

Socialisme ou Barbarie: From Castoriadis' Project of Individual and Collective Autonomy to the Collaborative Commons

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Abstract: In this article, I examine the content of socialism in the work of Cornelius Castoriadis in its potential relation to the current emergence of collaborative commons. I begin by analysing Castoriadis' conceptualisation of socialism, as crystallised in the project of individual and collective autonomy, which was initially demonstrated in the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* (1949-1965) and evolved thereafter in his later writings. I continue by briefly presenting some basic points of criticism, after which I explore the potential compatibility of Castoriadis' political project with the prospect of market socialism, as the latter emerges today in the form of collaborative commons. I argue, in particular, that collaborative commons echo Castoriadis' conception of socialism in several respects. Finally, I critically develop a series of proposals made by Vasilis Kostakis and Michel Bauwens that could provide fertile ground for further discussion on the prospect of the commons.

Keywords: Castoriadis, socialism, project of individual and collective autonomy, collaborative commons, Internet of Things, netarchical capitalism, Peer to Peer Licence (PPL), partner state

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1. Introduction

This article deals with the content of socialism as crystallised in Cornelius Castoriadis' project of individual and collective autonomy. Castoriadis was a Greek-French philosopher, best recognised for his political philosophy, initially presented in the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*¹. His project of individual and collective autonomy, following his critique of Marxism and of capitalism, is the most prominent reference point of his work. The key questions I seek to address, with reference to Castoriadis' political philosophy, are the following: What is the content of socialism in Castoriadis' political philosophy? Is Castoriadis' project of individual and collective autonomy compatible in any way with the current emergence of collaborative commons? If so, how could this compatibility thrive and become more beneficial?

I present in the first section the basic principles of Castoriadis' conceptualisation of socialism, as crystallised in the project of individual and collective autonomy. In the second section, I develop some basic points of criticism of Castoriadis' project of individual and collective autonomy. Then, on the basis of this criticism, I explore the potential compatibility of Castoriadis' project with the rise of collaborative commons. To this end, I focus on the description of the key features of collaborative commons by dissociating them from the greatly misleading term of the "sharing economy" and associating them instead with the socialist potential inherent in the current breakthroughs in information technology. I conclude that, despite the major differences, the collaborative commons echo Castoriadis' project in several respects. Finally, I critically develop a series of proposals made by Vasilis Kostakis and

¹ An overview of the content of the articles Castoriadis wrote in the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* is presented by Theofanis Tasis (Tasis 2007). Unlike Tasis, I concentrate in this article mostly on the parts of the journal relating to the break of Castoriadis with Marxism, to his critique of bureaucracy and capitalism, and, finally, to the development of his socialist project of individual and collective autonomy. On the significance of the journal's title, see Curtis (1989).

Michel Bauwens that could provide fertile ground for further discussion on the prospect of the commons.

2. The Project of Individual and Collective Autonomy

Castoriadis' conceptualisation of socialism stands in direct opposition to both Marxism and capitalist ideology. Castoriadis defines socialism as the collective self-management of the market and of society *in toto*, based on a direct democracy that introduces a positive notion of freedom, in contrast to liberalism's notion of negative freedom. His version of socialism opposes the hierarchical bureaucracy of both a communist party and a capitalistic enterprise, as it postulates the equality of all in participating in the creation of the law governing the market and the relative institutionalisation of society. Castoriadis' understanding of socialism also opposes both a representative and procedural democracy originating in the work of Kant and evolving in all variants of contemporary social democratic theories like the ones developed by for example Jürgen Habermas or John Rawls. Freedom is neither an autonomy deriving from a moral imperative formulated in the law of the state nor the unobstructed exercise of some basic liberal rights, but the equality of all participating in the creation of the law governing society. Freedom is the precondition of the individual and collective autonomy, for it permits the participation of all citizens in the formation of the rules governing the private and the public sphere. As Castoriadis put it:

“What was intended by the term ‘socialist society’ we henceforth call autonomous society. An autonomous society implies autonomous individuals – and vice versa. Autonomous society, autonomous individuals: free society, free individuals. Freedom – But what is freedom? And what freedom? [...] What is at issue is not inner freedom, but *effective, social, concrete* freedom, namely, to mention one primary feature, the largest possible space for movement and activity the institution of society can ensure for the individual. This freedom can exist only as dimension and mode of the institution of society [...] A free society is a society in which power is actually exercised by the collectivity, but a collectivity in which all effectively participate in equality. And this equality of effective participation, as goal to attain, must not remain a purely formal rule; it must be insured, as much as possible, by actual institutions” (Castoriadis 1993, 317-318).

Socialism signifies thus the self-institutionalisation of society on the basis of a direct democracy that introduces a positive notion of freedom as the precondition of individual and collective autonomy.

