

# **“The right to the city” in Athens during a crisis era**

Between inversion, assimilation and going beyond

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Ever since the book of Henri Lefebvre “The right to the city” was published in 1968 it served as a great inspiration for several scholars, researchers, academics and activists. Being the point of departure for various urban movements, it contributed to a wave of resistance and destabilization of sovereignty in many parts of the western world during the turbulent decades of the 60s and 70s. While it has become extremely popular or even fashionable, it often appears detached from its original meaning. Various forms of sovereignty used its revolutionary and innovative rhetoric in an attempt to grand radical contexts in their political agendas. Forty five years after the first publication of Lefebvre’s book, the Athenian metropolis, a city in the (epi)center of the crisis turmoil, is governed by a municipal authority party that goes under the name of “Right to the City”. The party adopted much of Lefebvre’s revolutionary rhetoric, such as “the city as oeuvre”, in order to form its political agenda and win the municipal elections of 2010 and 2014. Ever since, a political program is applied based on a rather distorted interpretation of “the right to the city”.

In this chapter two approaches of “The right to the city” (“TRTTC’ from now on) will be confronted. On the one hand the Lefebvrian notion of the 1960s and on the other hand Kaminis’ (the Athens mayoral candidate) appropriation of 2010 and 2014. The first approach is considered as an effort to introduce the Marxian thought in spatial thinking in order to contribute to the emerging emancipatory movements, and the second

as a fine example of distortion of contexts in favor of gaining power and promoting neoliberal policies.

In this direction, we unfold the political program of Kaminis and examine its applications versus its title and theoretical context. By examining urban policies and tactics that are applied under the cloak of “TRTTC” and form the everyday life in Athens we intend to demonstrate that divisions between form and content can often lead to the complete inversion of primal meanings. By lifting the veil of propaganda it becomes visible that the assimilation of radical contexts on behalf of municipal authority does not lead to emancipatory urban policies but aims to cover up sovereignty.

Bringing to surface neo-interpretations of Lefebvre’s analysis, though, does not only enlighten the subversion of the original notions or highlight them as stolen contexts from sovereignty. In fact, not only is it a great opportunity to explore once again and rethink what Lefebvre was teaching and writing during the 60s but also a motive to question, think beyond and challenge it in the contemporary contexts of urban uprisings and revolts. Inspired by the work of several radical scholars like Harvey, de Souza or Pasquinelli we make an argument on the perspectives beyond the Lefebvrian notion and an attempt to approach Athens as an emerging rebel city. During the crisis years various struggles and acts of solidarity have been taking place in the city area, thus several spaces of resistance and commoning have emerged. In this regard, we deal with the transition from demanding the city to occupying the city as a contemporary space of resistance.

## **1. “THE RIGHT TO THE CITY”: TWO CONTRADICTORY APPROACHES AND A SUBVERSIVE PRACTICE**

### **1.1 “The Right to the City” and the Lefebvrian approach**

In the late 60’s Henri Lefebvre wrote his famous book the “The Right To The City”. The publication of the book in 1968 coincided with the 100th anniversary of the publication of Marx’s *Capital*, and came just before the revolutionary outbreaks in Paris, Prague, the rest of Europe and the US. “TRTTC” was influential for several radical scholars and urban movements like DIY urbanism in Sydney, Australia or the Right to the

City Alliance in NY,USA , to name but a few. One of the basic thesis and point of departure of Lefebvre (1996: 109) was that

"the city [is] a *projection of society on the ground* that is, not only on the actual site, but at a specific level, perceived and conceived by thought, [...] the city [is] the place of confrontations and of (conflictual) relations (...), the city [is] the 'site of desire' (...) and site of revolutions".

