‘world-interpreting’ and ‘world-forming’ doing. The reconstruction demonstrates a hermeneutic undercurrent within Castoriadis’s early thinking on collective political projects, in particular. For example, Castoriadis notes the transformative dimension of autonomous revolutionary doing in his earlier works (between 1964 and 1974; e.g. Castoriadis 1971 [1964]: 9, 1987a [1964-1965]: 57, 77, 1997i [1955]: 48, 1997m [1957]: 60-61, 1997n [1964]: 109, 111-112, 132). This indicates an understanding of the *alteration* of worlds of meaning through political projects, rather than the self-creation of worlds *ex nihilo*. As I suggest in this chapter, for Castoriadis, political action is as much about *opening* the institution of the world onto a field of possibility via interrogation, as it is concerned with *re-*

forming the world through the creative re-articulation and re-institution of meaning. Hence, contra Castoriadis's later ontological approach, world-altering collective political action intertwines interpretative and creative dimensions.

In fact, Castoriadis also remarks on the 'transformative' 'alteration' of society via the project of autonomy after his shift toward the strong notion of creation *ex nihilo* after 1975 (see Castoriadis 1987b [1975]: 185, 262-263, 269, 371, 373, 1991c [1987]: 34, 36, 1993b [1979]: 302, 1993c [1977]: 244, 1997v [1990]: 113, 1997o [1994]: 336, 1997i [1989]: 132, 1997f [1994]: 333, 1997p [1983]: 310, 314). This runs counter to Castoriadis's later dismissal of 'interpretations of the world' in 'Done and to be Done' (1997b [1989]: 363-364). Notwithstanding this, Castoriadis 'flatly refuses to recognize the interpretative element of any "re-creation"' (Adams 2007: 51). The finding *vis-à-vis* the hermeneutical element in the political alteration of the world in this reconstruction problematizes Castoriadis's strong notion of the creation of the world *ex nihilo* as he develops it in his later work (which I discuss in Subsection 3.4.1 below).⁵⁶ Through the reconstruction, this chapter suggests that a tension arises in Castoriadis's thought: between autonomous societal alteration through political action, on the one hand, and the creation of worlds of meaning *ex nihilo*, on the other. If *la politique* centres on the collective self-interrogation of the instituted world in order to transform it, political doing must incorporate an interpretative dimension to creation. From this angle, the present study supports Paul Ricoeur and Adams's respective claims contra Castoriadis that creation (and, therefore, world-altering collective political action) must create *from something to something*, or, in Adams's terms, *from something* and *from somewhere* (see Adams 2005: 35, 2009b: 125, 2017a*, 2017b*)—that is, from *in-the-world*.⁵⁷

The ensuing reconstruction is broken into five sections. Following an introductory sketch of Castoriadis's key notions (specifically, *la politique*, *le politique*, and the societal self-creation of worlds of meaning; Section 3.1), I turn to Castoriadis's writings prior to 1965 to reconstruct his early elucidations of the world and the revolutionary project in Section 3.2. In

Section 3.3, I consider Castoriadis's works from after 1965 through to 1974. This corresponds to the period after the development of the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* in 1964-1965, and before the publication of the second part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* in 1975 (which makes his ontological turn explicit). As I Sections 3.2 and 3.3 reveal, an interpretative dimension of 'world-opening' doing emerges through his elucidations of the critical aspects of the revolutionary project. The hermeneutic element retreats from Castoriadis's thinking *en route* to his ontological turn; similarly, the thematic of doing recedes from Castoriadis's focus at this point. I reconstruct the traces of doing and the world problematic in Castoriadis's writings beyond 1975 in Section 3.4. I consider his elucidation of the proto-institution of *teukhein* and the notion of 'magma' in Subsection 3.4.1, which arguably represents an ontologisation of the world-horizon (see e.g. Adams, 2007: 47, 2009a: 129 n.7, 2011b: 241 n.3, 2011c: 240, 2013: 77; Arnason, 1992: 255). I then follow Castoriadis's remarks on political doing through to his later, more overtly political writings in Subsection 3.4.2, through which a notion of 'instituting power' emerges. I then bring together the threads of the chapter in a concluding discussion in Section 3.5. First, however, I detail Castoriadis's key notions of the political project of autonomy and the self-creation of worlds of meaning by society in the next section, to frame the subsequent reconstruction of his understanding of world-altering collective political action.

3.1. Preliminary Points of Orientation: On Castoriadis's Key Notions of the Project of Autonomy and the Self-Creation of Worlds of Meaning

Before commencing the central task of the present chapter—an analysis of Castoriadis's approach to the world-altering dimensions of collective political action—it is helpful to provide a statement on Castoriadis's mature theory of politics and understanding of the societal self-creation of the world. The objective of this section is twofold. The overview detailed here, first, serves to clarify Castoriadis's key concepts (which, despite their richness, 'can be ... challenging to understand'; Adams 2014c: xi), ahead of the reconstruction proper. I take

Castoriadis's later essay 'Power, Politics, Autonomy' (1991a [1978/1988])⁵⁸ as a mature account of his philosophy, because this essay places his important notion of the political project of autonomy into clear dialogue with his understanding of the imaginary institution of society and the self-creation of the social-historical. Second, I highlight the relation between the project of autonomy and the problem of the world by way of introduction. In this discussion, I highlight that the political project of autonomy comprises the explicit interrogation and re-creation of the institution of the world; as such, political action does *not* create the world *ex nihilo*, as per Castoriadis's ontological approach (I discuss this point toward the end of this section). This tension between political *alteration* and creation *ex nihilo* forms the frame for the ensuing analysis of Castoriadis's understanding of world-altering collective political action, which I commence in Section 3.2 by turning to Castoriadis's early writings on the revolutionary project from 1964 to 1965.

In 'Power, Politics, Autonomy', Castoriadis differentiates between two understandings of politics. On the one hand, *la politique* or 'politics' refers to the lucid and explicit mode of collective political doing that calls the established institution of society into question, in order to re-institute it (Castoriadis 1991a: 159-160, 169, 174; cf. 1990: 123, 127-128, 1991b: 102, 1993a: 323, 2007c: 105, 106). *La politique* is the constitutive mode of doing within the political project of autonomy. The political project of autonomy centres on the direct self-institution of society, as a collective exercise of 'effective, social, concrete freedom' (1993a: 317, emphasis in original; cf. 1991b: 106-107, 1993a: 317-318). Castoriadis contends that democracy—in both its ancient Athenian and modern articulations (see Castoriadis 1991b, 1996, 1997h)—is the appropriate political institutional form (*eidōs*) for this mode of explicit self-instituting collective political doing.⁵⁹

On the other hand, *le politique* or 'the political' pertains to the explicit configurations of power that operate within the institution of society, which are 'capable of formulating explicitly sanctionable injunctions' (Castoriadis 1991a: 156 emphasis in original; cf. 1991a: 156-159, 1997r:

1, 1997h: 85; see also Adams 2014a: 8; Straume 2012b: 196-197). *Le politique* in this way relates to the authoritative and overt dimensions of power present in all societies, which can suppress or prevent modes of being and doing within the society in question. While the element of *le politique* maintains instituted social order (Castoriadis 1991a: 154-159; see also Arnason 2014a: 19), *la politique*, in turn, challenges this field by calling the institution of society into question. Through *la politique*, ‘the political framework of social life becomes a matter of debate, a source of conflict, and an object of reform’ (Arnason 2001: 157).

The Greek creation of the democratic *polis* was simultaneously the birth of *la politique*. For Castoriadis, a pivotal part of the *polis* experience was the recognition of the self-institution of society by society: this opened the possibility of autonomous self-creation through democratic political doing (Castoriadis 1991a: 159-160, 1991b: 114).⁶⁰ As *auto-nomos*, autonomy in this way ‘signifies giving oneself one’s own law’ (Castoriadis 1993a: 321). Where heteronomous societies occult their self-creation by attributing their institution to an extra-social or ‘Other’ source—be it God, Nature, or Reason—autonomous societies identify and explicitly undertake their own self-institution (1991a: 159, 162-164, 1991b: 115; see also Adams 2001: 101; Klooger 2009: 315; Smith 2014a: 14-16).⁶¹ By recognising their self-creation, autonomous societies likewise acknowledge the lack of pre-given or predetermined limits to their self-institution (aside from the general existential limits of human mortality, for example; Adams 2014a: 2). With this in mind, Castoriadis contends that the project of autonomy is both one of *self-institution* and *self-limitation* (1991a: 173; see also Castoriadis 1991b: 115, 1997s: 251-252, 1997h: 93-94).⁶² The political project of autonomy rests on an under-determined or fragile foundation; as such, democracy is a tragic regime: the self-revocation of the institution is an ever-present risk when society remains permanently open to self-interrogation (Castoriadis 1991b: 115, 1996: 125, 1997h: 93-94, 1997p: 316; see also Karagiannis 2015: 37; Karagiannis & Wagner 2012a: 22; Klimis 2014: 210).

The creation of the democratic *polis* brought the self-instituting or self-creating dimension of society into relief for the Athenians (Castoriadis 1991a: 162). For Castoriadis, society is an imaginary (self-)institution that shifts and unfolds across time as the ‘social-historical’ (1987a: 112; cf. 1991c: 34). As Castoriadis puts it in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, the ‘social-historical’ is the ‘union *and* the tension of instituting society and of instituted society, of history made and of history in the making’ (1987a [1964-1965]: 108). While ‘instituted’ denotes the established form of the institution and its self-reproduction, ‘instituting’, in turn, points to the self-altering movement of the institution via creative doing and the articulation of the radical instituting imaginary (Castoriadis 1987b [1975]: 369-373, 1991b: 84, 1991a: 143-145; see also Mouzakitis 2014b: 93). For Castoriadis, social-historical change arises through the doing of the ‘anonymous collective’, which is ‘the social’, as Castoriadis defines it: the impersonal anonymous yet collective level of sociality that is irreducible to intersubjectivity (1987a: 108; see also Adams 2015a: 139). The political project of autonomy undertakes explicit social-historical change by actualising the instituting dimension of society as a lucid effort of societal self-alteration, and problematizing the instituted dimension of society. Autonomy thus ‘involves a restructuring—more precisely a self-reflexive and self-questioning turn—of the relationship between instituting and instituted society’ (Arnason 2014c: 103).

Castoriadis first elucidates the notions of the imaginary and the institution in the 1964-1965 part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987a: 108-164; hereafter, *IIS*). Originally published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, the writings that constituted section one of the *IIS*—titled ‘Marxism and Revolutionary Theory’—formed part of Castoriadis’s road beyond Marx (see Arnason 2015b: 143). In this part of the work, Castoriadis sought to rethink Marx’s determinist understanding of ‘historical materialism’, on the one hand, and theoretical approaches to the ‘institution’, on the other (Parsonian and Durkheimian versions of functionalism likely figured in Castoriadis’s counter analysis; see Arnason 2014c). Leaning instead on Merleau-Ponty and Weber, Castoriadis challenged the determinist teleology inherent in Marx’s historical

materialism and, in contrast, sought to elucidate the radical imaginary element that operates in the social institution which drives the creativity of history (Castoriadis 1987a: 146-155; see also Arnason 2014d: 45-46, 2014b: 25-27). Merleau-Ponty for example, hinted a notion of the ‘historical imagination’ when he wrote (in reference to Weber) that history is ‘the advent of meaning’, which is irreducible to ‘any hidden reason’ (Merleau-Ponty 1973b [1955]: 17, 16-22). Castoriadis saw this in Weber’s work, too. In a very early essay on Weber’s thought, Castoriadis argued that ‘the historical phenomenon is always the carrier of meaning’ (2014 [1944]: 36; see Adams 2007: 46). Castoriadis’s distinctive understanding of the role of the creative imagination (and its bifurcation as the radical imagination and social imaginary significations) in the self-creation of the social-historical thus does more than simply amalgamate Marxian and phenomenological tenets, as Habermas asserts (1987a: 329-330; see also Mouzakis 2014b: 89).

From Castoriadis’s perspective, the institution of society is irreducible to rational practices or the aggregation of intersubjective understandings, as may be said of Habermas’s approach (Castoriadis 1987a: 108, 116; cf. Arnason 2014c: 102). Rather, the self-institution of society incorporates both symbolic and—more importantly for Castoriadis’s thinking—imaginary dimensions (1987a: 117-132).⁶³ For Castoriadis, the ‘institution’ refers to the enduring dimensions of society (and its imaginary elements) which pattern human experience across history, as an imaginary self-creation of the society in question. Castoriadis incorporates the instituted and instituting elements of the institution (as noted above) into this framework. In his view, the instituted-instituting relation highlights the movement of the institution of society across time (*qua* social-historical), including the explicit self-instituting movement of collective political action.

Social imaginary significations animate institutional forms; likewise, the institution embodies social imaginary significations (Castoriadis 1991a: 146-147, 1997t: 313, 2007e: 96-97). Castoriadis foreshadowed ‘social imaginary significations’ as his theory of meaning in the

first part of the *IIS* (1987a: 135-146). Yet, he developed the notion most thoroughly in the final chapter of the second part of work (1987b: 340-373). Castoriadis's elucidation of 'social imaginary significations' thinks with but beyond Durkheim's notion of 'collective representations', as well as the 'ideal-typical' and subjectively-intended approach to meaning developed by Weber (Castoriadis 1987b: 365-366, 367; see also Adams 2011a: 122, 123, 128; Arnason 2014b: 29-31). Social imaginary significations are under-determined 'complexes of meaning' (Arnason 1989b: 48) which are irreducible to perception or rational explanation (Castoriadis 1987a: 140; see also Castoriadis 1997c: 8, 2010f: 48; Klooger 2009: 56-57). These complexes of meaning are created by the 'radical imaginary', which Castoriadis defines in a note as 'the capacity to make arise as an image something which does not exist and has never existed', which is then articulated as the actual social imaginary within the institution of society (1987b: 388 n.25). The imaginary institution orbits 'central' or 'core' imaginary significations, as well as secondary and tertiary levels of signification (Castoriadis 1987b: 364, 1997p: 315, 2007e: 100); 'God' is Castoriadis's archetypal example of a 'core' imaginary signification (e.g. 1987a: 129-131, 1987b: 361-362, 1997c: 7). Just as 'God's' existence can neither be rationally proven nor perceived in experience, core imaginary significations are 'not significations "of" something' (Castoriadis 1987b: 364; see also Arnason 2014b: 34). Rather, they are imaginary creations—they 'have no referent' (Castoriadis 1987b: 364).

Imaginary significations denote the mode of being (and doing) of the particular society in question, as well as the relation to itself, nature and the 'universe in which it lives' (Castoriadis 1987a: 149; see also Arnason 2014b: 36-37; Klooger 2009: 58). Castoriadis maintains that imaginary significations constitute the world and organize the social institution as such, through which society posits itself as *this particular* society (Castoriadis 1987b: 202, 206, 369-371, 1997t: 313). Particularly in his early work (see Section 3.2), Castoriadis highlights that social imaginary significations give form to the world, at the same time that

they articulate our access to the world (see Arnason 1989b: 28). It is in this respect that imaginary significations have a world-forming capacity (Adams 2011a: 101).

Alongside the clarification of Castoriadis's key problematics (including *la politique*, the project of autonomy, and the imaginary self-institution of a world of meaning), the second objective of this section is to detail the relation of the political project of autonomy to the question of the world. The discussion above demonstrated that the project of autonomy comprises an explicit interrogation and subsequent re-creation (or, alteration) of the social institution of the world, by actualising the instituting dimension of society to engender qualitative social-historical movement (see Castoriadis 1991a: 159, 161-162). The notion of historical *alteration* via political doing in this analysis sits in contrast to Castoriadis's strong notion of the creation of the world *ex nihilo* (which I analyse in further depth Subsection 3.4.1, later). In his earlier writings (particularly in the first part of the *IIS*, as I show in Section 3.2), Castoriadis notes the social imaginary articulation of a 'grasp' of the world within the self-creation of society (see 1987a [1964-1965]: 147). Here, the world refers the phenomenological notion of the institution of worlds of meaning and their interplay with the encompassing, inexhaustible world-horizon (see Section 1.1 of Chapter 1 for a discussion of this understanding). Castoriadis's later ontological approach, in turn, elucidates the societal creation of the world *ex nihilo*: 'society brings into being a world of significations and itself exists in reference to such a world' (1987b [1975]: 359). In light of the present inquiry into the world-altering aspects of collective political action, the notion creation *ex nihilo* is problematic; for political action to interrogate and re-institute the world to bring about qualitative change in the social-historical, the project of autonomy hence does not create the world *ex nihilo*. From this angle, this reconstruction aligns with Ricoeur and Adams's respective notions of the contextual character of creation: world-altering collective political action re-creates and alters the world *from something to something*, and *from something* and *from somewhere* (see Adams 2005: 35, 2009b: 125, 2017b*)—that is, collective political action begins *in-the-world*.

By outlining Castoriadis's key concepts above, this discussion frames the ensuing reconstruction of Castoriadis's approach to the explicit interrogation and re-institution of worlds of meaning via collective political doing. I commence the reconstruction proper in the next section. In Section 3.2, I begin with Castoriadis's writings on the revolutionary project from 1964 to 1965. As I will show, Castoriadis's remarks on revolutionary doing and *praxis* in this period incorporate implicit hermeneutic dimensions, in the reflexive relativisation of the world via critique. At the same time, Castoriadis details a broadly phenomenological elucidation of the world. I continue this analysis through Castoriadis's writings from 1965 to 1974 in Section 3.3. At this stage, Castoriadis increasingly sidelines the hermeneutic elements of political doing *en route* to his ontological turn, which became explicit in the second part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* in 1975. I reconstruct Castoriadis's reflections on collective political action and the world problematic after his ontological turn in Section 3.4. I split this discussion into two subsections for ease of understanding. In Subsection 3.4.1, I trace Castoriadis's ontologisation of the world problematic as *magma*, before reconstructing his remarks on political instituting doing from his more overtly political writings from after 1975 in Subsection 3.4.2. These writings detail a notion of 'instituting power'; however, Castoriadis's theorisation of instituting power remains underdeveloped. I discuss this in Subsection 3.4.2. Finally, I bring the insights of the chapter together in a concluding discussion in Section 2.5. First, however, I consider the world-altering aspects of political action at play within Castoriadis's early revolutionary writings in the next section.

3.2. *Praxis*, Doing and Interpretation within the Revolutionary Project: Castoriadis's Writings Prior to 1965

The task of this section is to reconstruct the theory of world-altering collective political action in Castoriadis's thought prior to 1965. I adopt a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach in this analysis (see Section 1.1, Chapter 1), which focusses on the interconnected dimensions of 'world-interpretation' and 'world-formation' that arise within the human articulation of the

world. This period of Castoriadis's work is significant for two reasons. On the one hand, Castoriadis's early thinking is markedly phenomenological in character (in contrast to his later, ontological approach; see Subsection 3.4.2, below). As I will show here and subsequently in Section 3.3, Castoriadis traces a notion of the world in the twofold sense of the institution of worlds of meaning and their interrelation with an overarching world-horizon in these writings. On the other hand, the question of 'doing' and *praxis* were central problematics for Castoriadis's rethinking of the revolutionary project in this period, including the works which formed the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987a [1964-1965]), in particular. After this, the thematic of 'doing' began to recede from Castoriadis's considerations (especially in the wake of his ontological turn after 1975; see Adams 2011a: 107, 229 n.2, 2012a: 30, 2013: 77-78, 87-88; Arnason 1991b: 74, 76, 2014b: 38, 2015a: 56; Klooger 2014b: 119; Smith 2009: 161).

In this section, I focus on 'Recommencing the Revolution' (Castoriadis 1997n [1964]), and part one of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987a [1964-1965]; hereafter *IIS*). The reconstruction revealed three key insights in relation to the alteration of the world via collective political action. First, Castoriadis's early thinking *vis-à-vis* the revolutionary project incorporated an implicit hermeneutic dimension within the mode of *praxis*. As I will show, this interpretative aspect of *praxis* reveals the workings of the institution through problematisation, and in so doing, opens the instituted imaginary to the possibility of creative alteration. 'World-interpreting' doing here takes the form of 'world-opening' action. Second, a related notion of political doing emerges through Castoriadis's remarks on the world-forming elements of political action in these texts. Both these dimensions of world-interpreting (or, world-opening) and world-forming doing intertwine within the movement of the revolutionary project. Third, Castoriadis details these notions of world-altering doing alongside an elucidation of the world problematic. In these works, Castoriadis sketches an understanding of the world as an imaginary institution of meaning in interplay with an encompassing 'field of possibility'.

Although there are broadly phenomenological aspects in the background of this approach, Castoriadis does not systematically develop the notion of the world as an encompassing meta-horizon within this period.

The phenomenological undercurrents within Castoriadis's thinking here is unsurprising given the influence of Merleau-Ponty and the field of 'phenomenological Marxism' upon his early reconsiderations of the questions of history and the revolutionary project. In light of this, it is helpful to situate Castoriadis within this general field ahead of the reconstruction. The field of 'phenomenological' Marxism that emerged in the mid-Twentieth century included such key voices as Herbert Marcuse, Karel Kosik, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty.⁶⁴ These variants of 'phenomenological' Marxism sought to return, amongst other things, to Marx's early approach to the creativity of *praxis* and the meaningfulness of history, which offered an alternative reading to those that centred on Marx's later, abstract economic theory (see Anderson 1976: 92, Bohman 1990: 165-166; Breckman 2013: 83; Piccone 1971: 4, 12, 24).

Merleau-Ponty's contribution to this field was especially influential upon Castoriadis's early thought. In his more political (rather than straightforwardly phenomenological) writings, Merleau-Ponty leant on Weber's *Verstehen* approach to elucidate the 'fabric of history'—including language and culture—to offset interpretations of Marx's 'economic determinism' (Merleau-Ponty 1973b [1955]: 31; see also Breckman 2013: 84; Flynn 2007: 131; Miller 1976: 112). According to Merleau-Ponty, the so-called 'young Marx' considered *praxis* as a worldly, practical and non-instrumental mode of action (as distinct from *theoria*) which re-creates society and history (Merleau-Ponty 1976: 94; see also Coole 2007: 86-87). Indeed, for Merleau-Ponty, *praxis* 'is part of the definition of the world' (Merleau-Ponty 1973b: 87). Merleau-Ponty took issue with Marx's shift toward the objective, scientific-economic study of materialism after *The German Ideology* (Marx & Engels 1976 [1846]; see Merleau-Ponty 1973b [1955]: 63). It is on this basis that Merleau-Ponty argued that the creative dimensions of *praxis* remained underdeveloped in Marx's thinking.

Castoriadis took up this line of inquiry within his own project in regard to the creativity of *praxis* and the formation of the social-historical, as an ‘ambitious’ version of ‘post-Marxist’ theory (Arnason 1991b: 69). In the writings published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Castoriadis reconsidered the Marxian version of the revolutionary project in light of ‘really existing Socialism’ and the realities of bureaucratic capitalism (see Castoriadis 1987a [1964-1965]: 63, 1988 [1960], 1997l [1955], 1997m [1957]). The essay ‘Modern Capitalism and Revolution’ (1988 [1960]) represented Castoriadis’s first major steps beyond Marx; Castoriadis’s break away from Marx was advanced further in the texts that formed the first part of the *IIS* (‘Marxism and Revolutionary Theory’, 1987a [1964-1965]: 10-70), and other texts of this period (such as 1997n [1964]: 106-124). In short, Castoriadis’s critique of Marx’s notion of historical materialism formed the starting point for his ‘reconsideration of meaning and its role in the constitution of a social-historical world’ (Arnason 2014b: 25).

Castoriadis’s critical dialogue with Marx (as well as with Aristotle)⁶⁵ paved the way for his reconfiguration of the notion of *praxis* in the early to mid-1960s, through which Castoriadis sought to develop ‘a better understanding of revolutionary action’ (Arnason 1991b: 74). Here, *praxis* can be preliminarily understood as the element of doing that creates qualitative change in history and forms part of the explicit mode of action specific to the project of autonomy (Castoriadis 1987a [1964-1965]: 75, 77). From this perspective, history is an ongoing project of ‘making/doing’ that ‘starts from the premise that the world moves’ (Beilharz 1989: 135), or rather, that the world is not ‘static’ (see Castoriadis 1987a: 69). With this in mind, I now reconstruct Castoriadis’s early elucidations of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action from ‘Recommencing the Revolution’ (1997n [1964]) and the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987a [1964-1965]). As noted at the start of this section, three key insights emerge through this analysis: the interpretative undercurrent within Castoriadis’s remarks on the revolutionary project; the world-forming elements of political doing; and, his

elucidation of the world, as the imaginary institution of a world of meaning and the encompassing ‘field of possibility’.

The reconstruction reveals that Castoriadis’s early thought develops an implicit hermeneutic element within his elucidation of the revolutionary political project and *praxis*. In the works under consideration, Castoriadis underscores the necessary connection between ‘thinking’ and ‘doing’, ‘reflection’ and ‘action’, or, between ‘theory’ and ‘*praxis*’ (1987a [1964-1965]: 14, 15, 21, 28, 57, 61, 62, 64-65, 65-66; cf. 1997n [1964]: 106, 108, 110, 113, 114, 124, 128, 130). In ‘Recommencing the Revolution’, for example, Castoriadis underlines the inherent connection between ‘reflection’ and ‘action’, such that the revolutionary project can ‘understand what they are doing’ (1997n [1964]: 106). The two elements of ‘action’ and ‘reflection’ together form what Castoriadis labels the ‘revolutionary element’ of *praxis* (1987a: 57, 61, 1997n: 130), which he unearths from Marx’s ‘youthful’ writings. In this early formulation, Castoriadis contends that collective political action articulates the revolutionary element to create new ‘forms of life’ (1987a: 57). Castoriadis here suggests that *praxis* comprises both interpretative (as ‘thinking’ and ‘reflection’) and creative dimensions within its mode of doing.

The interpretative dimension of the revolutionary project appears most explicitly in Castoriadis’s remarks on the self-reflexive interrogation of the institution of the social world—which, as he argues in ‘Recommencing the Revolution’, forms the preconditions of and for the revolutionary struggle (1997n [1964]: 128, 131, 132). In that work, Castoriadis notes that the interpretative collective acts of self-reflexive ‘thinking’ provide ‘a coherent and lucid view of the world’, and reveals the connection between the revolutionary project and people’s ‘concrete existence’ within the instituted world (1997n: 107). Castoriadis additionally points to the necessary self-reflexivity of the revolutionary movement due to the uncertainty and unpredictability of the *telos* of action,⁶⁶ ‘in the face of the unknownness of the perpetually renewed creation into which we are advancing’ (1997n: 114).

The implicit interpretative element of revolutionary doing resurfaces in the first chapter of the *IIS*. There, Castoriadis argues that the revolutionary project of societal alteration ‘demands that we first understand what we want to change’ (1987a [1964-1965]: 14). This necessitates an interpretative element, which Castoriadis himself notes: ‘as revolutionaries ... We first have to understand and interpret our own society. And we can do this only by *relativizing* it...’ (1987a: 28, emphasis in original). In this, Castoriadis rethinks the self-reflexive interpretation of the institution along the lines of the ‘relativisation’ of the institution. This arguably incorporates hermeneutic notions of ‘distance’, which clears a space for problematisation. Castoriadis returns to the act of ‘relativisation’ in the third chapter of the *IIS*. He writes that the critical reinterpretation of the institution of society through the revolutionary struggle creates tensions within the instituted imaginary. As society ‘challenges itself’, Castoriadis argues:

what is internal to society becomes external to it, and this, in so far as it signifies the self-relativisation of society, placing at a distance and criticising... what is instituted, marks the initial emergence of autonomy, the first crack in the [instituted] imaginary (1987a: 155).

In this analysis, collective self-reflexive and interrogative political doing works to relativize the instituted dimension of reality by interpretatively setting it at a critical distance. This act of relativisation clears a space for critique and, in so doing, marks a crack in the imaginary. This movement of problematisation, moreover, makes possible an understanding that society is not determined to its current institutional form (Castoriadis 1987a: 21, 28, 62).⁶⁷ The lucid and self-reflexive ‘relativising’ action leads to a collective ‘struggle against’ the established institution of the world (Castoriadis 1987a: 62). From Castoriadis’s reflections in the first part of the *IIS*, revolutionary *praxis* comprises the element of the self-reflexive and interpretative relativisation of the institution, to ‘prepare for the new’ by opening the institution to alteration via political action, as an explicit and lucid project (Castoriadis 1987a: 57).

Castoriadis considers the alteration or changing of the world and the interpretative dimension of *praxis* once more, at the close of the first chapter of the *IIS*. There, Castoriadis criticises Marx's famous eleventh thesis on Feuerbach (see Marx & Engels 1969 [1845]: 15). Despite the 'blinding light' of Marx's statement that 'the point is no longer to interpret the world, but to change it', Castoriadis argues that Marx failed to 'clarify the relation between interpretation and change', as he shifted focus to a determinist philosophy of historical materialism (Castoriadis 1987a: 66). In this passage, Castoriadis reiterates the necessary interrelation between interpretation and creation within the revolutionary project. Contrary to Marx, Castoriadis in these early writings highlights the essential self-reflexive—hence interpretative—dimension of *praxis*, which forms 'part of an uncertain attempt to realize the project of clarifying the world' (1987a: 74).

Castoriadis reaffirms the connection between interpretative and creative modes of revolutionary doing when he returns to Marx's eleventh thesis on Feuerbach at the close of the third chapter of the *IIS* (in part one). Yet, in that chapter, Castoriadis shifts away from the notion of 'self-reflexive' and 'lucid' action, and in so doing, recasts interpretative action along the lines of 'understanding'. In the revolutionary project, the dimensions of 'understanding and changing' are directed toward the 'living present of history' (Castoriadis 1987a: 164). Castoriadis modifies Marx's eleventh thesis to argue here that the revolutionary act of the interpretative elucidation of the institution of the world forms 'part of our effort to interpret the world *in order to* change it' (Castoriadis 1987a: 164, emphasis in original). Once again, Castoriadis underscores the inseparable connection between interpretative doing (in its modes of 'relativisation', 'understanding', or 'self-reflexivity') and creative action. Castoriadis's above reconfiguration of Marx's thesis demonstrates that, for Castoriadis's early work at least, interpretative action forms the preconditions for social-historically effective, collective political creativity, by opening the institution *in order to* alter the world and move toward a 'future that *is to be made by us*' (1987a: 164, emphasis in original). Notwithstanding Castoriadis's indications

of the centrality of the interpretative aspects of revolutionary doing in these early works, he does not systematically develop this line of thought. Castoriadis instead sidelines the interpretative element from his elucidation of the revolutionary project, in favour of a more explicit focus on *praxis* and political action *per se*.

In a first mention of ‘politics’ in the strong sense in the *IIS*, Castoriadis argues that politics belongs to the domain of history as a specific ‘mode of doing called praxis’, which is ‘at once lucid and radical’ (1987a: 75, cf. 76). Castoriadis articulates *praxis* by way of distinction: the ‘doing’ proper to *praxis* is neither ‘reflex’ action nor instrumental rational ‘technique’ (1987a: 72). Rather, the revolutionary project takes the form of *praxis* to create a new beginning in history, and develop both individual and collective autonomy (Castoriadis 1987a: 75). Further, because *praxis* belongs specifically to the field of history, *praxis* ‘evolves within a concrete context which conditions it’ (1987a: 76). Expanding on Castoriadis’s reflections here, the element of doing proper to the revolutionary project—*praxis*—begins from within history, to re-create it.

Alongside these remarks on the ‘world-interpreting’ aspects of *praxis*, Castoriadis sketches an understanding of the ‘world-forming’ dimensions of action in his writings from 1964 to 1965. In so doing, two overlapping notions of the world emerge in his analysis—the formation of imaginary worlds of meaning, and the encompassing ‘field of possibility’ (or, overarching meta-horizon of the world). However, he elucidates these notions neither systematically, nor in depth. First, Castoriadis interlinks doing with the articulation of meaning and the formation of historical worlds, which deepens his elucidation of revolutionary *praxis*. ‘The world’ here refers to the societal institution of a constellation of social imaginary significations (see 1987a: 14, 46, 1997n: 109-110). Castoriadis writes, ‘...the development of the historical world is *ipso facto* the unfolding of a world of significations’ which articulates ‘the whole of historical material’ (1987a: 14). He later adds, the ‘human world is the world of human *doing*’ (Castoriadis 1987a: 72, emphasis in original), which forms a ‘world of

significations' (1987a: 139) in encounter with an encompassing, enigmatic world-horizon (see 1987a: 133, 143, 146). In this, Castoriadis indicates that 'the real activity of human beings' is the 'source of all meaning' (1987a: 68), which is motivated by the radical social imaginary to institute novelty into the historical field (1987a: 146, 147, 160-161). The institution of history is thus a domain of meaning created through collective doing. This underlies Castoriadis's statement that within this creative doing 'dwell *significations*' (1987a: 146, emphasis in original). From the present discussion, *praxis* articulates new social imaginary significations via the radical social imaginary, and alters the social-historical field through instituting (and modes of political) action. For Castoriadis, the 'radical upheaval' of the institution of society and its rearticulation of patterns of meaning, in accordance with the 'supreme principle' of autonomy, comprises the 'most profound content of the revolutionary project' (1987a: 68).

On the other hand, Castoriadis adopts a notably phenomenological approach in these early writings as he situates the institution of worlds of meaning within an overarching meta-horizon. This becomes clear when he writes, 'every society considers itself as the centre of the world and regards all others from its own point of view' (Castoriadis 1987a: 34). Here, Castoriadis casts the world as a meta-horizon that encompasses socially instituted worlds of meaning. A 'sense' is formed 'on the world and its [society's] place in the world' (Castoriadis 1987a: 133; cf. 146) via the creation of imaginary significations, which articulate 'a specific manner of grasping the world' (1987a: 147; cf. 145). Castoriadis adds elsewhere, '...every society posits a "view of itself" which is at the same time "a view of the world"' (1987a: 39). These remarks indicate a broadly phenomenological notion of the world as a shared and inexhaustible horizon of horizons; however, Castoriadis does not fully pursue this analysis.

Yet, Castoriadis also traces an understanding of the meta-horizon of the world as a 'field of possibility' in the first part of the *IIS*, which resurfaces at varying places later in his trajectory (as I show in this chapter). In this analysis, the institution of society and the field of possibility are inherently intertwined. Castoriadis notes that 'Historical reality is not wholly

and entirely rational', nor is it 'simply chaos' in the sense of sheer indeterminacy (1987a: 79). Rather, the institution 'contains grooves, lines of force, veins, which mark out the possible, the feasible, indicate the probable and permit action to find points of anchorage in the given' (Castoriadis 1987a: 79).⁶⁸ Not only does Castoriadis hint that action—such as collective political action—is 'anchored' in, or begins from within the institution of the world in this statement, he indicates that the interstices within the institution mark out a field of possibility (perhaps, the world-horizon). The space between the field of possibility and the instituted world, in this sense, represents an opening 'between what is possible and what actually exists' (Castoriadis 1987a: 90).

This incipient understanding of the field of possibility that overarches—and is in interplay with—the institution may underlie Castoriadis's remarks that there is always 'more' to the instituted world than what it presents; for him, importantly, this makes the creativity of history possible (1987a: 111-112, 114). If the object of the revolutionary project is to 'transform[...] the real' (*qua* instituted reality; Castoriadis 1987a: 77), then the creative doing of *praxis* must go beyond that which *is* to articulate what *is possible* to reinstitute the world. Expanding on the above analysis, *praxis* achieves this 'active constitution' of the new by articulating the radical social imaginary and giving form to the world, as a field of possibility (Castoriadis 1987a: 133, 141). Expanding on the above reconstruction, the interpretative act of 'relativisation' triggers a crack in the instituted imaginary, which opens the institution onto the field of possibility to clear a space for social-historical creation. As Castoriadis writes, 'there will always be a distance between society as instituting', in the mode of collective political *praxis*, for example, 'and what is, at every moment, instituted' (1987a: 114; cf. 108).

I reconstructed Castoriadis's elucidations of the world-altering aspects of collective political doing from his writings from 1964-1965 in this section. Three insights were particularly significant. First, Castoriadis sketched an understanding of the interpretative element of the revolutionary project and *praxis*, which centred on the self-reflexive

interrogation of the institution. Castoriadis additionally remarked that the interpretative act of ‘relativisation’ opens a space for critique of instituted reality, which marks a crack in the instituted reality. Nevertheless, Castoriadis increasingly sidelines the interpretative aspect of action from his analysis, as I will next in Section 3.3. The notion of ‘world-forming’ doing was the second insight that emerged from the reconstruction. In Castoriadis’s approach, the radical instituting imaginary motivates collective political doing to articulate new patterns of meaning to ‘form’ the institution of the world and create movement in history. Castoriadis explicitly links the creation of meaning and the formation of history to modes of human and collective doing. From these two insights, political action is arguably as much *world-opening* doing via interpretation, as it is *world-forming*.

Castoriadis’s thinking of the interpretative and forming dimensions of the revolutionary project developed in interplay with his elucidation of the world problematic in these works. The third insight, then, relates to his twofold sketch of the question of the world: the imaginary institution of worlds of meaning via political doing, and the interrelation of these worlds with an encompassing meta-horizon or ‘field of possibility’. Castoriadis’s remarks on the ‘opening’ or ‘interstices’ in the institution which open onto the ‘field of possibility’ suggest the intertwining of the imaginary institution and the world *qua* under-determined meta-horizon. In contrast to Castoriadis’s more ontological approach (which I consider in Section 3.4.1, below), this understanding of the intertwining of the world-horizon with historical patterns of meaning is distinctly phenomenological. Expanding on this and the above-mentioned notion of ‘world-opening’ interpretative doing, critical interrogative political doing ‘relativises’ the instituted imaginary and, in so doing, opens a space between what ‘is’ and what ‘is possible’ for political creation, and hence world-alteration. These insights into the world-opening and world-forming aspects of the revolutionary project and the ‘interstices’ within the institution for creation highlight a tension in Castoriadis’s thought—between political *alteration* and *contextual* creation, and creation *ex nihilo*.

As I will show in the following section, the notion of the ‘field of possibility’ or ‘the possible’ continues through Castoriadis’s writings prior to his ontological turn, which became explicit in the second part of the *IIS* in 1975 (see Subsection 3.4.1, below). Yet the specifically phenomenological aspects of Castoriadis’s discussion of the world, as an overarching meta-horizon, are neither explicitly nor systematically developed between 1975 and 1974. The aforementioned interpretative aspect within Castoriadis’s analysis of the revolutionary project also recedes from his focus after 1965. I consider Castoriadis’s reflections on the questions of political doing and the world from the ‘cusp’ of his ontological turn (1965 to 1974) in the next section.

3.3. Reconstructing the Problematics of Collective Political Doing and the World on the Cusp of Castoriadis’s Ontological Turn: 1965 to 1974

As the previous section demonstrated, Castoriadis’s thinking from 1964 to 1965 centred on the questions of the revolutionary project, the doing of *praxis*, and the creative institution of social-historical worlds of meaning. Yet the reconstruction revealed an implicit hermeneutic element within Castoriadis’s elucidation of the revolutionary project—which emphasised the role of interpretation in order to change the world, in a reinterpretation of Marx—as well as the act of ‘relativising’ the institution through modes of critical distanciation. As noted above, for Castoriadis, this political act of critical distance cracks the instituted imaginary and in so doing opens the institution onto a ‘field of possibility’, through which the radical imaginary is rearticulated via instituting doing to institute change in history. In light of this, I suggested above that political action is as much world-opening (via interpretation) as it is world-forming in Castoriadis’s early work. Castoriadis did not fully address the traces of phenomenology beneath his reflections on the question of the world, in the interrelation of the institution of worlds of meaning with an overarching meta-horizon. Although he does not explicitly clarify the meta-horizon that overarches the imaginary institution, his elucidations of the figuration of the world via instituting doing are ‘certainly not *without-the-world*’ (Adams 2014c: xi).

Between 1965 and 1974, both the phenomenological aspects of Castoriadis's thinking on the world and the question of 'doing' increasingly recede from his focus. In this section, I trace Castoriadis's reflections on world-altering collective political doing through the essays, 'The Anticipated Revolution' (1993d [1968]), 'The Imaginary as Such' (2015 [1968-1969]),⁶⁹ 'The Sayable and Unsayable' (1984c [1971]), and 'Technique' (1984d [1973]). While the first text furthers Castoriadis's earlier emphasis on the revolutionary project, the latter three are more straightforwardly philosophical as Castoriadis started to consider the ontological dimensions of the institution and the creative imagination (and its bifurcation as the radical imaginary and social imaginary significations). The question of revolutionary doing receded from Castoriadis's focus as a result. Three key insights emerged from the reconstruction of these essays. First, the notion of the 'openings' or 'interstices' in the institution resurfaces in Castoriadis's thought here. Second, Castoriadis suggests once more that political critique or interrogation triggers a crack in instituted reality. Although he does not develop these points in depth, they nonetheless indicate a continuation of implicit ideas within his thinking (see Section 3.2, above). The third insight relates to Castoriadis's elucidation of the world. As in his work from 1964-1965, Castoriadis outlines his twofold notion of the world as the imaginary institution of a world of meaning in interrelation with an encompassing meta-horizon or 'field of possibility' in this period. Castoriadis does not systematically address the question of the world here. Nevertheless, the resurfacing of the notion of the 'field of possibility' and the 'interstices' in the institution in Castoriadis's writings from 1965 to 1974 highlight the tension between an understanding of the *alteration* of the world via instituting political doing, and his strong notion of creation *ex nihilo*.

'The Anticipated Revolution' (1993d [1968]) sees Castoriadis enlarge the revolutionary collective beyond the proletariat in the wake of the student revolutions in France in 1968.⁷⁰ For Castoriadis, the student movement was effective in its unprecedented attack of core institutions of knowledge and power, as a movement of autonomous political interrogation and creation

(1993d: 129, 138-140, 147, 153). The student movement broke out in response to the institution of the social world that they deemed problematic, as a struggle against both their present ‘and especially in anticipation of their future situation’ (Castoriadis 1993d: 153; cf. 127, 139). In this analysis, Castoriadis reaffirms that revolutionary action must include a dimension of interpretative reflection (1993d [1968]: 130, 131, 132, 139, 140), because ‘to transform things ... we have to understand them’ (1993d: 125). Castoriadis emphasises that the collective act of putting the institution into question renders the workings of the institution visible to enable the transformation of the world, as a precondition for revolutionary change (1993d: 125, 126, 127, 130, 133). Interpretative elements underlie Castoriadis’s formulation of the problematizing doing of the revolutionary project and its interpretative stance toward past, present and future; however, he does not systematically develop these notions within this essay.

In ‘The Anticipated Revolution’ (1993d [1968]), Castoriadis also broadens the dimensions of revolutionary doing to include the imaginary element. In so doing, he contends that revolutionary political doing—especially interrogation or problematisation—fractures the instituted imaginary (1993d: 130, 131, 132, 146). It is in this vein that Castoriadis portrays the student movement as an ‘explosion’ that ‘shatter[s] the imaginary ... in which alienated society, by its very nature, tends to enclose itself’ (1993d: 131). As noted above in Section 3.2, Castoriadis hinted at this understanding of the ‘fracture’ or ‘cracks’ in the instituted imaginary late in the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, but did not develop it in depth. There, Castoriadis wrote that the struggle of the proletariat forged cracks in the instituted imaginary, which, in his view, marked ‘the initial emergence of autonomy’ (1987a [1964-1965]: 155; hereafter, *IIS*). Hence, this notion of the opening and cracking the instituted imaginary via collective political doing re-emerges as an implicit thematic within Castoriadis’s thinking from the first part of the *IIS* through to ‘The Anticipated Revolution’. Expanding on this, autonomous collective political doing represents a ‘creative explosion’ that introduces

movement into the social-historical field by fracturing the instituted imaginary and opening it to the possibility of creation (Castoriadis 1993d: 125, 131-133).

This theme of the relation between doing and the social imaginary resurfaces in ‘The Imaginary as Such’ (2015 [1968-1969]). Castoriadis also sketches a notion of the interplay of the ‘real’ and the field of the ‘possible’ in this essay (as well as ‘Technique’ 1984d [1973]; I return to this), which he alluded to in the first part of the *IIS* (as noted in Section 3.2). Yet, rather than considering the revolutionary dimensions of doing *per se*, as he does in his earlier work, Castoriadis deals with the problematic of doing in a more philosophical sense in ‘The Imaginary as Such’ (2015). In this, Castoriadis arguably seeks to give conceptual weight to his earlier proclamation of the objective of the revolutionary project to ‘transform the real’, as argued in part one of the *IIS* (1987a [1964-1965]: 77). Or, as he puts it in ‘The Anticipated Revolution’: ‘a real attempt at transforming the world’ (Castoriadis 1993d [1968]: 130).

