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Comparing Cornelius Castoriadis’s Autonomy with Henri Lefebvre’s Autogestion: Urban Politics between State and Human Reason

The paper compares Cornelius Castoriadis and Henri Lefebvre’s approaches. It places particular emphasis on “the imaginary” in the politics of self-governance, rendering explicit how the imaginary accompanying self-governance revive the tension between State reason and human reason and. 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. According to Castoriadis, 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 intends to present which would be the implications of such revolutionary politics for urban studies.

Henri Lefebvre, in “Theoretical Problems of Autogestion”, underscores that autogestion introduces and stimulates a contradiction with the State. Lefebvre believes that autogestion 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. He 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. The paper revisits this question, juxtaposing it to the following question raised by Castoriadis, in *The Imaginary Institution of Society*: “Does not the critique of rationalism exclude the possibility of establishing a destructive and constructive revolutionary dynamics?” The objective is to relate the “practical way to change life” in Lefebvre’s thought to Castoriadis’s understanding of praxis.