In the previous quote Lefebvre demonstrated the trialectical character of space as conceived, perceived and lived, which he farther analyzed in his later work "The Production of Space" (Lefebvre 1974). By verbalizing imaginary spaces which are crucial to every process of space alteration he widened not only the notion of space but also the possibilities to imagine and produce different spatialities. By introducing social relations as a mean of space production he questioned vividly both the hierarchical perception of city space in terms of production (according to which space was formed by the expertised authorities) and the perception of space as two dimensional or box container of life. Moreover, according to several scholars (Collinge, 2008; Soja, 1989; Shields, 1999) Lefebvre's analysis constituted a break to the former aspatial dialectic of historical materialism of orthodox Marxism. Lefebvre thematised space and suggested that the dialectic can be "raised up" from a temporal to a spatial medium. For our purpose, one of the most significant contributions of Lefebvre's point of view is that he identified the space and the city as a result of social class antagonisms.

In this regard, Lefebvres' concept of "TRTTC" challenged the notion of citizen. By bringing to surface people as protagonists of the production of city space and introducing a dialectical schema of space -production he gave a new meaning to citizenship. In his thought, citizenship is not defined by membership in the nation-state but is based on membership in inhabitance, thus on the everyday production of city space. As Purcell (2003: 577) notes "Everyday life (...) is the central pivot of the TRTTC: those who go about their daily routines in the city, both living in and creating space, are those who possess a legitimate right to the city (Lefebvre 1991a)". Though he didn't manage to escape from the notion of the white west man as the absolute subject he contributed vividly to the proclamation of emancipator strategies.

Furthermore, Lefebvre (1996: 158) clarified that “TRTTC” is not a typical right to nature and the countryside but “in the face of this pseudo-right, the right to the city is like a cry and a demand” and he (1996: 173-174) continued “right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit, (...) to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city”.

In his work, like so many other scholars of the decade of the 60s, he aimed not only to reach the analytical tools in order to understand the city but also to encounter all those forces able to change it. In his words the right to the city meant “a radical restructuring of social, politic and economic relations, both in the city and beyond” (Lefebvre 1996:34). As Marcuse (2010: 88) points out the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources and as Harvey (2008:26) adheres “it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city”. Stavrides (2007:8) felicity described it :“Lefebvre, encountered in the city not only horror but also hope, not only orderliness but also disorder, not only the reproduction of the sovereign principles but also challenge, not only the normalization of routine but also the liberation feast.”

## **1.2 “The Right to the City” and the sovereignty approach: a short discourse analysis**

In 2010 the new party “RTTC”, under the leadership of George Kaminis, a former ombudsman, participated in the municipal elections. In the first round of the November 2010 elections Kaminis’ party came in second but managed to win the second round, gaining 52% of the popular vote against the conservative party of the former mayor, Nikitas Kaklamanis, mainly due to the support of the centre-left. Kaminis governed the city for the period 2000-2014 and in May 25<sup>th</sup> 2014 won the second round of the elections that assured him another 5 years of service. It is noteworthy that, for the first time, in 2010 a Nazi political party entered the town council, while in 2014 it came third with about 120.000 votes.

The manifesto of the party “TRTTC” focused on citizens, public space (mainly in terms of cleanness and security), private property, social services, green development and innovative entrepreneurship. Within this optic, Kaminis (2010a:5) considered the city as a “collective oeuvre

created by the inhabitants, the visitors and everyone that lives and works in the city and creates its actual wealth". Moreover, he (2010b) adhered:

"I am referring to our common perception that life in the city essentially means an aggregation of rights. Rights that are nowadays under massive attack; from the right to mobility in public space without spatial and temporal limitations, to the right to work, to private property, to the freedom of creation. For all of us, 'demanding the city' means demanding our right to the city; all the rights for all human beings. We want and demand a civilized city, open to its citizens and open to the world."

Reading, however, in depth Kaminis manifesto we come across to several contradictions. First and foremost, the inclusion of as many as possible in "the collective oeuvre" that forms the city is indicative of the gap between form and content in Kaminis rhetoric. Obviously this invocation was made in order to target potential voters and to reinforce the pluralistic profile of the party. Kaminis himself was presented as "a citizen for the citizens" (Kaminis, 2010a: 2). Still, the way he conceived the notion of citizen involved several inconsistencies and contradictions. Though he referred to citizens, inhabitants, workers and students in general, he posed a clear distinction between indigenous and newcomer population. Likewise, in his political manifesto appears an underlying bias for young couples or students that should inhabit the city center and change its character, not only due to their economic status (the crisis hadn't completely unraveled when the manifesto was formed in 2010) but mainly because they are regarded as members of the city's "creative class". Kaminis adopted much of the government's rhetoric for "preferable citizens", a creative class that would inhabit the freshly gentrified areas of the city center.