Although Castoriadis hints at the imaginary dimensions inherent in doing in ‘The Imaginary as Such’, Arnason (2015a: 56) highlights that Castoriadis dealt with the question of ‘representing’ to a greater extent than that of ‘doing’ in this essay. What is significant in ‘The Imaginary as Such’ is the resurfacing of the notions of the ‘real’ and the ‘possible’, as well as aspects of Castoriadis’s earlier approach to ‘relativisation’ from the first part of the *IIS*. As discussed in Section 3.2, Castoriadis suggested that the collective effort of critique ‘relativizes’ the instituted dimension of reality by interpretatively setting it at a critical distance (see 1987a [1964-1965]: 21, 28, 62). In so doing, political interrogation opens a space between the instituted dimension of reality and the encompassing field of possibility. In ‘The Imaginary as Such’, Castoriadis recasts this sketch of ‘relativisation’ as the act of ‘detachment’. For Castoriadis in this essay, imaginary creation involves a preparatory step of placing the real ‘at a distance’ to produce a detachment from instituted reality (2015 [1968-1969]: 60). This form of detachment creates an opening or space between the institution of the real and the field of possibility, ‘to represent and do what is not given, and to make the possible exist’ (Castoriadis

2015: 60, cf. 65).⁷¹ With this in mind, Castoriadis characterises ‘instituting doing’ in ‘The Imaginary as Such’ as the creative ‘ability to evoke into existence, or make things emerge ... in the sense of making present, realising something that did not exist’ (2015: 63). Yet, in contrast to his later approach to creation *ex nihilo*, Castoriadis hints at the contextual character of instituting doing in ‘The Imaginary as Such’. Because instituting doing begins from within an instituted social world, Castoriadis notes that this doing is ‘in part linked to prior representations [significations]’ but ‘surpasses them in indefinite ways’ (2015: 64).

Castoriadis hints at the articulation—as the ‘making real’—of the possible in this essay, which, did not ‘exist’ prior to the effort of creative doing. This suggests an interplay between the fields of the real and the possible within the act of instituting doing. Castoriadis indicates this interconnection when he writes, ‘...the possible and the real emerge as interconnected dimensions: thus the world constitutes itself as a human world...’ (2015: 65). In ‘The Imaginary as Such’, Castoriadis points to modes of interpretative ‘detachment’ within the movement of instituting doing, which opens a space between the ‘real’ and the ‘possible’, as part of the ‘constitution’ of the world into a human or historically-articulated world. Castoriadis’s earlier reflections on the world-opening aspects of revolutionary doing are arguably in the background of his thinking here (see Section 3.2). Relatedly, Castoriadis indicates that instituting doing gives form to the ‘possible’ by articulating the ‘possible’ into the institution of reality, which highlights a form of world-forming instituting doing. Hence, interpretative doing and creative action are in interplay in this analysis. Nevertheless, Castoriadis’s reflections on the question of doing are not systematically developed in ‘The Imaginary as Such’.

The question of doing is also ambiguous in ‘Technique’ (1984d [1973]). There, Castoriadis debates the notions of *techne* and technique via the Greeks—chiefly, Plato and Aristotle—and Marx. Yet, Castoriadis is more interested in the rational aspects of doing than the imaginary elements of instituting doing in this essay. Likewise, political action *per se* is not

an explicit focus for Castoriadis here. He notes that *faire* (or, ‘making/doing’) is ‘an element of the constitution of the world as a human world’ (1984d: 240; cf. Castoriadis 2015: 65), but does not develop this insight further. Castoriadis also makes reference to *praxis* in passing, which for him ‘bears upon “that which might also be otherwise” so that its field is the possible’ (Castoriadis 1984d: 232). However, in contrast to *praxis*, ‘technique’ is not motivated by the imaginary element.

Importantly, though, the notion of ‘interstices’ or openings within the institution for alteration or movement resurfaces in Castoriadis’s thinking in ‘Technique’. This becomes clear in Castoriadis’s discussion of the so-called ‘real-rational’, or ‘the rationality of the real’ (1984d: 240-241). As he presents it, society institutes the world into a human, historical world by articulating the ‘real-rational’ (Castoriadis 1984d: 240). Through ‘technique’, society imposes a particular ‘rational’ form onto the world to self-organise it. The notion of the openings in the institution returns in this part of the analysis. Castoriadis situates the mode of technique within a ‘milieu’ that both resists and enables doing (1984d: 240). Yet, Castoriadis argues, ‘it [this milieu] is not resistant full stop’:

what makes possible not just technique, but making/doing of any kind, is the fact that brute reality is not fixed, but bears within it *immense interstices which allow of movement, assembling, alteration* ... and the fact, too, that man is able to insert himself as a real cause in the flux of reality (1984d: 240, emphasis added).

Later, Castoriadis adds that ‘making/doing’ (including technique) constitutes ‘within brute reality, that in relation to which nothing can be done, and that into which some kind of making/doing is possible’ (1984d: 240). This discussion arguably foreshadows Castoriadis’s formulation of the proto-institution of *teukhein* in part two of the *IIS* (which I consider in the next section; see Subsection 3.4.1), as well as his distinction between the ‘ensidic’ or ‘ensemblistic-identitary’ and ‘imaginary’ dimensions of the institution of society (see e.g. Castoriadis 1987b [1975]: 221; see also Klooger 2014a). Although Castoriadis directs his attention to the rational dimensions of technique in ‘Technique’, it is important to note the

reappearance of the notion of the ‘interstices’ in the institution of reality that allow for ‘making/doing’. These remarks indicate that, for Castoriadis, the ‘indeterminate interstices’ within the institution and the interrelation of the real and possible (1984d: 240) provide the precondition for its alteration (which, in this instance, refers to the alteration of the ensidic, rather than the imaginary dimensions of the institution of society). Notwithstanding this, Castoriadis does not consider the notion of the ‘interstices’ within the institution along the lines of the world problematic, as was arguably the case in his earlier thought (see Section 3.2, above). Hence, both the questions of ‘doing’ and of the openings in the institution onto the ‘field of the possible’ are ambiguous in ‘Technique’.

The notion of doing is less of a focus for Castoriadis in ‘The Sayable and the Unsayable’ (Castoriadis 1984c [1971]); instead, and in contrast to ‘The Imaginary as Such’ and ‘Technique’, the world problematic is more explicit. As noted in the introductory part of this chapter, ‘The Sayable...’ is one of two of Castoriadis’s overt dialogues with Merleau-Ponty’s thought. ‘The Sayable...’ is an explicit homage to Merleau-Ponty, in particular to his approach to the questions of the world and the institution. The second work, ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition’ (1997u [1978]),⁷² demonstrates Castoriadis’s withdrawal from dialogue, on the basis of Merleau-Ponty’s implicit ontology of determinacy (see Adams 2007: 47, 2009a: 113). Earlier in Section 3.2, I highlighted the two notions of the world that emerged in the first part of the *IIS* in particular: the imaginary institution of a world of meaning, and an encompassing world-horizon. As Adams highlights (2009a: 118, 125), the tensions between these two elucidations of the world become especially apparent in ‘The Sayable...’. Specifically, Castoriadis notes the creation of a world of meaning, on the one hand, and the act of putting the world-horizon *into* meaning, on the other. For example, Castoriadis writes, ‘we find ourselves always already in a world of concrete contexts that have been culturally imagined’ and instituted (1984c: 130; see also Adams 2009a: 120). Additionally, Castoriadis remarks that ‘the world brought into existence as a world by

language is always an historical world' (1984c: 129). Both of these statements give credence to his developing understanding of the self-creation of worlds of meaning *ex nihilo*.

Yet, at the same time, Castoriadis sketches a notion of the world *qua* under-determined horizon when he questions how it is that 'every language ... is able to speak the same world?' (1984c: 128) and later answers: 'of the world there is always something else to be said' (1984c: 132-133). Indeed, Castoriadis highlights in 'The Sayable...' that the world (as encompassing meta-horizon) 'calls forth', lends itself to, or 'invites' signification (Castoriadis 1984c: 124; cf. Adams 2009a: 112). He adds later that the world offers 'indefinite possibilities' for articulation via language and in signification, where 'everything at the same time gives itself as a *certain being* and as the expression of *every possible being*'; in this analysis, the world *qua* meta-horizon *invites* signification (Castoriadis 1984c: 127, emphasis in original; see also Adams 2009a: 117). Hence, 'The Sayable...' reveals an understanding of the interplay of imaginary worlds of meaning with an overarching though under-determined meta-horizon. However, Castoriadis does not fully clarify the phenomenological problematics operative in the background of his thinking here. As Castoriadis presents it, the world—as a meta-horizon—is permeable enough for 'indefinite possibilities' of imaginary (re-)creation (1984c: 127). Although the institution of the world 'appears as containing everything that will ever be said', the encompassing world-horizon is such that it 'leav[es] us to create it' through imaginary instituting doing (Castoriadis 1984c: 127).

While the world problematic is central in Castoriadis's analysis in 'The Sayable...' (1984c [1971]), the question of doing *per se* is more submerged. In contrast to 'Technique', the traces of doing in 'The Sayable...' relate more directly to the imaginary elements of doing and creation. Despite his imminent shift toward the ontological understanding of creation *ex nihilo* (made explicit in part two of the *IIS*; 1987b), Castoriadis hints at the contextual character of imaginary creation in places in 'The Sayable...'. For example, Castoriadis notes that the 'constantly instituting role of the speaking word' is 'institution ever beginning afresh and, like

all history, continued creation' (1984c: 137). In the same section of the essay, Castoriadis argues that, on the one hand, historical novelty arises in the strong sense of the 'irreducibility of things to that which has preceded them'. But, on the other hand, Castoriadis highlights 'there are no absolute ruptures, no unbridgeable chasms, since it is only through the support lent by the "available significations" ... that the new meaning can emerge' (1984c: 137). Just as in 'The Imaginary as Such', these statements suggest that instituting doing (as a mode of imaginary creation) begins from within an already-articulated context and works to re-create or alter it. However, Castoriadis does not clarify this. In the last part of the essay, Castoriadis also refers to the notion of 'opening' in relation to *praxis*, but again does not develop this insight (see also Adams 2012a: 36). He writes, 'It is opening... in the sense of the work of opening, constantly renewed inauguration' which is 'the spirit of praxis' (1984c: 144), and concludes, 'the subject is that which opens' (1984: 144). Although he does not advance this point beyond this closing remark, it is worth noting the recurring motif of 'opening' in relation to 'doing' within Castoriadis's thinking.

The reconstruction of a cluster of Castoriadis's works between 1965 and 1975 in this section revealed three particular insights regarding the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. First, the notion of the 'openings' or 'interstices' within the institution resurfaced in Castoriadis's thinking here, which marks an implicit continuation of themes from his work from 1964 to 1965 (see Section 3.2). However, he did not systematically pursue this analysis. Second, and relatedly, the understanding of opening the instituted institution resurfaces in Castoriadis's remarks in relation to 'detachment', which reappears in 'The Imaginary as Such' (2015 [1968-1969]), and his suggestion of the triggering of cracks in the instituted imaginary in 'The Anticipated Revolution' (1993d [1968]). Expanding on these traces of Castoriadis's thought, political critique (via 'relativising' detachment) marks a crack in the instituted imaginary. This opens interstices between the instituted dimension of the 'real' and the field of possibility, to articulate or give form to 'the possible' via imaginary instituting

doing. As Castoriadis puts it in ‘The Imaginary as Such’, instituting doing can be understood ‘in the sense of making present, realising something that did not exist’ (2015: 63). In this sense, instituting doing is *contextual* creation: it opens the institution to the possibility of alteration and, in so doing, re-articulates the imaginary institution. These implicit aspects of Castoriadis’s thinking sit in tension with his strong notion of creation *ex nihilo*, which otherwise bypasses the condition of instituting creation *in-the-world* (I return to this in Subsection 3.4.1, below).

The third insight relates to Castoriadis’s elucidations of the world, in its twofold characterisation of imaginary worlds of meaning, and the encompassing meta-horizon of the world. In places, Castoriadis details an understanding of the world (as a meta-horizon) as offering ‘indefinite possibilities’ for social-historical articulation (Castoriadis 1984c: 127). The notion of the world as a field of possibility resurfaces here, especially in reference to the interplay of the ‘real’ and the ‘possible’. However, Castoriadis treats the questions of the world and instituting doing neither systematically nor in depth in his writings from 1965 to 1974.

In the next section, I continue the reconstruction of Castoriadis’s approach to the world-altering dimensions of collective political doing. I split the next discussion into two subsections. The first (Subsection 3.4.1) focusses on the second part of the *IIS*, whereas the second (Subsection 3.4.2) concentrates on Castoriadis’s more political writings from later in his trajectory. I analyse Castoriadis’s thought from after 1975 in the next section.

3.4. Castoriadis’s Elucidation of Political Instituting Doing from Part Two of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, and Beyond

The reconstruction of Castoriadis’s work up to this point has revealed implicit trains of thought in relation to his elucidation of world-altering political doing. For example, I noted in Section 3.2 that Castoriadis hinted at the hermeneutic dimensions within the revolutionary project in his writings from 1964 to 1965, in which revolutionary doing interprets the world in order to change it (in a reconfiguration of Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach). At the same time, Castoriadis sketched a notion of ‘relativisation’, as the opening of a space between the ‘real’

and the ‘possible’ as a precondition for political instituting doing. This notion of ‘relativisation’ or ‘detachment’ appeared in 1964 to 1965 (Section 3.2), and resurfaced in Castoriadis’s thinking between 1965 and 1974 (Section 3.3). From this, I suggest in this chapter that, for Castoriadis, political doing is as much *opening* the institution of the world as it is *re-creating* or *re-forming* it via imaginary instituting action. This latent aspect of contextual doing Castoriadis’s work sits in tension with his strong notion of creation *ex nihilo*. Yet, as noted in the previous sections, Castoriadis neither explicitly nor systematically dealt with the question of political action *per se* between 1964 and 1974; likewise, he bypassed an overt analysis of the world problematic. The reconstruction highlighted a twofold understanding of the world within Castoriadis’s thinking in this period: the imaginary institution of a world of meaning, and an overarching meta-horizon or ‘field of possibility’ in interrelation with the institution (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3). After 1975, however, Castoriadis marginalises both the questions of doing and the notion of the world as an encompassing horizon. Instead, in the wake of his ontological turn, Castoriadis came to emphasise the ontological creation of the world *ex nihilo*. The publication of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* in 1975 made this shift in Castoriadis’s thought explicit (via the appearance of part two of the work; hereafter *IIS*). I consider the traces of doing and the world in the second section of the *IIS* in Subsection 3.4.1, below.

Aside from passing statements at the close of the work, Castoriadis does not explicitly elucidate political action in part two of the *IIS*. In Subsection 3.4.2, I reconstruct the sketches of Castoriadis’s remarks on political instituting doing from a cluster of his more overtly political writings from between 1975 and 1989. In particular, I focus on ‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’ (1993a [1979]), ‘The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy’ (1991b [1983]), ‘Heritage and Revolution’ (2007c [1985]), and ‘Power, Politics, Autonomy’ (1991a [1978/1988]).⁷³ Although these essays are broadly political in character, the question of political doing *per se* remains obscured; instead, Castoriadis points to a notion of ‘instituting power’, which I discuss later. First, I turn to the second part of the *IIS* in the next subsection.

3.4.1. Section Two of *The Imaginary Institution of Society: On Doing, Teukhein, and the World Problematic*

I deal with the traces of doing and the problem of the world that emerge in the second part of the *IIS* in this subsection, which made Castoriadis's ontological turn explicit. Specifically, I focus on Castoriadis's elucidation of the proto-institution of *teukhein*; his remarks on instituting doing; and note Castoriadis's ontologisation of the world problematic as 'magma' (see Adams, 2007: 47, 2009a: 129 n.7, 2011b: 241 n.3, 2011c: 240, 2013: 77; Arnason, 1992: 255). Three insights developed through the reconstruction. First, Castoriadis's notion of the proto-institution of *teukhein* highlights that there are inherent openings within the institution that form the preconditions for modes of doing. Yet, *teukhein* pertains to the ensidic dimension of the institution—although Castoriadis notes that *teukhein* makes forms of doing possible, this analysis does not detail a notion of action *per se*. Second, and relatedly, Castoriadis does not explicitly analyse political instituting modes of doing in the second part of the *IIS*. He returns to the question of political action in the closing passages of the work; however, these remarks remain unsystematically developed. Third, Castoriadis recasts his earlier sketch of the encompassing meta-horizon of the world as 'magma' in the second section of the *IIS*, at the same time that he ontologises his notion of the imaginary creation of worlds of meaning. I detail these points below, before turning to Castoriadis's more straightforwardly political writings from after 1975 in Subsection 3.4.2, later.

As Castoriadis seeks to elucidate the mode of being of ontological creation and the social-historical institution in the second part of the *IIS*, he articulates the proto-institutions of *teukhein* and *legein* as the operative schema that posits the 'ensemblistic-identitary' or 'ensidic' dimension of the institution (in contrast to the social imaginary element). Castoriadis's consideration of the proto-institutions of *teukhein* and *legein* form part of his refutation of the ontology of determinacy, which, for him, pervades the (Western) philosophical tradition and equates 'being' with 'being-determined' (Castoriadis 1987b [1975]: 181, 1997c: 13, 1997d: 393). In contrast, Castoriadis elucidates creation *ex nihilo* as the creation of radical otherness (1987b:

172-173) that is ‘neither producible nor deducible from other forms’, which rests on an ontology of being as in- or under-determined (1997d: 392; see also Adams 2009a: 125; Joas 1989: 1192; Klooger 2011: 338; Mouzakitis 2014a: 54, 62). In brief, *legein* and *teukhein* are part of the primordial infrastructure of the institution of society, which form ‘the ground rules of thought and action’ (Arnason 1991b: 75; cf. Adams 2011a: 61). The twofold proto-institutions of *legein* and *teukhein* self-organise and articulate the ‘first natural stratum’ (Castoriadis 1987b [1975]: 229) as part of the ‘ensidic’ dimension of the institution. In so doing, *legein* and *teukhein* ‘lean on’ (*Anlehnung*) the preconditions given by the natural world to institute or ‘impose’ an ‘ensemblist organisation on an initial stratum of the given’ (Castoriadis 1987b: 344; see also Adams 2011a: 65; Blumenberg 2000; Klooger 2014d).⁷⁴

Much of Castoriadis’s discussion of *legein* and *teukhein* in the fifth chapter of the *IIS* lies outside of the present scope of analysis. Significant, however, are Castoriadis’s remarks on the openings within the infrastructure of *teukhein*, which form the preconditions for modes of social (and, arguably, political) doing within the institution. Yet, Castoriadis does not deal with this point at length; rather, he spends more time discussing the signifiable dimension of *legein* as ‘representing/saying’ (see Adams 2011a: 65, 70, 73, Arnason 1991b: 65, Klooger 2014b: 123). First, it is helpful to define the proto-institutions of *legein* and *teukhein* here. Both *teukhein* and *legein* intrinsically imply each other (Arnason 1991b: 75, Castoriadis 1987b: 260-261, Klooger 2014b: 117), and relate to the ‘ensemblistic-identitarian’ stratum of being. *Legein*, on the one hand, relates to the elemental institution of ‘distinguishing-choosing-positing-assembling-counting-speaking’ (Castoriadis 1987b: 223). Whilst Castoriadis elucidates *teukhein*, on the other hand, as the primal institution that makes something be ‘...as starting from ... in a manner appropriate to... and in view of ...’ in its mode of ‘assembling-adjusting-fabricating-constructing’ (Castoriadis 1987b: 260; see also Klooger 2014b: 118). Together, these primordial elements of the social-historical ‘permit the effective existence and operation of the institution’,

and are latent dimensions within all institutions that embody modes of ‘doing’ and ‘saying’ (Klooger 2014b: 123).

Later in the chapter on *legein* and *teukhein*, Castoriadis associates *teukhein* with the possibility of the self-alteration of the institution (1987b: 270): chiefly, through its central operative schema of ‘finality’. As Castoriadis presents it, ‘finality’ refers to ‘that which is[,] to that which is not *and* at the same time, could be’ (1987b: 262, emphasis in original). In this, the schema of *teukhein* institutes a division into the institution of the world, between the ‘possible’ and the ‘impossible’, which divides reality into that which *is*, and that which might *otherwise be* (Castoriadis 1987b: 262-263, 359, 368; see Adams 2011a: 79-80; Arnason 1991b: 75; Klooger 2014b: 123). Echoes of Castoriadis’s discussion of the real and the possible from the essay ‘Technique’ are evident here. Recall from Section 3.3 that Castoriadis noted the institution of the ‘real/rational’ as the articulation of ‘that in relation to which nothing can be done, and that into which some kind of making/doing is possible’ in ‘Technique’ (1984d [1973]: 240). In the second part of the *IIS* (1987b [1975]), Castoriadis contends that *teukhein* and *legein* originally institute the social-historical world in a mode of closure. However, Castoriadis argues that these proto-institutions ‘provide, at the same time, the resources that allow the breaking open what has been closed, altering society and the world’ (1987b: 269). The interrelation of the institution of the ‘real’ and the field of the ‘possible’ is, from this analysis, embedded into the institution of reality via *teukhein*. Their tension divides reality into that which is and ‘that which can be transformed’ (Castoriadis 1987b: 262; cf. Klooger 2014b: 123). Significantly, as Castoriadis later puts it, ‘there could never be any question of a rupture of any kind, or any autonomy’ if the institution exhausted the totality of ‘what is’ (1997p [1983]: 311). Again, the earlier-mentioned motif of ‘opening’ and the ‘interstices’ in the institution for doing resurfaces in Castoriadis’s thinking here, albeit largely in relation to the ensidic dimension of the infrastructure of the institution in this analysis. Nevertheless, is in this respect that *teukhein*

forms an institutional precondition for modes of instituting doing, as the institution of the real via *teukhein* is always ‘open to broader horizons’ (Arnason 1991b: 75).

Castoriadis’s earlier writings hinted that this ‘field of possibilities’ related to the world as a meta-horizon that overarches the imaginary institution of the world (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3). In the second part of the *IIS*, however, Castoriadis considers the world as a creation *ex nihilo*: as he puts it, ‘society brings into being a world of significations and itself exists in reference to such a world’ (1987b [1975]: 359). Castoriadis here shifts away from his earlier, more phenomenological approach that elucidated the formation of the world-horizon via imaginary significations and instituting doing, which articulated a ‘manner of grasping of the world’ (Castoriadis 1987a [1964-1965]: 147; see Section 3.2). After 1975, however, Castoriadis argues that the institution of the world is ‘always at the same time necessarily the institution of a magma of social imaginary significations’ (1987b: 344). With this shift, Castoriadis arguably recasts and ontologises the notion of the meta-horizon by drawing on the metaphor of ‘magma’ (see Adams 2007: 47, 2009a: 129 n.7, 2011a: 241 n.3, 2011b: 240, 2013: 77; Arnason 1992: 255).⁷⁵ The notion of ‘magma’ permeates Castoriadis’s thought post 1975 (see 1991a [1978/1988]: 144, 1993c [1977]: 233, 1997b [1989]: 363, 1997t [1982]: 313, 1997c [1986]: 7-8, 1997p [1983]: 305, 307, 2010f [1982]: 46, 47). Castoriadis traced a preliminary notion of ‘magma’ in ‘The Sayable and the Unsayable’ (1984c [1971]), where he noted that everything ‘at the same time gives itself as a *certain being* and as the expression of *every possible being*’ (1984c: 127, emphasis in original). For Castoriadis, ‘magma’ refers to the mode of being of the intertwined and under-determined web of imaginary significations within the institution, from which an infinite number of ‘ensemblistic-identitary’ forms can be ‘extracted’ or ‘constructed’, but which is irreducible to any or all of these ‘ensemblistic-identitary’ forms (Castoriadis 1987b: 343, 1997p: 297, 304-305; see also Klooger 2009: 179-212; Mouzakitis 2014a: 58-59, Rosengren 2014: 66).⁷⁶ In short, ‘magma’ refers to ‘the mode of being of what gives itself before identitary or ensemblist logic is imposed’ (1987b: 343). The institution of society always

includes *more* than can be rationally determined, and it is from this ‘something more’—the magma of imaginary significations—that new articulations can be formed. It is on this basis that Adams and Arnason have each argued that Castoriadis ontologised the world-horizon as ‘magma’ (Adams 2007: 47, 2009a: 129 n.7, 2011a: 241, n.3, 2011b: 240, 2013: 77; Arnason 1992: 255). Contra the inherited logic of the Western philosophical tradition that equates being with ‘being-determined’ (noted above; see Castoriadis 1987b: 221), the ontology underlying ‘magma’ ‘designates a world that is not completely determined’ (Rosengren 2014: 65-66), or, a world that is continuously *determinable* (Adams 2011a: 105, Rosengren 2008: 13). ‘Magma’ in this way denotes the fluid, ‘potentially explosive and essentially indeterminate’ dimensions of the institution of society that makes the ongoing (re-)institution of heterogeneous social-historical forms possible (Mouzakitis 2014b: 91; see also Rosengren 2014: 65, 68, Smith 2010: 15, 32).

Yet Castoriadis’s recasting of the world-horizon as ‘magma’ is problematic in that he absolutizes the imaginary creation of the world of meaning *ex nihilo*—which is to say, the institution of the world does not need to encounter the world-horizon ‘in order to be’ (Adams 2007: 51). The tensions between his elucidation of the world *qua* meta-horizon and the institution of a world of meaning become clear in a statement in the second to last subsection of the *IIS*. There, Castoriadis argues:

it is one and the same thing to say that society institutes *the* world in each case as *its* world[,] or *its* world as *the* world, and to say that it institutes a world of significations, that it institutes itself in instituting the world of significations that is its own, in correlation to which, alone, a world can and does exist for it (1987b: 359, emphasis added).

Adams rightly notes that these above remarks by Castoriadis do not refer to ‘one and the same thing’ (Adams 2007: 49, 2011a: 112, 2013: 78). This is for two reasons. In the first part of the above statement, Castoriadis states that the social-historical institutes *its* world in encounter with *the* world(-horizon), which is pre-given *prior* to the institution of a world of meaning. In

the second formulation, however, Castoriadis absolutizes *the* institution of the world as ‘our’ world and *the* world. The consequence is that each social-historical institution self-creates in a ‘worldless vacuum’ (Adams 2007: 49, 2011b: 241, 2013: 78)—an encounter with the overarching world-horizon is no longer necessary to form of a world of meaning (Adams 2007: 49, 2011a: 112). In this vein, Castoriadis recasts the world of signification as a ‘total’, whole, and universal world of meaning (cf. Adams 2007: 50). Not only does Castoriadis sidestep the ‘contextual embedding’ of the social-historical ‘within the broader world-horizon’ as an encompassing meta-context in this analysis (Adams 2011c: 78; cf. Adams 2014b: 70), he ‘bypasses the phenomenological insight that we are always already *in-the-world*’ (Adams 2011a: 100). As such, Castoriadis’s later elucidation of the self-creation of worlds of meaning *ex nihilo* lends itself to a form of constructivism. Abstracted from the condition *in-the-world*, *anthropos* appear as sovereign world-creators that assume a standpoint external to or outside of the world in the act of creation.⁷⁷

The above reconstruction centred on Castoriadis’s continued elucidation of the world problematic and the institution of society in the second part of the *IIS*. Two insights were significant. First, traces of the notion of ‘opening’ resurfaced in Castoriadis’s discussion of the proto-institution of *teukhein*, particularly in relation to its operative schema of ‘finality’. Although this pertains to the ensidic dimension of the institution—rather than the social imaginary element—it indicates a continuation of implicit themes in Castoriadis’s thinking. Furthermore, it highlights that the institution is never fully *closed* to the possibility of alteration; indeed, the interrelation of the ‘real’ and the ‘possible’ are articulated through *teukhein*, as noted earlier. Second, Castoriadis recast his earlier twofold notion of the world (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3, above) in ontological terms in the second part of the *IIS*, as ‘magma’. With this move, Castoriadis problematically sidelined the overarching meta-horizon of the world, as he absolutized the imaginary creation of a world of meaning *ex nihilo*. This jettisons the phenomenological insight of the human condition as always-already *in-the-world*. This position,

moreover, lends itself to a form of constructivism: the human condition is no longer *in-the-world*, but rather *outside of the world* as a sovereign world-creator. Yet, in contrast to the notions of magma, social imaginary significations, and the proto-institutions of *legein* and *teukhein*, the question of ‘doing’—especially collective political action—is particularly obscured in the second part of the *IIS*. Castoriadis notes ‘social doing’ in the final section in various places (e.g. 1987b [1975]: 370, 371, 372). However, it is only in the closing pages of the *IIS* that Castoriadis casts ‘doing’ along political lines in connection with the instituting dimension of the imaginary institution. There, Castoriadis contends the ‘self-alienation or heteronomy’ of society can be overcome by bringing about a ‘history in which society not only knows itself, but *makes itself* as explicitly self-instituting’: an autonomous society (1987b: 373). This societal self-alteration, Castoriadis concludes, ‘concerns social doing—and so also politics, in the most profound sense of the term’ (1987b: 373). While the first part of the *IIS* (1987a [1964-1965]; see Section 3.2) dealt more explicitly with political doing via Castoriadis’s analysis of the revolutionary project, the second section of the work marginalises this thematic. As such, the question of political doing is unsystematically addressed—even sidelined—in the 1975 part of the *IIS* (1987b). To further the present task of reconstructing Castoriadis’s approach to the world-altering dimensions of collective political action, I turn to a cluster of his more overtly political texts from between 1975 to 1989 in the next subsection.

3.4.2. World-Altering Political Action and the Question of Power: Castoriadis’s Political Writings between 1975 and 1989

While the questions of the world and the being of the institution were central for Castoriadis in the second part of the *IIS* (as discussed in Subsection 3.4.1, above), the notion of doing—especially collective political action—was less straightforward. Indeed, Castoriadis largely sidelines the question of doing from his thought after 1975. He makes his marginalisation of the question of ‘doing’ clear in a note to the essay ‘The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy’ (199b [1983]). There, he writes that his discussion ‘ignor[es] the movement’ of the

political project of autonomy—and hence its mode of doing—to focus instead on the ‘results’ of the project of autonomy (1991b: 106 n.22). Castoriadis accepts this ‘inevitable limitation’ to the essay (1991b: 106 n.22); yet, an elucidation of political instituting doing *per se* remains underdeveloped in his other works, too. With this in mind, I now reconstruct a cluster of Castoriadis’s explicitly political writings between 1975 and 1989, to trace implicit notions of world-altering political doing from Castoriadis’s later thought. As noted in the introductory part of this section (3.4), I analyse ‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’ (1993a [1979]), ‘The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy’ (1991b [1983]), ‘Heritage and Revolution’ (2007c [1985]), and, ‘Power, Politics, Autonomy’ (1991a [1978/1988]).

Three key insights emerged from the reconstruction. First, the hermeneutic element of political doing resurfaces in these writings, in relation to ‘opening’ the institution onto the field of possibility. Second, Castoriadis hints that the past forms a source for possible alterity in places in these writings; in so doing, the tension here reappears between his strong notion of creation *ex nihilo*, on the one hand, and indications of an interpretative or contextual aspect of political creation, on the other. Third, Castoriadis sketches an understanding of power in this period, which posits ‘instituting doing’ as a mode of ‘instituting power’. Yet he does not fully advance this this late development in his thinking. After the discussion of these findings, I bring together the insights of the chapter into a concluding analysis (Section 3.5).

Traces of the implicit notion of ‘opening’ the institution onto the field of possibility resurface across this period. This reveals a continuation of themes in Castoriadis’s thinking, particularly his contention that autonomous political critique triggers cracks in the instituted imaginary, which appeared in ‘The Anticipated Revolution’ and the first part of the *IIS* (see Section 3.2 and 3.3 above; see also 1987a [1964-1965]: 155, 1993d [1968]: 131). In ‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’ (1993a [1979]), Castoriadis argues that the political project of autonomy arises through the ‘rupture of instituted heteronomy’ through ‘the contesting of social imaginary significations’ (1993a: 316). He associates this collective contestation of the

instituted imaginary and the ‘rupture’ of the institution with the question of freedom. For Castoriadis, the Greeks articulated ‘freedom in a profound sense’: the ‘*effective freedom to think*’, in the sense that ‘everyone *can* think’ beyond that which is instituted (1993a: 322, emphasis in original). He reiterates this point in ‘The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy’ (1991b [1983]: 87, 101), as well as in ‘Heritage and Revolution’ (2007c [1985]: 116). Later in ‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’, Castoriadis situates autonomous doing ‘in and through this ineffaceable *gap*’ between the instituted dimension of society and other possibilities opened through questioning, which must remain ‘*constantly open*’ (1993a: 329, emphases in original). This critical distance provides the possibility for change:

we can judge and change the rule ... only if the gap remains, only if a [critical] exteriority is maintained... This is the very condition that permits us to call it [the institution] into doubt, that enables us to think otherwise (Castoriadis 1993a: 330).

Here, the incipient understanding of the field of possibility—as an under-determined horizon that encompasses the institution of the world that forms a space for autonomous instituting doing—re-enters Castoriadis’s thinking. This notion resurfaces again in ‘Power, Politics, Autonomy’, where Castoriadis contends that the project of autonomy cannot appear as a possibility:

unless the social-historical field has already altered itself in such a way that it opens a space of interrogation without bounds ... the institution must have changed to the point that it allows itself to be put into question by the collectivity (1991a [1978/1988]: 166).

Expanding on Castoriadis’s remarks here, autonomous political doing contests the instituted imaginary to the extent that it begins to fracture, which, in so doing, opens a space of possibility for the rearticulation of the institution and thus the alteration of the social-historical. Notwithstanding Castoriadis’s passing statements that highlight an implicit notion of openings within the institution for political doing, Castoriadis does not develop this point further.

In the essays after ‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’, Castoriadis rethinks this idea of the space of interrogation and relocates it within the *historical* field via the interconnected dimensions of past, present, and future. This becomes clear in ‘The Greek *Polis* and the Creation of Democracy’ (1991b [1983]), ‘Heritage and Revolution’ (2007c [1985]), and ‘Power, Politics, Autonomy’ (1991a [1978/1988]). For example, Castoriadis argues in ‘The Greek *Polis*...’ that the institution of the *polis* rearticulated notions of time as ‘public time’, which altered the collective relation to its instituted past, present, and future (1991b: 111-114). Castoriadis considers this as ‘the emergence of a dimension where the collectivity can inspect its own past as the result of its own actions, and where an indeterminate future opens up as a domain for its activities’, as a field for political doing (1991b: 113-114). In this, Castoriadis moves away from his former, implicit understanding of the world (as meta-horizon) of possibility, and rethinks this as a temporal dimension of history that remains permanently open to other possibilities of articulation.

Castoriadis echoes his contention *vis-à-vis* the Greek institution of the *polis* as opening the possibility of thinking, doing, and choosing otherwise in ‘Heritage and Revolution’ (2007c [1985]: 116). Yet, importantly, Castoriadis rethinks the ‘political act’ of ‘choosing’ as ‘willing’, and considers ‘willing’ in connection with the imagination and the possibility of alterity in the social-historical field. This line of thought emerges only in brief in the closing two pages of the essay. ‘Willing’ for Castoriadis arises through the ‘conscious dimension’ of the radical imagination of human beings (2007c: 117). In contrast to ‘judging’ and ‘choosing’, ‘willing’ is more radical: ‘To will autonomy entails willing some types of institution of society and opposing others’ (Castoriadis 2007c: 117). Significantly, autonomous willing engenders a specific—interpretative-creative—relation to past and future. Leaning on the Greek *polis* experience once more, Castoriadis notes that Greek tragedy opened a dialogue with the past by reinterpreting it within the ‘vivid present’, whilst similarly addressing ‘all possible futures’ (2007c: 117). ‘Our own past’, Castoriadis writes, forms ‘an inexhaustible source of proximate

alterity' for the project of autonomy (2007c: 117). The implicit interpretative-creative notion of political action resurfaces here, which Castoriadis links to the imaginary element in the closing sentences of the essay. The relation to the past and the future, in this analysis, 'must be progressively recreated' as the collectivity dares 'to will a future' (Castoriadis 2007c: 117). He concludes, 'not any future, not a blueprint, but this ever-unforeseeable, ever-creative unfolding, in the shape of which we can participate' (Castoriadis 2007c: 117).

Nevertheless, Castoriadis distances himself from this arguably interpretative approach to creative world-altering political doing, which leans on historical articulations to creatively 'will' possible, different futures. Yet, the tension between this incipient interpretative notion of doing and his strong account of creation *ex nihilo* is especially apparent in 'Power, Politics, Autonomy' (1991a [1978/1988]). On the one hand, Castoriadis notes that instituting activity 'must always take place within an already given history' (1991a: 170), which is to say political instituting doing begins from within an already-articulated world context. On the other, however, Castoriadis then argues that the historical context of political action is 'of no political relevance' (1991a: 170), on the basis that the social-historical institution 'tells us nothing about what we ought to will as the effective institution of the society in which we live' (Castoriadis 1991a: 171). Again, the 'will' reappears here, but remains an underdeveloped notion. With this statement, Castoriadis backtracks on his earlier proclamation in 'Heritage and Revolution' *vis-à-vis* the creative reinterpretation of the past to project possibilities onto the future, which we might 'dare to will'.

Despite Castoriadis's conviction in 'Power, Politics, Autonomy' that the past is of 'no political relevance' (1991a: 170), he then notes on the same page in the essay that autonomous political movements 'would still have to use what it finds on the ground in order to make a clean sweep' (1991a: 170). Autonomous political creation, then, leans on present articulations of the world and instituted patterns in order to self-alter the institution. He reiterates this in 'Does the Idea of Revolution Still Make Sense?' (1990 [1989]). There, Castoriadis contends

that the instituting creation of the revolutionary project ‘takes up what it finds laying about, the rupture in the new meaning it confers upon what it inherits or utilizes’ (1990: 124). Castoriadis glosses over the contextual character of political creation in both cases. For political instituting creation to ‘take up’ what is ‘laying around’, it must incorporate an interpretative dimension.

These remarks highlight a tension between Castoriadis’s understanding of creation *ex nihilo*, and his elucidation of the creativity of the political project of autonomy. Radical revolutionary political creation is always-already situated within an articulated institutional context and within the world-horizon, which, together, form the ground for political action and creation. In this, the self-alteration of the social-historical via political doing is *contextual*—it begins from *in-the-world*, both within historically articulated contexts and within an overarching meta-horizon—and, hence, creation does not arise *from nothing*. This implicit interpretative aspect to political action has lingered in the background of Castoriadis’s thought since his early reflections on the revolutionary project in the first part of the *IIS*. As noted in Section 3.2, Castoriadis emphasised the interpretative dimension of the revolutionary movement as ‘our effort to interpret the world *in order to* change it’, in a reconfiguration of Marx’s eleventh thesis on Feuerbach (1987a [1964-1965]: 164, emphasis in original). However, this tension between contextual political doing and creation *ex nihilo* ultimately remains unresolved—especially as Castoriadis explicitly dismisses arguments regarding the interpretative aspects of creation in ‘Done and to be Done’ (1997b [1989]: 363-364).

In addition to Castoriadis’s suggestions of the opening of the institution and the historical field of possibility in his writings in this period, the third insight unearthed through the reconstruction is Castoriadis’s elucidation of political ‘instituting power’. Although Arnason notes that Castoriadis’s discussion of power in ‘Power, Politics, Autonomy’ is ‘not to be found in earlier writings’ (Arnason 2014c: 105), traces of the notion of instituting power are evident in the contemporaneous essay, ‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’ (Castoriadis 1993a [1979]).⁷⁸ What is significant in these essays is Castoriadis’s reconfiguration of the

notion of political instituting ‘making/doing’ with ‘power’.⁷⁹ In ‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’, Castoriadis notes ‘the autonomous power of making/doing [*pouvoir-faire*]’ (1993a [1979]: 321). The inclusion of the original French in the English publication here points to an early sketch of instituting power, as the power to make/do. This becomes clear when Castoriadis writes:

Freedom is freedom to make/do—and making/doing is power to make/do alone as well as power to make/do with others. To make/do with others is to participate, to become engaged, to connect with others in a shared activity (1993a: 318).

This ‘shared activity’ refers to the political instituting activity of the project of autonomy, where ‘to participate in power’ in the collective articulation of *nomos* ‘is to participate in *instituting power*’ (Castoriadis 1993a: 321, emphasis in original).

Castoriadis expands on this incipient understanding of ‘instituting power’ in ‘Power, Politics, Autonomy’. There, Castoriadis contrasts the domain of instituted, ‘explicit’ power that maintains the order and operation of society (1991a [1978/1988]: 154-155) against a notion of ‘radical ground power’ (1991a: 150). Where explicit power manifests, for example, in the sphere of *le politique* or ‘the political’ (see Section 3.1, above), ‘ground power’ forms ‘an aspect of instituting society as such’ (Arnason 2014a: 19).⁸⁰ As Castoriadis presents it, ground power is the implicit form of power that society exerts over its inhabitants from the moment of their social fabrication into a ‘social individual’, as part of the instituting power of society that is prior to any exercise of ‘explicit’ power (1991a: 150; see also Adams 2016b: 124-125; Arnason 2014a: 19-20). This mode of ground power reproduces the instituted institution by forming social individuals such that they maintain the sanctioned modes of doing and saying (Castoriadis 1991a: 151). It is on this basis that Castoriadis argues that the ‘true’ objective of the political project of autonomy is to:

create the institutions which, by being internalized by individuals, most facilitate their accession to their individual autonomy and their effective participation in all forms of explicit power existing in society (1991a: 173, emphasis in original).

If society is to become properly autonomous, the institution must be reformed to the extent that ground power institutes social individuals as *autonomous* at the site of their social fabrication (see Castoriadis 1991a: 173; cf. 1997b: 405). In this respect, *la politique* serves to reconfigure the ‘infra-power’ of the instituting dimension of society (Castoriadis 1991a: 160; see Wolf 2013: 193-194). The political project of autonomy, then, ‘is the permanent attempt to make the power of the [ground, instituting-] imaginary visible and shapable’ (Wolf 2013: 197).

Bringing Castoriadis’s reflections on the problematic of power together, three notions of power emerge. In ‘Power, Politics, Autonomy’ (1991a [1978/1988]), Castoriadis points to two dimensions of power: the domain of ‘explicit’ power, and the implicit, instituting ‘ground’ power of the institution. Yet, in ‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’, Castoriadis hints at a notion of power *qua* instituting-power, in the sense of the power to make/do through political action (1993 [1979]: 318). This latter elucidation of instituting power is arguably the most significant for an understanding of the power manifested through the *doing* of the political project of autonomy; however, Castoriadis does not fully develop this insight into political modes of power. This highlights an avenue for further consideration at a later stage, which I discuss later in the conclusion to this study.

In addition to the problematic of power, two other insights emerged from the reconstruction of Castoriadis’s more overtly political writings in this subsection. To be sure, the thematic of world-altering collective political action *per se* was not at the forefront of Castoriadis’s considerations in this later stage of his intellectual trajectory. Nevertheless, Castoriadis’s implicit understanding of ‘opening’ the institution onto a ‘space’ or ‘field’ of possibility via contestation or interrogation resurfaced in his thinking here. Indeed, the collective effort of ‘opening’ the institution onto the field of possibility via political critique is a significant, though underdeveloped motif in Castoriadis’s work. Yet as noted above, Castoriadis recasts this ‘field of possibility’ as an open, *historical*—that is, temporal—horizon in this latter part of his thought. In this, Castoriadis sketched an understanding of historical

patterns and the interrelation of the past, present, and future as a source for projects of alterity; the interpretative undercurrent in Castoriadis's theorising re-emerged here. Castoriadis appeared to embrace the interpretative dimension of revolutionary *praxis* in his early writings (see Section 3.2, above). In these later works, however, Castoriadis contended that the social-historical context of political action is of 'no political relevance' (1991a: 170); at the same time, though, he remarked that revolutionary projects 'take[...] up what it finds laying about, the rupture in the new meaning it confers upon what it inherits or utilizes' (Castoriadis 1990: 124; cf. 1991a: 170)). The reconstruction in this subsection thus highlighted a tension between his strong notion of creation *ex nihilo*, on the one hand, and this incipient account of *contextual* political creation (and its inherently interpretative dimension in the explicit alteration of the institution and social-historical), on the other. I discuss the overall insights from the reconstruction of Castoriadis's political theory detailed in this chapter in the concluding section, below.

3.5. Concluding Reflections: On Castoriadis's Accounts of World-Opening and World-Forming Political Doing

The task of the present project is to develop a theoretical understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action, to address the question: 'how can collective political action make a difference in the world?' Leaning on hermeneutic-phenomenological debates—which highlight the intertwined elements of world-interpretation and world-formation in the anthropic encounter with the world-horizon—this chapter detailed the findings from a critical reconstruction of Castoriadis's political philosophy. As noted in the introduction to this chapter, the present analysis builds upon the interpretations of Castoriadis's understanding of political instituting doing as world-forming movement set out by Adams (2012a). In particular, the reconstruction traced Castoriadis's elucidations of the revolutionary project and the doing of the political project of autonomy, as well as his sketches of the world problematic. When reconstructed from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, Castoriadis details a twofold

understanding of world-altering collective political action, as both ‘world-interpreting’ (or better, ‘world-opening’) and ‘world-forming’ (or, ‘world-instituting’) doing. Contra Castoriadis’s strong notion of creation *ex nihilo*, the analysis detailed in this chapter highlights the interconnection between interpretative and creative dimensions within political doing. The key argument developed via this reconstruction of Castoriadis’s thought is that, for Castoriadis, political action is as much about *opening* the institution of the world onto a field of possibility via critique—triggering a crack in the instituted imaginary—as it is concerned with *re-forming* the institution of the world via the creative re-institution of social imaginary significations.