I assume that Castoriadis uses the word “self-institutionalisation” instead of “participatory or grassroots democracy” because of the importance he assigns to the concept of the institution in his work. However, a complete analysis of Castoriadis' concept of institution goes far beyond the scope of this article. In Castoriadis' work – the most representative sample of which is *The Imaginary Institution of Society* (Castoriadis, 1987) –, the radical imaginary of the human psyche deploys itself as *social-historical* through the dimension of the institution. The institution develops in two forms: *the instituting* and *the instituted* (Castoriadis 1991). *The instituted* is based on *the instituting* capacity of the radical imaginary, which is in turn characterised by the human psyche's free intentional/affective/representational flux. As such, *the instituted* is a creation of the anonymous collective of the human species, producing a radical ground-power, or primordial power, necessary for the self-preservation and self-perpetuation of the species. This primordial power constitutes an explicit power, termed *the political*, which manifests itself in a specific society's law, tradition, language, religion, technique, etc. during a particular historical era. Yet *the instituting* transcends *the instituted* as it consists in the autonomy of the anonymous collective to transform *the political*. Whereas in most cases societies have been developed in a state of instituted heteronomy, with the essential constituent of this heteronomy being the instituted representation of an extra-social source of nomos (be it the myth, the tradition, the religion, etc.), autonomy refers to the state of *politics* as the possibility of putting into question *the political*. Castoriadis locates the birth-

place of *politics* in Ancient Greece, where the first historical emergence of the project of collective and individual autonomy was observed. “Autonomy comes from *autos-nomos*: (to give to) oneself one's laws. After what has been said about heteronomy it is hardly necessary to add: to make one's own laws, knowing that one is doing so. This is a new *eidos* within the overall history of being: a type of being that reflectively gives to itself the laws of its being” (Castoriadis 1991, 164).

In this respect, Castoriadis distinguishes two major historical moments in relation to the birth of autonomy: the first dates back to the direct democracy of ancient Greece², developing in contradistinction to the heteronomy of the mytho-theological imaginary of tradition, and the second refers to the revolutions of the 17th and 18th century in West Europe, developing in contradistinction to the heteronomy of the absolute Monarchy (Castoriadis 2003, 81-83). Castoriadis relates thereafter the notion of autonomy to Marxism and the correlated movements of workers, women, and students in the 19th and 20th century, which developed in direct opposition to the bureaucracy of capitalism. However, Castoriadis later disengages from Marxism by developing his own project of individual and collective autonomy, following his criticism of both Marxism and capitalism.

The relation of Castoriadis to Marx has been examined in great detail by several authors in a series of works (Castoriadis 1987, 9-110; Castoriadis 2010, 11-45; Kavoulakos 2000; Rantis 2004; Papadimitropoulos 2014). Castoriadis' criticism of Marx is performed on two primary levels: a philosophical one and a purely economic one. I will dwell here mostly on the philosophical arguments because Castoriadis' criticism of Marx's political economy is far beyond the scope of this paper.

Castoriadis argues that Marx was sedated by the goal of positivism, which was to capture the totality of the potential determinations of nature and society, inasmuch as he attempted to discover the eternal laws of history in terms of what Castoriadis (1987, 56-68) criticises “the rational mastery of the unlimited expansion of economy and technology on nature and society”. The notion of the rational mastery dates back to Descartes' and Bacon's declaration of man becoming the possessor and master of nature. This programmatic declaration builds on Aristotle's empiricism and rationalism, which turned into the positivism of modernity in the form of what Castoriadis calls the determinacy principle, that is, the postulate of inherited thought (including Kant, Hegel) to fully determine nature and society on the basis of Aristotle's logic. Marx's work was in Castoriadis' view also sedated by the scientific determinism of positivism, as he attempted to become the Newton of history by developing a closed system, a “final” theory of a historical materialism based on a technological determinism. Marx reversed the Absolute Spirit of his teacher Hegel on the matter of nature evolving in accordance with the “eternal” laws of history, as the latter are discovered by science and apply furthermore to industry. According to Castoriadis' interpretation, Marx was equally sedated by the economism of capitalism in placing the economy into the centre of politics; in adopting, in other words, capitalism's model of *homo oeconomicus*. Finally, Castoriadis argues that the theoretical approach of the later Marx took dominance over the revolutionary element of the younger Marx. In the so-called socialist states of the former Eastern Bloc regimes, Marx's project was interpreted in a positivist manner to such an extent that the revolutionary project of the younger Marx transformed into the political dogma of Leninist-Stalinist Marxism.

Castoriadis developed a logic-ontology of magmas alongside his writings on *Socialism ou Barbarie* (Castoriadis 1987; Castoriadis 2009; Poirier 2011, 21-33; Poirier 2008, 59-72). Castoriadis defined magmas as follows:

“A magma is that from which one can extract (or in which one can construct) an indefinite number of ensemblist organizations but which can never be reconstituted (ideally) by a (finite or infinite) ensemblist composition of these organizations” (Castoriadis 1987, 343)

² Castoriadis examined Ancient Greek direct democracy at length in a series of books and articles. See: Castoriadis 2008, Castoriadis 2003.

