The December 2008 Youth Uprising in Athens: Spatial Justice in an Emergent "City Of Thresholds"

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The term "urban conflict" can be taken to include all those forms social antagonism takes, when the resulting struggles happen in an urban spatial context. Is the city however simply a container of these struggles or does urban spatiality actually mold social conflicts, giving them form, affecting their meaning and their relations with specific urban rights and demands?

This paper will attempt to trace the history of a specific and very recent period of urban conflicts in Athens, Greece, where a highly indicative series of phenomena seems to have taken place: What has started as a generalized expression of youth rage, triggered by the assassination of a young boy by a policeman, has evolved to a multifarious and inventive reclaim of city public space. As it is characteristic in most urban conflicts, the city was not simply involved as the setting of actions but urban space and its uses became one of the stakes of the conflict.

Either explicitly or implicitly connected with demands related to city life conditions, urban conflicts actively transform the city. Protecting or corroborating collective rights through historically specific struggles actually affects not only the corresponding status of legal procedures and laws but also the production of space (Mitchell 2003: 29). As there exists no spatial arrangement without a socially legitimized definition of its use and value, any form of "rights demand" redefines, transforms or creates the spaces in which those rights can be exercised.

The question is: Does the city, in these temporary or more permanent transformations, represent the stakes of the conflict along with the conflicting values of the social groups (or actors) involved in the conflict? Does the city become the mirror, and not simply the locus of the conflict?

In the case of the Athens December youth uprising, we may trace the possibility to answer these questions. During this period, the city had temporarily become the place where new forms of spatiality have emerged. Spatiality, as a concept, is meant to describe conditions, qualities and characteristics of space, not specific spaces. Even though we can locate specific forms of spatiality in concrete places, spatiality describes ways to perform space rather than spaces as concrete arrangements of physical elements.

Putting an emphasis on the importance of encounters can actively transform the ways we understand space as socially crafted. If places can be thought of "not so much as enduring sites but as moments of encounter" (Amin and Thrift 2002: 30, compare Bauman 2000: 95) then urban conflicts, by creating new forms of encounter, can produce new forms of spatial conditions.

So, to speak about the different spatialities of urban conflicts means to consider space as both the result and the precondition of social action. Space, as D. Massey suggests and as urban conflicts incessantly prove, "is never finished; never closed... always under construction" (Massey 2005: 9). Space happens.

The December uprising: a cry from the future?

Let us then see what happened on December 2008 in Athens, in order to focus on the spatiality of this urban conflict. There is a neighborhood located near the city center, Exarchia, which, since the 70s has become identified with a youth culture of protest and alternative entertainment. Connected symbolically with the November 1973 student uprising, which culminated in the bloody ending of the National Technical University occupation that took place in the University's main building situated in the area, Exarchia has become some kind of anti-

systemic youth stronghold. Today's picture differs, of course, from November's anti-dictatorship action which marked the beginning of the end of the 7 years military junta. Gentrification initiatives mingle with alternative culture and commodification of both entertainment and public space tends to prevail. There are however many outbursts of symbolic action as well as many organized demonstrations that still start from or end in Exarchia.

On the 6th of December, a police car was passing in front of one the coffee shops were young people meet. Police tactics is generally focused on guarding specific "possible targets" in the area (main political party offices, banks, government buildings etc.) with heavily equipped groups of police special forces (MAT). Occasionally, police raids sweep the center of the neighborhood, either in pursuit of "illegal immigrants" or in pursuit of drug dealers. Most of the times, however, police raids are meant to impose order after a violent demonstration (even though a demonstration often becomes violent because it is attacked by the police).

So, the passing of this police car was not something regular, something to happen unnoticed. What a few boys did was to yell at these policemen some kind of obviously not flattering remarks. But the policemen in the car did something so disastrous that it immediately triggered a huge youth outburst. They parked their car and they returned armed to respond to the insult. One of them took out his gun, aimed at one of the 15 year old students and shot him. The boy died on the pavement.

