“Autonomy, Democracy and Social Creativity: The Case of Castoriadis’ Work”

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Castoriadis, the name for what?

- Castoriadis (1922-1997)
- An extraordinary trajectory and a strong coherence
- According to Edgar Morin, Castoriadis was an "exulting Aristotle"
- A revolutionary militant within the group *Socialism or Barbarism*
- An economist working in capitalist institutions (OECD countries)
Castoriadis, the name for what?

- A professional psychoanalyst (a dissident of Lacan with the group *Quatrième groupe*). He followed Lacan’s seminars (1964 and 1968)
- A philosopher conducting seminars from the beginning of the 1980s until his death (*École des hautes études en sciences sociales*)
- An autobiography that illustrates a strong choice for autonomy (François Dosse)
Castoriadis, the name for what?

- The experience of bureaucratic societies (he was a Trotskyist militant at a very early age in Greece)
- He experienced clandestinity in Greece, he had to flee from Greece (exile on the *Mataroa* boat), he came to Paris where he did not have papers in the beginning
- A mediterranean philosopher at a crossroads between Antiquity and Modernity
A style of autonomy

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1) Experiencing democracy through a revolutionary group: the *ethos* of discussing

- A review that created a democratic atmosphere. At a microlevel, the review is not only an intellectual organ but a reunion of marginalized people who did not recognize themselves nor in Marxism neither in other radical left groups.

- A manifesto (1949) with Claude Lefort: choice between Socialism or Barbarism. Socialism: political atmosphere where people discuss how to share power. Equivalence between democracy and politics.
1) Experiencing democracy through a revolutionary group: the ethos of discussing

- Socialisme ou Barbarie. A “tendency” (summer 1946) inside the Parti Communiste International (PCI), the French Trotskyist Party. The tendency Montal / Chaulieu

- Analysis of the situation of Yugoslavia (refusal of the “Front Unique” with the Stalinists and the Trotskyists)

- Review founded in 1949. There is a distinction between the review and the group.
1) Experiencing democracy through a revolutionary group: the *ethos* of discussing

- 1949-1964: the review
- 1949-1967: the group (official end: 11 May 1967). Jean-François Lyotard, *Pérégrinations*, éditions Galilée, Paris, 1990, p.39: the name of the group was a political programme, either *Socialisme* or *Barbarie* (the words of Trotsky)
1) Experiencing democracy through a revolutionary group: the *ethos* of discussing

- The authors signed with pseudonyms (For Castoriadis, we had Coudray, Chaulieu, Cardan...for others, Vega...). Castoriadis had a clandestine activity in Postwar France (he flew Athens with other Greek intellectuals thanks to the *Institut français d’Athènes*).
1) Experiencing democracy through a revolutionary group: the *ethos* of discussing

- An editorial roadmap (political choice)
- An ongoing drama (dissents, strong political discussions, investigative journalism)
- An accurate study of bureaucratic societies (Hungary events in 1956, Strikes in France in 1955). A style of investigative journalism with an analysis framework
1) Experiencing democracy through a revolutionary group: the *ethos* of discussing

- The early diagnostic: the Soviet Union represents the extreme form of bureaucratization of social life. There is not a fundamental difference between western and eastern regimes, just a variation of degrees (fragmented bureaucracies with some rights granted to people versus total bureaucracies)
1) Experiencing democracy through a revolutionary group: the *ethos of discussing*

- Castoriadis elaborated the diagnostic because he flew the civil war in Greece (he experienced the absurdity of the Communist regime and the Nazi invasion). Claude Lefort shared this very original diagnostic and joined Castoriadis in order to found *Socialisme ou Barbarie*. The ambition is to emancipate the workers and create the conditions of a social and individual autonomy. It is thus important that the workers do not take part in the cold war.

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2) Correspondences between autonomy, democracy and socialism


- The review and the group announced some topics that were reused during May 1968 (the idea of self-organization). This expression, attributed to social revolutionary Daniel Cohn-Bendit, was used at the time to refer to the breach that rebellious students and workers were able to force in French universities, factories, and streets.
2) Correspondences between autonomy, democracy and socialism

- The review was *avant-guardist*, the exploration of a main political question: the bureaucratization of our societies

- Two interpretations: P. Gottraux (difference between the trajectory of Castoriadis in *Socialisme ou barbarie* and the engagement of Castoriadis after 1964). David Curtis (*The Castoriadis reader*) pointing out the coherence of his trajectory.

- The notion of social imaginary

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2) Correspondences between autonomy, democracy and socialism

- 1957, *Sur le contenu du socialisme*

- Autonomy: self-organization. Social and individual autonomy (The Individual is a social fabrication). Autonomy is an imaginary significance

- Socialism: Equality of conditions (political discussion)

- Democracy: collective discussion and decision

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2) Correspondences between autonomy, democracy and socialism

• A regime of political ontology. To be able to discuss collectively: the meaning of politics

• Socialism, autonomy and democracy are not the same thing but they refer to each other. Holistic perspective which is due to the institution of imaginary significations

• Democracy: a regime of self-determination rather than of underteminacy
3) Democracy and social creativity: aesthetics and politics

- A crossroads between Antiquity and Modernity: the creation of the Athenian *polis*
- The self-institution of politics, democracy and philosophy
- The aesthetics form: tragedy
- Correspondence between the circulation of imaginary significations and the aesthetics
- The *Greek* tragedy had a deep social meaning

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- The reference to the social and political context of Athens in the 5th century B.C. (Aeschylus, Euripides and Sophocles).
- Comparison between *Prometheus unbound* from Aeschylus (460 B.C.) and *Antigone* from Sophocles (442 B.C.).
- The question of human being (limits, laws)
- *Agôn tragikos*
3) Democracy and social creativity: aesthetics and politics

• Dynamics and interaction between nomos, demos and agôn

• According to Castoriadis, one of the few historical references when the collectivity was aware that it instituted its own regulation (Auto-nomos). The tragedy is that we are responsible for our political and social decisions.

• The historical context for artistic and social creativity

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3) Democracy and social creativity: aesthetics and politics

- Tragedy: the genre that supports the circulation of narratives, the genre that reflects a deep social and political consciousness

- Politics and philosophy were created in that period as there is an ontological refusal to accept an heritage of norms. Tragedy: sensitiveness that illustrates an autonomous consciousness
3) Democracy and social creativity: aesthetics and politics

- The tragical discovery of autonomy: we depend on ourselves, on the strong decisions that we take
- Reference to a collectivity that shares the access to decisions (we decide on things that were debated). *Boulèsis*
- Autonomy: emergence of a new social form
- Breach into heteronomous societies that have an extra-social foundation
Conclusion

- Autonomy, democracy and socialism are equivalent
- This system of references was historically created
- More creativity in those societies (equal and democratic societies)
- Masterpieces (*Fenêtre sur chaos*) illustrate the survival of autonomy (consciousness of a new form that emerges from nothing)
Conclusion

- In his last years (1990-1997), he was interested in the question of a new social significance.
- A world is a system of references that refer to each other (the society as a complex of forms).
- Thanks to his/her creativity, the artist plays with these forms (reference to Bach in *Fenêtre sur chaos*).
- A style that is similar to what the jazz-player does (no books, articles that are rewritten).
References

References