The foregoing analysis of Castoriadis’s thought was broken into four parts. Following an introductory prelude into key Castoriadian concepts in Section 3.1—including *la politique*, the project of autonomy, the institution of the world, and social imaginary significations—I turned to Castoriadis’s reflections on the revolutionary project from 1964 to 1965 in Section 3.2, which included ‘Recommencing the Revolution’ (1997n [1964]) and the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987a [1964-1965]). I analysed a cluster of Castoriadis’s works from the cusp of his ontological turn (from 1965 to 1974) in Section 3.3, which revealed Castoriadis’s implicit shift away from the question of ‘doing’ *per se*. Section 3.4 was split into two subsections. Subsection 3.4.1 focussed on the second part of the *IIS* (1987b [1975]). In particular, I considered the proto-institution of *teukhein* and Castoriadis’s ontologisation of the world-horizon as ‘magma’. Subsection 3.4.2, in turn, concentrated on a cluster of Castoriadis’s more explicitly political writings from 1975 to 1989.

Although Castoriadis did not systematically develop a theory of political action *per se*, there are openings for the development of an understanding of the world-altering aspects of political doing within his work, to analyse the question: ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ Castoriadis’s work is significant in that it underscores the human creation and collective institution of worlds of meaning as, foremost, a *political* institution of society. This sets his thought apart from Arendt, who bypassed a theory of

meaning in her elucidation of ‘world-forming’ or ‘world-founding’ action (as noted in Chapter 2). I discuss the findings from the reconstruction of Castoriadis’s work now, drawing particular attention to the notions of world-forming action and world-opening interpretative doing.

The institution of worlds of imaginary significations is a central aspect of Castoriadis’s intellectual project; hence, his work fosters an understanding of the world-forming and world-instituting dimensions of political doing. Castoriadis’s approach explicitly links the creation of meaning and the formation of history to modes of collective doing: the radical instituting imaginary motivates political projects to articulate new patterns of meaning to ‘form’ the institution of the world and create movement in the social-historical field. As he put it in the first part of the *IIS*: ‘the human world is the world of human *doing*’, and, within doing ‘dwell *significations*’ (1987a [1964-1965]: 72, 146, emphases in original).

Nevertheless, Castoriadis’s elucidation of the world-forming elements of collective political action was not straightforward. Castoriadis’s early writings (especially from 1964-1965) adopted a more phenomenological approach that pointed to the formation of worlds of meaning via doing within an encompassing meta-horizon (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3). In this analysis, social imaginary significations articulated a ‘grasp’ of the world (Castoriadis 1987a: 133, 146-147). In turn, Castoriadis’s ontological approach—emerging in the early 1970s and made explicit in the second part of the *IIS* in 1975 (see Sections 3.3 and 3.4.1)—shifted emphasis from the figuration of a ‘grasp’ of the world to the creation of worlds of meaning *ex nihilo*. The absolutisation of the creation of worlds of meaning *ex nihilo* in Castoriadis’s later thought (post-1975; see Subsection 3.4.1) is problematic because the formation of worlds of meaning no longer need to encounter the world-horizon ‘in order to be’ (Adams 2007: 51; cf. 2011a: 112). In so doing, Castoriadis bypasses the phenomenological insight that the human condition is always-already *in-the-world* (Adams 2011a: 100). As a consequence, Castoriadis’s later work lends itself to a form of constructivism: no longer situated within the pre-given limits of human condition *in-the-world*, *anthropos* assume the position of sovereign world-creators.

Yet, the reconstruction also revealed an implicit interpretative approach that emerged in traces across Castoriadis's trajectory. This latent notion of 'world-interpreting' doing largely centred on modes of *opening*: triggering a crack or fracture in the instituted dimension of reality via 'distanciation' (Section 3.2), 'detachment' or 'interrogation' (Section 3.3), and opening the institution and the historical field onto a space of possibility (see Sections 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4.2). The analysis above demonstrated that Castoriadis repeatedly linked the interpretative aspect of critique or problematisation with the creative *praxis* of the revolutionary project—especially in his early thought. As Castoriadis put it at the close of 'The Sayable and the Unsayable': 'It is opening... in the sense of the work of opening, constantly renewed inauguration' which is 'the spirit of praxis' (1984c [1971]: 144).

Castoriadis's implicit sketch of the intertwining of world-opening critique and world-instituting creation is arguably a more appropriate path to address the question of how collective political action makes a difference in the world, than his strong notion of creation *ex nihilo*. Expanding on these insights, collective political action cracks the institution of the real via interrogation, and creatively rearticulates or gives form to the field of the possible to alter the institution of the world to bring about movement in history. Nevertheless, Castoriadis did not explicitly develop this line of thought *vis-à-vis* the interpretative aspect inherent in *opening* the institution for explicit political alteration; indeed, he flatly dismissed hermeneutic approaches to creation and world-formation in 'Done and to be Done' (1997b [1989]: 363-364; see also Adams 2007: 51). However, this interpretative undercurrent arguably operates within his elucidation of the doing of the political project of autonomy, or *la politique*. As Castoriadis defines it, *la politique* is the explicit mode of *self-interrogation* that calls the established institution of society into question, in order for society to explicitly *re-institute* the institution of the world (Castoriadis 1991a: 159-160, 169, 174; see also Section 3.1). The political project of autonomy in this way intertwines the interrogative, interpretative element that *opens* the institution to alteration with the creative re-articulation of the institution of the world. As such, I argue that

for Castoriadis, political action is as much *world-opening* (via interpretation) as it is *world-forming*—*la politique* must therefore incorporate an interpretative dimension within the creative doing of collective political world-alteration.

Castoriadis's remarks on 'opening' the instituted imaginary additionally connect with his understanding of the openings *within* the institution of the world and the interrelation of the 'real' and the 'possible' (see Sections 3.2, 3.3, and 3.4). This aspect of Castoriadis's thinking was not systematically developed. However, it indicates a tension between his strong notion of creation *ex nihilo* and the implicit traces of an interpretative, *contextual* account of political doing (which I noted across this chapter; see Sections 3.2 and 3.3, and Subsection 3.4.2). The interpretative and contextual approach highlights that social-historical worlds of meaning are never formed in complete closure: spaces within the institution can be opened for creative re-institution via critique. Moreover, and importantly, this notion of opening the institution of the world onto an under-determined field of possibility offers a more modest approach to political action and anthropic world (re-)creation than that found in Castoriadis's elucidation of creation *ex nihilo*. Because the human condition is always-already *in-the-world* and within historically articulated world contexts, political action can only ever alter the institution of the world *in part*—*anthropos*, then, are not sovereign world-creators. Rather, collective political action creatively and interpretatively problematizes the institution of the real and to rearticulate the encompassing field of the possible and alter the institution of the world, from a situation *in-the-world*.

I reconstruct Peter Wagner's thought in the next chapter. While Arendt focussed on the anthropological preconditions for political action (Chapter 2), Castoriadis elucidated the institution of worlds of meaning and, as argued in this chapter, their rearticulation through the twofold modes of triggering of cracks in the instituted social imaginary via critique and the re-institution of the world to engender movement in the social-historical. Wagner, in turn, centres his analysis on the problematic of modernity. Wagner draws on broadly hermeneutic-

phenomenological thematics to elaborate an understanding of the succession of plural forms of modernity via political projects. Although Wagner does not systematically develop a theory of political action *per se*, this can be extrapolated from his remarks on political ‘projects of world-making’ (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a) which, I argue, comprises two interconnected dimensions of ‘critique’ and ‘reconstruction’. I undertake this reconstruction of Wagner’s political and historical-sociological approach to world-altering collective political doing in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FOUR

PETER WAGNER: CRITIQUE AND RECONSTRUCTION WITHIN POLITICAL PROJECTS OF WORLD-MAKING

This study pursues a theoretical understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action to address the question, ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ As detailed in Chapter 1 of this thesis, this project draws on the hermeneutic-phenomenological problematic of the world. These debates emphasise the encounter with and articulation of the world-horizon—with its intertwined elements of ‘world-interpretation’ and ‘world-formation’—at the collective level of sociality, as an elementary possibility of the anthropological condition *in-the-world*. From this hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, I then reconstruct and comparatively critique the works of Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Peter Wagner. Chapter 2 focussed on Arendt’s philosophical anthropological approach to the world-forming aspects of political action in the mode of ‘new beginnings’. For Arendt, the human conditions of ‘natality’ and ‘plurality’ *in-the-world* form the preconditions of politics and the possibility for world formation, through which political action ‘begins’ the world ‘anew’. Chapter 3 concentrated on Castoriadis’s work. While Castoriadis’s thought drew attention to the articulation of institutions of meaning as a world-forming mode of collective doing, the reconstruction also revealed an implicit interpretative dimension that centred on ‘opening’ the institution of the world via interpretative modes of critique. In this vein, I argued in Chapter 3 that, for Castoriadis, collective political doing comprises both the world-opening modes of critical interpretation and the world-forming elements of the creative re-institution of the world.

The present chapter analyses Wagner’s historical-sociological and political philosophical approach to the world-altering aspects of collective political action. While Arendt and Castoriadis’s political theories emerged from their direct experiences of the rise of fascism and the collapse of the European Left, Peter Wagner (1956–) belongs to a later

generation. Foremost, Wagner is a theorist of modernity. He developed his comparative historical-sociological approach to modernity through dialogues with key thinkers in the social theoretical tradition, building upon his postgraduate degrees in political science at the Freie Universität in Berlin. In particular, Wagner reconsidered the possibility of different trajectories of modernity in light of postmodernist rejections of the social determinism in neo-functional modernization debates in his first major work, *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (1994a; cf. Wagner 1992: 468, 1994a: 13, 150, 164, 2012: 12). Wagner furthered his understanding of modernity in encounter with the multiple modernities field—pioneered chiefly by SN Eisenstadt and Johann Arnason—and by drawing on Castoriadis’s work (1987c [1975]), and Reinhart Koselleck (2004 [1985]) within the history of ideas.⁸¹ The implicit political theory within Wagner’s theorisation of modernity, moreover, leans on the contemporary tradition of Critical Theory, including Luc Boltanski’s conception of critique (2011 [2009]; see also Boltanski & Thévenot 1999, 2000) and Axel Honneth’s notion of recognition (1996; see also Fraser & Honneth 2003). Through these dialogues, Wagner developed his approach to socio-cultural and plural varieties of modernities (see Wagner 2008a, 2009) which self-alter across time via collective modes of critique and reconstruction.

Wagner’s work is apt for the present inquiry into the world-altering dimensions of collective political action because it speaks to the three criteria outlined in Chapter 1 of this thesis. First, as this chapter demonstrates, Wagner’s elucidation of ‘successive’ and ‘plural’ modernities operates on an understanding of the alteration of social worlds through collective political doing.⁸² The reconstruction reveals early traces of this line of thought from in Wagner’s first major work, which continues through to his most recent writings. This notion of world-altering collective doing can be understood as projects of ‘world-making’. Second, Wagner develops this approach in dialogue with hermeneutic and phenomenological traditions of thought. With Nathalie Karagiannis (2007a), Wagner draws on Jean-Luc Nancy and Hannah Arendt—each situated within the phenomenological movement, broadly construed—

to detail the notion of ‘world-making’ (2007a: 2-3; I return to this, see especially Subsection 4.4.1). This expands upon his earlier understanding of common worlds as ‘spaces of experience and interpretation’ (Wagner 2008a), which leans on Arnason (e.g. 1992, 1993) and Charles Taylor (1985). Third, the problematic of modernity is the *leitmotif* of Wagner’s intellectual project. For Wagner, modernity is patterned by the imaginary significations of ‘autonomy’ and ‘rational mastery’ (I outline Wagner’s theory of modernity in Section 4.1 below; see e.g. 1994a: 18, 2001b: 167-168, 2012: 22). Through these imaginary articulations of the modern condition, Wagner contends that modernity can be broadly understood as ‘the societal condition under which human beings realise their autonomy and, by doing so, increasingly master and control the world’ (2001b: 167; cf. 2001c: 38). Wagner’s remarks here indicate that the modern imaginary of autonomy engenders a particular relation or stance toward the world, as a socio-cultural precondition for modes of collective political doing. On these grounds, Wagner’s thought is appropriate for the current task of analysing the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. As Wagner put it, in short: an understanding of freedom—particularly political freedom—‘raises the question of action as making a difference in the world’ (2001a: 5768).

The present reconstruction of Wagner’s work stands apart from other readings of his thought because it considers his implicit political theory from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective. In particular, Wagner’s understanding of political action—specifically: the world-interpreting and world-forming dimensions that intertwine within political projects of ‘world-making’—remains little remarked in the literature. A hermeneutic-phenomenological analysis of his political sociological theory can help to address this. Two general fields of debate surround Wagner’s thought. The first pertains to Wagner’s elucidation of modernity. Wagner’s focus on the imaginary dimensions of modernity and anchoring of his analysis within history is seen as a ‘crucial theoretical move’ because it highlights the ‘cultural and symbolic reality’ of modernity (Carleheden 2010: 53), in contrast to approaches that focus

on its philosophical discourse, such as that by Jürgen Habermas (1987b; see also Cannon 2016: 50; Carleheden 2006, 2010).⁸³ In light of this, scholars discuss Wagner's thought in relation to the plural cultural forms of modernity (see Jung & Sinclair 2015: 26; Larrain 2007: 41; Kaya 2014: 202; Mota & Delanty 2015: 44) as well as its varied historical trajectories (Arnason 2003: 47-48; Carleheden & Borch 2010: 5-6).

The second broad field of debate relates to Wagner's notion of critique. His encounter with Boltanski on this thematic has been noted (Blokker & Brighenti 2011: 286; Møen 2014: 581, 583; Sassatelli 2002: 170). Paul Blokker expanded upon both Boltanski and Wagner (as well as Castoriadis and Lefort; see Blokker 2014c) to sketch a 'political critique of capitalism' (Blokker 2014a: 262-265) to discuss the recent crises of the European Union (see also Blokker & Brighenti 2011). While Blokker focussed on Wagner's Boltanskian approach to critique, Magnus Wennerheg (2010) notes the element of 'contestation' at play in Wagner's successive modernities framework. Leaning on Wagner to analyse the Global Justice Movement, Wennerheg (2010: 26) argues that Wagner's theory focusses on the 'role that social movements have played during ... periods of contestation and renegotiation', which bring about the succession of forms of modernities by challenging and renegotiating institutions; yet, Wennerheg does not develop this insight further. Each in their own way, Blokker and Wennerheg draw attention to the mode of 'critique' and 'contestation' in Wagner's thought as a kind of political doing, broadly speaking. This highlights an opening for further consideration, which I take up in this study. Indeed, the notion of critique or contestation—and, importantly, its complementary form of political doing in 'reconstruction'—are constant problematics in Wagner's thought, from his earliest to his most recent work (as I show in this chapter). These dimensions of collective political doing have not yet been analysed as formative aspects within Wagner's elucidation of projects of 'world-making'; likewise, Wagner's approach to 'world-making' hitherto has not been considered from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, nor as a theory of collective political action. To my knowledge,

this is the first systematic reconstruction of Wagner's overarching intellectual project.⁸⁴ The present reconstruction takes a unique approach to Wagner's thought, which both draws upon but stands apart from other debates surrounding his work through its focus on collective political world-making. As such, it is an important contribution to this emerging field.

The intention of this reconstruction is to develop a theoretical understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action, in response to the question: 'how can collective political action make a difference in the world?' In this light, the works selected for analysis have a particular focus. Although the problematic of modernity predominates Wagner's work, I concentrate specifically on his (often implicit) reflections on political action, social movements, critique, reconstruction, interpretation, imagination, solidarity and collective agency, as well as the world problematic and his approach to 'world-making'. The reconstruction divides Wagner's intellectual project into three periods; the organisation of this chapter corresponds to these parts of Wagner's work. Section 4.2 concentrates on Wagner's elucidation of his successive modernities framework from his first major work, *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (1994a). The second period deals with his thinking from 2000 to 2008/2009, which I discuss in Section 4.3.⁸⁵ In this time, Wagner leans on interpretative debates to develop his understanding of 'cultures of modernity' as 'spaces of experience and interpretation'. The third considers Wagner's work between 2007 and 2016 (see Section 4.4). In this period, the question of the world becomes more explicit in Wagner's thought, in the wake of his announcement of the notion of 'varieties of world-making' alongside Karagiannis in 2007 (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a). While Wagner draws on hermeneutic traditions of thought between 2000 and 2008/2009, he leans on phenomenological thinkers (such as Arendt and Nancy, in addition to Nelson Goodman and Castoriadis) to advance his notion of world-making after 2007. Wagner has published his work in a number of languages (especially French and German). However, the present reconstruction is limited to English-language publications. Yet I do not restrict the analysis to Wagner's sole authored works; I also consider

his co-authored works in this reconstruction, particularly those with Heidrun Frieze and Nathalie Karagiannis.

The following reconstruction draws on the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the anthropic articulation of the world-horizon—with its intertwined aspects of world-interpretation and world-formation—to analyse Wagner’s approach to the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. The reconstruction reveals that two interconnected elements of political action emerge within collective political projects of ‘world-making’: world-interpreting ‘critique’; and, ‘reconstruction’, as a mode of world-forming creative doing. In this analysis, the critique of the instituted order forms the precondition for the reconstruction or re-creation of the institution of the social world, which brings about historical change. For Wagner, the interpretative moment of political doing is creative: the rearticulation of collective bonds and shared understandings via ‘critique’ forms part of the ‘reconstruction’ of the social world. Nevertheless, a tension arises in Wagner’s elucidation of collective political action as projects of ‘world-making’ (with its dimensions of critique and reconstruction). On the one hand, Wagner and Karagiannis contend that the ‘constant rebirth’ of the world is ‘the characteristic of political action’ in their sketch of ‘varieties of world-making’ (2007a: 2). In this, political action begins *in-the-world*—both within historically articulated contexts, and the encompassing meta-horizon that forms the common ground of the human condition—to bring about the ‘rebirth’ of the world. To be re-born is to begin again, or begin anew; this necessarily incorporates an interpretative element within the doing of historical re-creation. On the other hand, constructivist elements underlie Wagner’s discussion of *reconstruction* and *world-making*. This constructivism abstracts the human condition from its situation *in-the-world*, and instead renders *anthropos* as sovereign world-makers. Wagner’s emphasis on reconstruction, moreover, runs the risk of reducing the creativity of political doing to a predetermined *telos* in its mode of ‘fabrication’. Hence, a central argument developed through this chapter is that Wagner does not fully clarify this tension between the

interpretative-creative ‘re-birth’ or alteration of the world via political action, and its constructivist ‘reconstruction’ by omnipotent ‘world-makers’. This tension is clear in Wagner and Karagiannis’s citation of Nelson Goodman, where they write: ‘Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already at hand; the making is a remaking’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 3; cf. Goodman 1978: 6).

This chapter consists of five main sections. Following an introductory discussion of Wagner’s theory of modernity and notion of ‘world-making’ in Section 4.1, Section 4.2 commences the reconstruction proper. There, I analyse Wagner’s first elucidations of the world-altering aspects of political action and the elements of critique and reconstruction in his theorisation of ‘successive modernities’ in *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (1994a). In Section 4.3, I focus on Wagner’s works from 2000 through to 2008/2009, and split this section into three subsections to track a cluster of important problematics. I contend in Subsection 4.3.1 that traces of a hermeneutic turn emerge through this period of Wagner’s thought as he sketches his approach to ‘cultures of modernity’, which he later recasts as ‘spaces of experience and interpretation’. I reconstruct the political notions of critique and reconstruction as they develop in Wagner’s thinking from 2000 to 2008/2009 in Subsection 4.3.2. I draw on this analysis to undertake an excursus on Wagner and Karagiannis’s theory of ‘synagonism’ (2005) in Subsection 4.3.3. On first glance, the notion of ‘synagonism’ appears as the most explicit treatise on political doing in Wagner’s trajectory; yet, as I argue in the excursus, ‘synagonism’ does not deliver a theory of political action *per se*. Moreover, Wagner does not fully incorporate ‘synagonism’ into his own approach, as the notion of ‘synagonism’ resurfaces only in traces in Wagner’s work thereafter (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2013: 386 n.31; Wagner 2006: 34 n. 3, 2008a: 280 n. 3). Section 4.4 reconstructs Wagner’s works from between 2007 to 2016. This furthers the analysis of Wagner’s reflections on ‘world-making’ and the problematic of the world (Subsection 4.4.1) by focussing on the political doing of critique and reconstruction (Subsection 4.4.2), and considering these elements through

Wagner's discussion of the South African democratisation project (Subsection 4.4.3). Finally, I gather the insights of the chapter into a concluding discussion in Section 4.5.

4.1. A Note on Wagner's Theory of Modernity and Approach to Modern Projects of World-Making

Before undertaking the reconstruction proper—which centres on Wagner's understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action—it is helpful to detail key aspects of Wagner's theoretical framework regarding the problematic of modernity. First, I draw attention to Wagner's elucidation of modernity as patterned by the social imaginaries of 'autonomy' and 'mastery', leaning on Castoriadis and Arnason. Second, I highlight the role of this framework within Wagner and Karagiannis's co-authored sketch of varieties of 'world-making' in 2007. This overview frames the ensuing reconstruction of Wagner's approach to 'world-making' in Sections 4.2, 4.3 and 4.4, which, as I argue in this chapter, intertwines the connected elements of 'critique' and 'reconstruction'.

Wagner's approach to modernity brings philosophical and social theoretical debates into dialogue with historical-sociological analysis. Most simply, modernity can here be understood as 'the societal condition under which human beings realise their autonomy and, by doing so, increasingly master and control the world' (Wagner 2001b: 167; cf. 2001c: 38). Wagner leans on Castoriadis and Arnason to develop an understanding of modernity as a socio-cultural horizon patterned by the dual imaginary significations of 'autonomy' and 'mastery' (I return to this; see Wagner 1994a: 18, 2001b: 167-168, 2001f: 4, 2001d: 9951, 2001c: 38, 2001e: 4, 2012: 22). In Wagner's formulation, the imaginary significations form the socio-cultural lens through which modern societies interpretatively address what he terms the 'three *problématiques*': the epistemic, economic, and the political (2001b: 172, 2001f: 7, 2001e: 8, 2012: 74).⁸⁶ The *problématiques* are inescapable questions to which all societies must institute a response, the answers to which necessarily remain open to autonomous re-institution (Wagner 2001b: 171, 2001c: 42, 2001e: 8, 12, 2005b: 68, 2008a: 12-13, 2009: 264, 2012: 74-75,

2016b: 90). Additionally, Wagner argues that two components underpin the modern imaginary significations: the autonomy of the singular human being as a knowing and acting subject; and, the 'rationality of the world, i.e. its perceived intelligibility' (2001b: 168, 2001c: 38, 2001e: 4; cf. Wagner 1994a: 175, 2009: 252, 2012: 22).⁸⁷ In this way, Wagner argues that the modern condition is that in which 'human beings think of themselves as setting their own rules' (2001c: 38, 2001e: 4), without external foundation or guarantors (Wagner 2001b: 168, 2001f: 17, 2001c: 38, 2001e: 4, 2007a: 249, 2008a: 113, 2012: 22).

Noted above, Wagner draws his notion of the imaginary significations of modernity from Castoriadis's thought (see Wagner 1994a: 13-14, 22, 1995, 2001b: 94, 167-168, 2001c: 38, 2001e: 4, 81, 2008a: 10, 73, 246, 2009: 252, 2012: 22, 61, 73).⁸⁸ Wagner's reinterpretation of Castoriadis's elucidation of the modern imaginary significations (see e.g. Castoriadis 1997a [1992]: 39) is arguably more Arnasonian in character, than it is Castoriadian. Wagner draws on the notion of the dual modern social imaginaries to rethink the modern horizon as 'an interpretative space that is to be specifically filled in each socio-historic situation through struggles over the situation-grounded appropriate meaning' (Wagner 2001b: 167, 169; cf. 2001b: 171, 2001d: 9950, 2001c: 42, 2007a: 255, Wagner 2007b: 101, 2008a: 10, 2009: 253, 2012: 23). This broadly aligns with Arnason's approach. Arnason contends that the entanglement and tension between the dual imaginaries 'opens up a space for the structured conflicts of interpretations' (1989a: 337), such that modernity can be characterised as a 'field of tensions between divergent interpretations (Arnason 1991a: 205). Leaning on Arnason, Wagner argues that an interpretative perspective 'provides the ground for an understanding of the variety of possible forms of modernity' (2009: 254). This approach highlights the 'constitutive openness' of modernity to interpretative articulation on the basis that the '*history* of modernity knows both plurality and possibility' (Wagner 2001e: 7, 8, emphasis in original; cf. Friese & Wagner 2000: 35; Wagner 1999: 52-53, 2001b: 169, 2001f: 11, 2001d: 9950, 9953, 2001c: 41, 42).

Wagner expands upon this broadly interpretative approach to modernity in dialogue with Charles Taylor, also. In particular, Wagner draws on Taylor's understanding of *anthropos* as 'self-interpreting animals' (Taylor 1985: 45-76, 189, 191; cf. Wagner 2008b: 359); however, Wagner does not fully clarify the Taylorian influence upon his thinking. For Taylor, interpretation is 'an essential part of our existence' as self-interpreting animals. From his perspective, 'selves' are constituted through reflexive self-interpretation and by 'the language and culture' that is 'maintained and renewed in the communities he is part of' (Taylor 1985: 65, 8; cf. 72, 75, 60). In Taylor's account, self-interpretations are articulated through the 'web of interlocution' that forms the background assumptions of the world within which human beings 'always-already' find themselves (Taylor 1985: 8-9; see also Baynes 2010: 455, 452). In this analysis, Taylor links socio-cultural self-interpretations to language or patterns of shared narratives, which 'not only serve to *depict* ourselves and the world' but also '*constitute* our lives' (Taylor 1985: 10, emphasis in original) as they articulate background 'frameworks' that give shape to social life (Taylor 2010 [1989]: 25-26, 28, 33, 41).⁸⁹ Wagner's approach intertwines Arnason's hermeneutic understanding of modernity with Taylor's remarks on the interpretative aspects of human experience. Wagner writes that, as 'self-interpreting beings', we 'ascribe values to our action and experience our world and fellow human beings in an interpretative fashion' (Wagner 2008b: 359; cf. 2009: 264). This highlights that, for Wagner, the horizon of modernity remains open to plural possibilities of rearticulation (as noted above). At the same time, the traces of Taylor's notion of 'self-interpreting animals' in Wagner's thought hint that, in his analysis, 'social transformations are then reinterpretations of situations' (Wagner 2003: 177) brought about through 'the interpretative engagement of human beings with the situation they find themselves in' (2015b: 111), as a mode of collective human agency.

This forms the conceptual background for Wagner and Karagiannis's elucidation of 'varieties of world-making' (2007a). Wagner first sketched 'world-making' in a reconsideration

of globalization in a passing remark in 2005. There, Wagner contended that ‘globalization will need to be understood as world-making’, as ‘a dispute over varieties of possible modernities ... acted out on the global level’ (2005a: 54; cf. Wagner 2012: 163). Karagiannis and Wagner extrapolate this argument in their introductory response to globalization debates in *Varieties of Worldmaking: Beyond Globalization* (2007a; I discuss Karagiannis and Wagner’s approach to world-making further in Section 4.4.1). In brief, they reconfigure Goodman’s understanding of *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978) in dialogue with Arendt (1998 [1958]) and Nancy (2007 [2002]) to propose a notion of ‘varieties of world-making’, which rests on the ‘idea of diverse projects of giving meaning to the world’ in modernity’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 3). It is important to note for now that Karagiannis and Wagner broadly present ‘world-making’ as a collective project of political self-determination that is open to plural socio-cultural articulations. As noted in the introductory part of this chapter, Karagiannis and Wagner hint at the political element of world-making in their remark that the ‘constant rebirth’ of the world ‘is the characteristic of political action’ (2007a: 2). Yet, they do not systematically develop a theory of political doing *qua* world-making in their co-authored chapter on world-making; nor does Wagner explicitly pursue a theory of political action in his *opus* more broadly. The task, then, is to reconstruct the traces of an understanding of the world-altering aspects of collective political action from Wagner’s work. With the above discussion of Wagner’s theoretical framework of modernity (in its imaginary and interpretative dimensions) and the definition of projects of ‘world-making’ in mind, I commence the analysis of Wagner’s latent political theory in the next section.

4.2. Wagner’s Early Thought: Successive Modernities via Protest and Critique

The objective of this section is to reconstruct the emerging traces of Wagner’s political theory from his first major work, *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (1994a). I pursue this analysis by adopting a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective, which centres on the

interconnected dimensions of ‘world-interpretation’ and ‘world-formation’ that arise through the anthropic encounter with the world. *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* is significant in that Wagner outlines his approach to ‘successive modernities’ in this work. He classifies the forms of modernity as ‘Restricted Liberal Modernity’, ‘Organized Modernity’, and ‘Extended Liberal Modernity’, the latter of which continues to the present (Wagner 1994a: 16-18, 37, 48-51, 55, 57, 68, 118-119, 125-138). Indeed, Wagner carries this understanding of successive modernities through to his most recent work (e.g. 2012: 28-40, 2015b: 111-118). The reconstruction of *Liberty and Discipline* reveals two connected insights in particular. First, Wagner links the alteration of history (and hence the succession of forms of modernity) to the collective critique of the instituted order, which, in his analysis, triggers a ‘crisis’ in the institution. While the moment of crisis has a dissolving effect on the institution of society, Wagner also sketches an understanding of the complementary movement of ‘institution building’ as the re-creative dimension of collective political doing. Second, Wagner suggests that political critique and the subsequent crisis are prefigured by a rearticulation of collective identities and common interpretative patterns. I discuss these points together here. Although Wagner does not systematically pursue an understanding of collective political action *per se* in *Liberty and Discipline*, his remarks indicate an early, implicit notion of the transformation of history via collective political modes of critique and ‘institution building’. This line of thought continues in Wagner’s work, as I will show later in Sections 4.3 and 4.4.

Wagner anchors his elucidation of the succession of forms of Western modernity in *Liberty and Discipline* in a historical-sociological analysis of the rise of varied social movements that challenged the instituted order—specifically, the 1848 Worker’s Movement, as well as the 1968 Student Movement.⁹⁰ In Wagner’s analysis, the crisis that arose in the wake of the French Revolution through to ‘1848’ brought about the alteration of ‘Restricted Liberal’ modernity into ‘Organised’ modernity, via the rise of the working class and progressive responses to the ‘Social Question’ (Wagner 1994a: 16). As Wagner argues, ‘The social question incited the

construction of a new, partial collective identity inside modernity', which challenged the institution of restricted political liberties (Wagner 1994a: 50). Wagner here indicates that the collective rearticulation of responses to the economic *problématique* (in the 'Social Question') coincided with the formation of new common identities, which combined latent, pre-existing modes of understanding or 'cultural materials' in the act of 'rebuilding' shared identities (see 1994a: 50-51, 189-192).

Significant in this analysis is Wagner's contention that these newly formed common bonds challenged the established institution of society. In places, Wagner remarks that these new identities were 'constructed'; yet he also designates them as 'imagined' or 'imaginary communities', noting Benedict Arnason's work (see Wagner 1994a: 50, 187-188, 205 n. 44; see also Anderson 1991). The struggle between competing narratives in the first crisis of modernity—such as the conflict between the working class and the bourgeoisie—for Wagner 'disembedded' the collectivity from former 'identity-providing social contexts' (1994a: 56; cf. 187-188). Members of the community were then 're-embedded' into the newly created social identities and emerging institutional figurations, which paved the way for the re-institution of society (Wagner 1994a: 56-57, 123). As Wagner presents it, the critical reinterpretation of the instituted social order (such as inequality of citizenship) triggered a moment of 'crisis', which led to the rearticulation of common socio-political bonds in the wake of the critical 'disembedding'.

Wagner's sketch of 'institution building' and its interconnection with collective modes of critique emerges most clearly in his discussion of '1968' in *Liberty and Discipline*. Although he does not detail the interlinking of critique and 'institution building' at length, his remarks indicate the first traces of his understanding of the twofold dimensions of collective political action. For Wagner, the 1968 Student Movement marked the second crisis of modernity. The movement of '1968' made apparent that 'the dissolving effects of modernity stem from the activities of human beings', as 'an explicitly formulated, collectively pursued social [and

political] project' (Wagner 1994a: 144). Wagner draws on his understanding of the formation of new common identities and the critical reinterpretation of the instituted order to analyse '1968'. In Wagner's analysis, '1968' was characterised by two key objectives. On the one hand, the dissent *against* Organized Modernity sought to interrupt instituted socio-political practices; on the other, the project endeavoured to create a new collective 'historical Subject' (Wagner 1994a: 143). The two objectives facilitated the political project of overall societal renewal by mobilizing collective agency 'from below' to question 'representations' in an attempt to break-up the instituted order (Wagner 1994a: 142-143). Where the workers movements of 1848 resulted in institutional change (in the form of widened citizenship), '1968' in Wagner's view did not achieve a similar outcome in its project of 'institution building'. Wagner argues that the 1968 movement disembedded collective identities from the instituted order, but failed 'to re-embed' the collectivity into new shared identity patterns and institutions (1994a: 123-124, 141-145, 162-163). As such, Wagner concludes that '1968' was a missed opportunity: it did not reinstitute society (via 'institution building') in light of the new, common identity patterns articulated through the problematisation of the instituted institution.

This section reconstructed the implicit theory of political action within Wagner's reflections on the succession of forms of Western modernity in *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (1994a). Although Wagner neither explicitly nor systematically pursued a notion of political action *per se* in this work, two connected insights were particularly significant: the interrelation of critique, crisis, and institutional alteration; and, the formation of new common identities via political doing. The analysis unearthed traces of an understanding of the interplay of critique and the re-formation of the institution of the social world via 'institution building'. As noted above, critique engenders a moment of 'crisis'. 'Crisis' here refers to the event of socio-historical transformation, brought about through the critique of the instituted order and its subsequent rearticulation. Wagner carries through this notion of crisis and critique within his approach to successive modernities across his trajectory, as I show across this chapter.

Expanding on Wagner's early thinking here, 'critique' denotes the critical reinterpretation of the institution of society that effectively 'disembeds' common identities and triggers a crisis in meaning-providing contexts, which, in so doing, creatively articulates new modes of commonality. Wagner notes in places that these are newly formed 'imagined' communities, drawing on Anderson (1991); however, he does not pursue this further than a passing remark. 'Institution building', in turn, relates to the creative re-institution of society into a new, different form of modernity, as effective socio-historical alteration. Yet, compared with his discussion of modes of collective critique, Wagner did not thoroughly detail the aspect of 'institution building' in *Liberty and Discipline*.

Indeed, the notion of 'critique' often overshadows that of 'institution building' (or, 'reconstruction') in the next part of Wagner's thinking, too. As I will show in the next section, Wagner advances this understanding of the interpretative dimension of critique and rethinks his approach to common bonds and identity formation in dialogue with hermeneutic debates. In this, Wagner comes to emphasise the interpretative relation of *anthropos* to the world, and the reflexive reinterpretation of sedimented institutions via political doing. I consider these elements of Wagner's thought from 2000 to 2008/2009 in the next section.

4.3. Critique, World-Interpretation, and Synagonism: Wagner's Work between 2000 and 2008/2009

The analysis of *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* in Section 4.2, above, revealed the early lines of Wagner's understanding of the world-altering aspects of political action.

Specifically, his work highlighted that the critical reinterpretation of the institution of the world triggers a crisis in the instituted order, which commences the movement of socio-historical world alteration. As noted in Section 4.2, Wagner linked the doing of collective critique to the rearticulation of common bonds and new patterns of shared identity. Wagner's sketch of the elements of critique and common bonds, however, were more developed than his remarks on 'institution building' in *Liberty and Discipline*. This emphasis on the interpretative dimension of

political critique carries through to his work from 2000 to 2008/2009,⁹¹ which I reconstruct in this section.

The present discussion is split into three subsections. First, I consider Wagner's emerging notion of 'world-interpretation'. I argue in Subsection 4.3.1 that Wagner takes an implicit hermeneutical turn in his work after 2000. In this, Wagner (also with Heidrun Friese) expounds an understanding of the ongoing (re-)formation of common worlds via the interpretative doing of *anthropos* that rearticulates historical patterns and bonds in the present. This highlights that, for Wagner, common worlds and the historical field are permanently open to (re-)interpretation. This developing approach to world-interpretation paves the way for Wagner's characterisation of modernity as 'spaces of experience and interpretation' (2008a, 2009), and, moreover, for Wagner's elucidation of political critique.

I analyse Wagner's more overtly political writings from 2000 to 2008/2009 in Subsection 4.3.2. There, Wagner sketches an understanding of the interplay between 'critique' and 'reconstruction' in projects of political action. I contrast the findings of the reconstruction of Wagner's political thought in Subsection 4.3.2 against the theory of 'synagonism' that he and Nathalie Karagiannis develop in 2005 in an excursus in Subsection 4.3.3. The theory of 'synagonism' appears as the most explicit discussion of 'politics' (broadly speaking) in Wagner's trajectory. However, the excursus highlights a disjuncture between 'synagonism' and the approach to world-interpreting modes of critique and world-forming reconstruction developed in Wagner's project. After this discussion, I turn to Wagner's thought between 2007 and 2016 in Section 4.4, within which the notion of 'world-making' becomes explicit.

4.3.1. Wagner's Implicit Hermeneutic Turn: Interpretative Doing and the Rearticulation of Common Worlds

The task of this subsection is to reconstruct Wagner's developing hermeneutical approach by drawing particular attention to his remarks on the reinterpretation of historical patterns in the present to reshape common worlds and shared bonds. This reveals an understanding of

common worlds and history as open, interpretative horizons. Wagner's implicit hermeneutical shift in this period leans on Arnason, Taylor, and Reinhart Koselleck. I analyse Wagner's emerging notion of world-interpreting doing through a cluster of works from 2000 to 2008/2009. This includes 'When "the Light of the Great Cultural Problems Moves on": On the Possibility of a Cultural Theory of Modernity' (Frieze & Wagner 2000b), 'Culture' (Frieze & Wagner 2001a), *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation: A New Sociology of Modernity* (Wagner 2008a), and, 'Does Europe Have a Cultural Identity?' (Wagner 2008b). Three interconnected insights emerge from the reconstruction: Wagner's sketch of the formation of common worlds through interpretation; indications of a notion of world-interpretation as a mode of collective doing; and, an understanding of the openness of the world and the historical field to reinterpretation and thus alteration. I argue this hermeneutic approach provides the frame for Wagner's elucidation of political doing as world-interpreting critique; I consider Wagner's political writings from this period later in Subsection 4.3.2.

Wagner's co-authored essays with Heidrun Frieze, titled 'When "the Light of the Great Cultural Problems Moves on": On the Possibility of a Cultural Theory of Modernity' (2000b) and 'Culture' (2001a),⁹² mark a critical moment in Wagner's intellectual trajectory: they reveal the first traces of a hermeneutical shift in Wagner's thought. In both texts, Wagner and Frieze debate the so-called cultural turn in the human sciences. They argue that the cultural turn successfully challenged prior approaches that rested on an understanding of pre-constituted and unchanging communities (2000b: 27) that base modes of commonality within patterns of significance formed in the distant past (see also Wagner 2010c: 11, 2010a: 299, 2012: 68, 71-72, 153-154).⁹³ In light of these debates, Frieze and Wagner sketch a notion of 'cultures of modernity' (2000b: 33-37). What is significant is their emphasis on the formation of common worlds via the rearticulation of shared bonds and interpretative doing in the present. In 'When the Light...', Frieze and Wagner contend that cultural bonds are 'no longer ... the mere effect of a pre-existing commonality'—rather, 'it is the singular human beings who create and

produce the interpretations, even though in a social situation with the interpretative resources at hand' (2000b: 28). They reiterate this point in 'Culture'. There, Friese and Wagner argue that the articulation of common bonds (which leans on 'shared histories') is 'an operation that is always performed in the respective present' (2001a: 126). Traces of a notion of world-interpreting doing are evident here. They continue:

It ['common history'] is a specific representation of the past, reworking it with a view to creating commonalities. As such ... it may create the idea of belonging among human beings in the present. But it is not the past, as 'common history', that produces this effect, but the present interaction between those who propose to see the past as shared and those who are convinced by this reasoning and accept it for their own orientation in the social world (Friese & Wagner 2001a: 126).

As Friese and Wagner propose it here, human beings in the present form 'cultures of modernity' via the rearticulation of socio-cultural bonds and the reflexive reinterpretation of common histories (2000b: 32). This arguably forms the conceptual frame for Wagner's elucidation of the world as the 'common world' in his works beyond the year 2000 (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 6, 7, 10; Wagner 2001b: 106, 119-120, 127, 146, 159, 2001f: 23, 2002a: 37, 2006: 26, 2007a: 253, 2008a: 236-238, 2010e: 223, 2012: 67). This formulation of the active, collective interpretation of the past and the world in the present, moreover, resurfaces in Wagner's works after this period (see Wagner 2003: 172, 177, 2005b: 47-48, 54, 2006: 34, 2009: 257); however, Wagner does not treat this notion of world-interpreting doing as a theme in its own right.

Yet, in contrast to Arnason's (1992) trans-subjective notion of 'cultural articulations of the world' (see also Section 1.1, Chapter 1), Friese and Wagner consider 'the creation of a "cultural bond" to another human being' an 'intersubjective act', as 'the production of intersubjective meaning' (2000b: 28). This intersubjective 'production' of meaning performs an integrative function through the formation of cultural bonds (see Friese & Wagner 2000b: 28). They do not develop this point here. Yet, this notion resurfaces in Wagner's later writings. In *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation* (2008a) and 'Does Europe Have a Cultural Identity?'

(2008b), Wagner elucidates the world as common ‘spaces of experience and interpretation’. In ‘Does Europe Have a Cultural Identity?’ in particular, Wagner anchors this approach to common worlds in an understanding of *anthropos* as ‘self-interpreting beings’ (2008b: 359), leaning on Taylor’s anthropological configuration of ‘self-interpreting animals’ (1985: 45-76; see also Section 4.1, above). Wagner echoes his earlier sketch of world-interpreting doing when he argues that as ‘self-interpreting beings’, ‘we ... ascribe values to our action and experience our world and fellow human beings in an interpretative fashion’ (2008b: 359; cf. Wagner 2009: 264). Later in ‘Does Europe Have a Cultural Identity?’, Wagner adds that the collective (re-)interpretations of shared historical experiences overlap ‘like archaeological layers—layers of time’, and shift ‘in the light of new experiences and new interpretations’ (Wagner 2008b: 360; cf. 2009: 257, 262).

Wagner does not fully expand upon these ideas here, or elsewhere in his trajectory. Nevertheless, these remarks point generally to an understanding of the reflexive rearticulation of the common, historical world as anchored in the interpretative dimension of the anthropological condition, as ‘self-interpreting beings’. However, the emphasis on *self*-interpretation in this analysis obscures the fact that Wagner’s elucidation of interpretation pertains to the reinterpretation of *the world*—of historical patterns and the shared context of the present—not *the self*, as the above discussion demonstrates. Wagner does not clarify this in his writings here. Furthermore, these sketches additionally highlight that, for Wagner, common meaning formation (via the rearticulation of historical patterns) transpires at the intersubjective level of sociality via modes of world-interpreting doing—in contradistinction to Arnason’s trans-subjective approach to culture, for example (see Arnason 1992, 1993, 2003; and Adams 2009b). Wagner’s discussion of the reinterpretation of common bonds suggests that this actually arises at the collective level of sociality (as ‘intersubjectivity’ in its broadest possible sense), rather than through a dialogical mode of intersubjectivity. This remains unclear in his analysis. Yet, Wagner arguably places more emphasis on the configuration of common *bonds*

through the re-formation of common worlds in his discussion, over and above an analysis of the rearticulation of patterns of meaning; indeed, he does not systematically elaborate a theory of cultural meaning in his trajectory. As in *Liberty and Discipline* (1994a; see Section 4.2, above), Wagner draws attention to the intertwining of the reconfiguration of patterns of commonality via the act of reinterpreting common histories in these writings.

In the background of Wagner's analyses of the rearticulation of the common world and reformation of shared bonds in his work from 2000 to 2008/2009 lies a notion of history as open to reinterpretation. Wagner does not fully develop this understanding; however, it is worth noting here. Wagner draws on Koselleck's (2004 [1979]) discussion of the opening of the time horizon in modernity.⁹⁴ Koselleck's work draws attention to the modern notion that modes of human action actively constitute the movement of history. For Koselleck, the remembered past forms the interpretative 'space of experience' in the present, while 'expectation' is 'the future made present' as 'that which is to be revealed' (2004: 259). As Ricoeur remarks of Koselleck's analysis, 'a new future is opened by our new times, we can bend it to our plans, we can make history' (2008a [1985]: 211). Wagner first mentions Koselleck in *Liberty and Discipline* (see Wagner 1994a: 4), and carries through Koselleck's (2004: 256-270) insight of the 'opening of the time horizon' in modernity—or, the modern inauguration of a distance between past and future—through to his more recent works (e.g. Wagner 2001e: 88, 2008b: 360, 364, 2008a: 206, 2012: 28, 152). Wagner also extends the dynamic between the 'horizon of expectations' and the 'space of experience' from Koselleck's thought (e.g. Wagner 2007b: 100, 102 n.6, 2010a: 228, 2012: 61, 153). Koselleck's approach arguably forms part of the background of Wagner's elucidation of the openness of the historical field to reinterpretation. Friese and Wagner's above-mentioned discussion of 'cultures of modernity' points to the collective reinterpretation of the past in the present, which they argue opens a space between the past and the horizon of the future (Friese & Wagner 2001a: 126-127). The present, then, is an open interpretative space, through which latent

possibilities can be articulated to bring about a different future. As Friese and Wagner put it, ‘the present world is neither just there nor predetermined in the past; it is the creation out of a plurality of possibilities which existed at the moment before’ (2001a: 127). In this sense, the present ‘is a moment of openness’ (Wagner 2001e: 88).