It took just a few hours for people to spontaneously organize various forms of protest and action. During the same night many fancy shops in the most expensive commercial street in Athens where attacked and completely destroyed. Symbols of consumption were becoming targets all over the city. Collective rage was from the beginning directed against symbols of the affluent society. In the next morning all the schools in Athens and many cities in Greece were closed by their students (a result of coordination through e-mail and SMS "rhizomatic" communication). Spontaneous demonstrations of students in all neighborhoods (even in rich suburbs) were performing a kind of either peaceful or violent siege of police stations the days that followed. Police cars were overturned, policemen chased, expensive cars were burned.

What was highly characteristic of this spontaneous uprising was that there were no guiding centers or organizations, although anarchists and leftists were actively involved in most of the acts. Every local initiative had its own means to organize and express a common rage. It wasn't however that every action was simply expressing this rage. It wasn't that everybody who participated was only angry and sad for the brutal killing of a young boy. A common effort to actively express a different public culture was becoming apparent. And this culture contained forms of collectively reclaiming the city.

How could this indeed happen? The key element seems to have been a shared idea of justice, which is felt to be absent from the acts of the state, as emblematically declared by the shooting policeman. No policeman was ever punished in the past for police brutality: Young people were asking for justice although they knew that punishment will not be imposed. Young people actually feel in their everyday experience of study and work precariousness that in this society justice is always fleeting. It is as if every aspect of their life experience was somehow condensed in this unjust death. In a period of economic crisis, combined with major cases of government corruption, revealed by the press, in a period when no true alternatives to the political situation were visible, a claim for justice epitomized for young people a more general demand: "we want to live. This society literally or symbolically does not allow us to live".

So, after the first wave of demonstrations, a second wave of actions involved various forms of occupation of public buildings. There were cases of municipal buildings in various municipalities of Athens (as in Nea Smyrni, Ag. Dimitiros, Halandri etc.), which were temporarily transformed to community centers. Young squatters had attempted to create neighborhood meeting areas where community self-organized cultural events took place.

There was the case of the National Opera building which became a place of collective experimentation in the performing arts as well as an information center. This initiative took form as the culmination of a series of acts by a group of young performance artists. What they did is enter in almost every theater in the city demanding that an angry anti-police manifesto is read before the show.

There was the case of the occupied building of the General Confederation of Workers, as a gesture of protest against the official bureaucrats of the often paralyzed workers' syndicates. And of course, there were the occupied University and school buildings with differing forms of participation, and differing problems of coordination as communication between sometimes rivaling anarchist and leftist sects was difficult.

Images and acts of urban justice

Out of these experiences, the collective demand for justice in its expansive and diverse ways, has taken the form of actively pursuing a distinctively urban justice. The city was not simply the setting of collective actions and initiatives but became, more and more, a potential collective claim. In all these fragmentary, ambiguous and diffuse initiatives, explicitly or implicitly expressed was the collective will of young people to take their lives in their hands. Urban justice had thus effectively taken the form of Lefebvre's idea of the right to the city (Lefebvre 1996). Let us remember that, for Lefebvre, the right to the city is not simply one kind of rights among others. For him, in the form of this right, the totality of civic rights is condensed.

It is very important that, as Lefebvre insists, this right presupposes collective action in pursuing it and also collective action in actually imposing it. The city is understood as the "perpetual oeuvre of the inhabitants, themselves mobile and mobilized for and by this oeuvre" (ibid :173). The right to the city involves people in pursue of a collective project: to transform the city to a collective work of art. The city thus does not simply become an aggregate of services and goods with the corresponding collective demands for democratic access. Beyond this quantitative understanding of the urban condition is a qualitative critique of the contemporary city culture. Here is where urban conflicts, as the Athens December youth uprising, can contribute to a different understanding of the urban world, giving form to new, emergent spatialities.

When, during an urban conflict, people collectively seek to re-appropriate public space, they are not simply using the city as it is; they are transforming it. Their actions not only search for space, they invent space. These "performed" spaces, these "practiced" spaces, as they "happen" in the process of the conflict, acquire distinctive characteristics that tend to influence the outcome and the form of the conflict. Emergent spatialities, thus, represent the ways people who participate tend to imagine spaces that will house the life they fight for. At the same time, those spatialities reflect the ways in which collective action attempts to create its own space. The spatialities of urban conflicts are thus both imagined and real. It is very important, therefore, to understand how images and representations of space, actively participate in forming the qualities of the spaces created as urban conflicts transform the city.