This logic-ontology of magmas echoes the pre-Socratic philosophy inasmuch as Being is Chaos or Abyss, characterised by two essential attributes: indeterminacy and creation *ex nihilo* (Papadimitropoulos 2015). The indeterminacy of creation *ex nihilo* unfolds in the form of the elementary imaginary of *Physis*. It evolves historically in the radical imaginary of the human psyche and the social imaginary of the anonymous collective. Castoriadis' logic-ontology of magmas sustains thus an anti-foundationalist philosophy, developing in contrast to the determinacy principle of the inherited thought, be it the mathematical determinism of Plato, the rationalism of Aristotle, the Absolute Spirit of Hegel, the Reason of Kant, or the historical materialism of Marx. As such, it serves as a philosophical precondition of a political notion of freedom inasmuch as there is no foundation of Being, no a priori set of laws that predetermines nature and society, apart from the freedom of the anonymous collective to decide autonomously on the laws of society. The traces of this autonomy appeared for the first time in the direct democracy of Ancient Greece and manifested again in Western, European modernity. However, Castoriadis points out that the evolution of autonomy in modernity results in a distorted form of a rational mastery, developing on the poles of Marxism and capitalism. Both the rational mastery of Marxism and capitalism consist in the unlimited expansion of economy and technology that has negative effects on nature and society.

Castoriadis' criticism of the bureaucracy of capitalism differs from Marxism in that he holds that the fundamental contradiction of capitalism is not the one between the capitalists and the proletariat, but between those who direct the production and those who simply execute their orders, that is, between the directors and the executants (Castoriadis 1986, 190). The distinction between the capitalists and the proletarians remains a crucial one. The fundamental contradiction of capitalism lies for Castoriadis in the fact that the worker is obliged to participate in the production while being excluded from its planning. This contradiction results in an enormous waste due to untapped capacities and a perpetuated conflict between the directors and the executants (Castoriadis 1988, 92-93).

The contradiction penetrating the conflict between the directors and the executants spreads from the economy to all fields of society, including the family, education, politics, and culture (Castoriadis 1988, 92-93). As a result, people experience their lives as something alien, inasmuch as they cannot participate in the decision-making process concerning their own lives. People are treated as mere objects, when they ought to be the subjects of their lives, fulfilling their aspirations and exploring their interests to the limits of their capacity. Thus, the solution to this contradiction is not the abolition of private property, the nationalisation of production, and the planning of economy by the State, which according to Castoriadis re-establishes a new inequality between the state and the workers, but the management of economy and of society *in toto* by the citizens themselves (Castoriadis 1993, 296-297). Naturally, the question of how such a sort of socialism could be realised arises.

Castoriadis describes his socialist project in full detail in a series of articles published in the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie* between 1949 and 1965. I will now outline the principles of this project. Castoriadis argues that the fundamental principle of socialism is direct democracy, established first and foremost at the level of production on the basis of individual and collective autonomy. Direct democracy would operate through the creation of councils in which all workers would participate equally in terms of information made accessible to them in a transparent manner, sufficient quantity, and compact form. Given the global interdependence and decentralisation of the economy, the councils of workers would constitute the base of an assembly of all councils represented by a central government. Both the councils and the government would be composed of revocable delegates, who would guarantee the implementation of decisions made at the base. Analogous types of councils could form the centre of the concentric spheres of society, beginning from the workshop and expanding equally into all spheres (Castoriadis 1993, 217).

In contrast to the bureaucracy of capitalism that is managed by a liberal oligarchy that perpetuates itself by means of heredity while recruiting new staff from the lower strata on the strength of their ability to adapt to the managerial struggle for the survival of the fittest – with the latter being co-determined by multiple power relations (Castoriadis 1993, 223) –, socialism would aim at the transformation of work through the reunification of direction and execu-

tion. Socialism implies the abolition of the capitalist division of labour by means of the horizontal co-operation of the experts and the workers, the rotation of the workers, and, finally, the mutual control of work by the workers themselves. Additionally, the humanisation of technology would aim at turning the current robotisation of work into poetry. Work would not be a chore, an activity of misery, boredom and alienation, but the outcome of creation, self-fulfilment and co-operation. Technology, thus, would be subordinated not only to people's needs as consumers, but also to their needs as producers. Workers would be the masters of machines, not their slaves.

The humanisation of technology would also help reduce the working day:

“The problem is not to leave more and more ‘free’ time to individuals – which might well only be *empty* time – so that they may fill it at will with ‘poetry’ or the carving of wood. The problem is to make all time a time of liberty and to allow concrete freedom to embody itself in creative activity. The problem is to put poetry into work. (Strictly speaking, poetry means creation.) Production is not something negative that has to be limited as much as possible for mankind to fulfill itself in its leisure. The instauration of autonomy is also – and in the first place – the instauration of autonomy in work” (Castoriadis 1988, 107).

Furthermore, the reduction of the working day would be supplemented by the abolition of the hierarchy of salaries, wages and incomes (Castoriadis 2010, 162), resulting in the redistribution of the social product and the establishment of a truly democratic market based on the sovereignty of the consumer. This way, consumer choice would not be overshadowed by a marketing elite aiming to expand its share, but by the autonomy of the consumer herself who would have an equal vote in the market (Castoriadis 1988, 125-127).