The reconstruction of Wagner’s work between 2000 and 2008/2009 in this section revealed an implicit hermeneutic turn after 2000. Although Wagner did not systematically develop the notion of world-interpretation along the lines of a theory of political action in the works under consideration here, I argue that Wagner’s dialogue with hermeneutic thematics formed the conceptual framework for his contemporaneous discussion of political critique (which I consider next in Subsection 4.3.2). In particular, the analysis demonstrated that, for Wagner, world-interpreting doing is undertaken in the present via the reflexive rearticulation common historical patterns and shared bonds. The reconstruction highlighted Wagner’s developing understanding of the openness of common worlds to reinterpretation in the present, which, in turn, is to be understood as an open space for the rearticulation of historical patterns. Wagner’s thinking here draws attention to the creative elements of interpretation in the reconfiguration of common bonds through the reinterpretation of common histories as a form of world-interpreting doing.

Yet, the world-forming aspect of the alteration of the institution of the world arguably remains little remarked by Wagner in this period. Notwithstanding this, Wagner’s incipient notion of world-interpretation—which considers the world and the historical present as an open space for reinterpretation—paves the way for his elucidation of political critique. This builds upon the sketches of critical doing and the reconfiguration of common bonds found in *Liberty and Discipline* (1994a; see Section 4.2) and the writings considered above. I follow this line of Wagner’s thought through his more overtly political writings from 2000 to 2008/2009 in the next subsection.

4.3.2. The Elements of Critique and Reconstruction in Wagner's Elucidations of Socio-Political Change *en Route* to the Announcement of 'Projects of World-Making'

In the above subsection I suggested that Wagner's thought underwent an implicit hermeneutic turn after the year 2000. Through this shift, Wagner detailed an understanding of the interpretative relation of human beings to the world, as the common world patterned by history. In so doing, Wagner elucidated a notion of world-interpreting doing, which centred on the reflexive reinterpretation of the world and history to reconfigure collective bonds in the present. I trace this hermeneutical aspect of Wagner's work through his more explicitly political writings between 2000 and 2008/2009 in this subsection. In particular, I reconstruct Wagner's remarks on political action from his work *A History and Theory of the Social Sciences: Not all that is Solid Melts into Air* (2001b) and contemporaneous works from 2001. However, I focus much of the ensuing analysis on two key political texts from this period: 'The Project of Emancipation and the Possibility of Politics, or, What's Wrong with Post-1968 Individualism?' (Wagner 2002b), and, 'The Political Form of Europe, Europe as Political Form' (Wagner 2005b).

The reconstruction reveals two key insights in relation to Wagner's developing understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. First, Wagner advances his earlier analysis (see Section 4.2 and Subsection 4.3.1) by explicitly articulating the two elements in interplay within collective political doing: critique, and reconstruction. Second, Wagner builds upon this consideration of the twofold aspects of political projects by introducing the notions of 'historicity', 'reflexivity' and 'agentiality', which highlight the interpretative world relation inherent in political action. However, he does not fully develop these ideas. The notion of political critique instead predominates Wagner's discussion in 'The Possibility of Politics...' and 'Political Form...', which overshadows the dimension of reconstruction. Nevertheless, Wagner's formulation of the interconnected elements of political action clears a path for his elucidation of 'projects of world-making' alongside Karagiannis in

2007, as well as his analysis of the South African democratization project (I consider both of these themes later in Section 4.4).

Traces of Wagner's implicit political theory emerge in the chapters on 'Action and Institution' and 'Polity' in *A History and Theory of the Social Sciences: Not All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (2001b: 103-116, 146-159). The question of political action *per se* is not a central focus on the chapter on 'Polity', which is also true for Wagner's other writings on the theme of 'polity' in 2001 (see 2001a: 5768, 5773, 2001f: 23-24, 2001e: 36-59, 2001g: 516). He hints in places that political action is a creative mode of doing that is open to plural possibilities, and hence is unpredictable in its outcome (2001b: 159, 2001a: 5773, 2001e: 39), but does not develop this point. Likewise, Wagner does not systematically develop his own theory of action in 'Action and Institution'. Rather, he undertakes a critical analysis of these ideas in dialogue with the contemporary French sociological tradition of critical theory—in particular, with Luc Boltanski and Laurent Thévenot (see Boltanski & Thévenot 1999, 2000; cf. Boltanski 2011)⁹⁵—which builds upon an earlier encounter with these thinkers from 1994 (see Wagner 1994b).

Nevertheless, Wagner sketches a notion of communicative mode of doing in the chapter on 'Action and Institution', which is premised upon the collective determination of a situation in common (2001b: 106-108). Although Wagner places emphasis on communication here, his analysis arguably continues his earlier reflections on the interpretative dimensions of critique. For Wagner, the collective determination of a situation as one in common simultaneously constitutes social bonds and opens a plurality of perspectives upon the shared situation (2001b: 106, 107-108). Hermeneutic undercurrents also permeate Wagner's thinking here. Wagner argues that interpretative effort is 'required to determine, together with others, the situation as a shared and common one' (2001b: 106; cf. 2001a: 5768). Additionally, he notes that the potential to 'reach beyond a situation' arises through opening 'interpretative possibilities' (Wagner 2001b: 112; cf. 1994b: 281-282). The differentiation of perspectives opens the possibility of dispute between divergent interpretations of the situation; herein lies

the potential for the collectivity to challenge institutions, in order to reform them (Wagner 2001b: 109-110).

Wagner also hints at an understanding of the transformative dimension of action that initiates change in the institutional form. He writes that this mode of doing begins from the recognition that ‘social institutions are created by human beings’ (Wagner 2001b: 116; cf. 1994b: 287, 2001b: 109-116). In his discussion of institutions, Wagner notes the ‘historical transformation of an institution’ via dispute and renegotiation that brings about the formation of new conventions (2001b: 108). Yet, his remarks on this ‘transformative’ dimension of action are brief and thus remain underdeveloped in these works from 2001.

The two most explicit analyses of political action in Wagner’s work from 2000 to 2008/2009 are ‘The Project of Emancipation and the Possibility of Politics, or, What’s Wrong with Post-1968 Individualism?’ (2002b), and, ‘The Political Form of Europe, Europe as Political Form’ (2005b). Wagner recalls the thematic of the 1968 Student Movement from his earlier work (see Section 4.2) in these texts. The two essays are complementary: ‘Political Form’ begins from where ‘The Possibility of Politics’ left off.⁹⁶ In these works, Wagner unequivocally denotes the two dimensions at play within collective political projects: critique, and reconstruction. Wagner’s discussion of these elements, as well as his introduction of the notions of ‘historicity’, ‘reflexivity’ and ‘agentiality’ (I return to this shortly), paves the way for his later elucidation of political projects of ‘world-making’ alongside Karagiannis in 2007 (see Section 4.4, below). Specifically, the interpretative-creative approach to political doing detailed in these works helps to clarify Karagiannis and Wagner’s later elucidation of projects of world-making, which centres on the notion that the ‘constant rebirth’ of the world is the ‘characteristic of political action’. As they put it, political projects of world-making ‘start[.] from worlds already at hand; the making is a remaking’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 3; cf. Goodman 1978: 6).

In 'The Possibility of Politics' (2002b), Wagner critically discusses the '1968' movement as a project of emancipation (building upon his earlier analysis in *Liberty and Discipline*; see Wagner 1994a: 183-193; and Section 4.2 above).⁹⁷ Wagner juxtaposes the notion of emancipation *from* and emancipation *for* in his discussion of '1968' to make the argument that there are 'two elements of a political project, critique and reconstruction' (2002b: 37). He leans on the 1968 Student Movement to highlight the dimension of critique inherent in the push for emancipation *from* the dominating institutional form of 'Organised Modernity' (2002b: 32-33, 35, 37; cf. Wagner 1994a: 73-140). The collective doing of critique led to the 'construction of a collective subject', at the same time that the critical 'assessment of the situation' in the movement pushed for an 'exit-from' the instituted order (2002b: 35). Hence, collective protest or critique is directed *against* an instituted order to seek emancipation *from* a current, problematic situation (Wagner 2002b: 41).

However, Wagner notes that 'no accomplished new phase or state' is achieved via the mode of critique (2002b: 34). The element of 'reconstruction', in turn, pertains to the rearticulation of the institutional form in the wake of collective critique, as emancipation *for* a particular vision for the future. Wagner writes that the critique of established institutions 'also elaborated conceptions of new forms of social and political organization, thus of an alternative to the existing social order' (2002b: 36). Most simply, then, 'reconstruction' pertains to the 'rebuilding of social and political forms' that emerges through the articulation of alternatives via critique (Wagner 2002b: 41).

With this understanding of the interconnected dimensions of 'critique' and 'reconstruction' in mind, Wagner argues that the 1968 Movement was successful in problematizing the instituted order. Yet, he contends that it did not achieve the reconstruction of the institutional form (2002b: 41). For Wagner, the substantives of the 1968 project were 'either largely unspecified or lacked plausibility' due to their incompatibility with actual socio-historical conditions (Wagner 2002b: 41; cf. 37). As such, Wagner characterises '1968' as a

‘missed opportunity’—in both ‘The Possibility of Politics’, and in ‘Political Form’, as I will show—in its failure to reinstitute the institution of society in the wake of its problematisation via critique.

Wagner concludes ‘The Possibility of Politics’ with a definition of the term ‘political form’. As he characterises it, a political form ‘constitutes the relation between the singular human beings and the collectivity under specific socio-historical conditions, including power relations’ (Wagner 2002b: 43).⁹⁸ This statement forms a bridge to his essay, ‘The Political Form of Europe, Europe as Political Form’ (Wagner 2005b). There, the dimensions of critique and reconstruction resurface in Wagner’s elucidation of a narrative of ‘politics as *revolution*’ in modernity (2005b: 53, emphasis in original). Wagner develops this narrative of European political modernity by leaning on his successive modernities framework, to challenge modern political philosophies that operate on a linear teleology of socio-historical change and rest upon narratives of ‘liberalism and civic rights’, the narrative of ‘modern sovereign states’, and/or the ‘rise of democracy’ (2005b: 51-52). Wagner’s revolutionary narrative of politics as struggle, in turn, centres on the ‘use of conscious collective action to create a normatively superior state of the polity than the existing one’ (Wagner 2005b: 53). Indeed, for Wagner, the overarching narrative of political modernity is ‘a narrative of *struggle*’ between competing interpretations, which brought about socio-historical alteration (2005b: 60, emphasis in original; cf. 61).

Drawing on this notion of the narrative of political modernity as revolutionary struggle, Wagner furthers his elucidation of the dimensions of critique and reconstruction in political projects. Wagner calls the thematics of the 1848 and 1968 Movements in ‘Political Form’ (see Wagner 1994a and Section 4.2, above), yet also incorporates the 1989 uprisings in this analysis. He argues that the entrance of ‘the people’ into the political field in the eighteenth century democratic revolutions fundamentally ‘change[d] the terms of political struggle’ (2005b: 61) by articulating new common understandings, which effectively destabilised the instituted order. It is in this sense that Wagner portrays revolutionary events as ‘*possibilities* for

the realization of certain self-understandings of a polity', as new articulations of self-understandings crystallize into a new institutional form (2005b: 61, emphasis in original). Each of the 1848, 1968, and 1989 movements—albeit under different socio-political and historical circumstances—subjected the 'socio-institutional configuration' to critique and, in so doing, demanded liberation (Wagner 2005b: 65). However, Wagner reiterates his earlier arguments *vis-à-vis* the ultimate failure of these political projects to reconstruct the institutional form of society in the wake of critique. He writes, 'while both movements [1968 and 1989] can be regarded as highly successful as unsettling experiences' via critique, 'they were much weaker, if not outright failing, in terms of reconstructing the political form of their societies' (Wagner 2005b: 67). Here, Wagner underscores the necessary element of 'reconstruction' within political projects. He argues that these movements were a '*missed possibility*' for the reconstruction of a new, democratic political form (2005b: 61, emphasis in original; cf. 66-67): the project of collective self-determination was ineffective in reconstructing the institutional order and 'fell apart after the existing institutions had been successfully challenged' (Wagner 2005b: 66). Wagner's discussion highlights the risk inherent in collective political projects. While critique works to problematize a dominant institutional order, the failure to reinstitute society according to articulated alternatives may result in 'dead-ends' or the destabilisation of the institution (Wagner 2005b: 71). This clarifies Wagner's emphasis on the necessary intertwining of critique and reconstruction. From this angle, collective political action thus involves the problematisation and re-creation of the political form of society, to alter the institution of the world and engender qualitative change in history.

Alongside the discussion of the political narrative of modernity as revolutionary struggle and the dimensions of critique and reconstruction in 'Political Form' (2005b), Wagner introduces the notions of historicity, agency, reflexivity and the imagination.⁹⁹ Broadly speaking, these notions refer to the interpretative relations toward the world that underlie modes of political doing. Yet, Wagner does not systematically address these aspects in this essay; they

remain limited to a paragraph. Wagner's discussion of historicity, reflexivity and agentiality in 'Political Form' builds upon an earlier essay, titled 'Palomar's Questions: The Axial Age Hypothesis, European Modernity and Historical Contingency' (Wagner 2004a). There, Wagner details historicity, reflexivity and agentiality in a note, leaning on Bjorn Wittrock's summation of the key contentions of the Axial Age hypothesis (see Wagner 2004a: 93 n.9). As Wagner sketches it here, the notions of reflexivity, historicity, and agentiality draw attention to 'the conditions under which, and the ways in which, human beings relate reflexively to their being in the world' (2004a: 93 n.9). His earlier hermeneutic approach resonates in this analysis (see Section 4.3.1). Wagner adds, moreover, that the elements of reflexivity, historicity and agentiality relate to the 'possibility of human beings to collectively employ their capacity for reflexivity such that they can critically relate to their history and give themselves new orientations in the present' (Wagner 2004a: 93 n.9).

Wagner reconfigures this insight in 'Political Form' (2005b) by adding the notion of the imagination, to further his elucidation of the revolutionary narrative of political modernity (noted above). As Wagner presents it, the imagination underlies each of the three dimensions of reflexivity, historicity, and agentiality. The problematic of the world emerges in Wagner's thinking here: by and large, historicity, reflexivity and agentiality denote a particular interpretative relation to the world that is actualised through modes of political doing. Wagner argues that 'reflexivity refers to the imaginative capacity to 'step out of the immediate present', and 'to imagine other possible worlds' (2005b: 53). Historicity, in turn, relates to the differentiation of the present from a different, common past, as well as from a future that could be otherwise (Wagner 2005b: 53). Here, Wagner links the imagination with understandings of the openness of history, and with notions of collective human agency—'agentiality', then, pertains to the 'belief that human action may contribute to bringing a particular different future about' (Wagner 2005b: 53). Wagner does not expand on these insights in 'Political Form'. However, this brief discussion arguably leans upon his earlier consideration of the open

interpretative space of the present between past and future (e.g. Friese & Wagner 2000b, 2001a; see Subsection 4.3.1). The remarks in 'Political Form' moreover indicate a continuation of Wagner's understanding of the reflexive reinterpretation of the world as a mode of doing in the present; indeed, he advances this idea here by sketching the interconnection of historicity, reflexivity, and agentiality with the imagination, and by broadly connecting these elements to revolutionary political action.

Alongside the traces of the interconnected notions of historicity, reflexivity, agentiality and the imagination, the key insight that emerged from the reconstruction of Wagner's more overtly political writings from 2000 to 2008/2009 was his explicit characterisation of the intertwined dimensions of critique and reconstruction within political projects. He anchored this contention in his historical-sociological analyses of the 1848, 1968, and 1989 political movements. The element of critique fractures the institutional form of society: the critical assessment of the institution articulates possible alternatives at the same time as forming new self-understandings and modes of common bonds via reflexive re-interpretative doing (see Wagner 2002b: 35). As Wagner presented it, critique challenges the given instituted order; the dimension of reconstruction, in turn, recreates the political form of society in the wake of the articulation of potential alternatives (Wagner 2002b: 41). The world-interpreting aspect of critique in this way opens the institution of the world to the possibility of alteration or re-formation via the element of reconstruction. Although the political essays considered here pave the way for Wagner's later elucidation of political projects of world-making and his analysis of the South African democratization project (see Section 4.4, below), these insights nevertheless remain somewhat underdeveloped in the texts considered here.

The above analysis concentrated on Wagner's developing understanding of the interlinked elements of critique and reconstruction within collective political action in his thinking from 2000 to 2008/2009. This, I argue, forms the conceptual framework for his later analysis of political projects of world-making after 2007 (see Section 4.4). In the next

subsection, I contrast these findings against the ‘Theory of Synagonism’ that Wagner and Karagiannis developed in 2005 (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2005; cf. 2008, 2009), which, on first sight, appears to be the most overt and systematic treatment of the question of politics in Wagner’s trajectory. Yet, as I contend in the following excursus, the theory of ‘synagonism’ highlights a deviation from the broadly hermeneutic approach to political action found in Wagner’s sole-authored works from this period (which otherwise draw attention to the world-interpreting aspects of critique, as well as the element of reconstruction). I undertake this analysis in the next subsection, before turning to Wagner’s elucidation of projects of world-making between 2007 and 2016 in Section 4.4.

4.3.3. An Excursus: Karagiannis and Wagner’s Theory of ‘Synagonism’

Together, Karagiannis and Wagner developed a socio-political theory across three essays that they characterised as ‘Synagonism’ (2005, 2008, 2009). Karagiannis and Wagner define synagonism as ‘*the respectful struggle of one against another, bound by rules larger than the struggle, in view of excellence-winning for the benefit of the city*’ (2005: 237, emphasis in original; cf. 2005: 249, 255, 260, 2008: 324). The theory of synagonism emphasises forms of inclusivity rather than the exclusionary character of dissent, in contrast to ‘agonistic pluralism’ debates (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2005: 238-245). Moreover, synagonism is not predetermined to a rational *telos*, contra Marxian conflict theories (Karagiannis & Wagner 2005: 241-244).

On first reading, the theory of synagonism appears to be the most explicit treatment of political theory within Wagner’s *opus*. Yet, while ‘Towards a Theory of Synagonism’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2005) was published in the same year that Wagner first sketched ‘world-making’ in his own work (see Wagner 2005a: 54), Karagiannis and Wagner do not incorporate ‘synagonism’ in their introductory discussion of ‘world-making’ in *Varieties of World-Making* (2007a). The theory of synagonism, moreover, emerges only in traces in Wagner’s broader project, as well as in Karagiannis and Wagner’s later co-authored writings (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2013: 386, n.31; Wagner 2006: 34 n. 3, 2008a: 280 n. 3). This

excursus draws on the findings from the reconstruction of Wagner's implicit political theory—which revealed the intertwined elements of critique and reconstruction within projects of political action that alter the institution of the world (see Section 3.2, and Subsections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2, above)—to critically analyse Karagiannis and Wagner's theory of 'synagonism'. In light of the above reconstruction of Wagner's work, this excursus contends that the theory of synagonism represents a departure from the notion of world-altering political action that Wagner develops in his own project; which, I argue, underlies Karagiannis and Wagner's later elucidation of political projects of world-making (see Section 4.4, below). Three constitutive components underpin the theory of synagonism: solidarity, autonomy, and ritual. I debate these aspects in succession in the following analysis.

Karagiannis and Wagner enlarge the notion of solidarity as the social relation between actors as the precondition for action and the foundation for socio-political community (2005: 245). With this move, they think with but beyond communitarian debates (2005: 247). This is arguably the most developed aspect of the theory of synagonism, which draws on each of their respective analyses of common bonds (in the case of Wagner) and solidarity (for Karagiannis; see 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e).¹⁰⁰ Karagiannis and Wagner argue that solidarity is the ground for synagonism, which recasts the social bond of friendship on political terms as a precondition for the respectful struggle of synagonal action. Solidarity, here, comprises both social and political modes of belonging, but also a form of 'distance' or separateness, which makes possible a struggle between different perspectives (2005: 245, 247). Synagonism, moreover, assumes 'no strong cultural commonality between participants', in an effort to counter the exclusion that arises from the closure of socio-cultural communities (Karagiannis & Wagner 2005: 248; cf. 2008: 149-153). Karagiannis and Wagner argue that part of the task of synagonism is the reflexive questioning of common ties and 'their meaning' (2005: 248). They add, furthermore, that a 'shared understanding of common matters' emerges through the reconfiguration of social bonds as political solidarity via synagonal interaction (Karagiannis &

Wagner 2005: 249). However, they do not pursue these points at length. The element of solidarity, then, centres on the rearticulation of social ties into political bonds (intertwining distance and belonging), as a precondition for synagonism.

Alongside ‘solidarity’, the second constitutive component of the theory of synagonism is ‘autonomy’. Karagiannis and Wagner develop the collective notion of synagonal autonomy by leaning on the reformation acts of Solon Cleisthenes in Athens, as well as the *polis* experience more broadly (2005: 255-257; see also Lévêque & Vidal-Naquet 1996). At the same time, Karagiannis and Wagner draw on modern understandings of individual liberty to account for the autonomy of the singular human being *vis-à-vis* the social (2005: 257-259). And, following Castoriadis, Karagiannis and Wagner argue that individual autonomy necessarily implies collective autonomy, such that autonomy underlies the context of relationships (2005: 259). The element of solidarity, above, forms the precondition for synagonism in the mode of collective relationships prior to the doing of synagonism. In turn, the notion of autonomy—as both collective and individual autonomy—constitutes the objective for synagonism: to achieve ‘benefits for the city’ or community via ‘excellence winning’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2005: 237, 249, 255, 260; cf. 2008: 324).

The notion of ritual is the third constitutive aspect of Karagiannis and Wagner’s theory of synagonism. Indeed, ‘ritual’ relates to the *doing* of synagonism, as compared to its respective precondition and objective in the elements of solidarity and autonomy. In this vein, ‘ritual’ relates to the process character of synagonal action; yet, Karagiannis and Wagner do not fully develop this part of their theory of synagonism. Karagiannis and Wagner elucidate the ritual of synagonism by analysing the Athenian practices of theatre and athletics (both of which are linked to the *polis*; 2005: 249-252), and by contrasting these ancient rituals from modern proceduralist theories (2005: 253-255). However, their remarks on the specific rituals of synagonism are brief. Karagiannis and Wagner argue that synagonism follows a social institutional ritual of interaction, according to particular socio-cultural rules or ritual cues

(2005: 255). A 'reflexive judgement about the common good' then arises through the struggle between the perspectives of the interlocutors via this ritual mode of doing (2005: 254). The so-called 'benefits for the city' are 'determined through the interaction itself' in the participants' orientation toward excellence and relations of mutual respect and solidarity (Karagiannis & Wagner 2005: 254). Synagonism, then, translates an intersubjective mode of social interaction into a political struggle in its orientation to the common world.

The ritual aspect of synagonism, then, denotes the instituted rules according to which the struggle takes place. Karagiannis and Wagner do not systematically develop this aspect of synagonism, which is, arguably, the significant part of the theory that elaborates the *doing* of this mode of socio-political action. Two questions arise from this ultimately unfinished aspect of their work. First, the notion of ritual could have been deepened through an engagement with Émile Durkheim's masterwork, *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1912]). In *The Elementary Forms*, Durkheim shifted away from his more functionalist approach to sociological analysis (such as in *Suicide* (1968 [1897]) or *The Division of Labour in Society* (1984 [1893]), toward an incipient understanding of culture by reconfiguring his understanding of the *conscience collective* into *collective representations*. As Durkheim presented it in *The Elementary Forms* (in Book 3 in particular; see 1995: 303-417), ritual practices simultaneously bind members of the collectivity to their cultural patterns and embody common socio-cultural symbols. In so doing, rituals reinstate the sacredness of the community. This cultural element that underpins common rituals was missing from Karagiannis and Wagner's analysis. Durkheim's notion of ritual would have helped to consider the cultural horizons that bind the interlocutors and give meaning to both the struggle (of synagonism, in this case) and their shared context. This understanding may have further clarified part of their definition of synagonism: the interaction is '*bound by rules larger than the struggle*' (Karagiannis & Wagner 2005: 255, emphasis in original): the struggle is not only 'bound' by social rules, but also cultural forms of meaning that pattern the institution.

It is not only the cultural dimension of ritual that is significant in Durkheim's approach; he—and Castoriadis, in his wake—draws attention to the creative dimension inherent in the self-representation or self-institution of society (see Arnason 2014a, 2014b, 2014c; Doyle 2006). The second question, then, relates to the creative aspect of synagonism. Indeed, if synagonism is oriented by the constitutive dimension of autonomy, as noted above, the conflict inherent in synagonism arguably serves to 'open up the possibility of questioning cultural visions that underpin social structures' and the instituted rules of the collectivity (see Doyle 2006: 208). Karagiannis and Wagner note that the ritual of synagonism is an open one: the creativity of synagonism arises when actors 'exit from' the ritual in an 'exceptional' moment of dissent (2005: 255). Although Karagiannis and Wagner concede that it is legitimate to exit from the procedures of synagonal debate to 'address[...] novel circumstances', they nevertheless warn of the highly exceptional conditions of this 'exit': 'so exceptional as [in] the temporary suspension of the Constitution' (2005: 255). Yet, shortly after this statement, Karagiannis and Wagner argue, 'without being able to opt out of the ritual, no truly imaginative and democratic social and political life can exist' (2005: 255). On the one hand, Karagiannis and Wagner indicate that synagonism comprises imaginative and creative dimensions as the dissent triggers an 'exit from' instituted rituals in 'novel circumstances'. On the other, they appear to insist on the adherence to ritual procedure, and at times warn of the dangerous exceptionality of creative action. This suggests that synagonism simply confirms the instituted social order; dissent largely conforms to the predetermined rules of the ritual. It is unclear, then, how synagonism achieves 'excellence winning for the benefit for the city', or how relates to the creative re-institution of society in the wake of the struggle.

As such, the theory of synagonism does not clearly set out a theory of political action *per se* in the sense of the alteration of the institution of the world and history via critique and reconstruction, which Wagner lays out in his own work. While synagonism deals explicitly with the dimension of critique in its emphasis on dissent and the 'exit from', it bypasses the

important aspect of reconstruction—which Wagner characterises as ‘rebuilding social and political forms’ in the wake of critique (2002b: 41; see Subsection 4.3.2 above). Synagonism, then, destabilizes the socio-political order without successfully rearticulating its form. It is on this basis that the theory of synagonism represents a divergence from Wagner’s wider theoretical project.

I return to the present task of analysing Wagner’s developing theory of projects of ‘world-making’ with its dimensions of critique and reconstruction in the next section, by turning to his works from 2007 to 2016. This includes Wagner and Karagiannis’s announcement of the notion of ‘world-making’ in their introduction to *Varieties of World-Making: Beyond Globalization* (2007a). I then broaden the analysis to consider Wagner’s elucidation of the world problematic (Section 4.4.1) and reflections on the elements of critique and reconstruction (Section 4.4.2), before reconstructing Wagner’s discussion of the South African democratization project (Section 4.4.3), which, I suggest, is an exemplary case of political world-making within Wagner’s thought. I turn to this latter part of Wagner’s intellectual trajectory in the next section, before concluding the analysis of this chapter in Section 4.5.

4.4. Wagner’s Elucidation of Political Projects of ‘World-Making’ Across 2007 to 2016

The analysis of Wagner’s work up to this point has revealed an understanding of the two interconnected elements within collective projects of political world-alteration: critique, and reconstruction. These notions were implicit in Wagner’s elucidation of successive modernities in *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (Wagner 1994a; see Section 4.2). Wagner furthered his approach to critique and reconstruction through a hermeneutic turn after the year 2000, through which he came to emphasise the interpretative relation of human beings to the world (as the common world) and the rearticulation of shared histories and socio-political bonds (see Subsection 4.3.1). This latent notion of world-interpretation (and the constitutive

aspects of historicity, reflexivity, agentiality, and imagination; see Subsection 4.3.2), I argue, underlies Wagner's formulation of the interpretative dimension of political critique. The aspect of critique forms one dimension of the world-altering project of collective political action, alongside the element of reconstruction (which became explicit in Wagner's thought between 2000 and 2008/2009; see Subsection 4.3.2). With these insights in mind, I contrasted Wagner's developing political theory against the notion of synagonism that Nathalie Karagiannis and Wagner outlined in 2005 (see Subsection 4.3.3). I argue that these lines of thought *vis-à-vis* the dimensions of critique and reconstruction pave the way for Wagner's elucidation of political projects of 'world-making', which I consider in this section.

Three parts of Wagner's analysis are significant for the present task of elaborating Wagner's approach to the world-altering dimensions of collective political action; this section is split into three subsections, accordingly. The first relates to Wagner's elucidation of the world problematic, in both the sketch of 'world-making' by Karagiannis and Wagner, as well as Wagner's sole-authored works after 2007. In Subsection 4.4.1, I critically debate Wagner's understanding of the world as it develops in dialogue with Hannah Arendt, Jean-Luc Nancy, Nelson Goodman, and Cornelius Castoriadis. Subsection 4.4.2, in turn, follows Wagner's continued thinking of the political elements of world-interpreting critique and world-forming reconstruction between 2007 and 2016. Finally, in Subsection 4.4.3, I draw on the findings from the reconstruction to discuss Wagner's historical-sociological analysis of the South African democratization movement as a political project of world-making, ahead of a concluding discussion in Section 4.5.

4.4.1. Wagner's Approach to the Problematics of the World and World-Making Between 2007 and 2016: Encounters with Arendt, Nancy, Goodman, and Castoriadis

In this subsection, I deal with Wagner's understanding of the world as it emerges through his reflections on political projects of world-making and the thematic of modernity between 2007 and 2016. The problem of the world moves into focus via Wagner's articulation of the notion

of world-making alongside Karagiannis in 2007 (2007a), and gains increasing significance in Wagner's thinking after this point, particularly in the wake of his essay, 'Towards a World Sociology of Modernity' (2010a; cf. Wagner 2016b).¹⁰¹ However, Wagner neither explicitly nor systematically analyses the problem of the world between 2007 and 2016. I reconstruct Wagner's elucidation of the world it emerges across this period in this subsection. Two connected insights are significant. On the one hand, Wagner and Karagiannis's formulation of varieties of world-making leans on broadly phenomenological sources—specifically, Arendt and Nancy (as well as Goodman, outside of this tradition)—and rests on an understanding of the human condition as always-already *in-the-world*. Yet, on the other hand, Wagner develops a notion of the social institution of the common world—in a more constructivist sense of world-creation—via Goodman, Castoriadis, and Arendt, which sits in contrast with his other, more phenomenological approach to the world. The ensuing analysis of Wagner's shifting elucidations of the world thus reveals a tension between Wagner's emphasis on world-making in a constructivist sense, and his broadly interpretative approach (which I noted above, in Subsections 4.3.1 and 4.3.2 in particular).

First, I detail the notion of the world that emerges in Karagiannis and Wagner's sketch of 'world-making'. In response to globalization debates, Karagiannis and Wagner reconfigure Goodman's text *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978) by leaning on Arendt's work *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]) and Nancy's notion of *mondialisation* (2007 [2002]), to outline an understanding of 'varieties of world-making' (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a).¹⁰² A threefold notion of the world emerges through Karagiannis and Wagner's passing reflections on the world in their introductory essay. Via Arendt (1998) and Nancy (2007), Karagiannis and Wagner elucidate the world, first, as the 'common world': the shared space of the human condition that forms the ground for modes of community and belonging.¹⁰³ They write, 'human beings are always in the world, always together and facing each other', such that 'humans are experientially and normatively tied to the world' (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 2). Second, Karagiannis and

Wagner highlight the creation of the world, as the ‘man-made’ world (and their multiplicity), which ‘attribute[s] the existence of the world to the human capacity for creating it’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 3; cf. 2). Third, but less explicitly, an interpretative understanding of the world emerges in Karagiannis and Wagner’s discussion. They note that ‘every singular human being situates his/herself reflexively in the world’, and, leaning on Goodman, argue that the world makes possible a ‘plurality of ways that describe a world or worlds’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 7, 2).

Expanding upon these insights, Karagiannis and Wagner develop a notion of the world (or rather, ‘worlds’) as plural, human-created worlds of significance that form the ground of community and the human condition. From the above, *anthropos create* common worlds, but also assume a reflexive position *toward* the world. Here, the constructivist aspect in the notion of world-making comes into focus. Wagner and Karagiannis bypass the hermeneutic-phenomenological notion of the world as an encompassing meta-horizon in their analysis of the human creation of the world(s) *qua* ‘world-making’. The constructivist undercurrent emerges in two ways in their co-authored introduction. First, Karagiannis and Wagner draw on Arendt to characterise the world as a ‘man-made stabiliser between “man’s subjectivity” and “nature’s sublime indifference”’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 2; cf. Arendt 1998: 137). This part of Arendt’s discussion of the world appears in the section on ‘Work’ in *The Human Condition*, which relates to the world of objects produced via fabrication, not the formation of the common historical world of human relationships via political action (see Arendt 1998: 136-139). This *making* of the objective world is, in Arendt’s analysis, not the same as the alteration of the common world through *beginnings* via political action, which, as argued in Chapter 2, is an actualisation of the anthropological condition of natality *in-the-world* (see Arendt 1998: 177-178, 246-247, 2007a: 127; see also Subsection 2.2.2 and Section 2.3, Chapter 2). By leaning on Arendt’s remarks on the fabrication of the world of objects—rather than her notion of new

beginnings in the common, historical world—Karagiannis and Wagner’s notion of world-making lends itself to a form of constructivism.

The second and related constructivist element arises through Karagiannis and Wagner’s discussion of the creation of the world, which leans predominantly on Goodman (1978). First, they attribute the ‘possibility of making a world’ to ‘the human capacity for creating it’, which rests on an understanding of ‘human beings as making and remaking their own universe’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 3). This formulation renders *anthropos* as sovereign world-makers or world-creators. Yet, from Goodman, Karagiannis and Wagner argue that ‘World-making as we know it always starts from worlds already at hand: the making is a remaking’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 3; cf. Goodman 1978: 6). Karagiannis and Wagner contend that this indicates the ‘changing of the world on the basis of more or less existing worlds’ (2007a: 3). A tension here arises between the creation of worlds of meaning by a sovereign ‘maker’, on the one hand, and the alteration of worlds via the interpretative re-formation of always-already articulated worlds, on the other.

Here, it is helpful to draw upon Ricoeur’s (1991c) critical analysis of Goodman’s *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978) to elaborate this point. In Ricoeur’s reading, Goodman’s work radicalises Ernst Cassirer to give due to the ‘plurality and irreducibility of world-versions’ (Ricoeur 1991c: 209; cf. 200). Yet, according to Ricoeur, Goodman’s approach is problematic in that he underscores the *making* of world-versions (Ricoeur 1991c: 209-212). This bypasses the phenomenological insight of *being-in-the-world*—or as Ricoeur terms it in this essay, *dwelling* within the world—where the world *qua* meta-horizon is ‘that out of which, or against the background of which, [world-]versions refer’ (Ricoeur 1991c: 212). If the world is the inexhaustible horizon that encompasses all world-versions, and ‘the place where we dwell’, this points to a more humble approach that avoids the notion of the sovereign world-maker: ‘some kind of humility, accordingly, is entailed in the act of dwelling’ (see Ricoeur 1991c: 212). *Anthropos* do not create world-versions, but form versions *of the world* through the act of

dwelling *in-the-world* (Ricoeur 1991c: 212-213). Indeed, for world-making to be a *re-making*, Ricoeur argues that the inexhaustible world-horizon is ‘that which makes possible, suggests, and sometimes requires the transition from one version of the world to another’ (1991c: 213).

Nevertheless, Goodman’s work rests on an understanding of the irreducibility of a world-version to a common ‘base’ (1978: 4), which overlooks that the world-horizon ‘is more than each version without being apart from it’ (Ricoeur 1991c: 212). In a similar vein to Goodman, Karagiannis and Wagner overlook the phenomenological insight of the world as the inexhaustible meta-horizon that encompasses all ‘human-made’ worlds. In their co-authored introduction, they note the plurality of world-creations (2007a: 2) whilst leaning on Goodman to contend that “‘many different world-versions are independent ... without any requirement or presumption of reducibility to a single base’” (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 2; cf. Goodman 1978: 4). In contrast, hermeneutic-phenomenological approaches highlight that the overarching world-horizon makes heterogeneous versions of the world possible, while offering a fundamental point of commonality (see Arnason 2003: 229, 2007: 23; Adams 2009b: 258, 263, 2014b: 72-73). Indeed, part of *Varieties of World-Making: Beyond Globalization* (ed. Karagiannis & Wagner 2007b) is devoted to thinking through the possibility ‘and the actuality of the coexistence of different worlds’ and the re-creation of worlds ‘by contact with another world’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 9). Karagiannis and Wagner additionally suggest the commonality of relationships between worlds by citing Jacques Rancière: ‘Politics is not made up of power relationships; it is made up of relationships between worlds’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 2, n.1; cf. Rancière 2004 [1999]: 42). Nevertheless, they do not expand upon this remark. In this, Karagiannis and Wagner sidestep the hermeneutic-phenomenological notion of the world as an under-determined horizon of meaning that makes the re-creation—or ‘re-making’—of worlds possible, as well that which forms the common space of intercultural encounter. The constructivism in Karagiannis and Wagner’s approach to world-making, then, emerges in their account of the ‘making’ of common worlds by a sovereign human ‘creator’; an

encounter with the overarching world-horizon is no longer needed in order for *anthropos* to ‘make’ the world (see Adams 2007: 51).

This constructivist undercurrent in Wagner’s elucidation of the human creation of the world resurfaces in a cluster of dialogues with Castoriadis’s thought between 2010 and 2016 (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2012a, 2012v; Wagner 2013a, 2015b, 2015e).¹⁰⁴ In particular, this furthers Wagner’s developing understanding of the human creation of worlds. With Karagiannis, Wagner refers to Castoriadis’s discussion of the world-creating notion of ‘magma’ (see also Subsection 3.4.1, Chapter 3). For Karagiannis and Wagner, ‘magma’ relates to notions of ‘doing’. In their account, the ‘form-giving’ magma creates ‘an intelligible common’ out of the otherwise ‘empty’, ‘pre-social nature’ (2012b: 412). Karagiannis and Wagner quote Castoriadis directly: “‘Society brings into being a world of significations and itself exists in reference to such a world’” (2012b: 412; cf. Castoriadis 1987b [1975]: 359). In this, Karagiannis and Wagner draw out Castoriadis’s approach to the self-creation of an imaginary institution of meaning (Karagiannis & Wagner 2012b: 412-413), which, later, they connect to an understanding of the possible creation of a plurality of social-historical world-formations (Karagiannis & Wagner 2012a: 14-16).

Wagner furthers this notion of the human creation of worlds in two essays in 2015: ‘Interpreting the Present: A Research Programme’ (2015b) and ‘Modernity and Critique: Elements of a World Sociology’ (2015e). Wagner here leans on Castoriadis, as well as Arendt. From Arendt (1998: 2), Wagner differentiates between the world and the earth (Wagner 2015b: 113; cf. Wagner 2015e: 23). The earth refers the natural context of human habitation, whereas the world, for Wagner, pertains to ‘the social space human beings create between themselves’ (2015b: 113; cf. Wagner 2015e: 23). With this in mind, Wagner turns to Castoriadis to argue that ‘human beings collectively institute “world” by creating significations’,¹⁰⁵ adding, ‘Any such instituted world is always “social” because it is a creation of society’ (Wagner 2015e: 23). In this analysis, Wagner differentiates between the creation or ‘making’ of the social world, as

distinct from the natural world or 'earth'. In a sense, Wagner's presentation of the creation of the social institution of the world echoes Castoriadis (particularly his later ontological approach) which contends that the pre-social world is without signification prior to the social creation of worlds of meaning (see Castoriadis 1997d: 389, 1997b: 363; cf. Karagiannis & Wagner 2012b: 412).

In the same text that Wagner engages with Castoriadis *vis-à-vis* the institution of the social world, Wagner remarks in a note that his and Karagiannis's understanding of world-making is 'close' to Nancy's notion of *mondialisation* (Wagner 2015e: 33, n .2; see also Nancy 2007). Wagner does not undertake a systematic discussion of Nancy's approach in 'Modernity and Critique' (2015b), or elsewhere across his trajectory. Reconstructing the implicit connection between *mondialisation* and Wagner's approach to world-making helps to deepen the present analysis. Nancy understands the act of creation as 'the insatiable and infinitely finite exercise that is the being in act [sic] of meaning brought forth in the world' (2007: 55). That is, for Nancy, world-formation refers to the effervescent moment of bringing meaning into form 'in "this" world' and 'as "this" world' via collective struggle (2007: 55). This effectively situates the act of world-formation within an immanent world (as *dwelling-within the world*; Nancy 2007: 41). Nancy argues that the world 'grows from nothing'—yet this nothing is *something*, and 'this nothing ... cultivates its [the world's] growth' (Nancy 2007: 51). In Nancy's work, struggles for the world opens the world onto this nothingness, through which the world is (re-)created (Nancy 2007: 54). From this analysis, the world refers a 'totality of meaning' (2007: 41), yet this totality is neither closed nor final: the world remains permanently open to re-determination because 'this *world* is coming out of nothing' (Nancy 2007: 55, emphasis in original). Hence, world-forming doing for Nancy transpires within already-articulated world contexts and re-creates the world through the 'nothingness'. This resonates with Wagner's sketch of the creation of social worlds via world-making. As Wagner presents it, the creation of the world articulates and encloses everything that 'is' and 'is not' the case for

the society in question via institutional and interpretative patterns (Wagner 2015e: 23). For both Nancy and Wagner, then, the world is not a closed totality; the re-formation (or, re-making) of the world through projects of world-making action remains an ever-present possibility.

However, where Nancy highlights the inexhaustible ‘nothingness’ that makes the ‘growth’ of the world possible, Wagner’s approach bypasses the phenomenological notion of an overarching horizon that encompasses all socially instituted worlds. In light of his emphasis on the social creation of common worlds in distinction from the ‘natural’ world, Wagner adopts a more sociological approach to the world problematic. That is, Wagner draws attention to the collective creation of shared worlds *qua* socio-political worlds patterned by shared histories, which can be recreated through modes of critique and reconstruction (as the present analysis of Wagner’s thought demonstrates). This implicit, constructivist notion of the creation of the social world contra the natural world arguably sits in tension with Wagner’s earlier, more hermeneutic understanding of the world as an open horizon for creative reinterpretation (see Section 4.3.1, above). This latent hermeneutic dimension permeates Wagner’s thinking in this period, also (see Casassas & Wagner 2016: 160, 163; Wagner 2013c: 168, 2014: 306, 308, 2014: 306, 2015b: 111, 113, 2015e: 31, 2016a: 91, 2016b: 90). The above analysis of the world problematic, however, demonstrates that Wagner’s approach to world-interpretation is oriented to the *instituted* common world and sedimented histories—Wagner does not incorporate the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the world as an overarching meta-horizon in his analysis.¹⁰⁶ As Wagner presents it, then, projects of world-making re-create or re-make the social institution of the world without encountering the world-horizon. Although Wagner overlooks the phenomenological approach to the world as an overarching meta-horizon, his approach nonetheless highlights the openness of the institution of the common social world to reinterpretation and alteration.

The above discussion centred on Wagner (and Karagiannis's) elucidations of the world problematic between 2007 and 2016. The reconstruction revealed an understanding of the world as the social institution of the world, as a common space created or 'made' by human beings in distinction from the 'earth' or natural world. Wagner elaborated this notion of the world in dialogue with Arendt, Goodman, Nancy, and Castoriadis. Wagner points to a notion of the openness of the common world to the possibility of change or 're-making'. Nevertheless, he bypasses the hermeneutic-phenomenological insight that the inexhaustible world-horizon encompasses all world-formations, which makes plural projects of world-alteration (or, world-making) possible. I draw on the foregoing reconstruction of Wagner's sketch of the world problematic in the following subsection (4.4.2) to consider his continued reflections on the dimensions of critique and reconstruction within political projects of world-making between 2007 and 2016. As I will show in the ensuing discussion, the question of the world informs Wagner's dialogue with Luc Boltanski on the notion of critique in these writings. I turn to this aspect of Wagner's thought below.