One of the dominant modern images of a longed for emancipated community presents it as barricaded in a liberated stronghold: A defined territorial enclave always ready to defend itself. This image, embedded in the collective imaginary of the oppressed, tends to construct a geography of emancipation in the form of a map clearly depicting free areas as defined by a recognizable perimeter. Either as islands, surrounded by a hostile sea or as continents facing other hostile continents, these areas appear as spatially circumscribed and traceable. This image was many times dominant in the history of Athens youth movements: Exarchia was often fantasized as an alternative liberated stronghold.

Most of December's collective acts have escaped the enclosure characteristic of many previous student struggles and have spread out all over the city. Students, instead of being under siege

by the police in their university asylum enclaves, have reclaimed the streets and the city as spaces of collective action. And in many cases, it was the police stations that were under siege by students and school children.

The December uprising did not have a center, neither a political center, nor a center in terms of urban space. In direct contrast to the situated struggle of November 1973, which has turned the image of NTUA building to a national symbol of resistance, the December actions were everywhere. Unexpected, metastatic, unpredictable and multiform. During the December days, the fantasy of a liberated enclave, which dominated and still dominates many urban struggles, has lost most of its power. What kind of motivating image has replaced this fantasy?

Emancipation is a process not an essence, if we find it crucial to differentiate it from the religious image of a happy afterlife. Emancipation is the ambiguous actuality of spatially as well as historically dispersed struggles. There may be potentially liberating practices but there can be no fixed areas of freedom.

Could we then perhaps visualize spatialities of emancipation by considering those appeals for social justice that focus on the use of space? Spatial justice, in this context, could indicate a distribution principle that tends to present space as a good to be enjoyed by all. Accessibility can become one of the most important attributes of spatial justice. Any division, separation or partitioning of space appears, thus, as obstructing this kind of justice.

True, an emphasis on spatial justice may establish the importance collective decision making has for the social as well as for the physical definition of space. This imaginary geography of emancipation, however, has to understand space as a uniform continuum to be regulated by common will rather than as an inherently discontinuous and differentiated medium that gives form to social practices. In a somewhat crude form, this imaginary could end up completely reducing space to a quantity to be equally distributed. And accessibility might end up being some kind of distributing mechanism. We can actually connect this way of understanding spatialities of emancipation with contemporary discourses on human rights or human communicability (Habermasian ideal speech situation included). More often than not, these discourses presuppose some kind of trans-historical and trans-geographical human figure. The same kind of human figure becomes the subject of spatial justice, only this time such a figure is not viewed as the inhabitant of an ideal city any more but rather as the free-moving occupant of a homogeneous space.

A different (third) kind of geographical imaginary has emerged out of a criticism for this idealized view for a just city (or a city of justice). Sometimes drawing images from contemporary city-life, this imaginary focuses on multiplicity and diversity, as well as on possible polymorphous and mutating spaces, in order to describe a spatiality of emancipation. Strong roots support this view. A critique of everyday life and everydayness, already put forward during the 60s, has provided us with a new way to deal with the social experience of space. If everyday life is not only the locus of social reproduction but also contains practices of self-differentiation or personal and collective resistance, molecular spatialities of otherness can be found scattered in the city. As de Certeau has put it, "a migrational, or metaphorical city slips into the clear text of the planned and readable city" (de Certeau, 1984:93).

This image contains a view of inhabited space as a process rather than as a fixed condition. Spaces of otherness, thus, proliferate in the city due to diversifying or deviating practices. Spatialities of otherness, in such a view, are considered as inherently time-bound. Space is neither reduced to a container of otherness (idealized in utopian cities) nor to a contestable and distributable good. Space is actually conceptualized as a formative element of human social interaction. Space thus becomes expressive through use, or, rather, because use ("style of use" as de Certeau specifies) defines users. If an idealized version of spatial justice tends to invoke

common rights in order to define space as common good, an emphasis on spatialized molecular otherness tends to posit space as dispersed and diversified therefore not common.