Finally, for Castoriadis, socialism is based on an overall planning of the economy, supported by computers that store and continuously update all the data necessary for any decisions regarding investment, consumption, and production :

“Solving these problems will be the task of a highly mechanized and automated specific enterprise, whose main work will consist of a veritable ‘mass production’ of various plans (targets) and of their various components (implications). This enterprise is the plan factory. Its central workshop will, to start with, probably consist of a computer whose ‘memory’ will store the technical coefficients and the initial productive capacity of each sector” (Castoriadis 1988, 121).

This sort of data – gathered by statisticians and economists and used for decades now by multinational firms and banks – would be at the disposal of the assembly of each enterprise in the form of simplified and compact information. On the basis of these data, discussions would be held at the assemblies of each enterprise, proposals would be submitted, and decisions would be taken in terms of a majority vote (Castoriadis 1988, 129-130). As Castoriadis puts it:

“Once adopted, a given plan provides the framework of economic activities for a given period of time. It establishes a starting point for economic life. But in a socialist society, the plan will not *dominate* economic life. It is only the starting point, to be constantly reexamined and modified as necessary. Neither the economic life of society – nor its life overall – can be based on a dead technical rationality, given once and for all. Society cannot alienate itself from its own decisions. It is only that real life will almost of necessity diverge, in many aspects, from the ‘most perfect’ plan in the world. It is also that the workers’ self-managerial activity will constantly tend to alter, both directly and indirectly, the basic data and targets of the plan. New products, new means of production, new methods, new problems, new difficulties, and new solutions will constantly be emerging. Working times will be reduced. Prices will fall, entailing consumer reactions and displacements of demand. Some of these modifications will affect only a single fac-

tory, others several factories, and yet others, no doubt, the economy as a whole” (Castoriadis 1988, 130-131).

In summary, the basic principles of socialism in Castoriadis’ project of individual and collective autonomy are as follows:

- The abolition of the distinction between directors and executants by means of a direct democracy exercised first and foremost at the level of production of each enterprise and expanded subsequently into society *in toto* by means of councils composed of revocable delegates.
- The abolition of the hierarchy of the capitalist division of labour through the horizontal cooperation of the experts, the technicians, and the workers, the rotation of the workers, and, finally, the mutual control of work by workers themselves.
- The availability of information necessary to the workers provided in a transparent manner, sufficient quantity and compact form.
- The humanisation of technology necessary to transform the current robotisation of work into a meaningful form of creation that expresses the aspirations and interests of each worker.
- The reduction of the working day.
- The abolition of the hierarchy of salaries, wages and incomes.
- The real sovereignty of the consumer.
- The socialist plan supported by a computer providing all the data necessary for proposals to be submitted, and decisions taken in terms of a majority vote.

As stated earlier, Castoriadis develops in his later writings an anti-foundationalist ontology of magmas, which incorporates his professional engagement with psychoanalysis and serves furthermore as the philosophical precondition of his socialist project³. Finally, Castoriadis develops a line of criticism which argues against the devastation of the environment by the capitalist economy (Castoriadis and Cohn-Bendit 1992). On the basis of this criticism, technoscience in a socialist society would be at the service of democratic and ecological deliberation.

3. From Castoriadis’ Project of Individual and Collective Autonomy to the Collaborative Commons

Castoriadis’ project of individual and collective autonomy has been the subject of considerable criticism. One basic line of argument, developed by Ferenc Fehér, holds that Castoriadis’ project of individual and collective autonomy is a partial reproduction of Ancient Greek direct democracy that cannot be applied to contemporary societies due to their immense complexity (Fehér 1989, 401-402). Castoriadis argues in turn that the outcome of the evolution of technology today, that is, the very existence of computers, can facilitate rather than render impossible a socialist project (Castoriadis 1988, 144). Yet it seems, in my view, that the holistic and centralised features of Castoriadis’ project are not applicable to contemporary societies due to their increasing decentralisation. Moreover, Castoriadis seems to introduce a reversed bureaucracy that raises the question of whether – and to what degree – it can be supported by citizens themselves of their own volition. For a direct democracy to exist, the voluntary participation of the citizens is a *sine qua non*.

In addition, Hans Joas is in my view right when he argues that it is highly contestable whether the citizens would be at all willing to give their consent to a redistribution of their income (Joas and Meyer 1989, 1198). Castoriadis himself argues that the project of individu-

³ Alongside the writing of his political articles published in the journal *Socialisme ou Barbarie*, Castoriadis was working on an ontology of magmas that was more clearly formulated in his main work *The Imaginary Institutions of Society* (Castoriadis 1987). For more on Castoriadis’ early writings and his ontology see: Castoriadis 2009; Poirier 2011, 21-33; Poirier 2008, 59-72.

al and collective autonomy requires a certain degree of culture (*paideia*) that could help replace the current homo oeconomicus with a totally different anthropological type, equipped with the will and the knowledge to support an economy not based on profit. Yet it remains an issue as to how such a radical shift of mentality could occur, especially when Castoriadis rejects the current political system *in toto*, relying solely on the autonomous movements of collectives. Castoriadis was critical towards any political reform, since he believed that this would lead to the assimilation of the prospect of socialism by the current political system. It is a misconception, though, to consider Castoriadis an anarchist. Despite his being an anti-capitalist and anti-statist, he raised his objections to anarchism on several occasions. In particular, he argued in an interview with anarchists that there can be no society without a minimum degree of power and rules. He says that it is up to each society itself to decide on the degree and the content of both its power and rules (Castoriadis 2013). Given that Castoriadis was an anti-capitalist and anti-statist autonomist, how can his project of individual and collective autonomy be realised at all given the current dominance of neoliberal capitalism?