4.4.2. Advancing the Theoretical Groundwork of Political Projects of World-Making: Wagner on Critique, Reconstruction, Imagination, and Progress

At the same time that Wagner develops his understanding of the world as the creation of common social worlds after 2007 (as argued in Subsection 4.4.1, above), he continues to elucidate the interconnected dimensions of critique and reconstruction that emerge within political projects of world-making. I trace this line of thought by reconstructing a number of Wagner's texts between 2007 and 2016 in this subsection. In particular, I focus, first, on Wagner's engagement with—and departure from—Luc Boltanski *vis-à-vis* the notions of critique and the relation between 'reality' and 'world'. Second, I follow Wagner's continued discussion of the interrelation of critique and reconstruction within political movements, which, in this analysis incorporates the imagination and Wagner's reconfiguration of the notion of progress. Through this, Wagner furthers his understanding of the openness of the

historical field to reinterpretation (see Subsection 4.3.1, above). I argue that Wagner's advancement of his theoretical framework of critique and reconstruction in these works frames his contemporaneous analysis of the South African democratization project—as a project of world-making—which I consider later in Subsection 4.4.3, ahead of a concluding discussion in Section 4.5.

In Subsection 4.3.2, I noted Wagner's sketch of the notion of the 'political form', which centred on the articulation of relations between human beings across a collectivity under particular socio-historical conditions (Wagner 2002b: 43). This understanding resurfaces in Wagner's thought after 2007, but here, he recasts 'political form' as 'institution'. This becomes clear in two essays from 2010: 'Critique and Crisis Reconsidered' (Wagner 2010f), and 'The Future of Sociology: Understanding Transformations of the Social' (Wagner 2010e). In both essays, Wagner engages directly with Boltanski, as well as work on critique by Laurent Thévenot, and Alain Desrosières. Wagner argues in 'The Future of Sociology' that human beings 'construct' institutional forms, which he characterises as 'durable and extended social phenomena' that 'emerg[e] and persist[.] through the interaction of human beings' (2010e: 220). For Wagner, leaning on Boltanski, Thévenot and Desrosières, the institution of the socio-political world is fundamentally dependent on the continued 'investment in forms' via critical communicative practices (Wagner 2010e: 220).

Wagner returns to this sketch of the collective reproduction of institutions in 'Critique and Crisis Reconsidered'. There, Wagner details 'institutions' as 'social phenomena that ... are created by social actors and can be changed by them[,] but ... always pre-exist any human being and appear to impose their rules on them' (2010f: 475; cf. Wagner 2012: 58-59). Wagner adds that institutions are the 'sedimented outcome of conflictual interactions' (2010f: 475). 'Sedimentation' in the above sentence refers to the historical layers of tradition that give shape to the social world,¹⁰⁷ which, in Wagner's approach, are articulated through the creative dimension of collective critique.

Wagner advances his understanding of institutions in relation to the problem of critique in dialogue with Boltanski. Wagner focusses on Boltanski's notions of reality and world in his theory of critique (see Boltanski 2011 [2009]) in two texts in particular: 'Critique and Crisis Reconsidered' (Wagner 2010f), and the chapter titled 'Successive Modernities: Crisis, Criticism, and the Idea of Progress' in *Modernity: Understanding the Present* (Wagner 2012: 28-63). In so doing, Wagner draws upon Boltanski's approach to the space between 'the world' and 'reality'. Yet, Wagner departs from Boltanski to rethink the space of critique as a historical dimension *en route* to his formulation of 'progress' (I return to this).

First, it is helpful to detail Boltanski's work. In *On Critique: A Sociology of Emancipation* (2011), Boltanski outlines a distinction between 'the world' and 'reality'. According to Boltanski (2011: 57), institutions establish a closed and coherent set of meanings that provide modes of certainty and permanence for the society in question, which, for him, constitutes social reality (see also Blokker 2014b: 56, 2014c: 377). In Boltanski's analysis (2011: 57-59), the certainties of 'reality' sit in tension with the radical uncertainties of 'the world' (cf. Blokker 2014c: 376-377). The world, for Boltanski, forms a latent background horizon for instituted society that is fundamentally without meaning, yet—like Ludwig Wittgenstein—refers to 'everything that is the case' (Boltanski 2011: 57; see also Blokker 2014b: 56; Wittgenstein 2014 [1922]: 57).¹⁰⁸ Boltanski contends that the institution of reality constitutes a world (as in, the social institution of a world), however this worldly 'reality' can never institute an eternally closed order due to the uncertainty that operates in the background through the encompassing 'world' (see Blokker 2014b: 56, 2014c: 376-379). The tension between these two horizons—reality and the world—opens a space for critique.

On Wagner's reading, the distinction between the notions of reality and world in Boltanski's work demonstrates that 'every given "reality" is always only one of a plurality of possible ones', where 'the world' forms the background for all possible realities (Wagner 2010f: 475; cf. 2012: 59). For Wagner, because *anthropos* are 'hermeneutic animals' (arguably leaning

on Taylor's understanding of humans as 'self-interpreting animals'; see Taylor 1985: 191; and Section 4.1 and Subsection 4.3.1 above), human beings can adopt an interpretative stance toward instituted reality such that 'a gap between reality and world may emerge' (Wagner 2010e: 475; cf. 2012: 59). Wagner returns to the notions of reality and the world later in *Modernity: Understanding the Present*. Although Wagner does not make explicit reference to Boltanski, his presence is nonetheless implicit in Wagner's statement:

the distinction between such two spheres more generally creates a difference between 'reality' and 'world' as we experience it and another possible world—or worlds—that we can imagine. The imagined existence of those other worlds then provides us with the means to criticize 'reality' (Wagner 2012: 157).

Expanding upon Wagner's analysis of Boltanski, interpretative critique opens the instituted dimension of reality to potential alteration, following the articulation of many possible, other worlds via the imagination.

Wagner, however, takes Boltanski's insights *vis-à-vis* the distinction between reality and world and the space of critique one step further by placing these notions within a wider historical scope. In Wagner's analysis, Boltanski's (2011) discussion in *On Critique* is 'too presentist', which is to say that it 'fail[s] to perceive the historical precursors and conditions' of critique (Wagner 2012: 61; cf. 2010f: 476). Wagner turns to Koselleck to expand upon this point; however, Wagner does not develop this argument in depth. In particular, Wagner draws on Koselleck's notion of the distance between the 'horizon of expectations' and the 'space of experience' (Wagner 2012: 61; see also Koselleck 2004 [1985]: 256-259; Ricoeur 2008a [1985]: 207-240). Via Koselleck, Wagner recasts the space of critique as a temporal problematic: critique arises between the space of experience—as 'present past'—and is directed toward the horizon of the future, as 'that which is to be revealed' (Koselleck 2004: 259). Wagner details the Koselleckian insight of the 'link between critique and crisis' in the detachment of the 'human "horizon of expectations" ... from the "space of experience" in which human beings live', but does not take this analysis further in *Modernity: Understanding the Present* (2012: 61).

This line of thought resurfaces in an endnote in 2013, in which Wagner relates the term ‘expectation’ in the formulation of the ‘horizon of expectations’, to the notion of the imagination—yet, he does not fully clarify this claim (see Wagner 2013a: 66 n.26). Two years later, Wagner argues—perhaps with Koselleck in mind—that the imagination is ‘central in linking experiences of the past to understandings of the present and expectations for the future’, whilst simultaneously opening the possibility of instituting different worlds (Wagner 2015b: 113).

Although Wagner does not systematically develop these remarks, the dimensions of agentiality, historicity and reflexivity (and their interconnection with the imagination) that he sketched in 2004-2005 arguably lie in the background of his thinking (see Subsection 4.3.2, above). In those earlier works, Wagner highlighted the reflexive capacity to ‘step out of the immediate present’ to ‘imagine other worlds’ by differentiating the present from the past and an alternate future, which collective agency could bring about (2004: 93 n.9; cf. 2005b: 53). Indeed, this line of Wagner’s thinking resonates in the statement from *Modernity: Understanding the Present* that I quoted earlier: ‘The imagined existence of those other worlds’—as other possible futures—‘provides us with the means to criticize “reality”’ (Wagner 2012: 157). Expanding on Wagner’s analysis, critique engenders a reflexive interpretative relation to the world (*qua* the institution of the social world and common history; see Subsection 4.4.1). This opens a space through which to criticize instituted reality, in order to alter the institution to create (or, reconstruct) a possible future by actualising the dimension of ‘agentiality’ and the imagination (see e.g. Wagner 2005b: 53, 2012: 53). This implicit understanding may underlie Wagner and Karagiannis’s remark in ‘Imagination and Tragic Democracy’ that political action “‘springs from” the social in terms of translating the imagination into institution’ (2012a: 18).

The thematics of critique and reconstruction resurface in a cluster of essays between 2012 and 2015 (Karagiannis & Wagner 2012a; Wagner 2015d, 2015b, 2015e).¹⁰⁹ This time, Wagner draws attention to the ‘death’ or ‘dismantling’ of political forms in the wake of

critique; yet, he does not systematically develop the complementary aspect of the re-formation or reconstruction of political forms. Late in their co-authored essay, ‘Imagination and Tragic Democracy’ (2012a: 24), Karagiannis and Wagner connect the ‘death’ or ‘end of a political form’ to the ‘political imagination’.¹¹⁰ They argue that an understanding of *agon* or ‘*agonistic struggle*’ can help to elucidate an understanding of the mortality of political forms (Karagiannis & Wagner 2012a: 25, emphasis in original).¹¹¹ Karagiannis and Wagner highlight the role the imagination plays in the *emergence* of a political form (speaking to Castoriadis’s work; see 2012a: 24-26), and question whether the ‘work of imagination’ is involved in the demise or decline of the form—yet, they do not explore this contention further (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2012a: 25).

This motif of the ‘death’ or ‘dismantling’ of political forms reappears in 2015. In ‘Modernity and Critique: Elements of a World Sociology’, Wagner notes that ‘dismantling is often accompanied by building new institutions’ or by reforming existing forms (Wagner 2015e: 30-31); the element of reconstruction is implicit in Wagner’s analysis here. He continues this discussion of the demise and re-creation of institutions in both ‘Interpreting the Present: A Research Programme’ (Wagner 2015b) and ‘From Domination to Autonomy: Two Eras of Progress in World-Sociological Perspective’ (2015d). In ‘Interpreting the Present’, Wagner notes that institutions are formed via ‘sedimentations of earlier interpretations’ and reproduced through collective modes of doing, or otherwise enforced through domination (2015b: 111; see also Casassas & Wagner 2016: 160, 163). Wagner additionally refers to ‘the dismantling of existing institutions’ and ‘rebuilding’ new ones (2015b: 113) through political projects in this essay. Later, Wagner details the re-interpretative and creative effort of altering the world via political action. He characterises socio-political transformations in ‘Interpreting the Present’ as:

the interpretative engagement of human beings with the situation they find themselves in and as the work at reinterpretation of the situation should it be found deficient and unsatisfactory. Concatenated re-interpretative action, such as in current social

movements, can result in world-transformation. And new interpretations can sediment in new institutions ... (Wagner 2015b: 111).

Wagner makes broad reference to the reflexive, re-interpretative doing of collective political critique in this statement, and links the critical action to the transformative rearticulation of the institution of the world. He echoes this position in 'World Sociology: An Outline', where he writes that 'radical change means creating new institutions based on a reinterpretation of society' (2016b: 93). However, he does not explicitly develop this insight into a theory of political action *per se* in these works.

The elements of critique and reconstruction within political doing are more explicit in 'From Domination to Autonomy...' (2015d). There, Wagner returns to the thematic of '1968' (see Section 4.2 and Subsection 4.3.2, above). He continues his analysis of the twofold emancipatory dimensions of collective political movements—as 'liberation' or emancipation *from*, and emancipation *for* or *creative alteration*—by debating '1968' and other protest movements from the 1990s (including the end of Apartheid in South Africa, and the women's movement, for example; I turn to South Africa in Subsection 4.4.3). In Wagner's analysis, liberation movements seek to emancipate the collectivity 'from determination by the time and space one was born in' (2015d: 41). From this perspective, liberation movements effectively dismantle the patterns of determinacy within particular instituted socio-political and cultural orders (see Wagner 2015d: 42). In contrast, Wagner argues that political action 'dismantl[es] existing institutions' through re-interpretative critique; yet, at the same time, collective political projects incorporate a reconstructive element in the 'building of new institutions' (2015d: 39). From the above analysis, collective political movements that work toward the creative alteration of the world reconfigure new solidarities and interpretatively rearticulate the institution of society, in an effort to institute a normatively superior political form—that is, to engender progress (Wagner 2015d: 39, 36).

Wagner rethinks the problematic of progress in a cluster of works after 2010, culminating in his recent booklet, *Progress: A Reconstruction* (2016a; see also Wagner 2010c, 2012: 28-63). He ties the normative dimension of modernity—motivated by the commitment to ‘progress’—to the opening of the ‘horizon of expectations’ (Wagner 2012: 55). Significantly, Wagner’s reflections on progress also draw attention to a notion of ‘intentional collective [political] action’ that rests upon ‘the idea that the world can be improved, that a better world can be brought about’ as ‘normatively positive change’ (Wagner 2012: 53). Although he does not advance this within his theorisation of political action, Wagner’s remarks nonetheless reveal that the horizon of the future remains open to the possibilities of the creative re-institution of the world via collective, intentional political action, to bring about a normatively superior form of the world.

This subsection debated Wagner’s progression of his understanding of the interplay of political critique and reconstruction, to pave the way for the following discussion of Wagner’s most explicit analysis of a political project of world-making in his trajectory: the South African variety of modernity. As I show next in Subsection 4.4.3, the South African democratization movement comprises each of the elements of Wagner’s approach to collective political action discussed in this chapter: actualising the interconnected dimensions of historicity, agentiality, and reflexivity to bring about a different, normatively superior institution of the world via the intertwining of critique and reconstruction. As such, I suggest that the South African democratization movement is an exemplary case of political ‘world-making’ within Wagner’s thought. Nevertheless, the analysis in this subsection demonstrated that Wagner did not systematically develop his reflections on critique and reconstruction into a theory of the world-altering aspects of collective political action *per se*. Rather, these insights appeared in traces. Although Wagner maintained an emphasis on the necessary aspect of ‘reconstruction’ within political projects alongside the doing of critique (as argued above, as well as in Section 4.2 and Subsection 4.3.2), he did not explicitly expand upon this part of his thinking. Indeed, Wagner’s

remarks on the 'death' of political forms arguably drew attention away from his earlier emphasis on their re-creation or reconstruction in the wake of political critique. Nevertheless, the interpretative-creative intertwining of critique and reconstruction becomes clearer through Wagner's discussion of the South African democratization movement, as a political project of world-making. I turn to Wagner's analysis of South Africa in the following section, before bringing the insights of the chapter together in a concluding discussion (Section 4.5).

4.4.3. Collective Political Critique and Reconstruction within the South African Political Project of World-Making

The present inquiry into Wagner's work centres on his approach to the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. Up to now, the reconstruction revealed that, for Wagner, collective political doing intertwines the two elements of (world-interpreting) 'critique' and (world-forming) 'reconstruction' (see Sections 4.2, and Subsections 4.3.2 and 4.4.2, above). Wagner's understanding of critique in particular was influenced by his hermeneutic turn after the year 2000 (see Subsection 4.3.1). In this, Wagner emphasises the reflexive, interpretative relation of human beings to the world (Subsections 4.3.1, 4.3.2, and 4.4.2). As the reconstruction has demonstrated, the world in Wagner's thought refers to the social institution of the common world, as a space configured by shared bonds and patterned by shared histories, which, nevertheless, remains open to reinterpretation and rearticulation in the present to bring about a different future (see Subsections 4.3.1, 4.3.2, 4.4.1, and 4.4.2). Yet, as noted in Subsection 4.4.1, Wagner's broadly interpretative approach sits in tension with the constructivism that operates in his elucidation of 'world-making' and modes of 'reconstruction'. Although Wagner has not, to this point, theorised the dimension of 'reconstruction' to the same extent as the notion of 'critique', Wagner's approach is significant in that he anchors his understanding of the projects of political 'world-making' in historical analysis.

From this perspective, Wagner's discussion of the South African democratization movement can be understood as a collective effort of political world-making. In contrast to the

‘missed opportunities’ of ‘1968’ and ‘1989’ (see Wagner 1994a, 2005b; see also Section 4.2, and Subsections 4.3.2 and 4.4.2), South Africa successfully reconstructed the socio-political institutional form to engender change in the socio-historical field after collective critique opened—and eventually demolished—the instituted Apartheid order. I consider Wagner’s historical-sociological analysis of South Africa in this subsection. Wagner considers the South African project of world-making in a cluster of works between 2010 to 2015 (2010a, 2011b: 98-104, 2011c, 2012: 105-118, 119-149, 2013c, 2014, 2015c, 2015e).¹¹² Wagner does not explicitly term the explicit political self-institution of South Africa as *world-making* in his writings. Nevertheless, the reconstruction highlights that South Africa’s democratisation movement points clearly to a case of political world-making, according to the theoretical framework that Wagner develops. Following Wagner’s theoretical framework, the movement incorporates the elements of critique and reconstruction in the reflexive reinterpretation and rearticulation of the South African institution of the common world. Three aspects of Wagner’s analysis of South Africa’s political project are particularly significant: the configuration of new solidarities; a critical reinterpretation of the horizons of the past and future; and, the twofold critical interpretative struggle and reconstruction, which crystallises new institutional forms. I speak to each of these aspects below, before turning to the concluding discussion in Section 4.5.

First, the articulation of new collective bonds in the South African project of world-making did not rest upon previous configurations of ethno- or cultural-linguistic forms of commonality. For Wagner this symbolized ‘current unity in diversity’ as a ‘situation in which different cultural orientations can coexist without threatening the basic commonality’ of their newly formed collective bonds (2013c: 175; cf. Wagner 2011c: 494, 2012: 141). As noted earlier (see Section 4.2 and Subsection 4.3.1), the reconfiguration of former identities into new modes of solidarity form the preconditions for political action in the form of critique in Wagner’s approach. These patterns of solidarity were formed through the shared, critical

reinterpretation of common histories in the present, as the reformulation of ‘ties that make human beings commit themselves to the fate and destiny of other human beings’ (Wagner 2010a: 237; cf. 2012: 169).

Second, and relatedly, Wagner argues that ‘new societies’ (such as South Africa) are ‘*self-interpreting societies* par excellence’ (2013c: 169, emphasis in original). Here, Wagner arguably repositions his interpretation of Taylor’s ‘self-interpreting animals’ as operative at the collective level of sociality (see Taylor 1985: 191; cf. Wagner 2008b: 359; see also Section 4.1 and Subsection 4.3.1). The dimension of ‘self-interpretation’ emerges in two forms in Wagner’s analysis: the first relates to the conflict of interpretations between different ‘fragments’ forms common societal self-understandings; and the second pertains to the ongoing, reflexive reinterpretation of shared histories. Wagner’s discussion of ‘fragment societies’ (which includes South Africa and Brazil) leans on Louis Hartz (1964), who details the self-foundation of so-called ‘new societies’ via the interpretative-creative encounter between European colonial self-understandings and indigenous communities in South Africa and Latin America (see Wagner 2013c: 168, 2014: 296-297). The Eurocentricism within Hartz’s approach aside, Wagner’s reading underscores the creative encounter between these diverse world-interpretations. Yet, Wagner gives this a Bourdieuan twist: he discusses Pierre Bourdieu’s notion of *habitus* as the interpretative framework passed down through socialization which is either reproduced or rearticulated according to time and human agency (Wagner 2013c: 168, 2014: 296; see also Bourdieu 2008: 52-65).¹¹³ Instead, as Wagner presents it, the act of societal self-foundation (or, world-making) ‘draw[s] on the inherited resources’ of socialization, but ‘rework[s] them’ via the reflexive reinterpretation of self-understandings in encounter with other articulations (2013c: 169). Wagner argues that this re-interpretative action is a ‘major source for social change’, but does not systematically develop this point (2013c: 168; cf. 2014: 236). Expanding on Wagner’s remarks here, new societal self-understandings—or, patterns of common meaning, broadly speaking—are formed via encounters between different socio-cultural

interpretations, as an ‘event’ specific to that socio-cultural context (Wagner 2012: 74). These encounters ‘come together to form something new’, to crystallize new interpretative self-understandings into institutional forms (Wagner 2014: 300, cf. 303-304). Wagner’s analysis of South Africa draws attention to the reconfiguration of patterns of solidarity and societal self-understandings within the political project of world-making. In particular, the reflexive reinterpretation of societal self-understandings and shared histories determines the present situation as one shared in common as a precondition for political critique (see Wagner 2001b: 106; see also Subsection 4.3.2).

In turn, the third aspect of Wagner’s analysis of South Africa that demonstrates its mode of political world-making is the intertwining of ‘critique’ and ‘reconstruction’—the two elements that comprise Wagner’s implicit theory of political action (see 2002b: 37; see Subsection 4.3.2). Leaning on Wagner’s approach, the South African democratization movement is representative of a political project of world-making because it articulated (or, reconstructed) a new political form in the wake of collective political critique, to crystallise the new solidarities formed via the reflexive reinterpretation of the past, to bring about a different future (see Wagner 2010a: 232, 234, 237, 2012: 162, 164-165, 169). South Africa’s project of world-making and foundation of inclusive democracy transpired through a reinterpretation of sedimented institutions and past injustices, which challenged the instituted arrangement of society (Apartheid). Wagner’s analysis highlights the reconstruction of the institution of the South African social world to recognise conditions of equal freedom, as a newly articulated common societal self-understanding that worked to correct past injustices (Wagner 2011c: 494, 2012: 140-141, 2013c: 167; cf. Wagner 2015b: 120-121, 2015c: 12-13). The crystallization of this societal self-understanding into a political form in the South African case served to rectify ‘the trauma of being long-deprived of the possibility to self-govern their lives’ (Wagner 2014: 309; cf. 2015e: 32). The reflexive, collective engagement with—and the settling of—past histories is, in this sense, creative. The rearticulation of past interpretative patterns opens the

institution of the world to the possibility of explicit alteration by working as a ‘political resource [for] the (re)construction of a political community’ (Nedimović 2015: 198; cf. 197-198, 201, 203).

South Africa’s effort of collective self-determination—as a political project of world-making—combined the elements of critique and reconstruction: the movement challenged Apartheid via critique, and reconstructed the political form into a democratic republic. The key agent was the African National Congress alliance, which, for Wagner, formed a common solidarity across varied, smaller organizations (Wagner 2012: 141, 2013c: 175). Yet unlike ‘1968’ and ‘1989/1991’, the ANC offered ‘a full programmatic alternative’ to Apartheid (Wagner 2011c: 493; cf. 2012: 138). On Wagner’s account, the ANC developed a framework for the re-institution (or, reconstruction) of society for after the collective critique of Apartheid (see Wagner 2011c: 494); the period between the crisis of the instituted order and its re-institution was nevertheless marked by uncertainty and violence (Wagner 2011c: 494, 2012: 139). Despite the violent attempts to quash the political movement, ‘inclusive democracy’—the reconstructed political form—‘was claimed in a non-democratic setting’ (Wagner 2011c: 493). The success of the democratization movement was grounded upon the widespread collective consensus of the need for institutional reconstruction, which reinforced the project of political self-determination (Wagner 2012: 140).

Wagner’s analyses of the 1968 Movement and the twofold aspects of emancipation *from* and emancipation *for* also figure in his discussion of South Africa’s political project of world-making (see Wagner 2002b: 32-37; cf. 2015d: 39-42; see Subsections 4.3.2 and 4.4.2). As he puts it, the departure from Apartheid in South Africa was at once a movement of liberation *from* domination, and a project *for* the creation of a different institution of the social world through collective political action (Wagner 2013c: 168). Not only was the Apartheid regime indicative of the exclusionary and dominating forms of Restricted Liberal and Organized Modernity (see Wagner 1994a), it imposed the institutional order ‘from the outside’ via

colonization (Wagner 2011c: 498, 2012: 147, 2013c: 167-168). The South African experience was therefore more radical in its act of emancipatory and autonomous world-making (Wagner 2013c: 167-168, 174) than those within Wagner's analyses of the succession of Western varieties of modernities (see Wagner 1994a). Together with the crystallisation of newly articulated interpretative patterns and common bonds, the institution of a new democratic political form in South Africa represented 'political change in the direction of collective autonomy' (Wagner 2011c: 493; cf. 2012: 138).

This subsection focussed on Wagner's historical-sociological analysis of the South African democratization movement between 2010 and 2015. Leaning on Wagner's implicit understanding of the interconnected dimensions of 'critique' and 'reconstruction' in political action (see Subsections 4.3.2 and 4.4.2 above), I suggested that South Africa's democratization movement represents an exemplary case of political world-making. In particular, three insights from the above reconstruction of Wagner's analysis of South Africa are significant. First, Wagner draws attention to the reconfiguration of common bonds and, second, the rearticulation of self-understandings in the wake of the reflexive reinterpretation of shared histories within the South African project of world-making. Together, this doing of world reinterpretation problematizes shared histories and the common situation in the present, to articulate a different, possible future. Third, the interconnected notions of critique and reconstruction within political projects of world-making resurfaced in Wagner's thinking. Off the back of the reinterpretation of common histories and socio-political bonds, the South African democratization movement brought the instituted Apartheid order into crisis via collective critique. This intertwined with the dimension of reconstruction, as the political project articulated a new political form—an inclusive democratic republic—to crystallise the new societal self-understandings of equality, autonomy, and inclusivity. Where Wagner contended that '1968' and '1989' failed to reinstitute a new political form after the moment of critique (and hence were a 'missed opportunity'; see Subsection 4.3.2), South Africa was a

success: the political form was reconstructed in the wake of critique, in light of the newly articulated common understandings and bonds. Looking back through the reconstruction of Wagner's work at this point, a clear and largely continuous line of thought is evident *vis-à-vis* the aspects at play within world-altering collective political projects. Specifically, the reflexive critique of the instituted dimension of the world alongside the rearticulation of common understandings and reconfiguration of common bonds via collective political action, which leads to the reconstruction of the institution of the common world. With this in mind, I bring together the threads of this chapter into a concluding discussion in the next section.

4.5. Closing Considerations: On Wagner's Elucidation of the Dimensions of Critique and Reconstruction within World-Making Political Projects

In response to the question, 'how can collective political action make a difference in the world?', the present study develops a theoretical understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action. Leaning on hermeneutic-phenomenological debates—which draw attention to the intertwined elements of world-interpretation and world-formation in the anthropic encounter with the world—this chapter analysed the implicit political theory within Wagner's historical-sociological approach to the thematic of modernity. Taking Wagner and Nathalie Karagiannis's sketch of projects of 'world-making' as a focal point, I traced Wagner's elucidation of the modes of collective political doing that bring about the succession of forms of modernity, from his first major work, *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (1994a), to his most recent writings. The reconstruction revealed the interplay of two dimensions of doing within political projects of world-making: world-interpreting 'critique', and world-forming 'reconstruction'. In short, Wagner's approach highlights that the collective political critique of the institution of the world and shared histories forms the precondition for the 'reconstruction' of the institution, to engender historical change.

The above reconstruction of Wagner's work was split into four parts. After outlining Wagner's theory of modernity in Section 4.1, I analysed the elements of collective political action within his elucidation of 'successive modernities' in *Liberty and Discipline* (1994a) in Section 4.2. Section 4.3, in turn, focussed on Wagner's thinking from between 2000 and 2008/2009, which I split into three subsections. I traced Wagner's implicit hermeneutic turn in Subsection 4.3.1, through which he emphasised the reflexive, interpretative relation of human beings to the world; in this analysis, 'the world' denotes the common world, patterned by shared histories. Drawing on this hermeneutic insight, I reconstructed Wagner's more overtly political writings from 2000-2008/2009 in Subsection 4.3.2. Wagner made the interconnected aspects of 'critique' and 'reconstruction' within political projects explicit in these texts (see Wagner 2002b, 2005b), while he also detailed an understanding of actualisation of the interpretative relation to the world via 'historicity', 'agentiality', and 'reflexivity'. I contrasted the findings of Wagner's latent political theory against Karagiannis and Wagner's notion of synagonism in an excursus in Subsection 4.3.3, before turning to their sketch of 'varieties of world-making' in Subsection 4.4.1. There, I reconstructed the notion of the world at play in their elucidation of 'world-making', and traced the world problematic through Wagner's writings from 2007 to 2016. Next, I followed the development of Wagner's theoretical understanding of 'critique' and 'reconstruction' within political projects from his thinking between 2007 and 2016 in Subsection 4.4.2, and leant upon this to expand upon Wagner's analysis of the South African democratization movement in Subsection 4.4.3.

Wagner did not explicitly set out to develop a theory of political action *per se*; however, openings for an understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action were revealed through the reconstruction of his theorisation of the plural forms of successive modernities. Wagner's work in particular helps to analyse the question, 'how can collective political action make a difference in the world?' From his perspective, collective political action can make a difference in the world, firstly, by problematizing the institution of the social world

through critique. Political critique comprises the reflexive reinterpretation of shared histories and reconfigures common bonds as a result, which re-shapes the form of the common world. This intertwining of the critique of the institution and the rearticulation of common bonds and understandings triggers a crisis in the instituted order, which opens the possibility of its alteration. Second, and connectedly, collective political action makes a difference in the world by re-forming or ‘reconstructing’ the form of the institution of the social world, in light of the newly articulated common understandings and socio-political bonds. As the reconstruction demonstrated, Wagner maintained an emphasis on these key aspects of collective political doing across his intellectual trajectory—from his first outlines of the successive modernities framework and analysis of the 1968 and 1848 Movements in *Liberty and Discipline* (1994a), through to his discussion of the South African democratization movement (see e.g. 2010a, 2011c, 2012, 2013c, 2014, 2015e).

Yet, a central argument developed through this chapter is that a tension that arises between Wagner’s broadly interpretative approach to political critique (as a mode of ‘world-interpretation’), on the one hand, and the constructivist dimension in the reconstructive aspect of world-making, on the other. For the ‘constant rebirth’ of the world to be the ‘characteristic of political action’ (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 2), this indicates that political action must incorporate an interpretative element in the doing of socio-historical re-creation. Wagner’s broadly hermeneutic approach points in this direction. In particular, he sketched an understanding of the reflexive reinterpretation of the world as a mode of collective doing in the present that rearticulates common histories to open the possibility of a different future. Wagner’s remarks on the interpretative conditions of ‘historicity’, ‘agentiality’, and ‘reflexivity’, in addition to the notion of the imagination, give support to the hermeneutic dimensions of his analysis of world-interpreting critique. Leaning on Wagner here, political action begins from a situation *in-the-world*; that is, in Wagner’s approach, within already-articulated world contexts. In this way, Wagner espouses an understanding of the creative

dimensions of interpretation, and likewise, the interpretative aspects of creation. The reflexive reinterpretation of the present institution and shared histories makes possible the critique of the instituted order. The resultant ‘crisis’ opens the institution to alteration, to reconstruct the political form to begin the world anew, as a kind of ‘rebirth’.

However, Wagner’s understanding of world-making elaborates a constructivist—rather than hermeneutic-phenomenological—notion of the world. In this, his work after 2007 draws attention to the *creation* of the world by *anthropos*, as a distinctly human or social world, separate to the natural world or the ‘earth’ (see Section 4.4.1). This move renders human beings as sovereign world-*makers* and, in so doing, abstracts *anthropos* from the condition *in-the-world*. Drawing on Boltanski’s notion of the distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘world’ (see Subsection 4.4.2), Wagner hints that the world (*qua* institution of the common social world and history) remains open to the possibility of alteration, such that the ‘making’ can be a ‘remaking’ (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 3; cf. Goodman 1978: 6; see also Wagner 2012: 157). Yet, Wagner’s analysis overlooks the inexhaustible meta-horizon of the world that encompasses all ‘varieties of world-making’. As hermeneutic-phenomenological approaches demonstrate (see Section 1.1, Chapter 1; and Subsection 4.4.1), the under-determined horizon of the world provides the possibility for world-altering political projects of ‘re-making’ (see Ricoeur 1991c: 213).

In the next chapter, I critically compare Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s approaches to the world-altering dimensions of collective political action in light of the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the world problematic, to address the central question of this study, ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ The discussion focusses on three key thematics in particular: opening the world via world-interpreting critique; re-creating the world via world-forming doing; and their elucidations of the problematic of the world. The comparative critique serves to outline a new phenomenological understanding of political action, which I detail in the subsequent concluding discussion, alongside pathways for

future consideration beyond this project. First, however, I undertake the comparative analysis in the following chapter.

CHAPTER FIVE

POLITICAL ACTION AS MAKING A DIFFERENCE *IN-THE-WORLD: A DISCUSSION*

As I argued in the introduction to this thesis, the challenges of globalization, depoliticization and the contemporary experience of worldlessness call for a ‘systematic rethinking’ of the ways human beings relate to the world (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2007: 7). Jean-Luc Nancy stresses that globalization engenders the ‘un-world’: in the wake of the collapse of the world into an indistinct totality, the globalized world has exhausted possible meanings and ‘lost its ability to form a world [*faire monde*]’ (Nancy 2007 [2002]: 34; cf. 27-28). As Nancy puts it, globalization confronts us with our ‘impotence to form a world’ at the same time that it destroys the certainties of ‘what the world was’ (2007a: 35, 50). From a different angle, Zygmunt Bauman draws attention to the exhaustion of collective agency and the ability to ‘imagine alternative ways of living together’ in the globalized and depoliticized world (1999: 5). This decline of political creativity—representative of contemporary depoliticization (Straume & Humphrey 2010: 10)—ultimately rests on the belief that ‘there is little we can change in the ways the affairs of the world are running’ and that, ‘were we able to make a change, it would be futile’ (Bauman 1999: 1; cf. Straume & Humphrey 2010: 18). The intertwining of globalization and depoliticization thus give rise to an *insignificancy* of politics (Castoriadis 2011b: 5-6), collective impotence (Nancy 2007: 35) and political *indifference* (Straume & Humphrey 2010a: 18). In light of what she termed the ‘growth of modern worldlessness’, under the ‘conditions of radical isolation’ and declining political creativity (1998 [1958]: 58), Arendt posed a ‘radical ... and desperate’ question: ‘does politics still have any meaning at all?’ (2007a [1956/1959]: 108; cf. 201-203).

In response to this situation, Nancy (2007) proposes an alternative path by differentiating globalization from *mondialisation*. Nancy’s work is a call to action: to choose the ‘creation of the world’ or *mondialisation*, rather than idly witness the destruction of the world

via globalization (see Nancy 2007: 34-35; see also Raffoul & Pettigrew: 2007: 1). The challenges of globalization and depoliticization thus pose the ‘question of owning up to the present’, to ‘ask anew what the world wants of us’ (Nancy 2007: 35). The globalized and depoliticized world has not exhausted all possibilities of world-formation. To recapture our political agency, it is necessary to interrogate our collective impotence and re-open ‘the struggle for the world’ (see Nancy 2007: 54). In Nancy’s wake, the present project proposed to rethink collective political action as a world-altering project. In light of the perceived inability of contemporary society ‘to imagine a better world and to do something to make it better’ (Bauman 1999: 1), this study sought to develop a theoretical understanding of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action by analysing the question: ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’

Two overarching tasks emerged from this question. First, I argued that it was necessary to understand the problem of ‘the world’ in order to, second, analyse how collective political action alters the world. I turned to hermeneutic-phenomenological debates to speak to the first objective. I traced a political phenomenological framework via the hermeneutic-phenomenological problematic of the world, in which the world is understood as the under-determined, inexhaustible and encompassing shared horizon of the human condition, through which all phenomena appear as meaningful to *anthropos* (see Section 1.1, Chapter 1). The central claim of this study is that a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach makes possible an understanding of how collective political projects alter the world: it draws attention to the inherent openness of the world to change, as well as the ways in which human beings shape, and reshape sociocultural worlds in encounter with the world-horizon to bring about movement in history. This is the first project to develop a political theory from the hermeneutic-phenomenological insights of the world-interpreting and world-forming aspects of the anthropic encounter with the world. Hence this study opens an alternative, interdisciplinary path for phenomenological political theory—a new approach that is distinct

from the ethical or aesthetic approaches that have come to dominate the field (e.g. ed. Kompridis 2014; Myers 2013; Plot 2014; Rancière 2006, 2013).

Leaning on the political phenomenological framework elaborated in Chapter 1—which centres on the intertwined dimensions of world-interpretation and world-formation that arise in the anthropic encounter with and articulation of the world—I reconstructed the world-altering elements of collective political action found in the work of Hannah Arendt (Chapter 2), Cornelius Castoriadis (Chapter 3), and Peter Wagner (Chapter 4). This is the first analysis of the crossroads between these three thinkers, as well as the first to bring Arendt and Castoriadis’s notions of political action into critical dialogue from a hermeneutic-phenomenological perspective (see also Nedimović 2007: 154-177; Straume 2012b; Zerilli 2002). The next task is to critically compare the findings of the reconstructions, in order to elaborate an understanding of political action as making a difference *in-the-world*, as per the purpose of this study. I undertake the comparative critique in the present chapter.

The discussion is broken into three main sections. I analyse Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s elucidations of the world-interpreting and world-forming dimensions of collective political action in Sections 5.1 and 5.2, respectively, before debating the three approaches to the world problematic in Section 5.3.¹¹⁴ Drawing on this critical analysis, I detail the theory of political action *in-the-world* in the subsequent concluding discussion to this study, in which I also indicate openings for later consideration; specifically, the questions of power and time necessitate further thought in future. First, however, I commence the critical comparison in the next section.

5.1. The Hermeneutic Element of Political Doing: Disclosing, Opening and Reinterpreting the World via Critique

In Chapter 1 of this study, I outlined the hermeneutic-phenomenological notion of ‘world-interpretation’. I drew upon this notion to reconstruct the work of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner. Although, as I argued in Chapter 1, the elements of world-interpretation and world-

formation are fundamentally intertwined within the doing of world-articulation, I argued it was helpful to distinguish between these two dimensions for clarity of analysis. Because the anthropological condition is always-already *in-the-world*, the human encounter with and articulation of the world necessarily incorporates an interpretative aspect (see Arnason 1989a: 40, 1992: 247-249, 1993: 92-93; see also Adams 2014b: 71). Central to this mode of world-interpreting doing is the ‘conflict of interpretations’ (see Arnason 1992: 255, 2003: 229, 2007: 23; Ricoeur 1974 [1969], 1991b: 226-227). As suggested in Chapter 1, world-interpreting action comprises the interpretative interrogation of articulated patterns of understanding through the creation of a critical distance or space between the instituted world and the world-horizon; the hermeneutic movement between ‘distance’ and ‘belonging’ within the ‘interrogative’ mode of problematisation; and, the articulation of possible alternatives through the interplay and conflict of interpretations.

Alongside this hermeneutic-phenomenological sketch of ‘world-interpreting’ action, two connected insights are significant here. First, the critical dimension of world-interpretation, importantly, reveals the world as a ‘paradoxical’ and incomplete horizon. The conflict of interpretations problematizes the instituted form of the world, at the same time that it opens the possibility of its alteration via the creative tension between and articulation of potential alternatives. Hence, second, the understanding of world-interpreting action draws attention to the ‘*interpretative* moment of creation’ (see Adams 2005: 30, emphasis in original). Indeed, to make a difference in the world via political action presupposes the creative (re-)interpretation of the world to alter the institution of the world *from something into* something else (see Adams 2005: 35, 2009b: 125).¹¹⁵

Leaning on this hermeneutic-phenomenological sketch of world-interpreting doing, I reconstructed Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s elucidations of collective political action. I critically compare their approaches to the world-interpretative dimension of political action in this section. Three interpretative elements of political action emerged from the analysis: world-

disclosure (Arendt), world-opening critique (Castoriadis and Wagner), and the reflexive reinterpretation of the world (Wagner). As I will show, Wagner's account most thoroughly reveals the creative element of interpretation via his analysis of the reflexive reinterpretation of shared histories within the present to reconfigure common bonds and new patterns of understanding. This creative-interpretative form of political action, moreover, opens the institution of the world to the possibility of alteration. Wagner and Castoriadis each drew attention to this world-opening aspect of political doing. The key insight from this analysis is that critical world-interpreting doing paves the way for the creative re-institution of the world and rearticulation of patterns of meaning by opening the instituted world onto an under-determined field of possibility (i.e., the overarching world-horizon). In this, interpretative action is creative, at the same time that creative world-forming doing necessarily comprises an interpretative dimension; the two aspects are fundamentally intertwined in the political doing of world-articulation and world-alteration.

I reconstructed Arendt's thought in Chapter 2. As I traced her reflections on the anthropological condition of plurality, the analysis unearthed an implicit—and ultimately unfinished—notion of 'world-disclosure', as a mode of political doing that articulates the common world via speech (see Subsection 2.2.1, Chapter 2). This latent aspect of Arendt's theory of political action emerges through a cluster of writings from the early 1950s, *en route* to *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]). Arendt hinted at the hermeneutic dimensions of distance and belonging as part of the 'dialogue' of collective understanding in 'Understanding and Politics (The Difficulties of Understanding)' (1994e [1954]: 309-312, 323). Yet, the properly world-disclosing aspect appeared in two essays: 'Socrates' (2007b [1954]) and 'Introduction into Politics' (2007a [1956/1959]). There, Arendt sketched a notion of *doxa* as the articulation 'in speech of what *dokei moi*, that is, "of what appears to me"' in the world, "as it opens itself to me"' (2007b: 14; cf. 15). The mode of action *qua* speech, then, reveals or discloses interpretations of the world as it appears 'from all sides' (2007a: 128-129). As I argued in

Subsection 2.2.1 in Chapter 2, Arendt's remarks on world-disclosure speak more to the problematic of the world than elucidate a theory of political action: as the shared horizon of the human condition, the world forms the precondition for politics in its openness to plural and conflicting interpretations (see Arendt 2007a: 128-129, 167-168, 2007b: 14, 18). Nevertheless, Arendt leaves this aspect of her theory of political action unfinished. She does not develop an understanding of the political conflict of interpretations, nor does she advance the notion of world-disclosure toward an understanding of political critique in the interrogation of history. Indeed, Arendt sidelined the aspect of world-disclosure in favour a closer consideration of action *qua* new beginnings, as the actualisation of the anthropological condition of natality. Although Arendt's thinking *vis-à-vis* world-disclosure highlights that the world forms an open, common space for plural interpretative disclosures, her work remains limited in relation to the notions of world-opening and world-interpreting critique.

Both Castoriadis and Wagner go a step further than Arendt on the question of world-interpreting political doing. In particular, Castoriadis and Wagner each point to an interpretative dimension of political action that *opens* the institution of the world onto an encompassing field of possibility, as part of the world-altering political project. That said, Castoriadis and Wagner approach this from different angles. I argued in Chapter 3 that Castoriadis's early work incorporated an implicit hermeneutic undercurrent (see Sections 3.2 and 3.3). The reconstruction revealed traces of an understanding of the act of opening the institution of the world via self-reflexive, collective political interrogation, which cracks the instituted imaginary and, in so doing, opens the institution onto a broader field of possibility. This became clear through Castoriadis's remarks on the self-reflexive 'relativising' doing of the revolutionary project in the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987a [1964-1965]). Castoriadis argues that 'as revolutionaries ... We first have to understand and interpret our own society. And we can do this only by *relativizing* it' (1987a: 28, emphasis in original). As I suggested in Chapter 3, Castoriadis here draws out the interpretative dimension of the

revolutionary project in relation to the self-reflexive reinterpretation of the institution of the world, which relativises the instituted dimension in relation to other possibilities. As society 'challenges itself', Castoriadis writes:

what is internal to society becomes external to it, and this, in so far as it signifies the self-relativisation of society, placing at a distance and criticising... what is instituted, marks the initial emergence of autonomy, the first crack in the [instituted] imaginary (1987a: 155).

Self-reflexive, interrogative political action interpretatively sets the institution of society at a critical distance via this act of 'relativisation'. Following the above quote, the collective 'struggle against' the institution of the world triggers a crack in the instituted imaginary (Castoriadis 1987a: 62). This line of thought *vis-à-vis* fracturing the instituted imaginary via political interrogation resurfaces in places across Castoriadis's trajectory (e.g. 1993d [1968]: 130, 131, 132, 146, 2015 [1968-1969]: 60, 1993a [1979]: 316, 330), in which he also incorporates hermeneutic notions of relativizing distance and modes of 'detachment' (Castoriadis 2015: 60). From this analysis, the interpretative problematisation of the institution forms a precondition for and pivotal dimension of the self-alteration of the world via collective political doing. In this, Castoriadis goes further than Arendt in his elucidation of the world-opening aspects of political interrogation. Yet, he did not fully pursue this insight into the world-opening, fracturing of the instituted imaginary as part of the act of social-historical creation via collective political action. As I argued in Chapter 3, this implicit hermeneutic approach to institutional interrogation and the subsequent act of social-historical re-formation sits in tension with his strong account of the creation of the world *ex nihilo* (see Subsections 3.4.1, 3.4.2, and Section 3.5).

Wagner similarly detailed a notion of the world-opening dimensions of interpretative political doing in his reflections on the 'crisis' of the institution of the social world in the wake of collective critique. In his elucidation of the 'successive modernities' framework in *A Sociology of Modernity: Liberty and Discipline* (1994a; see Section 4.2, Chapter 4), Wagner

explicitly links the alteration of history to the collective critique of the institution of the world and the struggle between interpretative perspectives. Indeed, he later contends that the overarching narrative of political modernity is a ‘narrative of *struggle*’ (2005b: 60, emphasis in original). In Wagner’s approach, the push for emancipation *from* the dominating institutional form via critique triggers a ‘crisis’ in the instituted order (see 1994a: 50-51, 189-192, 2001b: 109-110, 2002b: 32-37, 41). This dispute opens the potential for the ‘reconstruction’ of the institutional form (I return to Wagner’s notion of reconstruction in Section 5.2, below).