However following Lefebvre (1991b:2342, translated in Kofman and Lebas, 1996: 34) the right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (citadin) and user of multiple services.; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the 'marginal' and even for the 'privilege').

In total discrepancy, Kaminis endorses the analysis of the ghettoization of the city center and introduces security, urban development and

entrepreneurship as a response. He is in accordance with gentrification processes, as we will show later on, that are promoted as the salvation of the so-called “city’s decay” and brings forth cultural capital as the leading force behind real estate, while appears eager to attract both investments and highly skilled workers.

But the emersion of this “chimera”, as Pasquinelli (2010) would describe the above strategy, determines also the relation between the city and the rest of the world. This relation with the “outside” is filtered thoroughly through the tourist industry. Athens is considered as the “face of the country” and therefore a highly important touristic destination. Though the rhetoric of the Olympic Games (2004) for a competitive city full of large-scale projects has faded, Kaminis brings forth once again the importance of the city image as a link to the outside. He unfolds a strategic of city-lifting, including small scale and neighborhood projects and targets to promote the city like a product ready for consumption. The Kaminis’ city-commodity reflects the absolute subversion of the Lefebvrian city. The key words of the manifesto under the title “urban development” are: entrepreneurship, city identity and tourism (Kaminis 2010a:7). This constitutes an explicit contradiction to Lefebvre’s critique for deification of the city image and its transformation to a commodity. Lefebvre’s internationalism is surpassed by a universal industry of cities. Athens is praised by Kaminis as a tourist destination taking no account of Lefebvre’s (1996: 70) criticism (of the 60s) while he wrote for the Athenian metropolis: “The monuments and sights (Agora, Acropolis) which enable to locate ancient Greece are only places of tourist consumption and aesthetic pilgrimage.”

The 2010 right to the development of the city, in other words the right to a touristic city, is directly linked to entrepreneurship and for this reason Kaminis announced measures against excessive bureaucracy. In the memorandum context though, the overcome of any possible delays in order to facilitate investments or entrepreneurship is directly connected to new investment law the so-called “fast track”<sup>1</sup>, a governmental tool that

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**1** | “Acceleration and Transparency of Implementation of Strategic Investments” or Fast Track Law (3894/2010) aims to abolish critical obstacles that have inhibited major investment in Greece. (...)This law streamlines the licensing procedure for Strategic Investments, making the process easier, smoother and more attractive. (<http://www.investingreece.gov.gr/default.asp?pid=167andla=1>)

was invented in order to skate over any legal difficulties or oppositions concerning private investments. Thus, Kaminis' "TRTTC" paves the way for the "right" to fast track policies.

On the side, the selection of the name "TRTTC" by George Kaminis and his partners is neither incidental nor coincidental, but maintains direct links and references to Lefebvre's oeuvre. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that at least twelve candidates of his party (Kaminis 2010b) are architects or involved in space and art sciences. Unsurprisingly, Kaminis promotes the aestheticization of the "TRTTC" by cutting off quotes and propound them as romantic thoughts of his political manifesto. In this way, he identifies himself and his party by using the terminology of an ideology he has very little in common.

The adoption of radical reasons and contents has been diachronically the strategic for numerous power mechanisms. The lack of a critical engagement with Lefebvre's rhetoric has often led to an overstretching of the concept. On deconstructing Kaminis' manifesto, the ostensibly radical intentions are ultimately weathered. The patchwork of rights, from private property to public space, along with strong indications of neoliberal policies and governance, leave no doubt that there is no common space between Kaminis' «Δικαίωμα στην Πόλη» and Lefebvrian "Droit à la ville".