Alongside the current spread of neoliberalism across the globe, there is much debate about the emerging anti-paradigm of collaborative commons, which echoes Castoriadis' project in several respects. This anti-paradigm is also often described as the emerging model of a sharing economy, in terms of which a series of companies unlock the untapped value of underutilised assets (cars, rooms, consumer goods, skills, capital, Wi-Fi, etc.) through the Internet and transform consumers into micro-entrepreneurs, trading, sharing, swapping and renting products and services. Yet the term "sharing economy" is a greatly misleading marketing buzzword, as the act of sharing *per se* does not presuppose any commodification of resources with regard to charging a fee for their use (Olma 2015; Slee 2015). These companies have actually built on the crisis of 2008 by transforming social co-operation into a unit of capital that profits through the creation of online platforms available to front-end users, but controlled by back-end centralised server infrastructures. They charge people a fee for exchanging products and services online rather than paying for new ones. In doing so, the classical bureaucracy of capitalism transforms into the digital bureaucracy of a netarchical or platform capitalism, replacing the old middlemen with new ones. The "invisible hand" of the market splits into a digital oligopoly accompanying traditional capitalism. Finally, netarchical capitalism produces less consumption and uncertain taxation (Knaebel 2015; Kostakis and Bauwens 2014, 25).

Also, however attractive the prospect of transforming workers into micro-entrepreneurs or flexible freelance workers may seem, platform capitalism – in most cases – puts the worker at a disadvantage, as it transforms labour into an auction that reproduces the social and economic inequalities by creating a disproportionate feedback of supply and demand. On the one side, it favours the "haves" over the "havenots" – as every auction does – while, on the other, it obliges the exploited amateurs to push professional prices down by selling their services cheaper. As a result, platform capitalism further widens the already widened social and economic inequalities. In addition, it offers low pay for hard work and no security, no health insurance, no pension, no unemployment insurance, no paid vacation, or paid sick days. On this account, "sharing economy" is actually a euphemism for a neoliberal, "flexible" form of the economy comprising independent contractors, temporary workers, the self-employed, part-timers, freelancers and free agents. Therefore, while it is true that platform capitalism has helped to decentralise the economy, by no means can it be considered to have established a true sharing or distributive economy.

This being said, the term "sharing economy" should neither be confused nor identified with collaborative commons, as the latter consists in a series of projects emerging across the globe in the last couple of decades with the mission to extract land, labour, and capital from the capitalist economy, and shift it into an alternative economy that favours decentralisation over central control, democratic self-management over hierarchical management, access over ownership, transparency over privacy, and environmental sustainability over growth at all costs. "To begin with, in general Commons refers to shared resources where each stakeholder has an equal interest. The Commons sphere can include natural gifts such as air, water, the oceans and wildlife, and shared 'assets' or creative work such as the Internet, the

airwaves, the languages, our cultural heritage and public knowledge, which have been accumulating since time immemorial” (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014, 38). Commons is neither public nor private, but a sort of collective governance based on three interlinked components: a well-defined material or immaterial resource, a community of users creating use value on the premises of the resource, and certain rules regarding the monitoring of the resource and the sharing of the use value with the aim of imposing sanctions on free-riders, that is, those who benefit from one resource without contributing (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014, 39).

Specifically, collaborative commons ranges from open-source software (Linux, LibreOffice and hundreds of others) and peer-to-peer networks (Wikipedia, OpenStreetMap, Wikihow, FabLabs, Open Source Ecology etc.) to seed-sharing commons in India and locally grown organic food co-operatives in Japan; from the Peruvian Potato Park protecting 500 species of genetically valuable potatoes to the CouchSurfing “gift economy” of free hospitality; from the collective land trust movement in the USA and the UK to the Chantier movement in Quebec and the Mondragon co-operatives in the Basque region of Spain. These projects are developing a plethora of new markets for community farming and housing, house care, renewable energy, social finance, manufacturing, education, and so forth (Ostrom 1990; Bollier and Helfrich 2012; Benkler 2006; Kostakis and Bauwens 2014, 42-43).