Arguably, three connected dimensions of world-interpreting and world-opening political action emerge in Wagner’s work. First, the collective interrogation of the shared situation simultaneously opens a plurality of interpretative perspectives upon the social world (e.g. Wagner 2001b: 106, 107-108; see Subsection 4.3.2, Chapter 4). Second, the dispute between interpretations opens the institution to possible ‘reconstruction’, in the wake of the reflexive reinterpretation of common histories and the simultaneous reconfiguration of collective bonds (Frieze & Wagner 2000b: 28, 32, 2001a: 126; Wagner 1994a: 50, 56-57, 123, 189-192, 1994b: 281-282, 2001b: 112; see Subsections 4.3.1, 4.3.2 and 4.4.2, Chapter 4). This was clear in Wagner’s discussions of the South African political project of world-making in particular (see Wagner 2011c: 494, 2012: 140-141, 2013c: 167-169, 2014: 300-304, 2015b: 120-121, 2015c: 12-13; and Subsection 4.4.3, Chapter 4). Third, Wagner furthers this notion of world-opening critique in dialogue with Luc Boltanski (2011 [2009]: 57; see Subsection 4.4.2, Chapter 4). Leaning on Boltanski, Wagner contends that reflexive critique alters the relation of human beings to reality such that ‘a gap between reality and world may emerge’ (Wagner 2010e: 475; cf. 2012: 59). In this, Wagner draws attention to the critical reinterpretation of the social institution of ‘reality’, which opens onto the encompassing ‘world’. This is similar in some respects to Castoriadis’s remarks on the relativisation of the institution (noted above). As Wagner puts it, the space cleared via collective critique opens a ‘difference between “reality”

and “world” as we experience it and another possible world ... that we can imagine’ (2012: 157).

Where Castoriadis stops short of elucidating the creative dimensions of world-opening interpretative relativisation, Wagner’s work, in turn, underscores the creativity of world-interpreting critique. Critique is creative in that it clears a space between the institution of society (or ‘reality’) and the overarching field of possibility (or, the world-horizon) for the articulation of the new, which triggers a crisis in the instituted order ahead of its rearticulation. The creative dimension of interpretation additionally emerges through Wagner’s reflections on the simultaneous reconfiguration of common bonds and reflexive reinterpretation of shared histories in the present, which constitute key dimensions of the doing of ‘critique’. Through interpretative-critical political doing, then, ‘major social institutions and, with them, the prevailing configuration of institutions [and interpretative patterns], undergo a transformation’ (Wagner 1994a: 31; cf. 2012: 37).

Hence, collective political action can make a difference in the world, firstly, through critique. From Wagner’s work in particular, as well as traces within Castoriadis’s approach, we learn that the interrogation of the institution of reality reconfigures common bonds and rearticulates shared historical patterns to alter interpretative patterns and configurations of the present, which challenges the instituted order and opens the possibility of its alteration via political action. In this way, critique is a ‘possibility-disclosing practice’ (Kompridis 2005: 339). Collective political action comprises the simultaneous interpretation, interrogation, and rearticulation of the world, to reshape common interpretative patterns and offer potential alternative institutional forms. From this, a theory of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action must incorporate an interpretative element: the problematisation of the world opens the world to alteration, and articulates possible alternatives via the conflict of interpretations.

It is possible to advance this elucidation of the world-interpreting dimension of political action via Jan Patočka's phenomenological approach to politics, with its interconnected notions of freedom and problematicity (Patočka 1996: 39; see also Adams 2016a: 223; Findlay 2002: 100-102). For Patočka, dissenting political action 'shatters' the certainties of socio-political reality, which reveals the problematicity of the world and the human condition in it (Findlay 2002: 102-107, Patočka 1996). Patočka's sketch of the world-problematizing movement of dissent highlights the connection between the encompassing world-horizon and the institution of the world (Adams 2016a: 223). As Arnason (2007: 15) notes in regards to Patočka, 'the experience of freedom is... also an experience of transcendence'. In this way, political action reaches beyond 'given reality' by 'opening ... horizons beyond the given' through the permanent questioning of already-articulated historical patterns and the human condition *in-the-world* (Arnason 2007: 16). In particular, Patočka's interrelated notions of human freedom, the problematicity of the world and historical movement via politics warrant further analysis to explore the interpretative-creative dimensions of his understanding of political action, which remains little discussed in the literature (see Lom 2004: 277-278, Melançon 2016).

This section debated Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's approaches to the world-interpreting aspect of collective political action. Arendt's work sketched a notion of world-disclosing speech that ultimately remained unfinished; she did not advance this toward a theory of collective political critique, unlike Castoriadis and Wagner in their respective works. Both Castoriadis and Wagner highlighted that the collective interrogation of the institution fractures the given institution, which opens the possibility of its rearticulation. Yet, as I argued in this section, Wagner went one step further than Castoriadis in relation to the creative dimensions of world-interpretation, by highlighting the concomitant reconfiguration of common bonds and the reflexive reinterpretation of shared histories via the conflict of interpretations. In the next section, I consider the element of world-forming political action

that emerged from Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's works, before analysing their respective approaches to the world problematic in Section 5.3.

5.2. On 'Making' a Difference *in-the-World*: World-Forming Political Action as Beginning the World Anew, or Creative Reconstruction

The above comparative analysis of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's approaches to the world-interpreting dimension of political action served to elaborate an understanding of the creativity of world-interpreting critique: the collective interrogation of the institution opens the world to alteration via the articulation of possible alternatives through the conflict of interpretations. This highlights the close intertwining of world-interpreting critique with world-forming doing. In this section, I debate Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's respective elucidations of the element of world-forming political action as the explicit alteration of the form of the institution of the world to engender movement in history. Recalling the notion of 'world-forming' doing from hermeneutic-phenomenological debates from Chapter 1, the element of 'world-formation' relates to the articulation of the under-determined world-horizon via the formation of patterns of meaning, which gives shape to social-historical and cultural worlds and the human condition (see e.g. Arnason 1989a: 38, 1993: 89, 92; Merleau-Ponty: 2002 [1945]: xx; Ricoeur 1976, 1986 [1975]). Central to this understanding is the 'figurative articulation of meaning' within the instituting act (Arnason 1993: 96) which forms the dimensions of society and history (Merleau-Ponty 2002: xx) and modes of cultural belonging (Ricoeur 1995: 38, 1981c: 116-117; 1991a: 453; see also Adams 2015a: 140-141). The interrelation between these articulated patterns of meaning and the overarching world-horizon means that socio-cultural and historical worlds are never instituted in closure (see Arnason 1993: 96); the underlying under-determinacy of the encompassing world-horizon means these worlds are always open to the possibility of alteration.

After discussing the commonalities between Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's notions of the world-forming aspects of political action below, I draw out two key points for critical

analysis in this section. On the one hand, political action assumes the character of ‘beginning’ (Arendt) or ‘creation’ (Castoriadis). Yet a constructivist element emerges here, particularly in Castoriadis and Wagner’s theories in relation to the creation of the world *ex nihilo* and world-making, respectively. On the other hand, because political action is undertaken by human beings that are always-already *in-the-world*—as Arendt’s work makes clear—collective political projects begins the world *anew*. On this point, I bring Arendt and Wagner’s works into dialogue to detail an understanding of political action as making a difference by beginning the world *anew*. After this critical comparison of the three approaches to world-forming doing, I turn to Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s elucidations of the world problematic in Section 5.3.

Each in their own way, Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner highlight the creative alteration of history via the rearticulation of the institution of the world and patterns of meaning. Castoriadis’s approach is the most explicit of the three. Particularly in the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* and his writings from the 1960s, Castoriadis sketches an understanding of the formation of the imaginary institution as the articulation of a ‘grasp’ of the world (1987a [1964-1965]: 147; cf. 145) through the creation of meaning (as shown in Sections 3.2 and 3.3, Chapter 3). Castoriadis writes, ‘the development of the historical world is *ipso facto* the unfolding of a world of significations’ (1987a: 14). Here, Castoriadis notes that within doing ‘dwell *significations*’ (1987a: 146, emphasis in original; cf. 66), in which a ‘world of significations’ is formed via encounter with an encompassing world-horizon (1987a: 139; cf. 133, 143-146). This world-forming aspect of Castoriadis’s thought helps to clarify Arendt’s remarks on the miraculous character of action that creates historical realities and patterns of remembrance (Arendt 1998 [1958]: 8 - 9, 2006f [1969]: 169), and ‘constitutes the very texture we call real’ (2006f: 168). Wagner’s work similarly focuses on the historical institution of the social world, although he does not consider the question of socio-cultural meaning to the extent Castoriadis does. In his writings from 2000 to 2008/2009, Wagner notes the

‘production’ of meaning via the reflexive reinterpretation of shared histories in the present (Friese & Wagner 2000b: 28; see Subsection 4.3.1, Chapter 4). Yet, as Wagner and Heidrun Friese contend, this ‘intersubjective production’ of meaning is likewise the formation of *common* bonds (see Friese & Wagner 2000b: 28). As I suggested in Chapter 4, Wagner’s analysis centres arguably centres more on the creative institution of the world *qua* political *form* and the configuration of common bonds. This becomes clear in his definition of a political form, as the ‘constitu[tion] of the relations between the singular human beings and the collectivity under specific socio-historical conditions’ (Wagner 2002b: 43), which arises through the crystallisation of new interpretative self-understandings into a form (2005b: 61). Combining these three approaches, the notion of world-forming doing denotes the simultaneous articulation of a world of meaning *qua* historical pattern and the configuration of common bonds into an institutional form.

I noted above that the analysis of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s works revealed a twofold notion of action: the question of action as *beginning* or ‘creation’, which can lend itself to a form of constructivism in the creation or ‘making’ of the world; and, the re-creation and alteration of the institution of the world to *begin* history *anew*. I debate these aspects now. Both Arendt and Castoriadis elucidate their respective theories of creative political action on the background of a critique of the modern means-end, rational teleology inherent to ‘technique’ (e.g. Arendt 1998: 153-159, 220-230, 294-305, see also Subsection 2.2.2, Chapter 2; and Castoriadis 1987a: 72-77, 1984d [1973]; see also Adams 2012a: 34). Arendt and Castoriadis’s theories of creative doing likewise respond to philosophies that espouse modes of determinacy. For Castoriadis, the ontologies of determinacy that pervade Western philosophy reduce ‘being’ to ‘being-determined’ (e.g. 1987b: 181, 1997c: 13, 1997d: 393; see also Adams 2011a: 4; Klooger 2011: 35-38, 2014a). From a different angle, Arendt challenges how ‘the concept of action was interpreted in terms of making and fabrication’ within the philosophical tradition (1998: 228; cf. 220), with the consequence that action was rendered as a predetermined process

to achieve a prescribed ‘end’. In contrast to these debates, Arendt and Castoriadis each consider action as the unpredictable, creative articulation of the unprecedentedly new in the world—as a spontaneous ‘miracle’ (Arendt; see Subsection 2.2.2 and Section 2.3, Chapter 2) or ‘creation *ex nihilo*’ (Castoriadis; see Subsection 3.4.1, Chapter 3). Despite the theological undertones of each thinker’s approach to creation, both Arendt and Castoriadis strip the notions of ‘miracles’ and ‘creation *ex nihilo*’ of their religious associations and attribute the source of creation to *anthropos*.

As discussed in Chapter 2 (see especially Subsection 2.2.2, and Sections 2.1 and 2.3), Arendt anchors her understanding of the potential for creative ‘beginning’ in the anthropological condition of natality. Leaning on Augustine, Arendt argues that *anthropos* was created into the world to ‘act as a beginner and enact the story of mankind’ (1996 [1929/1964]: 55). She repeatedly cites Augustine across her trajectory to make the point that *anthropos* have the condition of *initium*—human beings are *beginners*: ‘this beginning [*initium*] did in no way ever exist before. In order that there be such a beginning, man was created before whom nobody was’ (Arendt 1996: 55; cf. 1958 [1951]: 465, 1994e [1954]: 321, 1998 [1958]: 177, 2006a [1963]: 203, 2007a [1956/1959]: 126). Arendt contends that each new birth into the world is a potential ‘beginning’ because *anthropos* have the capacity for action in their condition as *initium* or *beginning*, to enact ‘miracles’ and create the possibility of history. What is significant for the present analysis is that Arendt renders *anthropos* as ‘miracle workers’ (2007a: 113). She writes, ‘It is men who perform them [miracles]—men who[,] because they have received the twofold gift of freedom and action[,] can establish a reality of their own’ (Arendt 2006f: 169). Here, ‘miracles’ are to be understood as the emergence of ‘something new’ in its ‘startling unexpectedness’ (1998: 178), which ‘bursts into the context of predictable processes as something unexpected, unpredictable, and ultimately causally inexplicable—just like a miracle’ (2007a: 112; cf. 1994e: 326 n.14, 1998: 246, 2006a: 216, 223, Arendt 2006f: 168-169). Arendt links this to the Kantian notion of spontaneity in passing (see Arendt 2007a: 126, 1998:

230, 231, 235 n.75). However, she does not fully elaborate the role of the creative imagination within the human potential for ‘miracles’ and enacting new beginnings in history; nor does she expand on her passing statement that the ‘deepest meaning’ of political freedom lies in the ‘freedom of spontaneity’ (Arendt 2007a: 127; cf. 113).¹¹⁶ Nevertheless, like Castoriadis, Arendt dissociates the notion of the creation of history from a ‘divine’, extra-social origin or Creator—it is human beings that create and recreate history, which, for Arendt, begins from the situation of the human condition as always-already *in-the-world*, or, *born into-the-world*. As Arendt puts it, ‘With each new birth, a new beginning is born into the world’, through which ‘a new world has potentially come into being’ (1958: 465).

There are general affinities between Arendt’s sketch of the human potential for historical formation and the enactment of ‘miracles’, and Castoriadis’s elucidation of creation *ex nihilo*. In particular, the emergence of the unprecedentedly new in the historical field via the self-creation of the social-historical. For example, Castoriadis notes in the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* that revolutionary *praxis* refers to ‘a beginning, anything but an end’ (1987a [1964-1965]: 75), which ‘prepares the new by refusing to predetermine it’ (1987a: 57; cf. 32). Through his ontological turn (made explicit in the second section of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* in 1975 (1987b); see Subsection 3.4.1, Chapter 3), Castoriadis details an understanding of creation *ex nihilo*: the generative emergence of *radical otherness* in the social-historical field through the institution of new forms via the instituting social imaginary (1987b: 197, 1991c: 34, 1997c: 3, 1997d; see also Adams 2011a: 2; Klooger 2011; Mouzakitis 2014a). Arguably social-historical creation here assumes the appearance of a ‘miracle’ in the world, insofar as imaginary creation is ‘neither causally producible nor rationally deducible’ from what ‘is’ (Castoriadis 1997f: 333; cf. 1987b: 181, 1997c: 13, 1997d: 392-393; see also Mouzakitis 2014a: 54). As Jeff Klooger puts it in regard to Castoriadis, “‘that which is created’ ... is invented, imagined... It begins’ (Klooger 2011: 38). Castoriadis makes the role of the creative imagination (in its bifurcation as the radical imagination and social imaginary

significations) explicit in the self-creation of the social-historical,¹¹⁷ in a step beyond Arendt's under-developed approach to spontaneous new beginnings.

At the same time, however, Castoriadis's ontological approach to creation underscores the imaginary creation of worlds of meaning *ex nihilo*. In this, Castoriadis absolutizes the moment of social-historical creation as *the* creation of *the* world *ex nihilo*, which 'bypasses the phenomenological insight that we are always already *in-the-world*' (Adams 2011a: 100, emphasis in original; see Castoriadis 1987b: 359, and Subsection 3.4.1, Chapter 3). This sidelining of the phenomenological insight of the anthropological condition *in-the-world* in Castoriadis's work lends his elucidation of creation *ex nihilo* to a form of constructivism (cf. Adams 2011a: 100, 2011c: 78, 2014b: 70). This analysis abstracts *anthropos* from the condition of always-already *being-in-the-world*, which, in so doing, renders human beings sovereign world-creators that create the world from an external standpoint.

This critique may similarly be levelled at Wagner's work. Although Wagner notes at various points across his trajectory that autonomy relates to 'the human capacity for unpredictable beginnings' (2001b: 171; cf. Wagner 2001c: 42, 2001f: 10, 2004b: 49, 2006: 32, 2008a: 244), he does not explicitly theorise the character of action as 'creation' or 'beginning' to the extent that Castoriadis and Arendt do, respectively. Like Arendt and Castoriadis, Wagner's work also indicates the irreducibility of political action to a predetermined *telos*, and the inability to control the course and outcome of political projects (2001a: 5773, 2002b: 42). This is especially clear in his remarks on the 'missed opportunity' of the 1968 Student Movement, for example (Wagner 1994a: 123-124, 141-145, 162-163, 2002b: 34-41, 2005b: 61-67; see Section 4.2 and Subsections 4.3.2 and 4.4.2, Chapter 4).

More important for the present discussion is the inherent constructivism within Wagner's approach to 'world-making'. I debated this point in Subsection 4.4.1 in Chapter 4. In the wake of Wagner and Nathalie Karagiannis's (2007a) introductory sketch of 'varieties of world-making', Wagner's work draws attention to the creation of the socio-historical world by

anthropos as a distinct ‘world’ separate to the ‘earth’ or natural world (see Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 2, 2012b: 412-413; Wagner 2015e: 23, 2015b: 113; see also Subsection 4.4.1, Chapter 4). In this, Wagner (and Karagiannis) characterise human beings as capable of ‘making and remaking their own universe’, which attributes the ‘possibility of making a world’ to the ‘human capacity for creating it’ (2007a: 3; cf. Wagner 2015b: 113, 2015e: 23). In a similar vein to Castoriadis, Wagner bypasses the insight of the human condition as always-already *in-the-world* in his approach to world-making. Wagner likewise renders *anthropos* as sovereign world-makers, which construct the social world as a distinct realm separate to the natural world. For both Castoriadis and Wagner, then, the human condition is no longer *in-the-world*; rather, *anthropos* assume a point of omnipotence *outside of the world* from which to create or ‘make’ the world.

The constructivist dilemma in Wagner’s approach arguably stems from his appropriation of the term ‘world-making’ from Nelson Goodman’s work, *Ways of Worldmaking* (1978; see Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a). There, Goodman argues that human beings cognitively ‘construct’ worlds of experience—‘world-versions’—through symbolic systems (Goodman 1978: 6-7; see Donato-Rodríguez 2009: 215; Ricoeur 1991c: 200). The problem lies in Goodman’s contention that there is no underlying commonality between ‘world versions’: each way of ‘world-making’ constructs a world-version which is irreducible to a ‘single base’ (1978: 4). In this respect, Goodman sidesteps the phenomenological notion of the world as an encompassing horizon that overarches all possible world-versions. As Ricoeur notes in his ‘Review of Nelson Goodman’s *Ways of Worldmaking*’, Goodman’s understanding of ‘world-versions’ are *not* versions *of the world*, ‘in the sense that there is no world in itself before or beneath these versions’ (Ricoeur 1991c: 201, 213). Contra Goodman, Ricoeur argues that the overarching and under-determined horizon of the world exceeds each world-version ‘without being apart from it’ (Ricoeur 1991c: 212). The world-horizon is ‘that out of which, or against the background of which’ world-versions are created (Ricoeur 1991c: 212). In this way,

Ricoeur highlights that *anthropos* do not construct world-versions, but rather form versions of *the world* through the doing of human dwelling *within-the-world* (1991c: 212-213). Although Goodman (and Karagiannis and Wagner, following him) remarks that ‘Worldmaking as we know it always starts from worlds already at hand; the making is a remaking’ (Goodman 1978: 6; cf. Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 3), it is precisely the inexhaustibility and under-determinacy of the encompassing world-horizon that enables the ‘making’ to be a ‘re-making’ (Ricoeur 1991c: 213).

In contrast to Castoriadis and Wagner, Arendt stresses that ‘beginnings’ serve to begin history *anew*, as the actualisation of the anthropological condition of natality *in-the-world* (I return to the notion of ‘beginning anew’ shortly; see Subsection 2.2.2 and Section 2.3, Chapter 2). Although in places she notes that the act of ‘beginning’ relates to the creation of a ‘decisive beginning of [a] whole history’ (especially via the political act of foundation; 2006e [1959]: 120), Arendt remains steadfast that ‘man is not the creator of the world’ (1994b [1946]: 167). Arendt’s work underscores the anthropological condition *in-the-world* as the precondition for and the possibility of political action and history (as I argued in Chapter 2). Following Arendt, *anthropos* are not masters *over* the world; human beings do not *act upon* the world from an Archimedean point outside of the world, abstracted from the historical field (Arendt 1998: 296-297; see also Brient 2000: 525). In Arendt’s view, the attainment of the Archimedean standpoint forms part of the modern articulation of the human condition as ‘world alienation’, and underlies the modern tendencies toward mastery (see 1998: 257-268). For Arendt, the modern age is characterised by the conviction that ‘man can know only what he makes’, in the wake of Cartesian doubt (1998: 228; cf. 1998: 272-280, 2006d: 53-57). History then came to be interpreted as ‘made’ by human beings in the same manner that the cosmos is ‘made’ by God, thereby rearticulating the human condition in modernity as the ‘Maker’ of the world (Arendt 1998: 296, 298 n.62, 2006d: 57). As Ricoeur noted elsewhere, ‘making’ suggests the ‘fabrication of something exterior to the maker’ (1991b: 210). To posit that *anthropos* stands in

the place of the Creator and hence creates the world from this omnipotent position abstracts the human condition from its context *in-the-world*. Human beings do not stand before the world to then construct it; in this vein, *anthropos* do not create the world *ex nihilo* (see Arendt 1994b: 177).

A hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to collective political action offers an alternative to this constructivist dimension because it recognises the anthropological condition as always-already *in-the-world*. Political doing does not ‘make’ the world in the same manner as fabricating a chair, as the construction of an external object according to a predetermined schema. From the argument developed above, the creativity proper to collective political action involves the articulation of imaginary elements to engender radical novelty—in the appearance of a ‘miracle’—to form a new beginning in the world. Further, because political projects are anchored in the anthropological condition *in-the-world*, political doing cannot *create* the world *from nothing* and *from nowhere* (cf. Adams 2005: 35, 2009b: 125, 2017b*); rather, world-altering collective political action interpretatively re-creates the world, to begin the institution of the world and history *anew*.

This point brings the present discussion to the second key insight for consideration, which I noted at the start of this section: while political action has the character of *beginning* or *creation*, human beings enact these beginnings from their situation as always-already *in-the-world* to begin the world *anew*. To elaborate this contention, I draw on both Arendt and Wagner. (Castoriadis flatly dismissed the possibility of the interpretative re-creation of the world (see 1997b [1989]: 363-364; see also Adams 2007: 51); as such, I have left him aside from the analysis.) Arendt highlights the political dimensions of the anthropological condition of natality via her sketch of the ‘act of foundation’, as the creation of a ‘new beginning’ within history (see Arendt 1994e [1954]: 321). As I argued in Subsection 2.2.2 and in Section 2.3 in Chapter 2, a twofold notion of ‘beginning’ emerges in Arendt’s reflections on the act of foundation. On the one hand, Arendt notes the collective foundation of a new world *qua*

‘beginning’ through the formation of political and cultural institutions (including the nexus of tradition, authority, and religion) and the configuration of common bonds. Yet, as Arendt’s discussion of Rome in *On Revolution* revealed, even the Roman act of foundation—a decisive political event and beginning of their history (Arendt 2007d [1953]: 48, 53, 2007a: 126)—leant upon pre-existing cultural articulations and historical ‘origins’ (2006a [1963]: 202). For Arendt, the preeminent Roman act of foundation was, in this way, ‘a re-establishment... a regeneration and restoration’ (2006a: 200).

Hence, on the other hand, Arendt underscores that collective political action is likewise *beginning anew*—to preserve, augment and renew the thread of tradition and the foundation history via creative new beginnings and collective political action (2006e [1959]: 120-121, 2006f [1960]: 165). In this way, the new beginning in the political act of foundation—or, world-forming action—draws on always-already articulated historical patterns to rearticulate the institution of the world and begin history anew. Thus, Arendt acknowledges the pre-given limits of the anthropological condition *in-the-world* (within socio-cultural and historical contexts, and the encompassing world-horizon), to indicate that political creation is not the creation of the *absolutely new*. Rather, political action begins the world *anew*. World-forming political doing, then, is *contextual*: world re-formation is at once world re-interpretation. From this analysis, the dimension of beginning anew ‘add[s] to the original foundation’ by rearticulating the thread of tradition and altering the historical world via political doing (Arendt 2006e: 120; 2006f: 165). As Arendt puts it, ‘political institutions ... depend for [their] continued existence upon acting men; [and] their conservation is achieved by the same means what brought them into being’: political action (2006f: 152). Notwithstanding these insights, Arendt does not clearly address the question of *how* collective political action enacts difference in the world or begins history anew (as I argued in Section 2.4, Chapter 2). She neither elucidates the problematisation of the world via collective critique, nor adequately elaborates

how the foundation of the institution is ‘renewed’ or ‘altered’ via political doing. Arendt’s theory of political action is elusive in this respect.

Wagner’s historical-sociological approach arguably addresses this limitation within Arendt’s thinking. Specifically, Wagner underscores the interplay of the two elements of ‘critique’ and ‘reconstruction’ within the revolutionary project (2002b: 37; see Subsection 4.3.2, Chapter 4). The reflexive, re-interpretative interrogation of the world opens the possibility of the alteration of history through the reconfiguration of common bonds and rearticulation of shared histories (see Section 5.1, above). In the wake of this world-interpreting moment of collective political action, the dimension of ‘reconstruction’ works to re-form the institution of the world in light of the newly configured cultural patterns and shared bonds. This constitutes the core of Wagner’s argument *vis-à-vis* the succession of plural of modernities that he maintained across his trajectory, from his early analyses of 1968, to his reflections on the South African democratization movement (e.g. Wagner 1994a, 2010a, 2011c, 2014; see Section 4.2, and Subsections 4.3.2, 4.4.2 and 4.4.3, Chapter 4). Although the constructivist element continues through Wagner’s notion of ‘reconstruction’, its inherent interplay with the world-interpreting aspect of ‘critique’ demonstrates most clearly how collective political action alters the form of the world to engender change in history. As Wagner put it, ‘Concatenated re-interpretative action, such as in current social movements, can result in world-transformation. And new interpretations can sediment in new institutions ...’ (Wagner 2015b: 111). It is this twofold understanding of political doing—world-interpreting critique and world-forming re-creation or reconstruction—that underlies Wagner and Karagiannis’s passing remark that the ‘constant rebirth’ of the world is the ‘characteristic of political action’ (2007a: 2). This indicates the inherent intertwining of interpretative and creative doing in the political act of social-historical re-creation and alteration.

This section debated Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s approaches to the world-forming dimensions of collective political action. It focussed on two problematics in particular,

after detailing their common understandings of ‘world-forming’ doing. First, I brought Arendt and Castoriadis’s respective notions of ‘miracles’ and ‘creation’ into dialogue to elaborate the precondition for the possibility of political world-creation within the creative, world-forming capacities of *anthropos*. Yet, where Arendt anchors her understanding of *anthropos* as ‘miracle workers’ and ‘beginners’ within her philosophical anthropology of natality—which rests on a notion of human birth *into the world*—Castoriadis’s approach to creation *ex nihilo* absolutizes the act of creation and, in so doing, recasts *anthropos* as sovereign world-creators. Wagner’s notion of world-making similarly incorporated this constructivist element. Both Castoriadis and Wagner’s works in this way bypass the phenomenological insight that the human condition is always-already *in-the-world*; *anthropos* cannot ‘create’ or ‘make’ the world as an external object. With this in mind, second, I turned to Arendt and Wagner to elucidate a notion of world-forming doing as beginning the world *anew*, which gives appropriate due to the interpretative dimension of creation, and likewise, the creative element in interpretation. From the above, the grounding of political action within the anthropological condition *in-the-world* reveals that political projects interpretatively re-create the world to begin or re-form the institution of the world anew.

The question that hitherto has not been addressed in the present discussion is the hermeneutic-phenomenological question of the world *qua* encompassing, overarching, and inexhaustible horizon. I noted at the opening of this section that hermeneutic-phenomenological debates highlight that the underlying under-determinacy of the world-horizon indicates that the worlds formed through instituting doing are never articulated in closure—historical worlds, then, are always open to alteration. The very openness of the world to potential rearticulation, I argue, forms a precondition for world-altering collective political action. I consider Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’s approaches to this problematic in the next section, ahead of a concluding discussion and overview of future directions, later.

5.3. Thinking with but Beyond Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner on the Problematic of the World

The critical comparison of Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's understandings of the dimensions of world-interpretation (Section 5.1) and world-formation (Section 5.2) at play within world-altering collective political projects, additionally, reveals insights into the problematic of the world. First, world-interpreting political critique is premised upon an understanding of the world as an open, interpretative horizon, which makes a plurality—and conflict—of interpretations possible. Second, an approach to political action that recognises the human condition as always-already *in-the-world* problematizes constructivist notions of world-making and tendencies toward human mastery, which otherwise render *anthropos* as sovereign world-creators that assume an Archimedean point *outside* of the world from which to make it. Third, the element of world-forming doing additionally highlights that the overarching world-horizon must '*be able to be made meaningful*' (*sinnfähig*; Adams 2011a: 218, emphasis in original), to be articulated into plural socio-cultural and historical worlds via political doing. Fourth, and relatedly, the under-determined character of the inexhaustible, encompassing world-horizon '*makes it possible to envisage additions and changes to any concrete configuration*' (Arnason 2013b: 294; cf. 1993: 95). The world-horizon, then, always offers further possibilities for articulation and institution (see Ricoeur 1991a: 453), as a fertile ground that is '*pregnant*' with '*possible worlds*' (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 250; cf. Adams 2014b: 76).

With these insights in mind, I debate Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's approaches to the world problematic in this section. I analyse their works from three perspectives: the notion of the world as the institution of a common, social-historical world; the openness of the world, as an interpretative space and historical field; and, the phenomenological question of the world as an overarching '*meta-dimension*' (Arnason 2013b: 294). I argue that, by and large, the three thinkers consider the world as the social institution of a common historical world, and give short shrift to the phenomenological notion of the world *qua* overarching horizon. Without

giving due to the under-determined world-horizon that encompasses all socially instituted worlds, their analyses of world-altering political action appear as closed or inward processes of world-interpretation and world-formation. A hermeneutic-phenomenological approach, in turn, helps to understand the inherent openness of socially instituted worlds to the possibility of alteration, because the inexhaustible horizon always offers more and remains ‘incomplete’ (Arnason 1993: 95). After this critical comparative discussion of the three elucidations of the world problematic, I bring together the findings of the project into conclusion, and in so doing, open further pathways for consideration to advance the theory of political action *in-the-world* developed in this study.

Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner each elucidate a notion of the world as the social institution of a common historical world, in their own way. Arendt explicitly characterises the world as the ‘common realm’ in *The Human Condition* as ‘the human artefact’ formed through the ‘affairs which go on among those who inhabit the ... world together’ (1998 [1958]: 52; cf. 183-184). This builds upon Arendt’s earlier proclamation that the world is to be ‘understood as the human world constituted by men’, from her doctoral study (1996 [1929/1964]: 58; cf. 65-66, 74; see Section 2.1, Chapter 2). In this, Arendt intertwines the pattern of history and the common world: history is a ‘story of events’ carried out by the inhabitants of the common world, which both preserves and re-forms the binding thread of historical tradition and memory across time (1998: 252; cf. Arendt 2006e [1959]: 120, 2006f [1960]: 165; see also Ricoeur 1983: 67-68). Arendt’s approach largely centred on the foundation of common worlds—which, for Arendt, ‘creates the condition for remembrance, that is, for history’ (1998: 8-9)—rather than the phenomenological notion of the overarching meta-horizon.

Wagner’s understanding of the world leans on Arendt in two ways. Wagner draws on her differentiation between ‘earth’ and ‘world’ to emphasise the creation of the social world as distinct from nature (see Arendt 1998: 2, and Wagner 2015b: 113; cf. Wagner 2015e: 23; see also Subsection 4.4.1, Chapter 4). And, he sketches a similar notion of the world as a common

space of shared history (see Wagner 2001b: 106, 119-120, 127, 146, 159, 2001f: 23, 2002a: 37, 2006: 26, 2007a: 253, 2008a: 236-238, 2010e: 223, 2012: 67). As noted in Subsection 4.3.1 in Chapter 4, a key aspect of Wagner's developing hermeneutic approach was his elucidation of 'cultures of modernity', which underscored the ongoing reflexive reinterpretation of shared histories in the present to reconfigure common socio-cultural bonds (see Friese & Wagner 2000b: 32, 2001a: 126-127). This paved the way for Wagner's notion of varieties of modernity as common 'spaces of experience and interpretation' (2008b; cf. Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a: 2; see Subsection 4.3.1, Chapter 4). But, Wagner goes a step further than Arendt in her notion of the common world; Wagner adopts a more historical-sociological approach, as evident in his remark that the world is the 'social space that human beings create between themselves' (2015b: 113; cf. Wagner 2015e: 23). In this, Wagner emphasises the creation of social worlds and realities via the reinterpretation of historical patterns by those within the common world in the present, to construct a common, human world distinct from the natural world.

Castoriadis, in turn, elucidates the self-creation of the world as a constellation of social imaginary significations (e.g. 1987a [1964-1965]: 14, 46, 139; cf. 1987b [1975]: 344, 359; see Section 3.1, 3.2 and Subsection 3.4.1, Chapter 4). Where Arendt and Wagner each outlined a notion of the world as a common world, Castoriadis was more interested in the self-institution of society as the institution of a world of imaginary significations and its self-alteration across time as the social-historical (1987a: 112, 1987b: 369-373, 1991b: 84, 1991a: 144-145, 1991c: 34; see Section 3.1, Chapter 3). Particularly after his ontological turn, Castoriadis rethinks societal self-creation as the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, as he argues that 'society brings into being a world of significations and itself exists in relation to such a world' (1987b: 359; cf. 344; see Subsection 3.4.1, Chapter 3; I return to the phenomenological aspects of Castoriadis's elucidation of the world shortly). With this move, Castoriadis absolutizes the self-institution of the social world. He writes, 'society institutes the world in each case as its world' and 'its world as the world' (1987b: 359). As a result, Castoriadis's ontological approach recasts the world of

significations as a ‘total’ and universal world of meaning (cf. Adams 2007: 50; see Subsection 3.4.1, Chapter 3).

From the above, Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wager outline a notion of the social institution of a common, historical world in their works, each in their own way. Yet they each underline that these historical worlds are never closed to the possibility of alteration via political action. In Arendt’s doctoral study, later published as *Love and Saint Augustine*, she contends that the creative capacities of *anthropos* engender qualitative movement in history, which, at the same time, assumes a certain openness of history to alteration (e.g. Arendt 1996 [1929/1964]: 55, 1994b [1949]: 167, 2006c [1958]: 79). As she put it, ‘man was created into time ... together with motion and change’—as *beginners*, human beings prevent ‘time from turning eternally in cycles ... without anything new ever happening’ (1996: 55). Castoriadis similarly highlights the under-determined character of the social-historical in explicit contrast to the determinism that he argues pervades the Western philosophical tradition (see Castoriadis 1987b: 181, 1997c: 13, 1997d: 393). As noted in Subsection 3.4.2 in Chapter 3, Castoriadis additionally traces a notion of the reconfiguration of relations to ‘public time’ within the Greek creation of the *polis*, which altered the collective relation to instituted past and present (1991b [1983]: 111-114). In so doing, ‘an indeterminate future opens up’ as a field for political action (Castoriadis 1991b: 113-114). In this sense, for Castoriadis, the future is an open, under-determined, temporal field, an ‘ever-unforeseeable, ever-creative unfolding, in the shape of which we can participate’ (2007c [1985]: 117).

Castoriadis does not systematically develop this point; indeed, Wager goes a step further in his interpretative approach to the reflexive reinterpretation of history. Especially in his work between 2000 and 2008/2009 (see Subsection 4.3.1, Chapter 4), Wager details a notion of the historical present as a ‘moment of openness’ for the interpretative action of human beings in the present (Wagner 2001e: 88). In their early co-authored articles, Heidrun Friese and Wager write that ‘the present world is neither just there nor predetermined in the

past; it is the creation out of a plurality of possibilities which existed at the moment before' (2001a: 127; cf. 2000b: 32). Wagner draws attention to the open space between the past and the under-determined horizon of the future (see Friese & Wagner 2001a: 126-127; cf. Wagner 2010e: 475, 2012: 157). This is particularly evident in his conceptualisation of the interpretative relations of human beings to the world via the notions of 'historicity', 'reflexivity', and 'agentiality' (see Subsections 4.3.2 and 4.4.2, Chapter 4). In this, Wagner links modes of collective doing with a reflexive orientation to the world and the historical field. 'Reflexivity' refers to the imaginative capacity to 'step out of the immediate present', and 'to imagine other possible worlds' to bring a 'different possible future about' through 'agentiality' (2005b: 53), while the aspect of 'historicity' differentiates the present from a common past at the same time as opening a future which could be otherwise (Wagner 2005b: 53; cf. 1994a: 4, 2001e: 88, 2004: 93, 2008b: 360, 365, 2008a: 206, 2012: 28, 53, 155, 157; see also Koselleck 2004: 259; Ricoeur 2008a: 211).

Wagner here associates the openness of the historical field (as a 'horizon of expectations') to the interpretative 'space of experience' in the common world (see e.g. Wagner 2007b: 100, 2010a: 228, 2012: 61, 153). Yet Wagner does not incorporate a notion of the encompassing meta-horizon into this analysis, as the overarching interpretative horizon of horizons. Like Wagner, but from a different angle, Arendt also renders the common world as a public 'space of appearances' (1998 [1958]: 50, 57). This was evident in her elucidation of the anthropological condition of plurality and remarks on 'world-disclosure' (see Subsection 2.2.1, Chapter 2). As I argued in Chapter 2, Arendt's (ultimately unfinished) formulation of world-disclosure focussed on the articulation in speech a 'comprehension of the world "as it opens itself to me"' (2007b [1954]: 14; cf. 15). Yet, because the world forms the common ground of the human condition, Arendt's sketch of world-disclosure rests on the assumption 'that the same world opens up to everyone... despite all differences between men and their positions in the world' (2007b: 14; cf. 2007a [1956/1959]: 128-129, 167-168, 1998: 57). Arendt's approach

is more straightforwardly phenomenological in that she emphasises, on the one hand, the world is the common space of human coexistence (via her anthropological understanding of human plurality) and, on the other, the world is an open interpretative horizon that forms a ‘unity in plurality’ (see Adams 2009b: 258; Arnason 2003: 229).

Nevertheless, Arendt gives short shrift to the phenomenological understanding of the world as an encompassing, inexhaustible meta-horizon in her elucidation of the common world. This is similarly the case for Wagner’s work. Both Arendt and Wagner note the openness of history to alteration and the interpretative space of the common world. Yet, because they bypass an understanding of the situatedness of the institution of common, historical worlds within an overarching world-horizon, Arendt and Wagner’s works point to a closed and inward process of world-alteration. This becomes clear in Wagner’s analysis of South Africa’s democratization movement, for example (see Subsection 4.4.3, Chapter 4). As Wagner presented it, the South African political project of world-making involved the self-reflexive reinterpretation of societal self-understandings (including a self-examination of the horizons of past and future) to rearticulate the democratic socio-political form. From this perspective, world-altering political action comprises an inward mode of the self-reflexive reinterpretation of the common world, to begin the particular common world and history anew. The consequence here is that world-altering political action self-creates and self-alters the common historical world in a ‘worldless vacuum’ (Adams 2007: 49; cf. 2011b: 241). Likewise, this approach overlooks that the world-horizon forms a shared context of intercultural encounter, which allows for diverse and conflicting cultural interpretative-articulations (see Arnason 2003: 229, 2013b: 294; cf. Adams 2009b: 258, 263, 2014b: 72-73). In this vein, political action (in its twofold dimensions of world-interpretation and world-formation) does not encounter and articulate the encompassing world-horizon in Arendt and Wagner’s works.

In contrast, Castoriadis's early, more phenomenological approach draws attention to the intertwining of the institution of a world of meaning with the encompassing world-horizon. In the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, for example, Castoriadis notes the articulation of a 'specific manner of grasping the world' (as encompassing horizon) in the 'unfolding of a world of [social imaginary] significations' (1987a [1964-1965]: 147, 14; cf. 133, 143, 145-146). Later, in 'The Sayable and the Unsayable' (1984c [1971]), Castoriadis highlights the act of putting the world-horizon *into* meaning, which rests on an understanding of the world-horizon as 'calling forth', lending itself to, or 'inviting' signification (see Castoriadis 1984c: 124; see also Adams 2009a: 112, and Section 3.3, Chapter 3). Following the phenomenological traces within Castoriadis's early thought, the world-horizon here 'calls for' the articulation of meaning, and, likewise, offers 'indefinite possibilities' for formation (Castoriadis 1984c: 127; see also Adams 2009a: 117).

There are two elements of the world at play within this formulation. On the one hand, Castoriadis reveals the articulation of an encompassing world-horizon that is 'put into', and indeed 'invites' meaning. This phenomenological understanding of the world-horizon sits in contrast to Castoriadis's later proclamation (after his ontological turn) that 'The world *tout court* is senseless, devoid of signification' (1997b [1989]: 363) and 'must be void of meaning' to allow for infinite possibilities of imaginary creation (Castoriadis 1997d [1990]: 389). Contra Castoriadis, Suzi Adams highlights that the world is not *void* of meaning in the sense of sheer *meaninglessness*—as I noted at the opening of this section, 'the world *must be able to be made meaningful*' (Adams 2011a: 218, emphasis in original; cf. 2009a: 127, 2011a: 100). As Adams argues, the phenomenological understanding of the anthropological condition *in-the-world* indicates that 'we are always already enveloped by the *Sinnfähigkeit* of the world as the precondition for the culturally sayable' (2009a: 127).

On the other hand, Castoriadis highlights that the world *qua* under-determined horizon offers potentially infinite possibilities for articulation (see 1984c: 127). This second aspect evokes the notion of the open ‘field of possibility’ that resurfaces across Castoriadis’s trajectory (as I argue in Chapter 3; see e.g. 1987a [1964-1965]: 79, 90, 2015 [1968-1989]: 60, 63, 65, 1984d [1973]: 240, 1993a [1979]: 329, 330). He notes the intertwining of the institution of historical worlds and the field of possibility when he writes, ‘...the possible and the real emerge as interconnected dimensions: thus the world constitutes itself as a human world...’ (Castoriadis 2015: 65; cf. 60, 63). In this, Castoriadis hints at the interplay of, and inherent opening ‘between what is possible[,] and what exists’ within instituted reality (1987a: 90), following the recognition that there is always ‘more’ to the institution of the world than what it presents (Castoriadis 1987a [1964-1965]: 111-112; cf. 1984c [1971]: 132-133).

It is here that a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach to world-altering collective political action is especially significant. It is not enough to consider the openness of the future as the ground for political action to make a difference in the world. To understand how collective political action can make a difference in the world, the world must be considered in a twofold sense: as the intertwining of a common historical space of meaning and a broader field of possibility. As Merleau-Ponty put it, ‘The world is already constituted, but also never completely constituted; in the first case we are acted upon, in the second we are open to an infinite number of possibilities’ (2002 [1945]: 527). Because the world *qua* overarching horizon is ‘an open and dynamic field of possibilities’ (Adams 2014b: 76), socially and historically instituted worlds remain forever ‘incomplete’ and ‘*unfinished*’ (Arnason 1993: 55; Richir 1993: 68, emphasis in original). It is this ‘fragility of the social world’ (Blokker 2014c: 386) in connection with the fundamental openness of the world-horizon that provides the ‘condition that permits us to call [the institution of the world] into doubt’, which ‘enables us to think otherwise’ (Castoriadis 1993a: 330) and to articulate the possible in order to make a difference in the world via collective political action.

This section debated Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's approaches to the world problematic from the three perspectives: the institution of a common socio-historical world; the open field of history; and, the phenomenological understanding of the world as an encompassing inexhaustible horizon. The three thinkers largely left aside the phenomenological insight of the world as a meta-horizon of meaning (except for Castoriadis in his earlier, more phenomenological work). As a consequence, the notions of world-formation and world-interpretation developed in their work tend to appear as closed or inward processes of historical alteration; from this angle, political action does not need to encounter the world-horizon in order to alter socio-historical worlds. A hermeneutic-phenomenological approach helps to correct this by highlighting the interrelation between socially and historically instituted worlds, and the overarching meta-horizon of the world. This draws attention to the fundamental openness of worlds to the possibility of alteration through collective political action—because the world-horizon is inexhaustible and always offers *more* for articulation, instituted worlds always remain 'unfinished' and open to alteration. Hence, an understanding of the world as an encompassing and under-determined field of possibility is an important starting point for political theory, in order to understand how collective political action makes a difference in the world. I conclude the thesis in the following discussion by outlining the theory of political action *in-the-world* in response to the central question, 'how can collective political action make a difference in the world?', whilst highlighting pathways for further consideration to develop this theoretical approach in future.