### 1.3 "The Right to the City" and the sovereignty practice

Following Lefebvre's analysis we consider space as a product of social relations, therefore, we examine the production of the Athenian space in relation to its inhabitants and visitors. In order to perceive the politics applied to the Athenian metropolis over the past four years we examine the way these policies 'position' the subjects- citizens in the city. With 'position' we are not implying that any authority is truly capable of positioning, thereby determining, the subjects, since they are self-determined and therefore position themselves in space according to their social relations. Mostly we refer to the intentions and practices of the authorities to act in the name of the inhabitants. In this direction, we use the dialectic schema of inclusion-exclusion, which help us understand the municipality's policies and the consequent urban space that is produced by them.

The municipality's declarations of population reclassifications, by bringing "the young and the restless" Greeks to the city center, directing

migrants to ethnic markets and displacing “the decadents” to the outskirts are indicative of their intentions. Subsequently, not all the inhabitants are considered as equal citizens, some of them are not considered citizens at all, and not all of them have the same rights to the city. The Kaminis’ “right to the city” is connected with race and class prerequisites and this constitutes one of the primary distortions of the Lefebvrian notion.

Kaminis (2010c) noted in one of his interviews: “Greece is a country in which-because of economic traditions-you cannot just make a sudden move, gather 5.000 people and take them to three concentration camps. This is not practically possible and does not comply with the fundamental coexistence principles of a coordinated community.” However, since 2010 hundreds of police operations have taken place in Athens. According to statistics of Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection within seven months (8/2012-2/2013) 77.526 migrants were prosecuted, that means in most cases beaten, deported, arrested or abused. Since the operations was decided in the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection (with the active support of the municipal police, though) Kaminis attributed the issue to the Prime Minister’s office. Migratory populations are often thought to come from an outer sphere; therefore they are considered to have no actual connection, references or rights to the city they inhabit. Kaminis by transferring the migrant issue in another hyper spatial structure or even in a supranational level, he practically dislocates them out of the city. At the same time several concentration camps, the so-called “hospitality centers” by the authorities, have been created in Greece, one of them in the wider district of Athens. At the moment (May 2014), there is an open discussion for the transformation of a former hospital (“Agia Varvara”) in west Athens (closed due to cuts in health that followed the advent of IMF in 2010) to a detention center.

The political formation of Kaminis explicitly targeted immigrants from the very beginning of his administration. In his (Kaminis 2011) words: “our policy concerning migration should aim to the social incorporation, to manage illegal migration and all illegal migrants that already inhabit our country. This population should come out to light and be recorded. All the illegal migrants should return to their home countries.” Using the “illegal trade” as a pretext Kaminis separated the indigenous populations from the newcomers. The latter became the scapegoat of the recent crisis accused for the collapse of the commercial sector (Kaminis 2010c, 2011). As formulated by Kaminis (2011a) “the city center decays because of two



things: illegal trade and manifestations." Significantly, the attitude of the municipal authorities, in 2011, towards one of the biggest hunger strikes that have taken place in Greece (300 migrants hunger strikers claimed legislation for migrants in Greece) was indicative. Kaminis washed his hands of migrants' demands by refusing to provide them accommodation during the strike and transposed any responsibility once again to the government.

The municipal authority has been making a furious attack against migrants indicating their expulsion from the public space of the city since they are considered as non-citizens. This massive pogrom in which Nazis, racists, state police and municipal police take part has had several victims, like Cheikh Ndiaye, an African street vender who died falling on the train rails in February 2013 while hunted by municipal policemen. Such politics express certain spatialities. The expulsion from public sphere means inevitably the alteration of city public space. For instance, since 2009 members of the Nazi party Golden Dawn have banned access to a public playground in a central migrant neighborhood, targeting in this way migrant's children. The playground remained locked until April 2014, a month before the elections.