Collaborative commons also echoes Castoriadis’ aforementioned thesis that the evolution of technology in the 21st century could facilitate the creation of a more democratic and free society. The use of the Internet and information technology in general (3D printers, artificial intelligence, blockchain technologies, etc.) could boost the creation of a post-capitalist economy. In particular, Paul Mason and Jeremy Rifkin, among others, claim that the Internet could become the infrastructure of a new economy, based on the free flow of information undermining the monopolies of the corporations and the surveillance of the governments (Mason 2015; Rifkin 2014; for a critique of this approach as form of technological determinism and breakdown theory of capitalism, see Fuchs 2016). On this account, the same operating principle of capitalism, that is, the increase of productivity and the decrease of marginal costs, would appear to undermine capitalism itself as long as the free flow of information creates an abundance of things – the so-called Internet of Things – that are shared through a smart-grid of collaborative networks at near zero marginal cost (Rifkin 2014, 70-71):

“The Internet of Things will connect everything with everyone in an integrated global network. People, machines, natural resources, production lines, logistics networks, consumption habits, recycling flows, and virtually every aspect of economic and social life will be linked via sensors and software to the IoT platform, continually feeding Big Data to every node – businesses, homes, vehicles – moment to moment, in real time. Big Data, in turn, will be processed with advanced analytics, transformed into predictive algorithms, and programmed into automated systems to improve thermodynamic efficiencies, dramatically increase productivity, and reduce the marginal cost of producing and delivering a full range of goods and services to near zero across the entire economy” (Rifkin 2014, 11).

The effects of the Internet of Things (IoT) are already visible in several media industries, such as entertainment, communications, and publishing (Rifkin 2014, 65). Moreover, the Internet of Things has the potential to reach into all sectors of the economy, including energy, manufacturing, education, biotechnology, finance, etc.

It is said that energy costs could be significantly reduced through the distribution of renewable energy technologies over the Internet. This way, consumers can become prosumers, harvesting their own energy while sharing its excess across a distributed Energy Internet on an IoT infrastructure. Rifkin estimates that within the next few decades, buildings in America and Europe will be equipped with digital smart meters capable of optimising the efficiency of home devices and appliances by means of real-time “updates” (Rifkin 2014, 73-81).

Likewise, the development of 3D printing could accompany an IoT infrastructure and contribute thus to the decentralisation of manufacturing, given that 3D printers could produce a wide range of products, from artworks and construction to furniture and the means and com-

ponents of transportation (car and airplane parts, for instance), human prostheses and bionic implants to bio-printed cells and tissue; even food. Sand, rock, as well as virtually any kind of discarded waste or recycled material have the potential to be used in 3D construction and in 3D-printed buildings. Lastly, the designs for 3D products exist in the form of digital files, which could be shared online under the terms of open-source sharing, thus reducing the cost significantly by eliminating the need for long-distance shipping (Rifkin 2014, 89-108).

Open-source technologies and peer-to-peer networks challenge intellectual property and patent rights, permitting the reproduction and redistribution of software, songs, articles, etc., while protecting the creators' rights. The "Creative Commons" (CC) license, for example, offers people the right, without charge, to share, remix or modify a piece of work, or use it for purely non-commercial purposes, or a combination of all. Creative Commons licensing is being used extensively on the Internet. Companies such as Flickr, YouTube, SoundCloud and Wikipedia have all adopted CC content licensing, as have numerous record labels, public policy networks and open online education programmes. Scientific and research communities are increasingly abandoning traditional copyright laws and patents, which often discourage collaboration, impede the progress of research, and hold back innovation. Instead, more and more scientists, universities and foundation-sponsored laboratories are "in favor of uploading their research in open-source networks to be shared freely with colleagues in managed Commons" (Rifkin 2014, 180).

Open platforms are already challenging the hierarchical management of capitalism inasmuch as they permit a certain degree of transparency and democratic access. Different actors can communicate on the same level in such a way that anyone is able to take on greater or lesser responsibility according to their differing degrees of motivation, expertise etc. The creation of such horizontal, flexible cross-connections leads to the recombination and creation of knowledge and often results in increased innovation and resilience.

Open-source technologies may also have a significant impact on the finance sector insofar as they could support various sorts of micro-finance based on cryptocurrencies such as Bitcoin, which enables peer-to-peer transactions to take place over a decentralised global network without the need for any sort of intermediary (e.g., banks, the government, etc.). Cryptocurrency transactions could take place instantaneously anywhere in the world with no transaction fee (Rifkin 2014, 255-260). In addition to a cryptocurrency, microcurrencies and community currencies could sustain an alternative currency system (Rifkin 2014, 261).

Last but not least, the development of advanced robotics, artificial intelligence, big data analysis, and advanced analytics and algorithms may contribute to a considerable degree to the automation of work, allowing humans to free themselves from the alienation of wage labour. By handing off the means of production to intelligent machines and automating repetitive low-skill tasks, humans would be free to select the desired ends and pursue their own interests (Rifkin 2014, 121-133).

