


# Urban Politics at the Crossroads of the State Reason and Human Reason: Juxtaposing Auto-gestion and Autonomy

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**Urban Politics at the Crossroads of the State Reason and Human Reason: Juxtaposing Autogestion and Autonomy**

The paper focuses on Cornelius Castoriadis and Henri Lefebvre's approaches and sheds light on "the imaginary" in the politics of self-governance. It shows how tactics of self-governance and the imaginary accompanying them revive all the contradictions between the State reason, on the one hand, and human reason and freedom, on the other hand. Castoriadis, in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*, emphasizes the internal relation between what is intended (the development of autonomy) and that through which it is intended (the exercise of this autonomy). He notes that these are two moments of a single process and defines as revolutionary politics "a praxis which takes as its object the organization and orientation of society as they foster the autonomy of all its members and which recognizes that this presupposes a radical transformation of society, which will be possible, in its turn, only through the autonomous activity of individuals." My paper treats the following questions: How might a politics like this exist? On what could it be based and what would its implications be for the tactics of formation of urban design tools?

Henri Lefebvre, in "Theoretical Problems of Autogestion", underscores the fact that autogestion introduces and stimulates a contradiction with the State. Autogestion, according to Lefebvre, calls into question the State's functioning as a constraining force erected above society as a whole, capturing and demanding the rationality that is inherent to social relations and practice. Lefebvre also considers that autogestion tends to resolve contradictions by subletting them into a new totality. In parallel, he wonders whether the principle of autogestion is an ideal whose rational core and content is ultimately derived from the democratic ideal. My paper will revisit this question, juxtaposing it to the following question raised by Castoriadis, in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*: does the critique of rationalism not exclude the possibility of establishing a destructive and constructive 'revolutionary dynamics'?

Despite Lefebvre's claim that autogestion cannot be a utopia, he refers to Henri Desroche's notion of "occupia", which is used to define a genre of socializing related to practical utopia. He claims that autogestion "shows the practical way to change life". My aim is to present how this "practical way to change life" in Lefebvre's thought relates to Castoriadis' understanding of praxis. Juxtaposing Castoriadis' conception of autonomy and Lefebvre's understanding of autogestion, I examine what strategies of bottom-up urban politics are implied by each of these conceptions. Taking as a starting point the fact that Castoriadis' praxis is based on a kind of knowledge that is always fragmentary and provisional, I examine what would be entailed by an integration of such a conception of knowledge into the procedures of formation of urban design tools. Special attention is paid to how Lefebvre and Castoriadis' conceptions and autogestion respectively aimed to reinvent the relationship between public space and the collective ideal.