Moreover, in December 2011 took place a vicious pogrom in the city center. Several sex workers, many of them were migrant women, were arrested and imprisoned for over a year. They were slandered of being HIV positive and accused of "transmitting diseases to the Greek family" (Loverdos 2012) by the Minister of Health. As the Minister (Loverdos 2012) distinctively declared "it is necessary to deport HIV positive prostitutes in order to stop being a threat to the Greek family (...), it is a problem of the Greek family as the disease is transmitted from the illegal migrant women, to the Greek client, to the Greek family." Kaminis disclaimed again any responsibility but he supported the minister indirectly. A few days later he signed a protocol of cooperation with the minister concerning "measures for the improvement of citizen's everyday life and the reassurance of a better living condition". The contemporary 'vagabonds' such as drug addicts or homeless that have been increasing rapidly the last few years live in a blurred routine. On the one hand the municipality created spaces to provide them food and sometimes shelter and on the other, a constant battle takes place in order to keep them out of tourists' sight. Numerous times they are exiled with police buses from the city center

either to detention centers or abandoned in the national highway, in order to achieve a “clean and clear” urban environment.

Since 2010 (the year of the advent of the IMF), several groups and individuals have expressed openly a strict negation to the “Memorandum”. Their spaces of reference have been targeted constantly from the various aspects of sovereignty, including the municipality. During the last two years several evictions of squats, occupied buildings and social centers have taken place in Athens. The eviction of the anarchist social centers-squats Villa Amalias and Skaramaga showed the stigma of zero tolerance to the voices of resistance. Though the municipal authorities once again renounced any responsibility by declaring that this was an issue held by the state police, they willingly decided to reclaim the buildings once they were evicted. In the case of Villa Amalia (a building squatted for the last 22 years in the center of the city that functioned also as a space of fight back to numerous fascist attacks to migrants) the municipality started renovation works a few days before the 2014 elections. Still, in the case of the municipal market of Kupseli, an abandoned local market occupied by citizens in a central neighborhood of Athens and transformed into a social center, the eviction came from a direct command of the municipality. Indeed, the eviction of such spaces and the dislocation and exclusion of certain people and ideas from the city equates with the production of a sterilized city environment friendly to Nazis and the police.

But the pinnacle of municipal policies that distorted ultimately the meaning of TRTTC was the eviction of Syntagma Square<sup>2</sup> occupation by the ‘Indignados’ and various other people. The 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2011 a big riot took place in Syntagma square. The next days the mayor (Kaminis 2011b) stated:

“The municipality does not oppose to the Indignados. The right to gather in public spaces and manifestate is supported by the Greek constitution. The Municipality respects, as it should, the right to peaceful protests. Still, there is a distinction between the right to manifestate, that could be on a daily basis in the same spot on special occasions (like the Indignados did) and the ‘right’ to camp in public spaces with all the consequent effects concerning the malfunction of the city.”

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**2** | ‘Syntagma’ means ‘Constitution’. Syntagma Square is the square in front of the Greek parliament.

And he (Kaminis 2011b) continued arguing that

"It is inconceivable that those who name themselves Indignados think that they can occupy the central or any other square of Athens. The square should be clean, open and available to all citizens and inhabitants of the city with no exceptions or discriminations. This applies for all the squares of the city and especially for the first one."

In mayor's speech we distinguish once again the *thrasos* of sovereignty to determine the rules, the topography, the means of fight and behavior of the revolted (Makrygianni and Tsavdaroglou 2010: 52). What Kaminis described was the breaking of the former "spatial contract" of Syntagma square. The permanent occupation of a square constituted a break to the former temporary demonstrations. Until June 2011 there were two main tactics in the repertoire of protestors: occupations of public buildings and demonstrations. Both of them express the spatial contract, i.e. the "democratic" right to interrupt the urban normality and protest for a limited time in public space or in a public (State) building. Square occupations combine the two previous tactics and constitute a new spatial grammar in the syntax of struggles. In the words of Antonis Vradis: "the occupation of Syntagma Square (...) was a first attempt to break the spatial contract or to cancel it definitively" (Vradis, 2011:215).

Confronting the above with Lefebvre's rhetoric it seems rather ironic that while the later, inspired by the Paris Commune of 1871 flared the events of May '68, Kaminis' rhetoric contributed actively to the suppression of the Indignados movement and the wave of resistance that followed in Greece.