Finally, Rifkin appears to be an advocate of a mixed form of techno-social democracy, in which the developed nations in company with the big corporation would be the leaders of the third industrial revolution. Mason in turn introduces a sort of techno-deterministic postcapitalism, tamed by a Leftist State. Castoriadis instead was much more radical than Rifkin and Mason dare to be today. Moreover, he rightly asserted that there is no such thing as a neutral form of technology developing in terms of technological determinism. Technology always depends on the imaginary significations attached to its specific use (Castoriadis 1978, 301-324). However autonomous the economy may appear today with the use of advanced mathematics techniques in creating computer simulations, it is worth keeping in mind that each of these simulations serves the purpose it was designed for. And every single one of these designs reflects a human choice. Yet there is no denying that the evolution of technology will have a considerable impact on all spheres of society in the decades ahead. This being the case, information technology holds enormous potential for supporting an alternative economy driven by a co-operative logic that favours democratic self-management over hierarchical management, distribution of value over profit maximisation, collaboration over competition, equity over self-interest, and environmental sustainability over endless growth at all costs. In contrast to the capitalist logic that advances rampant accumulation and overconsumption,

devastating the environment, the collaborative commons points toward a sustainable quality of life that advances social value while reintegrating itself with the Earth's biosphere.

Taking all these aspects into consideration, it becomes more evident that the prospect of the collaborative commons echoes Castoriadis' project of individual and collective autonomy in several respects. This is not to say that Castoriadis' project identifies with the collaborative commons. Castoriadis' conception of socialism was based on centralised planning, whereas the collaborative commons aims at decentralised self-management. Castoriadis' project dissociates from any sort of activism, voluntarism or charity by envisioning a radical transformation of society through the creation of a new anthropological type not driven by profit maximisation. That is, whereas Castoriadis was arguing in favour of the abolition of the hierarchy of salaries, wages and incomes, the collaborative commons aims at a more diverse and flexible distribution of surplus-value. Finally, while Castoriadis did mention the role information technology could assume in a socialist society, he could not at the time have foreseen – at least in extent – the vast potential of information technology to transform the capitalist economy into post-capitalist or collaborative economy.

Despite the differences between Castoriadis' project and the collaborative commons, the Commons movement itself faces considerable barriers: a lack of access to resources and training, a significant gap in managerial and technical skills, sectoral and operational isolation in a number of sub-sectors, and a lack of public policy and institutional support from both the state and the larger co-operatives. In addition, public sector assets – forests, water, minerals, highways and other civil infrastructure – are being sold off as tax revenues decline and austerity cuts deepen. In Asia, Africa, Latin America and, most recently, in Greece we are experiencing a form of neo-colonialism, expanding this time by means of money instead of weapons. An unprecedented land grab by hedge funds and sovereign investment funds is appropriating lands that have been managed as commons by indigenous people and traditional communities for generations. Not to mention the patenting of the seeds by the biotech companies, which appropriate the biogenetic content of life itself. Hence, the peer-to-peer co-production sector is still but a parasitic economy, depending largely on financial and technological systems managed by corporate capital and neoliberal state policies (Bauwens and Kostakis 2014, 356). In Castoriadis' words, the commons are still largely heteronomous rather than autonomous.

In the same vein, it could be argued, in contrast to the optimism of both Mason and Rifkin, that the technological innovations that have the potential to foster collaborative commons could just as easily be appropriated by the capitalist economy – especially in the case of open-source software and open platforms – and lead to various dystopian scenarios such as the dominance of the finance sector, increased unemployment and exploitation of labour, cybercrime, and monopolies of information, facilitating state and corporate surveillance and thus undermining democracy and human rights (Pettifor 2015). As far as the control of the Internet *per se* is concerned, we are already witnessing centralised (and often proprietary) platforms – typically driven by corporate interests – progressively taking over the web. These centralised chokepoints can be used by governments to increase surveillance (as disclosed by the Snowden revelations), to blackout the Internet (e.g. as in Egypt and Syria, and on BART, San Francisco's transport system), or to restrict the activities of activist organisations (such as Wikileaks) (Kostakis 2013, 177-178). It is crucial to mention, finally, that cryptocurrencies could be designed in such a way – as in the case of Bitcoin – that could reproduce a reversed oligarchy-aristocracy leading to speculation and crises (Kostakis and Giotitsas 2014).

For these reasons, I hold that not only is it necessary to direct a stream of income from the capitalist economy to the commons, but also to create a corresponding mentality and develop the skills necessary to support the shift to an alternative value system whose values would contrast the ones promoted by capitalism, that is, privatisation and profit maximisation. Such an alternative economy would reflect the difference inherent in the cultural diversity, while respecting the common grounds of individuality, such as the ecological sustainability of the planet, the social coherence of communities, and the social distribution of value in accordance with the classic principle: from each according to his/her abilities, to each according

to his/her needs. In this respect, I hold that Castoriadis' argument for the abolition of the hierarchy of salaries, wages and incomes is highly controversial and problematic. For this reason, I am in favour of alternative business models and policies that advance a distribution of income according to the diversity of responsibility, motivation, expertise etc.