TOWARDS A THEORY OF POLITICAL ACTION *IN-THE-WORLD*: CONCLUSIONS AND FUTURE DIRECTIONS

At their core, depoliticization debates underscore the decline in political creativity and the collective impotence of political communities to ‘imagine a better world and to do something to make it better’ in the contemporary trend toward political insignificance (Bauman 1999: 1; cf. Castoriadis 2011b: 5-6; Straume & Humphrey 2010). Likewise, but from a different angle, Jean-Luc Nancy attributes ‘our impotence to form a world’ to the exhaustion of the possible meaning of the world in the crisis of globalization (2007: 35; cf. 27-28, 34-35). Nancy’s proposal to choose *mondialisation*—or, the world-forming creation of the world—over globalization is an urgent call to action, in order to ‘own up to the present’ and ‘ask anew what the world wants of us [and] what we want of it’ (2007: 54). In Nancy’s wake, this study proposed to rethink collective political action as a world-altering project by developing a new theoretical approach in response to the question: ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ Unpacking this question, two overarching tasks emerged: the elucidation of an understanding of ‘the world’; and, an analysis of how collective political action alters the world. In this concluding discussion, I offer a response to the central question of this study, and, in so doing, outline a new theoretical approach to world-altering collective political projects, which I term: political action *in-the-world*. Yet, I recognise that this theoretical project remains unfinished; through this conclusion, I also sketch pathways for further consideration to advance the theoretical framework developed here.

At the opening of their recent co-edited volume, *Phenomenology and the Political*, S. West Gurley and Geoff Pfeiffer ask: ‘Of what use is phenomenology to the political?’ (2016: xi). If, as in this study, ‘politics’ is understood as the explicit self-interrogation of the institution of the world by society in order to alter it (Castoriadis 1991a: 159-160), as the effective possibility of ‘making a difference in the world’ (Wagner 2001a: 5768), politics thus assumes a certain ‘shapeability’ of the world through modes of political doing (see Wagner 1994a: 175). Within

this formulation lies the question of the world, which is a central problematic for hermeneutic-phenomenological debates. As this thesis demonstrated, a key contribution of phenomenology to theories of the political, then, is the understanding of the world as an overarching, under-determined, ‘*universal, meaning-generating field*’ that forms the shared ground of the human condition (Kohák 1989: 247, emphasis in original; see also Adams 2009b: 255-256; Arnason 1992: 254-255, 1993: 95; Ricoeur 1991c: 212-213; Rechter 2007: 36). This is an important and appropriate starting point for political theory on two grounds. First, a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach highlights the human encounter with and articulation of the world (in its intertwined dimensions of world-interpretation and world-formation) as a central aspect for understanding of the anthropological condition as always-already *in-the-world*. Second, it reveals that the world *qua* horizon remains permanently open to infinite possibilities of articulation (see Arnason 1993: 95; Adams 2014b: 76; Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964]: 250, 2002 [1945]: 527; Richir 1993: 68; Ricoeur 1991a: 453). A phenomenological approach to politics hence draws attention to the inherent openness of the world—in the twofold sense of the overarching meta-horizon and its institution—as the precondition for political, world-altering doing.

Leaning on this hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of the world-horizon and the interconnected elements of world-interpretation and world-formation that arise in the human encounter with the world-horizon, this thesis critically compared Hannah Arendt, Cornelius Castoriadis, and Peter Wagner’s theories of political action. It did so in view of the question: ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’ This question begins from the assumption that political action works to alter the current shape of the world that is deemed problematic, which, at the same time, suggests that collective political projects are always-already situated within a particular instituted world context. To interrogate or question the world incorporates an interpretative element: the conflict of interpretations via critique articulates potential alternatives, to posit the possibility of *difference*. Yet, in turn, to

make a difference indicates the creative dimension of political action in the alteration of the form of the world—both in the sense of a qualitative change in the historical field (as temporally ‘different’ to a prior state), as well as in the re-articulation of new and different socio-cultural and political patterns of meaning.¹¹⁸ Conversely, to make *a* difference in the world draws attention to the partial character of collective political action. From this angle, political projects cannot proclaim to make *a whole new world*; rather, to make *a* difference implies the alteration of the institution of what *is* to begin this world *anew*. This casts notions of collective political action on different terms, in contrast to the common-held image of revolutionary projects as ‘tearing down and building up’ (Arendt 2006a: 225).

The key aspect of the question, ‘how can collective political action make a difference in the world?’, however, is *how*. This project offered an answer to this question by analysing the problematic from three connected perspectives: the notions of ‘world-interpretation’, ‘world-formation’, and ‘the world’. Although I kept these aspects analytically distinct for the purpose of clarity in this thesis, the critical comparison in Chapter 5 in particular demonstrated the inherent intertwining of world-interpreting and world-forming doing, along with the openness of the world-horizon that ‘calls for’ articulation via political doing. From the analysis, world-interpreting political critique is, at once, creative: the problematisation of the institution of the world reveals the world as a ‘paradoxical’ and ‘incomplete’ horizon (Merleau-Ponty 2002 [1945]: xv; cf. Arnason 1993: 95; Merleau-Ponty 1968 [1964]: 103, 169), at the same time that critique assumes a reflexive stance toward the world. By interrogating the institution of the world and relativising it via hermeneutic modes of detachment, collective political critique opens the institution onto the encompassing, under-determined field of possibility that is the world-horizon. At the same time, the conflict of interpretations articulates potential alternatives, whilst reflexively reinterpreting patterns of meaning and reconfiguring common bonds in the world; world-interpretation, then, simultaneously takes the form of world-forming doing. The problematisation of the institution and detailing of potential alternatives via

political critique paves the way for the rearticulation (or, 'reconstruction', in Wagner's approach) of the institution of the world through world-forming dimensions of political doing. In this, the world-forming aspect of collective political doing pertains to the creative rearticulation of patterns of meaning and the reconfiguration of common bonds (both of which, as noted above, incorporate an interpretative element), to alter the socio-cultural and political form of society and engender movement in the historical field.

The reconstruction thus revealed that collective political projects assume the character of 'beginning', as the creative formation of the unprecedentedly new into the world to engender radical novelty (see Section 5.2, Chapter 5). Yet, hermeneutic-phenomenological debates highlight that the anthropological condition is always-already *in-the-world*, as *être au monde*, in the twofold sense of *being-in* and *being-of* the world (cf. Merleau-Ponty 1968: 224; Ricoeur 1981c: 106, 116–117). As such, collective political projects do not *create* the world; rather, this thesis contends that collective political action *begins* the world *anew*. This anthropological grounding serves to acknowledge the pre-given limits upon human creation, at the same time that it underscores, once again, the inherent intertwining of the world-interpreting and world-forming dimensions of collective political action. To begin anew is to interpretatively re-create the given institution of the world in encounter with the encompassing meta-horizon, which invites rearticulation through collective political doing. From this perspective, a hermeneutic-phenomenological approach helps to check notions of human mastery *over* the world, which otherwise posit *anthropos* as sovereign world-creators and render the world as an external 'object *outside* of us that can be controlled' (Nancy 2007: 34; cf. Arnason 2003: 90, 93-94).

The above discussion revealed *how* political action can make a difference in the world via the intertwined dimensions of world-interpreting and world-forming doing. One last question remains: *how* is such world-alteration possible? As demonstrated through this study, the world *qua* horizon always remains open to potential alteration, as an encompassing field

that offers—and indeed calls for—further articulation (see Castoriadis 1984c: 124; see also Adams 2009a: 112). As Merleau-Ponty put it, the world-horizon is a ground that is ‘pregnant’ with ‘possible worlds’ and potential ‘variants of this world’ (1968: 250). The horizon of the world always extends beyond the institution of what ‘is’, which offers an ‘interpretative surplus’ that provides the possibility of different and potentially plural interpretative-creations (see Adams 2009b: 256; Ricoeur 1991a: 453). Hence, the interplay of articulations of the world with the overarching, under-determined world-horizon means that institutions of the world remain permanently ‘incomplete’ (Arnason 1993: 95) and ‘*unfinished*’ (Richir 1993: 68, emphasis in original). This fundamental openness of socio-cultural, historical worlds and the encompassing field of possibility provide the preconditions for the effective possibility of political action to make a difference in the world. In short, collective political action can make a difference in the world precisely because the world always remains open to further possibilities of world-interpretation and world-formation.

Nevertheless, the theoretical of political action *in-the-world* developed here does not proclaim to be a complete framework; certain questions went beyond the scope of the present study, which provide openings for further consideration. Three thematics emerge, in particular: the problematics of modernity, power, and time. As I noted in Chapter 1 (Section 1.1), an understanding of the modern assumption of the ‘shapeability’ of the world (Wagner 1994a: 175) and notion of political action as a ‘consciously chosen ... attitude toward the world’ (Arnason 2003: 93) formed part of the frame for this project. In light of this, it would prove fruitful to further analyse the enabling and constraining dimensions within articulations of the modern condition, particularly in light of the contemporary trends of depoliticization (as noted throughout this thesis). Examining Arendt’s (1998) elucidation of the modern anthropological condition of ‘world alienation’ is one such starting point;¹¹⁹ turning to the work of Marcel Gauchet (1999) and Claude Lefort (1986) is another, to consider the modern rearticulation of

the relation between *anthropos* and the world and their institution in modern political forms (see also Doyle 2003, 2012).

Advancing the theoretical framework of political action *in-the-world* is more straightforward in relation to the question of power. Neither Arendt, Castoriadis, nor Wagner systematically developed a notion of political power; there are openings, however, within the traces of political power that appeared late in Arendt and Castoriadis's works (see Section 2.3, Chapter 2, and Subsection 3.4.2, Chapter 3). As noted in the chapters respective to their works, Arendt and Castoriadis each highlight the role of power in the political institution of the world—both in the instituting movement of political action, and within the established patterns of authoritative power, and their interplay (e.g. Arendt 1998: 200, 244, 2006a: 166, 206; Castoriadis 1991a: 149-150, 154-158; see also Adams 2016b: 124-125, Arnason 2014a: 19-20). Wagner notes the question of power only in brief, in relation to the articulation of power relations between members of the collectivity in the reconstruction of the political form (see Wagner 2002b: 43; and Subsection 4.3.2, Chapter 4). It is possible to expand upon these points of dialogue between Arendt and Castoriadis's works via Lefort. Lefort's notion of *le politique* refers to 'the moment of the institution of the social' as a mode of instituting power, which creates the 'generative [and symbolic] principles of its "form"' (2000: 226; see also Doyle 2003: 77; Marchart 2007: 90; Howard 1989: 8). In so doing, for Lefort, the society in question configures new articulations of legitimacy and authority. Lefort tracks different social articulations of power in his analyses of the particular political forms of modernity. These include 'tyranny', as an 'inauthentic power based on a cowering population' (Flynn 2005: 34), or 'democracy', which refers to an 'empty place of power' as the space of symbolic legitimacy is not embodied by a specific entity (be it a monarch or sovereign ruler; Lefort 1986: 279, 285, 303; see also Accetti 2015; Flynn 2005: xxv). Arendt herself noted the establishment of new configurations of power in *On Revolution*, where she argued that the French Revolution 'put the people in the seat of the king' (2006a [1963]: 147). A dialogue with Lefort's work in this way

enables a consideration of the interplay of two modes of power: the act of instituting—as Castoriadis argued, ‘to participate in power is to participate in *instituting power* (1993a: 321, emphasis in original)—and, the simultaneous articulation of cultural and political configurations of power into the form of the institution.

Such an analysis of the intertwining of forms of power within political projects is significant in that the *doing* of politics is likewise the *doing* of power. Ingerid Straume highlights that ‘*doing politics* means to discuss and deliberate, question and debate; but also to exercise power and create (new) political forms, institutions, and significations’ (2012a: 114, emphasis in original). In this way, power is manifest through the world-interpreting and world-forming elements of collective political action. This mode of power, additionally, sits in contrast to hierarchical modes of dominance, or power as expressed through violence (see e.g. Arendt 1970, 1998: 199-204). As Arnason argues in ‘Praxis and Action—Mainstream Theories and Marxian Correctives’, an understanding of the link between ‘meaningful contexts’ and ‘the ability to intervene in the world’ is an ‘obvious starting point for a comprehensive theory of power’ (1991b: 65). Indeed, the present study of political action *in-the-world* opens onto such an approach to power, as manifest within the collective effort of making a difference in the world.

The third thematic for further consideration alongside that of modernity and the question of power is the notion of time. More specifically: the temporality of political action, whether as a revolutionary burst of political doing or a slow alteration over time. Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner each undertake an analysis of revolutionary projects within their trajectories. Arendt’s work *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]) is an unambiguous example (see Section 2.3, Chapter 2). Castoriadis, in turn, reflected specifically on the revolutionary potential for societal transformation in his *Socialisme ou Barbarie* writings and via his elucidations of the political project of autonomy (see Sections 3.1 and 3.2, and Subsection 3.4.2, Chapter 3). Like Castoriadis (1993d [1968]), Wagner similarly debated the 1968 Student Movement (see e.g. 1994a, 2005b) as a project of societal alteration. Wagner expanded upon

this and other modern revolutionary movements to posit a narrative of European political modernity as ‘a narrative of revolution’ (2005b: 53, 60; see Section 4.2 and Subsections 4.3.2 and 4.4.2, Chapter 4). A broad understanding of politics as revolutionary project thus emerges from these theoretical approaches. In his recent essay, ‘Revolutions, Transformations, Civilizations: Prolegomena to a Paradigm Reorientation’ (2016b), Arnason highlights the difficulty of defining ‘revolutions’, specifically in relation to the speed and scope of the societal transformation. In a statement that resonates with the present study, Arnason notes, ‘Revolutions that combine new articulations of the world and the human condition with institutional mutations are inseparably social and political’ (2016b: 50). However, many central events in the revolutionary tradition—such as the French or Russian Revolutions—consist of ‘abrupt turns of events with wide social ramifications’, and are often associated with violence (Arnason 2016b: 28). In response, Arnason offers an alternative understanding of revolutions based on the slow transformation of the society in question.

The theory of political action *in-the-world* developed through this study has similarities to Arnason’s notion of revolutionary societal transformation. The theoretical understanding of political action *in-the-world* outlined here grapples with the rearticulation of patterns of meaning and institutional forms through a productive conflict with the instituted order. This may take shape at varying speeds, according to the effervescence and intentions of the revolutionary project. Yet, the emphasis on the formation of institutions and reflexive reinterpretation of shared patterns of meaning within this project suggests a slower movement of longer-term change than the burst of protest in the 1968 student movement, to borrow from Wagner’s analysis (2002b).

The notion of the temporality of change, however, raises an additional question in relation to the articulation of ‘lasting’ forms. Although Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner each place emphasis on the character of political action as *beginning* to some extent (see Section 5.2, Chapter 5), a tension arises between the *beginning* inherent to action and the creation of *lasting*

forms and the effective *change* of the socio-historical world. Wagner's underlining of the important moment of 'reconstruction' within the political project to constitute a new form in the wake of critique becomes especially significant here (2002b: 37; see Subsections 4.3.2 and 4.4.2, Chapter 4). Arendt draws attention to this conflict between 'novelty' and 'permanence' late in *On Revolution*:

if foundation [or, the creation of a new social institution] was the aim and the end of revolution, then the revolutionary spirit was not merely the spirit of beginning something new but of starting something permanent and enduring; a lasting institution, embodying this [revolutionary, creative] spirit and encouraging it to new achievements, would be self-defeating. From this, it unfortunately seems to follow that nothing threatens the very achievements of revolution more dangerously and more acutely than the very spirit which has brought them about (2006a: 224).

At its core, this quotation reveals the problematic conflict at the heart of political projects. Here arises the question, how can political action institute lasting and effective change into the world, when political projects push for the ongoing interrogation of the world and the creation of new beginnings? Further, does the ever-present potential of creative new beginnings, then, risk constantly bringing the institution of the world into flux? This recasts Arnason's insight into the temporality of revolutionary alteration along different terms *vis-à-vis* the longevity of political projects that intend to make a difference in the world. A consideration of the productive tension between the creation of *lasting* change and attempts to begin the world *anew* is another pathway through which to advance the theory of political action *in-the-world* developed in this study.

The new theoretical approach developed here is a significant, interdisciplinary contribution that brought hermeneutic-phenomenological philosophy into productive dialogue with political social theory and sociology. By advancing a phenomenological theory of political action *in-the-world*, this study offers an alternative to aesthetic and ethical debates on politics that have come to predominate the contemporary field (see e.g. ed. Kompridis 2014; Myers 2013; Plot 2014; Rancière 2006, 2013). Likewise, this hermeneutic-phenomenological

approach to political theory problematizes intersubjective and subjective notions of social and political doing within the field of sociology that analytically places ‘the subject’ at the centre (see Adams 2014b: 67). By taking the question of the world as the pivotal point, the theory of political action *in-the-world* offered here presents a different perspective from which to consider the collective articulation and alteration of socio-cultural worlds via political doing—which intertwines the elements of world-interpretation and world-formation—without reducing sociality to an intersubjective constitution. In contrast, the hermeneutic-phenomenological understanding of political action *in-the-world* developed in this study demonstrates that the fundamental precondition for political projects is the inherent openness of the world-horizon as an inexhaustible and encompassing field of possibility, which calls for and invites re-articulation through political action. From this angle, socially instituted and historical worlds remain permanently incomplete and unfinished, which provides the possibility for collective political action to make a difference in the world. Taking cue in part from Klaus Held’s proclamation that phenomenology ‘has not yet succeeded in producing a systematic, well-grounded reflection on the political’ (2012: 442; see Section 1.2, Chapter 1),¹²⁰ the notion of political action *in-the-world* developed in this study opens a new agenda within the fields of political social theory and phenomenology, to be advanced via the questions of power and the temporality of political projects (as noted above). As Gurley and Pfeifer (2016: xii) recently put it, there is ‘something deliciously fruitful’ about the new pathway opened through the encounters between phenomenological philosophy and questions on the political. The dialogue between phenomenological problematics and political theory can, as this project suggests, offer creative solutions to the growing insignificance of politics and the twin problematics of globalization and depoliticization.

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ENDNOTES

¹ The reflections upon the depoliticized and globalized modern condition that forms part of this introduction appears in an altered form in the essay, ‘On the Possibilities of Political Action *in-the-World*: Pathways through Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner’, published in the journal *Social Imaginaries*. See Carlisle (2017).

² Bauman here leans on C. Wright Mills’s famous elucidation of ‘the promise’ of *The Sociological Imagination* (see Mills 2000 [1959]: 3-24). Put simply, the sociological imagination refers in part to the grasp of the relation between history and biography in society, through which public issues intersect—or indeed interweave—with private concerns.

³ Notwithstanding these insights by Bauman regarding depoliticizing trends in a globalizing context, it may be questioned whether there remains such a ‘lack of courage’ and political will at present. Although ‘the belief in the possibilities of politics’ is said to be ‘waning’ (Straume 2012a: 120), the rise of popular

movements across the political spectrum—including Occupy Wall Street, the Arab Spring, as well as organised resistance for and against ‘Brexit’ and the election of Donald Trump to the American presidency, more recently—gives pause for thought.

⁴ Hannah Arendt does not systematically elucidate her notion of modern world alienation; as such, it arguably remains misunderstood in the field. Elizabeth Brient rightly notes that for Arendt, modernity must ‘be understood in terms of a profoundly new and unprecedented form of self and world orientation’, or a ‘new existential orientation’ for the human condition (Brient 2000: 514). Brient then turns to a comparative discussion between Arendt and Hans Blumenberg *vis-à-vis* the ‘unworldly worldliness’ of the modern age (see Brient 2000); yet, in so doing, Brient does not take the insight of Arendt’s understanding of the world-orientation of modernity further. I am in the process of developing this argument via reconstruction of Arendt’s incipient hermeneutic of modernity, which rests on an articulation of the human condition as alienated from the world. This paper in progress is provisionally titled, ‘The Modern Condition of World Alienation: Hannah Arendt’s Implicit Hermeneutic of Modernity’.

⁵ See Jean Grondin’s work, *Introduction to Philosophical Hermeneutics* (1994), for a comprehensive overview of this field of debate.

⁶ Suzi Adams develops the notion of the ‘hermeneutic spiral’ through a reconstruction of Castoriadis and Ricoeur’s 1985 radio dialogue, which centrally focussed on the question of human creation in history. This dialogue has recently been published in French (see ed. Michel 2016), and the English translation is forthcoming in 2017; see ed. Adams 2017b*. For Adams, Castoriadis and Ricoeur both dismiss the image of the hermeneutic circle because of its inherent closure, and instead implicitly elucidate versions of a ‘hermeneutic spiral’. This enables an understanding of the creative dimensions of interpretation. As Adams put it, ‘In traversing a single loop of the hermeneutic spiral, new spirals emerge’. See Adams (2017a*).

⁷ Paul Blokker recently leant upon both Arendt and Castoriadis, as well as others, in an analysis of the imaginary dimensions of constitutions. Although he did not draw out their theories of political action *per se* in his discussion, it is still worth noting his contribution here. See Blokker (2017).

⁸ As Maurice Merleau-Ponty notes in the preface to the *Phenomenology of Perception*, the phenomenological movement may be traced through the work of GWF Hegel, Søren Kierkegaard, Karl Marx, Friedrich Nietzsche, and Sigmund Freud, prior to the explicit philosophy of phenomenology announced by Edmund Husserl. See Merleau-Ponty (2002: [1945]: viii).

⁹ Jürgen Habermas’s *Theory of Communicative Action* (2004 [1984], 2006 [1987]) can arguably be situated in this field. Despite his critiques of Husserl and Alfred Schütz regarding the subjective constitution of the *Lebenswelt* (see Habermas 1988 [1970]: 107-117, 2001 [1971]: 23-43; 2006 [1987]: 130-140), Habermas’s notion of communicative action rests on a ‘demarcation’ between external and internal worlds (2006: 122), and an understanding of intersubjective encounter ‘at the level of the common constitution of a world that is identical for them’ (2001: 37). With this move, Habermas bypasses the hermeneutic-phenomenological insight of the human condition *in-the-world*. In so doing, he overlooks that the world-horizon forms ‘the very

precondition for intersubjective contexts of interaction ... and mutual understanding' (Adams 2014b: 67, emphasis in original; see also Arnason 1992).

¹⁰ Yet, in contrast to Bernhard Flynn (2012), Oliver Marchart instead characterised Lefort as an 'ontological thinker' of the political. See (Marchart 2007: 85-86).

¹¹ I leave Arendt and Castoriadis aside from discussion here for the moment, as I will reconstruct their political theories in Chapter 2 and Chapter 3 of this study, respectively.

¹² I refrain from discussing Castoriadis here for the moment, as I will reconstruct his work in Chapter 2 of this study.

¹³ For analyses of Ricoeur's political and ethical philosophy in French language debates, see: Abel (1996), Amalric (2015), Dosse (2008), Kemp & Hashimoto (2015) and Thomasset (1996).

¹⁴ An ethico-political dimension permeates each of Patočka, Ricoeur, and Taylor's reflections on politics. The question of ethics has been left aside from the present inquiry in favour of a more explicit analysis of political *action* as a mode of doing explicitly linked to the anthropological condition of *being-in-the-world*. Both ethical aesthetic approaches to politics have come to dominate the field of political social theory in recent decades. Yet this turn to the ethical and the aesthetic in political theorising has, in my view, resulted in the blurred distinction between moral-ethical politics, aesthetic politics, and considerations of political *action*, properly speaking. In regard to the aesthetic understanding of politics, Jacques Rancière (2013 [2000]) is an important voice in the field. He connected aesthetics (as a regime of reflecting upon the arts that articulates the relationship between ways of making, doing and thinking) with the sensible dimensions of politics and power, pertaining to what is given to sense experience and able to be made intelligible. See Kompridis (2014) for a discussion of aesthetic politics. The ethical turn in political theory connects the normative, moral elements of politics to questions of justice, and often leans on Emmanuel Levinas's ethical phenomenology, as well as the work of Jacques Derrida. For an ethical approach to political thought that draws on the notion of the world, see Myers (2013). In contrast to the ethical and aesthetic fields of debate, the present inquiry follows a Castoriadian understanding of politics in the strong sense, as *la politique*. As I noted earlier in the introduction to this study, such a notion of politics emphasises the self-alteration of society as an explicit project of collective instituting doing (see Castoriadis 1991a: 159-160). The present investigation of the world-altering dimensions of collective political action therefore aligns itself with Castoriadis's elucidations of the project of autonomy.

¹⁵ In his earlier work, Dallmayr flagged the need for a 'critical phenomenology of politics' and took a step in this direction by bringing the German traditions of phenomenology (specifically, Heidegger) and Frankfurt School critical theory into dialogue (see Dallmayr 1981, 1991). In this work, Dallmayr considered politics to include both 'a world of phenomena endowed with manifest or latent (occasionally camouflaged and repressed) meanings, and a domain of human initiative and ... critically reflective human agency' (Dallmayr 1981: 5). Despite his indications of the need for a critical phenomenological approach to politics, Dallmayr's

discussion remained limited to an analysis of those Germanic philosophical traditions, rather than an elucidation of political action *per se*.

¹⁶ I have only mentioned English-language works in this discussion due to limitations of space. Other works that centre on the world problematic outside of the Anglosphere include Marc Richir's French-language essay, '*Nous sommes au monde*' (1989), and Hartmut Rosa's German-language discussion of language as an 'exploration of the world' (1998). Not to mention numerous German texts by Klaus Held that explore the world problematic, including '*Heimwelt, Fremdwelt, die eine Welt*' (see: ed. Staehler 2007; see also Held 1992, 1996, 2003, 2012). Marieke Borren's effort toward a hermeneutic-phenomenology of politics in *Amor Mundi: Hannah Arendt's Political Phenomenology of World* (2010) may also be added to this list. However, Borren's approach was left out of this discussion because it centres solely on Arendt's theory; as such, I refer to Borren's work in the chapter on Arendt's thought. See Chapter 2.

¹⁷ Yet, at the same time, modernity can only define itself in relation to the past, as well as the future. Castoriadis notes this in 'The Retreat from Autonomy: Postmodernism as Generalized Conformism' (1997a: 34): modernity rests on a characterisation of 'indefinite openness with regard to the future' but likewise only makes sense 'in relation to the past'. Space does not permit to discuss this relational aspect of modernity and the so-called dialogue between the ancients and the moderns, which forms an additional point of commonality between Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner. For a discussion of the relational dimensions of the temporal-historical understanding of modernity, see for example: Arnason (1996), Baron (1959), Habermas (1987c), ed. Lilly (1996), and Rosen (2002).

¹⁸ Indeed, both Castoriadis and Arendt are amongst Wagner's key influences; see Chapter 4.

¹⁹ As remarked in note 4, above, I am in the process of reconstructing Arendt's incipient hermeneutic of modernity, which rests on an articulation of the human condition as alienated from the world. I have provisionally titled this paper 'The Modern Condition of World Alienation: Hannah Arendt's Implicit Hermeneutic of Modernity'.

²⁰ Space does not permit to detail Arendt's encounter with Nazi totalitarianism here. In brief, Arendt emigrated from Germany to France in 1933 and worked for a Zionist organisation to aid Jewish refugees escaping from Germany. Arendt's German citizenship was revoked in 1937, and as an 'illegal alien', Arendt was confined in an internment camp after the military occupation of northern France in 1940. Arendt escaped, and with her husband Heinrich Blücher (a Marxist philosopher and revolutionary socialist), fled to the United States of America through France and Portugal in 1941. In her seminal reinterpretation of Arendt's political philosophy, Margaret Canovan (1995: 19) notes the significant influence that Arendt's direct encounter with Nazi fascism had on her work, *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (Arendt 1958 [1951]). Arendt devotes much of the analysis to the Nazi version of totalitarianism, and arguably shifts emphasis late in the work to broaden the discussion to incorporate Stalinist Communism as a totalitarian form (see Canovan 1995: 18-20). Although Arendt had not ever been a communist, Blücher's involvement in the Communist Party (see Canovan 1995: 10; Young-Bruehl 2004 [1982]: 124-128) may have been influential upon her reconsideration of the Communist version of totalitarianism late in *The Origins of Totalitarianism*.¹³

(Arendt 1958). For a comprehensive account of Arendt's biography, see Elisabeth Young-Bruhl's work, *Hannah Arendt: For Love of the World* (2004 [1982]).

²¹ As two of her teachers, both Martin Heidegger and Karl Jaspers were especially influential upon Arendt's early thinking. Arendt studied under Heidegger at the University of Marburg in the mid-1920s, in the period that he was formulating *Being and Time* (1967 [1927]). Karl Jaspers supervised Arendt's doctoral project on the notion of 'love' in Augustine's philosophy (I discuss this in Section 2.1 in Chapter 2), which was interrupted by the Second World War. The dialogue between Jaspers and Heidegger in Arendt's thought is especially clear in her essay, 'What is Existential Philosophy?' (1994b [1946]). I analyse this essay in Section 2.1 of this chapter. Additionally, Arendt's relationship with Heidegger—as his student and lover—has been the point of much contention. I do not enter into these debates here. For further reading, see Arendt and Heidegger (2004), Ettinger (1995), Maier-Katkin (2010), and Young-Bruhl (2004 [1982]).

²² Arendt's engagement with the question of women's liberation is complex. Space does not permit in this introductory discussion to fully elaborate the feminist reception of Arendt's remarks on women and the women's movement. Feminist scholars rightly criticise Arendt's remarks on the inherent place of women in the private realm in *The Human Condition* (1998). For example, Arendt writes in relation to the situation of women in ancient Greece: 'Women and slaves belonged to the same category and were hidden away not only because they were somebody else's property but because their life was "laborious", [and] devoted to bodily functions' (1998: 72), such as child-rearing. The reduction of women to a status of property and to a life of child-rearing in this statement is highly problematic. Moreover, Arendt's relegation of women to the private sphere due to their condition of labour means that, by extension, women are fundamentally excluded from political action in the public sphere. Arendt does not address these issues elsewhere, either. A short review essay titled 'On the Emancipation of Women' (1994c [1933]) partially clarifies her ideas. There, Arendt criticises women's unequal economic status, despite their equality of political rights (1994c: 66). From her essay, Arendt's issue with the women's movement is their failure to translate the *economic* problem of inequality into a properly *political* question. She writes that 'a women's movement only for the sake of women' is as 'equally abstract' as a movement for the youth (Arendt 1994c: 68). This is to say that the women's movement, in Arendt's view, failed to interrogate the fundamentally masculine institution of the political sphere, as an issue of in/equality for *all* (see Arendt 1994c: 67-68). Nevertheless, Arendt did not expand upon this contention. Indeed, her broader theoretical project otherwise excluded women's political concerns from discussion. For the reception of Arendt's theory by feminist scholars, as well as extensions of her thought, see for example: Benhabib (1993), Dietz (2010), Honig (1995), Honkasalo (2016), and Pitkin (1981). For an appropriation of Arendt's notion of political action for feminist political projects, see Borren (2013a) and Zerilli (2005a).

²³ As an aside, the term creative 'making' (Czobor-Lupp 2008: 457, 2014: 69; Pickle 2015: 76) in particular sits at odds with Arendt's elucidation of political action, properly speaking. In Arendt's view, 'world-building activity' relates to 'building houses' in the mode of fabricating, technical action (1981: 57; see also Arendt 1998: 136-174). In Arendt's work, it is important to differentiate between modes of 'fabrication', on

the one hand, and ‘action’ in the political sense of unpredictable ‘new beginnings’, on the other; fabrication rests on a predetermined rational teleology of means and ends, whereas ‘new beginnings’ refers to an open and creative collective movement of history. I discuss the difference between these forms of doing in Section 2.2.2 of this chapter.

²⁴ A range of Arendt’s works have been excluded from analysis here due to this specific selective scope. This includes her reflections on the Jewish experience (such as the essays published as *The Jewish Writings* (2009), as well as Arendt (1978) and her notions of the *parvenu* and *pariah*, found in *Rahel Varnhagen: The Life of a Jewess*; 2000 [1933]). Although Arendt’s reflections on violence (1958) and *The Origins of Totalitarianism* (1958 [1951]) form the background of her elucidation of political action as a form of freedom across the 1950s, I do not explicitly analyse these texts in this reconstruction as they focus less on political action and more on oppressive socio-political regimes. I have also left Arendt’s late reflections on thinking, willing, and judging out of the analysis—including her unfinished work *The Life of the Mind* (1981), *Eichmann in Jerusalem* (1965), and *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (1991 [1982])—because they are concerned more with the faculties of the mind than with an analysis of collective political action or its condition *in-the-world, per se*.

²⁵ A previously unpublished essay by Arendt, titled ‘The Freedom to be Free’, appeared in *The New England Review* in June, 2017 (see Arendt 2017), which is approximately dated as originally written between 1966 and 1967. I was unable to consider this text within the reconstruction due to the late publication of the work. In this manuscript, Arendt continues to reflect upon the questions of modern revolutionary projects and violence, leaning on her analysis of the ‘success’ of the American Revolution as a non-violent political event (which she developed in *On Revolution*, see Arendt 2006a [1963]; see also Section 2.3 of this chapter).

²⁶ In this analysis, I employ the version of *Love and Saint Augustine* that was edited by Joanna Vecchiarelli Scott and Judith C. Stark (Arendt 1996). Their translation and editing of Arendt’s work brought together the original dissertation with two copies of Arendt’s later revisions, approximately dated from the early 1960s. Arendt signed a contract for the publication of her study on Augustine in 1962, and reworked the dissertation ‘in anticipation of a 1964-1965 publication date’ (Scott & Stark 1996: 115). I have dated the reference to *Love and Saint Augustine* in the present reconstruction as (1929/1964) to give due to the original and updated version of the document. The later revisions of the text may be seen to problematize the use of *Love and Saint Augustine* as an early Arendtian text in this reconstruction. Veccharelli Scott and Stark note that she transferred some of her terminology from her thinking from the 1950s and 1960s across to her revisions, and that ‘the return to Augustine directly infused her revisions of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, her new study *On Revolution*, [and] the essays collected in *Between Past and Future*’ (Scott & Stark 1996: x). Nevertheless, Veccharelli Scott and Stark remark that ‘the revisions [to Arendt’s doctoral study] did not alter the character of the dissertation’. More importantly, the editors add that ‘the revisions demonstrate her continuing commitment to the subject matter, the discourse, and conclusions she had produced in 1929’ (Scott & Stark 1996: x). This justifies the use of *Love and Saint Augustine* as an early indication of Arendt’s

emerging political anthropology prior to *Origins* and *The Human Condition*. That said, I remain conscious of the presence of later concepts in Arendt's revisions of the text in my reconstruction.

²⁷ Arendt contrasts this notion of change with the unchanging, 'unalterable' character of God, who stands outside of the world (1996: 52). Arguably, such an understanding of the unchangeable and external 'creator' underlies Arendt's later reflections in *The Human Condition* on the mode of doing that fabricates objects external to the human being through forms of instrumental rationality: *homo faber* (see Arendt 1998 [1958]: 136-159, 220-230, 294-304). This notion of the creator standing outside of the world similarly operates within Arendt's critique of the modern 'achievement' of the Archimedean point through scientific advancement, also found in *The Human Condition* (1998: 257-268). I return to Arendt's contention that 'man is not the creator of the world' (1994b [1946]: 167) in Subsection 5.2 in Chapter 5. For a discussion of the temporal conditions of human mortality and action in Arendt's thinking in *The Human Condition*, see Ricoeur (1983).

²⁸ This aspect of Arendt's discussion of modern 'world alienation' remains little remarked in the literature. Sophie Loidolt notes 'alienation' in passing in her reconstruction of Arendt's essay 'What is Existential Philosophy?', yet pays closer attention to Arendt's articulation of the notion of human plurality in this essay (see Arendt 1994b; Loidolt 2013). Loidolt's critical reading of Arendt importantly notes her transformation of phenomenological and philosophical concepts, which form the foundation of Arendt's political theory. To Loidolt's account, I would add that Arendt's elucidation of plurality emerges alongside and through her interpretation of modern world alienation. As noted in the introduction chapter to this thesis, I am in the process of reconstructing Arendt's notion of world alienation, in an essay provisionally titled 'The Modern Condition of World Alienation: Hannah Arendt's Implicit Hermeneutic of Modernity'.

²⁹ I raised this point regarding the dominant readings of Arendt that place emphasis on the expressivist disclosure of the self in the opening part of this chapter.

³⁰ 'Socrates' (Arendt 2007b [1954]) appears in the edited collection of Arendt's essays, *The Promise of Politics* (ed. Jerome Kohn). In the editorial introduction, Kohn notes that 'Socrates' is comprised from lecture material that Arendt developed in 1954, titled 'Philosophy and Politics: The Problem of Action and Thought after the French Revolution' (Kohn 2007: viii). This lecture material was compiled and published as 'Philosophy and Politics' in the journal *Social Research* in 1990 (see Arendt 1990). 'Socrates' is an expanded version of the text published as 'Philosophy and Politics'. There is also a slight variance in the prose between 'Philosophy and Politics' and the version published as 'Socrates'. Given that 'Socrates' is an expanded version of the text, I chose to reconstruct this essay in the present analysis.

³¹ Jerome Kohn, the editor of the collection of Arendt's essays, *The Promise of Politics*, dates the unpublished manuscript titled 'Introduction into Politics' as between 1956 and 1959 (see Kohn 2007: xvii). This is significant: Arendt would have been working on *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]) at the same time as devising 'Introduction into Politics'. Arendt's elucidations of politics and political action in this essay are thus contemporaneous to those found in *The Human Condition*, and also prefigure her reflections on revolutionary political action in *On Revolution* (2006b [1963]).

³² Additionally, Arendt employs her philosophical anthropology of natality to separate ‘action’ in the creative, world-forming sense from work and labour. I return to this in Subsection 2.2.2, below.

³³ Marx stands in the background of Arendt’s differentiation of ‘work’ and ‘labour’ here. Arendt argues that Marx correctly understood that labour refers to the human ‘metabolism with nature’ (Arendt 2002: 285; Marx 1990 [1867]: 133, 283; see also Arendt 1998: 88, 98-99, 103). However, in Arendt’s view, Marx conflated this primarily consumptive and reproductive activity of labour with the productive activity of ‘work’. As a consequence, Marx ‘attributes labour a productivity that it never possesses’ (Arendt 2007c: 79). Marx’s apparent ‘glorification of labour’ made explicit the modern anthropological turn that reversed the hierarchy of *vita activa* to place labour at the pinnacle, above work and action. Where human beings were previously conceived as *zōon politikon* (Arendt 1998: 23), *animal rationale* (Arendt 2006c: 21, 2006d: 63, 2007d: 60, 2007c: 79), or *creatura Dei* in the likeness of God (Arendt 2007c: 79), the modern age regards ‘labour itself as the preeminent human activity’ (Arendt 2007c: 79; cf. 1998: 108, 2002: 288). For Arendt, this modern rearticulation of modes of human doing was already evident in the rise of the ‘social question’ of poverty in the French Revolution, as well as the demand for ‘labour’ through the Industrial Revolution (Arendt 2002: 283; cf. 1998: 288, 293, 2006a: 49-55, 2006c: 24, 31, 2007c: 80). Although Marx attempted to argue that labour is a specifically ‘human’ characteristic, in Arendt’s analysis labour returns *anthropos* to an animal-like state, driven by the necessity of simply staying alive (Arendt 2002: 289). The predominance of labouring doing in the modern age in this respect has the consequence of ‘levelling all human activities to the common denominator of securing the necessities of life and providing for their abundance’ (Arendt 1998: 126).

³⁴ Although Arendt points toward a notion of meaning in this quotation, she does not systematically develop a theory of meaning across her trajectory, in comparison to Castoriadis and his elucidation of social imaginary significations, for example (see especially the final chapter of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*; 1987b [1975]: 340-373; see also Arnason 1989b, 2014b). As Arendt presents it across ‘Understanding and Politics’ (1994e), meaning emerges through the collective interpretative act of understanding that is oriented toward the past, which forms the interpretative ‘framework’ of common sense. This indicates an opening for a reconstruction of Arendt’s incipient theory of socio-historical meaning, which links to Arendt’s earlier remarks regarding remembrance in *Love and Saint Augustine* (see Section 2.1 of this chapter). However, this reconstructive task reaches beyond the scope and limits of the present discussion.

³⁵ Arendt’s thought arguably comprises implicit notions of the creative imagination, which, I argue, have not been fully elaborated in relation to the question of politics. Space does not permit to expand on this in depth here. Arendt’s most explicit remarks on the imagination appear in her *Lectures on Kant’s Political Philosophy* (1992 [1982]). Many have debated Arendt’s understanding of the faculty of the imagination as it emerges in this work alone (such as, for example, Beiner & Nedelsky 2001, Kaplan & Kessler 1989, Zerilli 2005b). However, Arendt’s sketches of the political dimensions of the creative imagination as expressed through ‘spontaneous’ action remains little remarked in the literature, and indeed remained underdeveloped

by Arendt herself (see e.g. Arendt 2007a: 113). Arendt did not elucidate the creative element of the imagination to the extent that Castoriadis did. On this thematic of the creative dimension of the imagination, a dialogue between Arendt, Castoriadis, and Ricoeur may prove fruitful. One attempt to flesh out Arendt's notion of imagination in relation to Castoriadis's thought has been undertaken by Svjetlana Nedimović. In her doctoral thesis (which was supervised by Peter Wagner), Nedimović presented an excursus on Arendt's notion of imagination as it emerged through her (unfinished) theory of judgement (like those secondary analyses, noted above) in dialogue with Heidegger and Castoriadis (see Nedimović 2007: 154-178).

³⁶ The last two chapters of *The Origins of Totalitarianism*, titled 'Ideology and Terror: A Novel Form of Government' and 'Epilogue: Reflections on the Hungarian Revolution' were added to the second enlarged edition to the work. This is to say that they did not appear in the first edition of the book in 1951; rather, the two chapters were first written and published in 1953, and 1958, respectively. Although this does not pose issues for the current hermeneutic reconstructive task, it is worth noting here. See the preface to the second enlarged edition of *Origins*, Arendt (1958: xi-xii).

³⁷ In his recent book, *Kant on Spontaneity*, Marco Sgarbi argues that the notion of 'spontaneity' plays a key role within Kant's philosophy, yet he did not deal with this problematic explicitly (see Sgarbi 2012). Although Arendt draws upon this Kantian thematic in her elucidation of the creative dimensions of new beginnings, she does not fully develop the notion of 'spontaneity' herself, either. For an analysis of Kant's approach to spontaneity, see Sgarbi (2012) and Pippin (1987).

³⁸ I pursue an analysis of this line of Arendt's thinking—particularly in relation to the notion of 'miracles'—in dialogue with Castoriadis in the discussion chapter of this thesis. See Section 5.2, Chapter 5.

³⁹ It is through this characterisation of 'work' and the anthropological understanding of *homo faber* that Arendt criticises modern philosophies of history, both in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]) and in her important essay 'The Concept of History: Ancient and Modern' (2006c [1958]). As a field of beginnings, history for Arendt therefore cannot be 'made': this latter understanding of making suggests that there 'must come a moment when this "object" is completed', which has the 'consequence that there will be an end to history' (Arendt 2006c: 79). I return to the constructivist aspects of political doing or 'making' in Section 5.2 in Chapter 5. Furthermore, this emphasis on means and ends for Arendt leads to potentially 'murderous consequences' and justifications of violence in order to achieve said 'ends'. For *homo faber*, 'all means, provided that they are efficient, are permissible and justified to pursue something defined as an end' (Arendt 1998: 229). It is on this basis that Arendt criticises Marx's revolutionary understanding of the 'making' of history and his contention that "'violence is the midwife of every old society pregnant with a new one'" (see Arendt 1998: 228). Arendt's arguments against violent notions of 'making history' likewise permeate her discussion of the descent of the French Revolution into terror in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]).

⁴⁰ Indeed, the Roman experience permeates Arendt's thinking in the mid-1950s and thereafter—including 'The Tradition of Political Thought' (2007d [1953]), 'Introduction into Politics' (2007a [1956/1959]), 'What is Authority?' (2006e [1959]) and 'What is Freedom?' (2006f [1960])—and paves the way for her analysis of the foundation of new political worlds in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]), which I consider in Section 2.3. 318

Despite the significance of Rome for Arendt's elucidation of political action in the manner of world-founding doing, Arendt's encounter with the Romans remains less remarked in the literature than that with the Greeks. See for example, Maggini (2015) and Taminiaux (2000).

⁴¹ Here, I am making implicit reference to Arnason's recent essay, 'The Religio-Political Nexus: Historical and Comparative Reflections' (2014a). For a discussion of Arnason's developing theorisation of the religio-political nexus, see Adams (2016b). It may be possible to expand Arendt's analysis of the sacralisation of the foundation of Rome by drawing on Emile Durkheim in *The Elementary Forms of Religious Life* (1995 [1912]). Space does not permit to pursue this analysis here. However, a dialogue between Durkheim and Arendt on this point may further develop her incipient theory of socio-cultural meaning and tradition as the institution of the 'sacred', particularly in relation to the religious and political practice (or, ritual?) of preserving the institution.

⁴² I pursue this connection between Arendt's notion of action *qua* beginnings and Castoriadis's elucidation of creation *ex nihilo* in Section 5.2 of Chapter 5.