Nonetheless the policies of exclusion go hand in hand with certain inclusive practices. The rhetoric of the municipality reflects the dominion of the capital over city space and promotes a specific and restricted topology of rights. The production of the desired space derives from the exclusion of the "flagitious" and the concomitant inclusion of the "desired" through the promotion of certain plans.

In 2011 an architectural competition for the renewal of a central Athenian named "Rethink Athens" street took place. The competition was held on behalf of the private institution-foundation "Alexandros Onassis" and urged us to rethink the Greek capital in 'better' terms. The competition that was embraced warmly by the authorities and the municipality interpreted the city followed close Kaminis' scenario. The

“creative class” should inhabit Athens, give her new breath and character along with an ethnic essence created on multicultural markets (that is one of the few places where migrants are welcomed). Thereafter, in April 2013 a new plan for Athens, “Re-launching Athens” with time horizon the year 2020 was presented by the mayor. This ambitious concept concerns large-scale gentrification projects in the city center like the construction of commercial and habitat infrastructures, the renewal of abandoned building, the pedestrianization of central streets etc. The plan’s funding is based on the EU and private investors (it also entails the Jessica program and NSRF<sup>3</sup>). It is crucial here to notice the terms in which the municipality and certain spatial politics are related to the EU. “TRTTC” is linked to huge infrastructures which will alter the urban environment in favor of the capital and will inevitably abort the redundant population. In a similar spirit the “Re-activate Athens” initiative, that was presented a few months ago by various researchers, enjoyed the warm acceptance of the mayor.

Indeed what Lefebvre (1968: 84-85) was writing in 1968 for the planning developers seems rather insightful

“They conceive and realize, without hiding it, for the market, with profit in mind (...) they are no longer selling houses or buildings but planning. With, or without ideology planning becomes an exchange value...They will build not only commercial centers, but also centres of privileged consumption: the renewed city.”

The production of the city space following Kaminis’ “rights” and guidelines come to direct opposition with the thought of the French philosopher. In Kaminis’ ratio the city and especially the city image turns into commodity, a suggestion that is directly opposed to Lefebvre’s principles. In Kaminis case the collective oeuvre of the inhabitants refers to the creation of pleasant scenery to host tourists. In this context they create new spatialities taking as guiding principles not only major projects but also small scale interventions in the daily life. The contemporary manufacturers familiarize with tools like “the everyday life”, introduced from Lefebvre (1991a), but use them in order to include the city into the market and turn it to an antagonistic tourist spot on the map.

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**3** | National Strategic Reference Framework (NSRF) is the programming of European Union Funds at national level.

## 2. "THE RIGHT TO THE CITY": CONTRADICTIONS CROSSINGS AND CRACKS

### 2.1 Contradictions of the Lefebvrian 'Right to the city'

The more we unfold Kaminis project in theory and practice, the less commons it appears to share with Lefebvre's rhetoric. Nevertheless, these contradictions open spaces of controversies and urge us not only to read again "TRTTC" but also to think critically and go beyond. To do so, we first have to dive in deep waters of Lefebvre's theory and then emerge in the contemporary crisis' everyday life struggles.

One of the basic notions that Lefebvre used in order to evolve his thought is the perception of the city as "oeuvre". Lefebvre sought to define the "oeuvre" and the city, which are articulated in "TRTTC" through the Marx's categories of value: use value and exchange value. Lefebvre (1996: 124) argues that "if one wants to go beyond the market, the law of exchange value, money and profit, it is necessary to define the place of this possibility: urban society, the city as use value", and he (1996: 126) states later that the city "did not have, it has no meaning but as an oeuvre, as an end, as place of free enjoyment, as domain of use value". In the previous quotes Lefebvre seeks the characteristics of urban society and he is opposed to the categories of exchange value, money and profit. However we argue that he misinterprets the Marxian category of use value. Lefebvre tends to separate the two forms of value, use value and exchange value, and he attributes an ontological positive status in use value, thus the social antagonisms in their historical context, that he previously mentions, are lost. But as Marx conceptualizes the categories of value and labour (exchange value and use value as well as concrete-useful and abstract labour) Lefebvre's misinterpretation becomes clearer.