In this vein, I hold that Vasilis Kostakis' and Michel Bauwens' suggestion for a commons-oriented economic model that would keep the surplus value within the sphere of commoners might provide a viable alternative (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014, 59-69). This commons model would be based on the entrepreneurial coalition of three basic components: 1) a civil society consisting of contributory commons, peer-to-peer networks, autonomous individuals and collective movements; 2) ethical market entities ranging from corporations and co-operatives to NGOs; 3) a partner state. Kostakis and Bauwens introduce a Peer Production Licence (PPL), designed and proposed by Kleiner (2010), which could foster an open co-operativism between the commons and ethical market entities, based on the principle that companies that would like to use the commons without contributing should pay a licence fee. This way, a stream of income would be directed from ethical market entities to the commons, securing the autonomy of the commons (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014, 63). In this framework, the role of the partner state is of critical importance, as it could introduce a corresponding legal framework, supporting win-win sustainable models for both collaborative commons and ethical market entities, that is, market players who are willing to minimise negative social and environmental externalities. To this end, taxation of social and environmental entrepreneurship should be minimised, whereas taxation of negative social and environmental externalities should be increased (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014, 66-67). In addition, debt-free public monetary policies could accompany the creation of specialised complementary currencies (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014, 67). Finally, education and publicly funded research and innovation could be aligned with the commons-oriented economic model (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014, 68). "In these ways, the partner state would sustain civic Commons-oriented infrastructures and ethical Commons-oriented market players, reforming the traditional corporate sector in order to minimize social and environmental externalities" (Kostakis and Bauwens 2014, 67).

However, the centrality of the commons within a reformed market and state – a goal that seems highly ambiguous given the inherent contradictions of capitalism *per se* – does not challenge the basic structural contradiction of capitalism reproduced by the state itself, if it's not oriented on the gradual abolition of the heteronomy inherent in the division between the directors and the executants. I would therefore stress, following Castoriadis, the need for the deep democratisation of institutions across the globe with the mission to establish a more radical freedom and autonomy, expressing the interests of the communities involved in the projects in question. The more democratic and open the dialogue over the prospect of collaborative commons, the more likely the institutionalisation of individual and collective autonomy creates a loop of constantly revisable feedback between theory and praxis, instead of relying on supposedly definitive policies.

4. Conclusion

In this article I examined Castoriadis' conceptualisation of socialism as crystallised in his project of individual and collective autonomy. I outlined the principles of Castoriadis' political project as presented in the journal *Socialism ou Barbarie* between 1949 and 1965. I argued, specifically, that the basic principle of Castoriadis' political project is the abolition of the capitalist distinction between the directors and the executants, and the subsequent management of the economy by the workers themselves. This self-management would be based on a direct democracy established in terms of information available to the workers in a transparent manner, sufficient quantity and compact form. The economy would in such socialist self-management be determined by the mutual control of work by workers themselves, the humanisation of technology, the reduction in length of the working day, the abolition of the hierarchy of salaries, wages and incomes, and the sovereignty of the consumer. Finally, techno-

science in a socialist society would be at the service of democratic and ecological deliberation.

After revealing the basic principles of Castoriadis' conceptualisation of socialism, I presented some key points of criticism addressed at Castoriadis' project of individual and collective autonomy. In particular, I discussed the arguments of Fehér and Joas, according to which Castoriadis' political project is not applicable in contemporary societies due to their immense complexity and decentralisation. Joas argues, specifically, that it is highly doubtful whether citizens would be at all willing to accept a distribution of their income. In addition, I argued that Castoriadis' total rejection of the political system renders his project more difficult to realise, especially at a time when neoliberal capitalism is spreading across the world.

Nevertheless, we are witnessing the emergence of a new economic paradigm, termed the collaborative commons, which echoes Castoriadis' project in several respects. The collaborative commons refers to the creation of an alternative economy that favours collaboration over competition, decentralisation over hierarchy, access over ownership, transparency over privacy, equity over self-interest, and environmental sustainability over growth at all costs. The collaborative commons ranges from community-supported farming, renewable energy projects, environmental stewardship services to collective land trusts movements, community services, health clinics, and pharmacies, and so forth.

The collaborative commons also builds on the free flow of information deriving from the explosion of information technology and the concomitant technological innovations of our times. Open-source technologies, open platforms, peer-to-peer networks, 3D printing, cryptocurrencies, artificial intelligence, advanced robotics, advanced analytics and algorithms are all tools that could help build a more democratic economy inasmuch as many of them could be made easily accessible to the general public.

However, the collaborative commons today relies or depends heavily on capitalism: The capitalist economy can easily appropriate technological innovations of our times, leading to dystopian scenarios. For these reasons, Kostakis and Bauwens point to the reformation of the current politico-economical system through a commons-oriented economic model based on the coalition of three basic components: 1) a civil society collaborating through peer-to-peer networks, 2) an ethical market economy, 3) a partner state introducing mutually beneficial policies for both civil society and the market, including the taxation of negative social and environmental externalities, the support of specialised complementary currencies, and the funding of commons-oriented education, research and innovation. I argued, though, that if this model is to challenge the basic contradiction of capitalism reproduced by the state, it would need to be oriented toward the gradual abolition of the division between the directors and the executants. Following Castoriadis, the deep democratisation of the institutions of individual and collective autonomy is a *sine qua non* for the realisation of a more radical freedom and autonomy for the communities involved, and *vice versa*.

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