⁴³ It is worth noting that Arendt's analyses of modern revolutionary projects and the Roman experience of foundation incorporate an implicit dialogue between the ancients and the moderns. Due to limitations of space and scope, I did not expand on this debate here.

⁴⁴ As an aside, Arendt leans on Machiavelli in both 'What is Authority?' and in the first chapter of *On Revolution*. Machiavelli's influence on Arendt's thinking of the political act of foundation first became apparent in a passing remark in 'Understanding and Politics' (1994e [1954]: 321), but she did not expand on this point there. For Arendt, Machiavelli articulated the act of foundation as the central political experience and beginning of Roman history (Arendt 2006e [1959]: 138). Arendt returns to this Machiavellian insight in the first chapter of *On Revolution*. She argues that Machiavelli 'was the first to think about the possibility of founding a permanent, lasting, enduring body politic' (Arendt 2006a [1963]: 26). In her view, Machiavelli was also the first to consider the perplexities inherent in this task—including the articulation of a new source of power to replace the absolute power of God, in the context of Machiavelli's plan for an Italian republic (2006a [1963]: 29). Here the thematic of power and its connection to religious and cultural patterns of authority appears in Arendt's work. However, Arendt does not systematically address the question of power in her intellectual project. 'Power' permeates Arendt's analysis in *The Human Condition* (1998 [1958]), but moves more to the forefront of her thinking late in *On Revolution* (2006a [1963]). Although Arendt's reflections on power have received some (albeit limited) attention in the secondary literature (such as Bernstein 2011; Habermas 1977; La Caze 2011; Volk 2016), there is room to expand on Arendt's understanding of the binding power of socio-cultural tradition via authority, particularly in its political dimensions. Ricoeur's 1989 essay on Arendt's conception of power and violence forms an important starting point for this; see Ricoeur (2010). Due to limitations of space and scope, this task cannot be undertaken here. I plan to reconstruct Arendt's implicit understanding of power at a later time.

⁴⁵ Arendt's remarks on the place or 'seat' of power and authority in *On Revolution* resemble Claude Lefort's reflections on power as a space of symbolic legitimacy (see e.g. Lefort 1986: 279, 285, 303). I note the link

between Arendt and Lefort in relation to the theme of power in the concluding discussion of this thesis. Indeed, a dialogue between these two important political thinkers on the problematic of power is an important task to be undertaken in future, as this link has not been fully explored from this perspective in the literature.

⁴⁶ Here I am making general reference to Castoriadis's long-planned but ultimately unfinished work on 'the imaginary element' (*L'Élément imaginaire*). He makes mention to this work in the preface to *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (1987c [1975]: 2), as well as in the posthumously published article 'The Imaginary as Such' (2015 [1968-1969]: n.2), which formed part of an introduction to *L'Élément imaginaire*. For a discussion of 'The Imaginary as Such', see Arnason (2015a).

⁴⁷ Castoriadis juxtaposes *la politique* or 'politics' from *le politique* or 'the political' in his essay, 'Power, Politics, Autonomy' (1991a [1978/1988]). Where *la politique* refers to the instituting dimension of society as manifest in the explicit and interrogative activities of the political project of autonomy (Castoriadis 1991a: 160), *le politique*, in turn, relates to the instituted normative dimensions of power within the given society, as 'the political' (Castoriadis 1991a: 156-159). I return to Castoriadis's distinction between *la* and *le politique* in Section 3.1, in which I outline Castoriadis's key concepts to frame the reconstruction of Castoriadis's.

⁴⁸ Castoriadis's work, *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, comprises two parts. The first part, 'Marxism and Revolutionary Theory' (1987a) incorporates essays originally published in *Socialisme ou Barbarie* between 1964 and 1965. The second part, 'The Social Imaginary and the Institution' (1987b) was written in the early 1970s, before the two parts were brought together and published in French in 1975 (and later in English in 1987). I differentiate between the two parts in this reconstruction because Castoriadis's writings in the first part are more phenomenological in their elucidations of the world, and concentrate more explicitly on the question of doing. In turn, the second part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* makes Castoriadis's ontological turn explicit, which results in a formulation of the world problematic as the creation of the world *ex nihilo*, in contrast to his earlier approach. I discuss the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* in Section 3.2, and the second part in Subsection 3.4.2 in this chapter.

⁴⁹ 'Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition' was originally written in 1978, after Castoriadis's ontological turn. In this, Castoriadis withdraws from dialogue Merleau-Ponty's thought because, in Castoriadis's view, he remained wedded to a philosophy of determinacy, or of 'being' as 'being-determined'. Adams provides a concise overview of this text in relation to Castoriadis's first dialogue with Merleau-Ponty in 'The Sayable and the Unsayable' (1984c [1970]) in her reconstructive essay, titled 'Dimensions of the World: Castoriadis' Homage to Merleau-Ponty'. See Adams (2009a: 113-114).

⁵⁰ These themes lie outside of the present scope of analysis. Important texts by Castoriadis on psychoanalysis, the psychical monad and the 'living being' include: Castoriadis (1984a [1977], 1997i [1989], 1997j [1991], 1997k [1986], 2007b [1996], 2010b).

⁵¹ Castoriadis's understanding of socialism sharply contrasts with the realities of 'really existing socialism' that was practiced in the USSR. For Castoriadis, these societies more readily epitomized a form of

totalitarian bureaucratic capitalism (1988 [1960]: 308 n.10, 312, 50, 1997l [1955]: 44-47, 1997m [1957]: 50, 91-92, 1997n [1964]: 118-119) rather than a socialist-communist project of emancipation. For a discussion of Castoriadis's reflections on socialism, see Klooger (2012a) and Ramsay (2014).

⁵² Castoriadis has argued that the Greek creation of politics and philosophy was a decisive 'rupture' and creative 'invention'. This is not without criticism. Arnason in particular argues that the *polis* appears more of an 'emergence' or a 'long revolution' than an 'invention' or 'rupture' *per se* (Arnason 2013a: 21, 36; Castoriadis 1997h: 88; see also Raaflaub et al. 2006). Arnason's argument rests on an interpretative understanding of the creation of history, such that philosophy and politics were interpretatively-created from within a meaningful cultural context, in which 'politics' and 'philosophy' were latent possibilities. Castoriadis, on the other hand, understands creation as *ex nihilo*, which underscores his use of the term 'rupture'. See Adams (2005: 26-31) for a comprehensive treatment of this debate.

⁵³ The specifics of the Athenian *polis* (and the ancient Greek *polei* more broadly, including Corinth and Sparta) are complex, and lie outside of the scope of the present analysis. For further information, see the work, *Origins of Democracy in Ancient Greece* (Raaflaub et al. 2006). It is also worthy to note here that Castoriadis sharply separates the birth of Greek politics (and thus by extension his project of autonomy) from Greek religion and religious practices. In places he argues (and in others, alludes) that religion did not play a role in, or was kept at a distance from ancient Greek political life (see Castoriadis 1991b: 87, 1997h: 92, 2010b: 160). This point has been criticised. For one, Castoriadis 'underestimates the role of religion in the Greek polis' (Adams 2014a: 10; see also Arnason 2012; Osborne 2013). Arnason (2014d) has recently worked to elucidate the 'nexus' between the religious and political dimensions of societies and civilizations, partly by leaning on Castoriadis. For a discussion of Arnason's approach to the 'religio-political nexus', see Adams (2016a).

⁵⁴ Castoriadis was a noteworthy omission from *The Creativity of Action*; particularly the section on 'Creativity and Collective Action' (Joas 1996: 199-209). Instead, Castoriadis appeared in this work in relation to his departure from Marx, and his dismissal of the determinism of the Western philosophical tradition. See Joas (1996: 105, 107, 236).

⁵⁵ This restriction to English-language publications means that I am unable to reconstruct the possible dimensions of political doing and world present in a number of Castoriadis's French-language works, that have hitherto not been published in English. This includes his seminar series on ancient Greece, delivered at the *École des hautes études en sciences sociales* in the early 1980s. These seminars were later published in three volumes in French under the main title *Ce qui fait la Grèce* (Castoriadis 2004, 2008, 2011b), and have not as yet been translated into English. I am additionally unable to consider the posthumously published *Histoire et création. Textes philosophiques inédits (1945-1967)* within the present analysis on this basis (ed. Poirier 2009). Similarly, I am unable to take the recent publication of the Ricoeur-Castoriadis dialogue into consideration here. This has been recently published in French (Michel 2016), and will be available in English later in 2017 (see Adams 2017).

⁵⁶ In his essays, ‘Time and Creation’ (1997b [1983]) and ‘Done and to be Done’ (1997b [1989]), Castoriadis circumvents the ontological absolutism of creation *ex nihilo* with his statement that social-historical creation ‘always takes place *under constraints*’, adding that creation is neither *in* nor *cum nihilo* (Castoriadis 1997b: 370, emphasis in original, 1997d: 392; cf. 1990: 126, 1997f: 321, 333). This ‘conditional’ notion of creation additionally sits in tension with his strong understanding of creation *ex nihilo*.

⁵⁷ In contrast to Castoriadis, Paul Ricoeur argues that creation is ‘from something to something’, and is thus ‘contextual creation’. This forms a key talking point of the present chapter. I have referenced Suzi Adams here, as she uncovered this insight in her archival research (see Adams 2005: 35, 2009a: 129, n.6), in the transcript to an unpublished radio discussion on *France Culture* between Ricoeur and Castoriadis in 1985. This radio discussion has recently been published in French (see Michel 2016), and the English translation publication is forthcoming in 2017 (See ed. Adams 2017b*).

⁵⁸ In the edited collection *Philosophy, Politics, Autonomy* (1991d, ed. Curtis), Castoriadis dates the original French essay ‘*Pouvoir, politique, autonomie*’ as completed in 1987, and first published in 1988. However, he also dates the essay as first developed in 1978. This is significant in that Castoriadis’s other essay that incorporates notions of power—‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’ (1993a)—was first published in 1979, which indicates the complementary character of these essays. I consider these two texts in dialogue later in this chapter, when I turn to Castoriadis’s sketches of instituting power (see Subsection 3.4.2).

⁵⁹ That said, Castoriadis is highly critical of the contemporary institutional form of representative capitalist democracies. In his view, they are not democracies in the strong sense, but rather ‘liberal oligarchies’: the only form of political participation is intermittent voting for representatives by citizens based on pseudo-options predetermined by bureaucratic parties (Castoriadis 2010c [1991]: 166, 2010d [1986]: 127; see also Castoriadis 1997q: 346, 1997r: 7). In short, these are pseudo-democracies. For Castoriadis’s discussion of liberal oligarchies and critique of contemporary democratic politics, see ‘What Political Parties Cannot Do’ (Castoriadis 2010e [1979]), ‘“Democracy” Without Citizens’ Participation’ (2010c [1991]), ‘Democracy as Procedure, Democracy as Regime’ (1997r [1996]), ‘The Greek and the Modern Political Imaginary’ (1997h [1991]), and ‘What Democracy?’ (2007d [1990]).

⁶⁰ Having said that, Castoriadis acknowledges that the Athenian *polis* was only partly autonomous. As Castoriadis makes clear, the whole institution of society was not open to interrogation by the Athenian citizens; questions of universal equality and private property remained unquestionable (Castoriadis 1996: 126-127, 1997h: 95-96; see also Adams 2014a: 10). In this vein, Castoriadis attributes success to the modern revival of autonomy, because it continually opens *the whole* institution to question (1997h: 95).

⁶¹ As Castoriadis presents it, the political project of autonomy comprises both individual and collective dimensions; I focus on the collective dimension of autonomy in this study. Space does not permit to discuss these dimensions in full in the body of the chapter. In brief, an autonomous society presumes autonomous subjects, and vice versa. The development of individual autonomy involves the twofold step of socialization, and the inauguration of a critical relationship to the institution and its social imaginary discourses (see Castoriadis 1987a: 104, 1991a: 164, 1997k, 1997i: 129-134, 2010b: 164; and Adams 2014a: 6; Smith 2010,

165). Castoriadis notes in ‘Power, Politics, Autonomy’ that the intention of the collective political project of autonomy is to re-form the institution to the extent that the institution forms autonomous subjects at the level of socialisation, such that subjects are socially fabricated as ‘autonomous’ in the first instance (see Castoriadis 1991a: 170-174; cf. Castoriadis 1987a: 75-77, 107-108, 1997i: 134). The Greek notion of *paideia* enters Castoriadis’s considerations here regarding the formation of the autonomous subject. Again, I outline this in brief here due to limitations of space and scope within the thesis proper. *Paideia* refers to a pedagogical mode that institutes the subject into an autonomous subject, to ‘develop in the subject the capacity to learn’ and self-reflect about the institutions that the subject is socialized into (Castoriadis 1997i: 129; see also Castoriadis 1991a: 140-141, 161-162, 173, 1997i: 129-134; Straume 2013, 2014a: 149, 2014b: 195). Ingerid Straume has written extensively on this aspect of Castoriadis’s work, and has extended this understanding in her reflections on modern education and democracy. See e.g. Straume (2012a, 2013, 2014a, 2014c, 2015).

⁶² *Self-limitation* forms part of the foundation of the project of autonomy, and as such, is a task for democracy. As an aside, this sits in contrast to Castoriadis’s elucidation of the modern social imaginary of the *unlimited* expansion of pseudo-rational pseudo-mastery, which underpins the seemingly *limitless* accumulation of wealth, power, knowledge and control in modern Western forms of bureaucratic capitalism. See Smith (2014b: 180).

⁶³ Although Castoriadis foreshadows ‘the symbolic’ in the first part of the *IIS*, he leaves it aside in the second, ontological part of the work. He does not develop a notion of the symbolic across the remainder of his thought; instead, the problematics of the imaginary and social imaginary significations predominate. Castoriadis contends that the imaginary element is a precondition for a society’s particular symbols, whereas other thinkers, such as Lefort and Ricoeur, focus more specifically on the symbolic *per se*. The difference between social imaginary significations and the symbolic tends to be obscured in Castoriadis’s own writings. This has led to confusion in the wider literature on the differences between the dimensions of the ‘symbolic’ and the ‘imaginary’ in Castoriadis’s thought, where contrasts and comparisons are made between his and the Ricoeurian and Lefortian approaches to the symbolic. See, for example, Breckman (2013: 104-118) and Adams (2015a).

⁶⁴ The purpose of the present discussion of ‘phenomenological Marxism’ is to situate Castoriadis’s early thinking within phenomenological currents of thought, particularly alongside that by Merleau-Ponty. The term ‘Phenomenological Marxism’ is contested; there is not one specific, categorical definition of this philosophical movement. Space does not permit to detail these debates here. The term broadly pertains to the work of those thinkers listed in the main body of the text: Herbert Marcuse, Jean-Paul Sartre, and Maurice Merleau-Ponty. For a discussion of phenomenological Marxism, see Bohman (1990), Breckman (2013), and Piccone (1971). See also Arnason (1991) for a discussion of approaches to *praxis* that think with but beyond Marx.

⁶⁵ For a powerful discussion of these two thinkers, see Castoriadis’s essay ‘Value, Equality, Justice, Politics: From Marx to Aristotle and Aristotle to Ourselves’ in *Crossroads in the Labyrinth* (1984b). See also the text

titled 'Technique' (also published in the collection of essays, *Crossroads in the Labyrinth*; 1984d), in which Castoriadis debates their approaches to *praxis* and *poiesis*.

⁶⁶ The reconstruction of Castoriadis's earlier work additionally revealed an incipient understanding of the 'unpredictability' and 'uncertainty' of action, contra rational or instrumental understandings of doing. Space did not permit to undertake an analysis of these ideas at present. Interestingly, a parallel between Arendt's argument of the unpredictability of collective political action (see Subsection 2.2.2, Chapter 2) and Castoriadis's thought arises here. I return to this notion of the 'unpredictability' of action in brief in Section 5.2 in Chapter 5.

⁶⁷ Castoriadis additionally hints at the interpretative relation to the past in places in the first part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. Where Castoriadis speaks of the interpretative relativisation of the 'given' institution of the world, he also makes mention of a simultaneous reflexive relation to the instituted past (1987a [1964-1965]: 34, 39). However, Castoriadis does not expand on this insight of reinterpretations of past institutions and patterns of meaning beyond these passing remarks.

⁶⁸ This formulation arguably foreshadows aspects of Castoriadis's later elucidation of the proto-institution of *teukhein* in the second, ontological part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*. I turn to this part of Castoriadis's thought in Subsection 3.4.1 of this chapter, below.

⁶⁹ 'The Imaginary as Such' was recently translated and published in English in the journal *Social Imaginaries*. It was first posthumously published in French as '*L'imaginaire comme tel*' in 2007 (Castoriadis 2007f: 145-158). Written between 1968 and 1969 (prior to the second part of *The Imaginary Institution of Society*), this text was an exercise in thought for Castoriadis, and was not intended for publication in its original form (see Arnason 2015a: 53). While Castoriadis signals a number of ideas to be further elucidated at a later time, he does not accomplish this within the essay; as such, 'The Imaginary as Such' remains fragmentary in this sense.

⁷⁰ In 'The Anticipated Revolution', Castoriadis undertakes an analysis of the stages of the revolutionary student movement in 1968, and launches a critique of the proletariat's lack of autonomous creativity (1993d [1968]: 128-129, 137-145). The text is topical in that Castoriadis wrote it while the events were underway, in May and June of 1968 in Paris. In his view, the worker's movement simply sought better conditions *within* the capitalist, bureaucratic, consumer society that they were situated (1993d: 140), compared to the larger scope of the student movement. The use of this text in the present reconstruction aims to bring this work into light as an important, if marginalized, work by Castoriadis. In addition, it is worth noting that both Castoriadis and Peter Wagner have written specifically on '1968'. This reveals another opening for a cross-comparison of their thought, which lies outside of the scope of the current project.

⁷¹ Aristotle's distinction between actuality and potentiality lingers in the background of Castoriadis's thinking of the real and the possible in 'The Imaginary as Such' (Castoriadis 2015). For Castoriadis's discussion of this Aristotelian distinction, see his essay 'The Discovery of the Imagination' (1997g [1978]).

⁷² The contents of this essay lie largely outside of the scope of the present analysis of the world-altering dimensions of collective political doing; as such, I have omitted it from the reconstruction. ‘Merleau-Ponty and the Weight of the Ontological Tradition’ (originally written in 1978) appeared after Castoriadis’s ontological turn. In this essay, Castoriadis comes to dismiss Merleau-Ponty’s thought because, in Castoriadis’s view, his work remained wedded to a philosophy of determinacy, which equated ‘being’ as ‘being-determined’. Adams offers a concise overview of this text in relation to ‘The Sayable and the Unsayable’ in her essay, ‘Dimensions of the World: Castoriadis’ Homage to Merleau-Ponty’ (Adams 2009a: 113-114). In that text, Adams reconstructs Castoriadis’s elucidations of the world problematic in ‘The Sayable and the Unsayable’, and situates Castoriadis’s thinking within his broader *oeuvre*. I lean on her work in this section, yet concentrate more closely on the world-altering or world-forming aspects of doing, *vis-à-vis* the purposes of this chapter. Hans Joas’s essay ‘On Articulation’ (Joas 2002) also centres on Castoriadis’s homage to Merleau-Ponty in ‘The Sayable and the Unsayable’. However, in contrast to Adams, Joas focusses on the problematic of language, not the question of the world.

⁷³ The essay titled ‘Anthropology, Philosophy, Politics’ (Castoriadis 1997v [1990]) may also have been included in this reconstruction. However, the text reiterates much of Castoriadis’s reflections from the political texts under consideration here; as such, I opted to sideline this work from analysis here.

⁷⁴ An elucidation of Castoriadis’s reconfiguration and radicalisation of Freud’s notion of *Anlehnung* in the chapter on *legein* and *teukhein* in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* reaches beyond the scope of the present study. See Castoriadis (1987b [1975]: 229-237). For further discussion, see Adams (2011a: 65-72) and Klooger (2014d).

⁷⁵ Karl Smith has argued that Castoriadis’s ontological rendering of the world-horizon as ‘magma’ still incorporates phenomenological undercurrents (Smith 2010: 14). For Smith, Castoriadis’s elucidation of magma ‘implies a strong correlation between the magma and Merleau-Ponty’s conceptualization of the “flesh of the world”’, yet, according to Adams (2013: 79 n.8), Smith has not fully explored this connection. Due to space limitations, comments here must remain brief. Merleau-Ponty’s notion of ‘the flesh’ denotes the ‘invisible in the visible’; namely, the web of meanings which intertwine between oneself, others, and the world through perception and experience (Merleau-Ponty 1968: 138, 248). Notably, Merleau-Ponty writes that the ontology of the flesh is comprised of ‘invisible nuclei of meaning’ (1968: 236), as a field of varied layers of subjectivity (which intermeshes levels of subjectivity, inter-, and trans-subjectivity; see Merleau-Ponty 1968: 227). Traces of Merleau-Ponty’s notion of the flesh are notable in Castoriadis’s understanding of magma, although Castoriadis does not explicitly acknowledge this in his writings.

⁷⁶ Castoriadis also extends his understanding of magmatic modes of being beyond social imaginary significations and the social-historical to the strata of nature and the psyche in the final chapter of the *IIS*. However, these considerations lie outside of the present scope of discussion.

⁷⁷ I debate this point in Sections 5.2 and 5.3 in Chapter 5 of this study, in dialogue with Arendt and Wagner’s approaches to the world problematic and world-forming doing.

⁷⁸ As I indicated earlier in note 58, Castoriadis dates the original French text ‘*Pouvoir, politique, autonomie*’ as completed in 1987 and published in 1988, but also notes that the essay was first developed in 1978. On this basis, the original formulation of ‘Power, Politics, Autonomy’ was contemporaneous to that of ‘Socialism and Autonomous Society’ (1993a [1979]).

⁷⁹ I return to the notion of power in relation to collective political projects in the concluding discussion of this thesis, as it forms an avenue for further consideration to advance the understanding of world-altering collective political action developed in this study.

⁸⁰ Arnason recently reconfigured Castoriadis’s incipient elucidation of power in his essay, ‘The Religio-Political Nexus: Historical and Comparative Reflections’ (2014a). See Adams (2016b) for a discussion of Arnason’s reconsideration of Castoriadis’s approach to instituting power.

⁸¹ For Wagner’s ongoing dialogue with the multiple modernities field, see: Friese and Wagner (2000b: 34-37) and Wagner (2001b: 169, 2001e: 7, 2008a: 12-13, 2009: 254-255, 2011b: 91, 2012: 24-26, 32-34, 65, 153-155).

⁸² Wagner attributes the term ‘successive modernities’ to Arnason, as Arnason discussed Wagner’s work along these terms in his plenary lecture at the 2005 Congress of the International Institute of Sociology in Stockholm. See Wagner (2010c: 21, n.2, 2012: 32, n.5). Wagner develops the notion of ‘successive modernities’ after his first work in response to—and in departure from—the multiple modernities field (especially Eisenstadt’s work), but also through William Sewell Jr’s historical-sociological approach. See Carleheden and Borch (2010: 5), and Sewell (2005).

⁸³ Craig Browne has recently published a critical comparison of Jürgen Habermas and Anthony Giddens’s philosophies of *praxis* in light of the question of modernity, and Browne incorporated Wagner’s elucidation of modernity as the autonomous self-constitution of society into the discussion. Browne’s work was published in early 2017, and could not be included in the present discussion as such. See Browne (2017).

⁸⁴ Due to my restriction to English language texts, I am unable to speak to the reception of Wagner’s work in broader European or global debates. I accept this inevitable limitation to the analysis. It is also important to note that the international scholarly journal *Social Imaginaries* will publish a *Festschrift* on Wagner’s thought in early 2018, which will include a ‘reply’ by Wagner himself. The issue will contain analyses of his approaches to modernity and ‘world sociology’, his rearticulation of ‘progress’, as well as contributions by some of Wagner’s key interlocutors. Unfortunately, this publication was unavailable for reconstruction at the time of writing this chapter. An earlier special issue on Wagner’s approach to successive modernities was published in *Distinktion: Scandinavian Journal of Social Theory* in 2010, edited by Mikael Carleheden and Christian Borch (2010). This issue featured the Wennerhag (2010) article noted above, a critical discussion of the theory of modernity underpinning Wagner’s thought by Carleheden (2010), as well as Wagner’s reconsideration of the notion of ‘progress’ (2010c).

⁸⁵ I have used the publication of Wagner’s *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation* (2008a) and its accompanying essay ‘Modernity as Experience and Interpretation: Towards Something Like a Cultural Turn

in the Sociology of “Modern Society” (2009) as the close of the periodization here. I consider these works as representative of a culmination of a period of Wagner’s thought as he articulates his theory of modernity as ‘spaces of experience and interpretation’. This explains the use of ‘2008/2009’ in this reconstruction, as it corresponds to the publication dates of these texts.

⁸⁶ Wagner also adds a fourth and fifth *problématique* to this cluster in his early works, which he leaves aside in his later essays. The fourth *problématique* concerned the collective relation to time, which Wagner characterised as the ‘ways of living the lived present to time past and time future’ (2001b: 172; cf. 2001e: 8). The fifth *problématique*, in turn, related to the question of the formation of the ‘self’ and ‘identity’ (Wagner 2002a).

⁸⁷ It remains unclear whence Wagner draws these ‘components’ of the modern imaginary significations. They may arguably be linked to Enlightenment and philosophical understandings of modernity. Specifically, the human capacity for Reason and agency, as well as the Enlightenment ideal that the world can be made intelligible through human reason.

⁸⁸ As Mikael Carleheden notes, Wagner does not explicitly clarify his understanding of the notion of ‘imaginary significations’, or expand upon what the term means for his own project (see Carleheden 2010: 52-53). Understood broadly as complexes of meaning, Castoriadis elucidates ‘social imaginary significations’ as part of his theory of meaning in *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Castoriadis 1987b: 340-373; see also Adams 2011a: 101, 117-127, and Section 3.1 of Chapter 3). It is unclear whether the idea of the imaginary significations of modernity plays a similar role in Wagner’s own project. Later in his trajectory, Wagner broadly equates ‘imaginary significations’ with ‘basic modes of societal self-understanding’ (2006: 34), yet does not clarify whether this comprises his notion of socio-cultural meaning. For a discussion of Castoriadis’s notion of social imaginary significations, see Arnason (2014b) and Adams (2011a: 117-127).

⁸⁹ I leave Taylor’s text *Modern Social Imaginaries* (2004) aside from discussion here because Wagner does not explicitly draw on this aspect of Taylor’s work in his analysis. Wagner predominantly leans on Taylor’s notion of ‘self-interpreting animals’ in his project, and mentions *Modern Social Imaginaries* only in brief in *Modernity: Understanding the Present* (Wagner 2012: 73).

⁹⁰ ‘1968’ is a watershed moment for Wagner; as this chapter demonstrates, it is a recurring thematic in his thinking. See for example: Friese & Wagner (2002a), eds Ginsborg et al. (2002), and Wagner (2002b, 2005b: 65-66, 2008a: 62-74, 2012: 7, 97, 2015d: 32-36). Wagner (and others) co-edited a special issue on the event in *Thesis Eleven* in 2002—their 68th issue. Wagner contributed a cluster of essays to this issue. I discuss the most important of these essays, titled ‘The Project of Emancipation and the Possibility of Politics, or, What’s Wrong with Post-1968 Individualism?’ (Wagner 2002b) in Section 4.3.2, below.

⁹¹ In note 85, above, I clarified the use of ‘2008/2009’ in this periodization of Wagner’s thought, as it corresponds to the publication dates of Wagner’s *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation* (2008a) and its complementary essay ‘Modernity as Experience and Interpretation: Towards Something Like a Cultural Turn

in the Sociology of “Modern Society” (2009). In these works, Wagner elucidates an understanding of plural modernities as ‘spaces of experience and interpretation’.

⁹² ‘When “the Light of the Great Cultural Problems Moves on”: On the Possibility of a Cultural Theory of Modernity’ (2000b) was published in a special issue of *Thesis Eleven* in 2000, which was a *Festschrift* on Arnason’s thought. In this essay, Friese and Wagner think with and against the notion of culture found within multiple modernities debates and civilizational analysis (Arnason is an important figure in these fields). Yet, Friese and Wagner do not explicitly deal with Arnason’s work *per se* in this essay; in so doing, they bypass a discussion of Arnason’s contribution to a theory of culture. Space does not permit to detail Arnason’s nuanced elucidation of culture here, which he develops via Castoriadis, Merleau-Ponty and Weber, among others. Particularly important texts by Arnason on this topic include: ‘Culture and Imaginary Significations’ (1989b), ‘World Interpretation and Mutual Understanding’ (1992), ‘Merleau-Ponty and Max Weber: An Unfinished Dialogue’ (1993), and *Civilizations in Dispute: Historical Questions and Theoretical Traditions* (2003; see especially Chapter 4). For a discussion of Arnason’s culturological approach, see Adams (2009b).

⁹³ This is an indirect critique of ethno-nationalist understandings, as well as both the multiple modernities field and civilizational debates (see Wagner 2008b: 25, 2010a: 229, 2011a: 233-234, 2012: 24-27, 73, 161). Wagner makes this point across his trajectory (see Friese & Wagner 2000b: 27-28, 30, 36-37; Wagner 2005b: 69, 2006: 31, 2008b: 359, 2008a: 3, 12, 50, 52-57, 135, 141, 172, 193, 203-204, 212, 2009: 254-255, 2010d: 54-55, 2010c: 11-13, 2010a: 229, 2011a: 233-234, 2012: 6, 15, 24-25, 31, 41, 60-61, 67, 116-117, 153, 2013c: 164, 2014: 294). For Wagner, multiple modernities and approaches to civilizational analysis give limited due to the novelty of societal change in modernity (especially post-1960), and situate modes of commonality in patterns of significance rooted in the Axial Age (see Wagner 2010c: 11, 2010a: 299, 2012: 68, 71-72, 153-154). Similarly, Wagner contends that these approaches overlook individual human agency, and at times maintain a determinist view of history (Friese & Wagner 2000b: 36-37). Although Wagner often takes issue with S.N. Eisenstadt’s notion of ‘cultural programmes’ in this vein, he overlooks Eisenstadt’s later departure from this functionalist approach (as seen in Eisenstadt 1995, 2000, 2003).

⁹⁴ Wagner also refers to Arendt’s portrayal of the ‘gap between past and future’ (Arendt 2006g [1961]) in the chapter ‘The Accessibility of the Past’ in his work, *Theorizing Modernity: Inescapability and Attainability in Social Theory* (Wagner 2001e). In this, Wagner elaborates the present as ‘a moment of openness in which thinking and acting can intervene and liberate human beings from the thought of being caught between two adversaries, past and future’ (Wagner 2001e: 88). Wagner does not take this insight further; instead, he draws on Koselleck in passing to discuss the notion of the opening of the time horizon (2001e: 88). Because Wagner does not detail Arendt’s approach further than this remark, I left this aside from the discussion in the main body of the thesis.

⁹⁵ In the chapter on ‘Action and Institution’ in *A History and Theory of the Social Sciences: Not All That Is Solid Melts into Air* (2001b: 103-116), Wagner notes a number of important French thinkers in relation to the question of action; however he does not detail their work in depth. For example, Wagner refers to the reappropriation of hermeneutics and phenomenology in both Ricoeur and Merleau-Ponty’s thought, and cites

François Dosse (Wagner 2001b: 115; see also Dosse 1995). Interestingly, Wagner does not include Castoriadis's notion of institution in his discussion here (see Castoriadis 1987a: 115-127, and Arnason 2014c). Instead, Wagner elaborated the contours of Boltanski and Thévenot's approach.

⁹⁶ 'The Political Form of Europe, Europe as Political Form' (Wagner 2005b) additionally reworks thematics from a series of earlier essays on the same topic that Wagner co-authored with Heidrun Friese, which were published in both French and English (see Friese & Wagner 2000a, 2001b, 2002b). Both 'The Possibility of Politics' and 'Political Form' were also republished together in the political section of Wagner's later work *Modernity as Experience and Interpretation* (2008a: 31-61, 62-73).

⁹⁷ As highlighted in note 90, above, 'The Project of Emancipation and the Possibility of Politics, or, What's Wrong with Post-1968 Individualism?' (2002b) featured in a special issue of *Thesis Eleven*—the 68th issue—which Wagner co-edited alongside Paul Ginsborg, Luisa Passerini, and Bo Stråth (see eds. Ginsborg et al. 2002).

⁹⁸ The question of power appears to assume a position at the forefront of Wagner's considerations in this quotation. However, Wagner does not systematically deal with the problem of power in his *oeuvre*. I note the problematic of power in the concluding discussion of this thesis, as it constitutes an avenue for further consideration to advance the theoretical understanding of world-altering collective political action developed in this study.

⁹⁹ Wagner's remarks on the imagination appear in traces across his intellectual trajectory. He discusses the imagination as a faculty of the individual human being (which he does in 'Political Form'; see 2005b: 53). Yet, elsewhere, Wagner notes that 'the human faculty of imagination can institute different worlds' and then adds, 'worlds can be the imaginary point of reference for action' (2015b: 113). This interchangeable use of the terms also resurfaces in Wagner and Karagiannis's essay, 'Imagination and Tragic Democracy' (2012a: 13-14, 16, 18), and in his recent booklet, *Progress: A Reconstruction* (2016: 20, 38). In this, Wagner often shifts between understandings of the *faculty* of the imagination, and the *social* imaginary within socio-cultural worlds, without fully clarifying these two notions.

¹⁰⁰ Part of Karagiannis's intellectual project deals with a reconfiguration of the problematic of solidarity (see Karagiannis 2007a, 2007b, 2007c, 2007d, 2007e). She maintains yet goes beyond the commonplace understanding of solidarity, as "that which holds society together", to characterise solidarity as 'a recurrent specification of social bonds with a political view' (Karagiannis 2007b: 215, 216; cf. 2007c: 155). In Karagiannis' understanding, solidarity brings together the sociality of common bonds and the space of human connectedness, and politicizes it with a view to a common project (Karagiannis 2007b: 216; cf. 2007c: 157). Moreover, solidarity engenders feelings of belonging via cooperation, but simultaneously also forms of resistance to the existing order (Karagiannis 2007c: 163, 2007d: 2-3). Solidarity is, in Karagiannis's later analysis, '*a politically committed re-specification of the social*' (2007d: 2, emphasis in original).

¹⁰¹ At times, Wagner shifts between an understanding of the world as the social institution of the world, and 'the world' in the more geographical sense of 'the global whole' (such as, 'the modern world' and 'global

modernity'; see e.g. Wagner 2005b: 69, 2008a: 17, 2010b: 21, 37-38, 2010a: 228, 232, 2012: ix-xi, 10, 120, 163, 167, 170, 2013b: 626, 2015b: 106, 123, 2015e: 22-24, 2016b). In contrast, I focus this discussion on his approach to the world problematic, which incorporates both the world in the phenomenological sense of an overarching inexhaustible meta-horizon, and the institution of a world of meaning.

¹⁰² Wagner's contribution to the co-edited volume *Varieties of World-Making: Beyond Globalization* (ed. Karagiannis & Wagner 2007b) is titled 'Imperial Modernism and European World-Making' (Wagner 2007a). Although the thematic of world-making appears to take a central position in this essay, Wagner does not explicitly deal with the notion in that text. As such, I exclude this essay from analysis in this study.

¹⁰³ Karagiannis and Wagner cite the original French publication of Nancy's *The Creation of the World, or, Globalization* (2007 [2002]) in their discussion. The ideas they draw from Nancy regarding the commonality of the world of experience are arguably more explicit in his earlier works, *The Inoperative Community* (1991: 3-4, 25) and *Being Singular Plural* (2000: 1-100) than in *Creation of the World*, although Nancy reiterates his framework in the latter work (see Nancy 2007: 41-42, 44). It is intriguing to note that Wagner and Karagiannis focus on the 'social givenness of, and interaction in, the world' (2007a: 2) from Nancy's work, rather than the notion of *creation* in Nancy's notion of *mondialisation* or *world-creation* (2007) in their discussion of varieties of world-making (Karagiannis & Wagner 2007a).

¹⁰⁴ Karagiannis and Wagner's essay 'What is to be thought? What is to be Done? The Polyscopic thought of Kostas Axelos and Cornelius Castoriadis' (2012b) featured in a special issue on Castoriadis's thought in the *European Journal of Social Theory* (see eds. Adams & Straume 2012).

¹⁰⁵ Wagner follows Castoriadis when he notes that human beings institute the world by 'creating significations' (Wagner 2015e: 23). However, Wagner does not explicitly outline an understanding of the creation of meaning in his trajectory, nor does he develop notion of cultural meaning further than a brief remark on 'societal self-understandings' as a mode of creative agency (see Wagner 2008b: 367, 368, 2009: 254, 2010b: 27, 2011a: 233, 234, 2015d: 36, 2015c: 13). This part of Wagner's thought arguably calls for further consideration, to give further weight to his elucidation of varieties of world-making.

¹⁰⁶ As an aside, Merleau-Ponty also develops a notion of sedimentation in relation to the problem of the world in his *Phenomenology of Perception* (2002 [1945]). 'Sedimentation' appears in traces in that work, and each time refers to a form of history or historicity (see e.g. Merleau-Ponty 2002: 249). For instance, Merleau-Ponty notes 'sedimentation' in relation to the 'world of thoughts' (2002: 149), and indicates that the world-structure of consciousness comprises stages of sedimentation and spontaneity (2002: 150). Later, Merleau-Ponty details the notion of sedimentation in the context of the human, cultural world: '...the spontaneous acts through which man has patterned his life should be deposited, like some sediment'. This is to say that actions and interpretative patterns become sedimented 'in the form of a cultural world' and history (Merleau-Ponty 2002: 405). For an overview of Merleau-Ponty's notion of sedimentation, see Spurling (2014: 58-60). Ricoeur's work also incorporates a notion of 'sedimentation', which relates to narrative tradition. In *Time and Narrative I*, for example, Ricoeur argues, 'tradition is constituted by the interplay of innovation and sedimentation' (2008a [1984]: 68). Wagner does not fully develop the interrelation between

institutions and sedimentation in his work. A dialogue between Wagner, Ricoeur, and Merleau-Ponty on this point may prove fruitful.

¹⁰⁷ As noted in note 106 above, this understanding of sedimentation has broad connections to the work of Merleau-Ponty (e.g. 2002 [1945]: 149-150), and Ricoeur (e.g. 2008a [1984]: 68).

¹⁰⁸ Blokker draws attention to a ‘rough’ similarity between Boltanski’s distinction between ‘reality’ and ‘world’ and Castoriadis’s notions of ‘chaos’ and ‘cosmos’ in a recent essay on Boltanski, Castoriadis, and Lefort. See Blokker (2014c: 367-377, 388 n.12).

¹⁰⁹ I have not included Wagner’s recent essay ‘Interpretations of Modernity and the Problem of World-Making’ (2015a) in this analysis, because Wagner concentrates on the theme of ‘interpretations of modernity’ over and above the notion of world-making in this text. Wagner mentions world-making in the closing sentences of the text to support his argument that modernity is best interpreted as varieties of world-making (Wagner 2015a: 278). Yet, he does not elaborate the political dimensions of world-making here. On this basis, I have omitted this essay from discussion.

¹¹⁰ In this essay, Karagiannis and Wagner also associate the mortality of institutions with the Athenian notion of tragedy, which for them reveals the risk of self-cancellation inherent to democracy via *hubris* (Karagiannis & Wagner 2012a: 19-23; see also Castoriadis 1991b: 115, 118; Klimis 2014). Karagiannis and Wagner reiterate the tragic uncertainty of democracy in other texts, both together and separately (Karagiannis 2006, 2015, 2013: 382; Wagner 2013a: 55-56). Wagner reflected on the ancient Greek institution of democracy (often, in contrast with modern forms) in two essays after 2012 (Karagiannis & Wagner 2013; Wagner 2013a). I have not included these essays in this chapter because they do not explicitly deal with the notion of world-making, nor Wagner’s elucidation of the dimensions of critique and reconstruction as part of a collective political project.

¹¹¹ Although this statement makes implicit reference to the theory of synagonism *vis-à-vis* the ‘agonistic struggle’, Karagiannis and Wagner do not refer to their theory here. Instead, they cite the theory of synagonism in a note regarding the relation between ‘the social’ and ‘the political’. See Karagiannis and Wagner (2012a: 17 n.11).

¹¹² Wagner draws on the South African and Brazilian varieties of modernity in a number of works between 2010 and 2015. He argues that both Brazil and South Africa challenge Western-centric modernization theorems, and the multiple modernities framework, because these varieties of modern world-making articulated modes of socio-cultural commonality without recourse to axial-age civilizational patterns (Wagner 2012: 108, 2013c: 167). Wagner examines Brazil in *Modernity: Understanding the Present* (Wagner 2012: 111-115) and ‘The Modernity of New Societies: South Africa, Brazil, and the Prospect for a World-Sociology’ (Wagner 2013c). Yet Wagner often subordinates the analysis of Brazil in favour of a lengthier discussion of South Africa. South Africa is more central across other articles by Wagner (such as Wagner 2011c, 2012: 111-115, 119-149, 2013c), and is positioned at the forefront in the introduction to *Modernity: Understanding the Present*, whereas Brazil is not mentioned there (cf. Wagner 2012: 9-10). On

these grounds I have chosen to focus South Africa in this analysis, without incorporating Brazil in the discussion.

¹¹³ Wagner does not draw on Arnason's notion of cultural patterns as 'articulations of the world' in this analysis (see e.g. Arnason 1992: 260-261, 2003: 220-221, 228-229). Arnason's approach may have helped to clarify the creative interplay of cultural patterns via the conflict of interpretations in intercultural encounter.

¹¹⁴ The insights that form part of this discussion of the world-altering dimensions of political action in Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner's work appear in an altered form in the recent essay, 'On the Possibilities of Political Action *in-the-World*: Pathways through Arendt, Castoriadis, and Wagner', published in *Social Imaginaries*. See Carlisle (2017).

¹¹⁵ As I remarked earlier in note 57, Ricoeur argues contra Castoriadis that creation is 'from something to something' in their radio dialogue on *France Culture* in 1985 (see Adams 2005: 35, 2009a: 129 n.6). This radio discussion has been recently published in French (see ed. Michel 2016) and the English translation is forthcoming in 2017 (see ed. Adams 2017b*).

¹¹⁶ Discussions of Arendt's understanding of the imagination often place emphasis on her late *Lectures on Kant's Political Philosophy* (1992 [1982]; which were interrupted by her untimely death), and draw attention to her analysis of Kant's theory of judgement (see e.g. Beiner 1992, Beiner 1994, Beiner & Nedelsky 2001, d'Entrèves 2000, Kaplan & Kessler 1989, Zerilli 2005b). In my view, the properly *political* significance of Arendt's reconstruction of Kant's theory of judgement remains elusive. As noted in the body of the discussion chapter, her statement that freedom—especially political freedom—'is identical with beginning ... or, to use a Kantian term, spontaneity' (2007a: 113) indicates a path for consideration of the creative potential of imagination as intertwined with her understanding of political action, which remains little remarked in the literature. This offers an alternative to considerations that focus on Arendt's theorisation of imagination as 'representative visiting' or the 'enlarged mentality', which concentrates on the 'freedom' of seeing the world from another's perspective (see Czobor-Lupp 2012, Disch 1997).

¹¹⁷ In an essay concerning the creative imagination in Castoriadis's thought, Arnason notes that Castoriadis 'did not explain at length why he preferred to thematize the imaginary rather than the imagination' (Arnason 2014d: 44). Although Castoriadis notes the two poles of the radical imaginary, as within the psyche/soma and the social-historical (that is, at the trans-subjective level), within the last chapter of *The Imaginary Institution of Society* in particular, Arnason rightly notes that Castoriadis's thought generally places greater on the radical social imaginary than the radical imagination. Arnason contends that, at times, Castoriadis 'appears to take the difference between the two concepts'—the imagination and the imaginary—'for granted' across his project (Arnason 2014d: 44); especially in his late essay, 'Imaginary and Imagination at the Crossroads' (Castoriadis 2007a). Elaborating on this problematic in Castoriadis's thought reaches beyond the scope of the present analysis. For further discussion, see, for example, Castoriadis (1997e, 1997g, 1997f, 2007a), and Adams (2011a: 83-135), Arnason (2014d), Dews (2002), Michel (2015: 123-135), and Urribarri (2002).

¹¹⁸ Wagner's notion of the plural varieties of modernities and their succession over time typifies this twofold character of 'difference'. See, for example, Karagiannis and Wagner (2007a) and Wagner 2010a, 2010c, 2010d, 2012, 2015a, 2015b, 2016b.

¹¹⁹ As I remarked in note 4 in relation to the introduction of this thesis, I am in the process of developing this argument by reconstructing Arendt's incipient hermeneutic of modernity and the question of 'modern world alienation'. This paper is provisionally titled, 'The Modern Condition of World Alienation: Hannah Arendt's Implicit Hermeneutic of Modernity'.

¹²⁰ As I noted in Section 1.2 in Chapter 1, Held's (2012: 442) contention in relation to the failure of phenomenology to establish a systematic elucidation of the political is not without criticism. For example, Bernhard Flynn (2012) characterised Claude Lefort a 'phenomenologist of the political' in the same year that Held published his essay, and Held, moreover, did not include Patočka within his analysis.