Marx in the beginning of the first volume of *Capital* presents the two factors of commodity: the use value and the exchange value and he argues that in the capital mode of production "in the form of society to be considered here they [use-values] are also the material bearers of ... exchange-value" (Marx, 1976: 126). According to Marx the use value is directly linked to the useful-concrete labour and "the usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value" (Marx, 1976: 126). Different useful labours differ from each other qualitatively and not quantitatively.

Following Marx's analysis (Marx, 1976: 128, 132-133) the qualitatively different useful labours produce use values, which are the bearers of exchange value. Furthermore exchange value, as opposed to use value, concerns the quantitative relations of commodities: "exchange value appears first of all as the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind. This relation changes constantly with time and place." (Marx, 1976: 126) The discovery of this double character of commodities, as use values as well as exchange values, as qualities as well as quantities, runs throughout the entire work of Marx's *Capital*. Illustrative is the following quote from the subchapter "Value-Form or Exchange-Value":

"commodities come into the world in the form of use-values or material goods, such as iron, linen, corn, etc. This is their plain, homely, natural form. However, they are only commodities because they have a dual nature, because they are at the same time objects of utility and bearers of value. Therefore they only appear as commodities, or have the form of commodities, in so far as they possess a double form, i.e. natural form and value form." (Marx, 1976: 138)

Marx claimed that use value comes from useful labor and later on explained where exchange value comes from. To do so, he analyzes the dialectical dual character of labor as concrete-useful labor and abstract labor. Marx shows that concrete labor produces use value and the abstraction of concrete labor that means abstract labor produces exchange value. In his words (1976: 129) "a use-value, or useful article, (...) has value only because abstract human labor is objectified or materialized in it." Marx (1976: 310-1) makes clear that while it is necessary for the commodities to have a concrete use value, however it is totally indifferent which exactly this use value will be. This finding is based on Marx's conception of abstraction

"the exchange relation of commodities is characterized precisely by its abstraction from their use-values(...)If we make abstraction from its use-value, we abstract also from the material constituents and forms which make it a use value. It is no longer a table, a house, (...) or any other useful thing. All its sensuous characteristics are extinguished. (...) With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are

all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract." (Marx, 1976: 127-8)

Consequently, the capital mode of production is based on use value, which is abstracted, and aims in value (exchange value) and ultimately in surplus value. The outcome of Marx's analysis is that the conceptualization of commodity as something dual, is based on the dual character of labour, as concrete-useful labour as well as abstract labour; and "this point is crucial to an understanding of political economy" (Marx, 1976: 132)

Once we recognize this dual character, it becomes easier to understand the missteps of the Lefebvrian "TRTTC". Indicatively are the following quotes, in which Lefebvre separates use value and exchange value and then he unhistorically prettifies the use value and consequently the city itself:

"City and urban reality are related to use value. Exchange value and the generalization of commodities by industrialization tend to destroy it by subordinating the city and urban reality which are refuges of use value, the origin of a virtual predominance and revalorization of use" (Lefebvre, 1996: 67)

and

"The most eminent urban creations, the most 'beautiful' oeuvres of urban life (we say 'beautiful', because they are oeuvres rather than products) date from epochs previous to that of industrialization" (Lefebvre, 1996: 65)

Lefebvre follows a 'dangerous' path: First, he disconnects the use value from exchange value and he argues that the only form of commodity is the exchange value. Then, he unhistorically illustrates use value as a positive substance, which existed before industrialization, and creates only "beautiful" oeuvres. And finally, he connects the city only with use value, hence attributes the city with the same unhistorical positivity. As a result of this way of thinking, Lefebvre contradicts himself with his original thesis, that the city is a *projection of society on the ground*. While this thesis suggests that the use values and exchange values are determined at each historical time by the social class antagonism, Lefebvre's outcome is different.

He repeats the same argument several times in his book and constantly seeks for the moments that “the use (use value) of places, monuments, differences, escapes the demands of exchange, of exchange value” (Lefebvre, 1996: 129). Since he has disconnected use value from exchange value, then he seeks the lost ontological primacy of use value, “use value, subordinated for centuries to exchange value, can now come first again. How?” Although his thought it was extremely visionary on the concepts of city and space, he is however trapped in the supposed confrontation between use value and exchange value.

Ultimately, he builds his theoretical framework “TRTTC” on the postulation of use values and defines as the revolutionary subject for this purpose the working class. In the words of Lefebvre:

“the right to the city (...) the proclamation and realization of urban life as the rule of use (of exchange and encounter disengaged from exchange value) insist on the mastery of the economic (of exchange value, the market, and commodities) and consequently is inscribed within the perspectives of the revolution under the hegemony of the working class” (Lefebvre, 1996: 179).

## 2.2 From “the right to the city” to the occupation of the city

Lefebvre’s analysis in “TRTTC” has been adopted by numerous urban and environmental movements, NGO’s, also often co-opted by state institutions with respect to housing and mortgage regulation (Brenner et al., 2009; Leontidou, 2010; Mayer, 2009). Their common feature is the postulation of urban use values i.e. affordable housing, free spaces, open-green areas, parks, bicycle lanes and generally public goods (education, health, energy etc.). The movements and agencies for the right to the city criticize the neoliberalism or the capital relationship only in the form of exchange value, and they ignore how the commodity value is produced as a unity. The result of this tactic is that the produced or claimed use values, at the same time when they are defined and claimed they are transformed and abstracted to exchange values, hence serving as a like a necessary fuel for the circulation of commodities, as an inseparable unity of use value and exchange value. According to de Souza (2010:316-317) for these agencies the political-philosophical and social-theoretical premises could be resumed as follows: “As much social justice and environmental protection as possible, of course; but please let us be realistic, the time of



utopia has passed". As he (2010:316) felicitously points out, the right to the city has the meaning that

"neoliberalism obviously is refused, but not capitalism as such (i.e. (...) [it] should, in the best of all cases, be replaced by a sort of "left-Keynesianism", which could in turn be supplemented by alternative, "solidarity"-oriented economic [micro] circuits)(...) a "participative democracy" must be achieved, and this usually means the following: representative democracy must be supplemented and "corrected" by "participation" (that is, representative "democracy"(...) ."

In contrast with the traditional movements for the right to the city, the last years we are witnessing a rising tide of urban revolts and mobilizations. In the 'Reclaim The Streets' movement of the late 90's, in the uprising of Parisian banlieue in 2005, in Oaxaca 2006, in Athens 2008, in London 2011 and in the recently occupied squares of Cairo, Madrid, Athens, US, we recognize that the rebels do not claim and do not postulate the city from the sovereign power but rather they occupy it and tend to transform it.

What was typical of the last years' urban conflicts in the Athenian metropolis was not a defensive stance against State violence but a constant offensive against all that resembled the presence of sovereign power. The struggles and revolts brought to light the rebel space and gave birth to a plethora of spaces and practices in the perceived-conceived-lived space. Furthermore they left dynamic spatial legacies that are used and enriched in every new moment of resistance. Several initiatives and movements focused to answer the crucial question of social reproduction. In Athens, more than fifty local decentralized neighborhood assemblies were created, while in all over Greece more than one hundred started organizing communal gardens, collective kitchens, give-away bazaars, barter structures, self-studying and social tutoring. Furthermore, autonomous labor grassroots base unions emerged, as well as unemployed networks, immigrant networks, agro-collectives and social structures as social self-organized health centers, social kindergartens and social groceries. The recent uprisings were accused of having no demands and no representatives to negotiate concrete claims, or better concrete use values. We claim that the passage from the famous slogan of the 60's "be realistic, demand the impossible" to the slogan of the recent Occupy movement in US "occupy everything, demand nothing" (see Deseriis and Dean, 2012)

formulates a different culture of struggles and signifies a new era for the emancipator movements.

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