Emancipating spatialities, in such a view, would be dispersed spatialities of otherness. Discontinuous and inherently differentiated space gives ground to differing social identities allowed thus to express themselves. Essentially connected with identity politics, this geographical imaginary "tends to emphasize situatedness" (Harvey 1996: 363) as a prerequisite of identity formation. Identities, however, may rather be the form that social discrimination takes. A social inculcation of human interaction patterns is always the scope of social reproduction. Inhabited space, in societies that lack "the symbolic-product-conserving techniques associated with literacy", is, according to Bourdieu, the principal locus of this inculcation of dispositions (Bourdieu, 1977:89). Inhabited space however, seems to have resumed this role in post-industrial societies, not because people have become less dependent on formalized education but because city life has become the educational system *par-excellence*. A wide variety of em-bodied reactions are learnt through using metropolitan space. Everybody has to be able to deal expressively with the risks and opportunities of city life. Where someone is allowed to be and how he or she conforms to spatial instructions of use, is indicative of his or her social identity. Space identifies and is identified through use.

Urban conflicts and urban struggles can become focused on the protection of specific places as places that contain and represent specific situated collective identities. A working class neighborhood threatened by gentrification or an ethnic minority meeting spot threatened by racist neighbors can become stakes in an urban conflict which involves different groups of citizens and different authorities. December uprising seems to have taken one step further: reclaiming space was not connected to the preservation of established situated identities. Collective identities, as we will see, were implicitly criticized.

Urban porosity

A contemporary liberating effort may, indeed, seek "not to emancipate an oppressed identity but [rather] to emancipate an oppressed non-identity" (Holloway, 2002:156). If social reproduction is enforcing identity formation, an emancipating struggle might be better directed against those mechanisms that reduce humans to circumscribed and fixed identities. Spaces of emancipation should then differ from identity-imposing and identity-reproducing spaces. Space as identity (and identity as space) presupposes a clearly demarcated domain. Space as the locus of non-identity, as the locus of relational, multifarious and open identities, has to be, on the contrary, loosely determined space. It is not that such spaces are or become amorphous. It is their power to compare and connect adjacent areas that makes those spaces "loose" (Franck and Stevens 2007), open to different determinations.

Societies have long known the ambiguous potentialities of such spaces. Anthropologists have provided us with many examples of spaces that characterize and house periods of ritualized transition from one social position or condition to another. Van Gennepp has described as "rites of passage" (Van Gennepp 1960) those ritual acts connected with spaces that symbolize transitions (from childhood to adolescence, from single to married life, from the status of the citizen to that of the warrior or the hunter). Ritual acts aim, above all, to ensure that an intermediary experience of non-identity (Turner 1977), necessary for the passage from one social identity to another, will not threaten social reproduction. Through the mediation of purification rites or guardian gods, societies supervise spaces of transition, because those spaces symbolically mark the possibility of deviation or transgression.

Liminality, this experience of temporarily occupying an in-between territory as well as an in between non-identity, can provide us with an alternative image for a spatiality of emancipation. Creating in-between spaces might mean creating spaces of encounter between identities

instead of creating spaces corresponding to specific identities. When Simmel was elaborating on the character of door and bridge as characteristic human artifacts, he was pointing out that "the human being is the connecting creature who must always separate and cannot connect without separating" (Simmel 1997:69).

This act of recognizing a division only to overcome it without however aiming to eliminate it, might become emblematic of an attitude that gives to differing identities the ground to negotiate and realize their interdependence. Emancipation may thus be conceived not as the establishing of a new collective identity but rather as the establishing of the means to negotiate freely between emergent identities ("freely" only means without corroborating pre-existing asymmetries). Difference thus is not connected to privilege but to potentiality.

In-between spaces are spaces to be crossed. Their existence is depended upon their being crossed, actually or virtually. It is not however crossings, as guarded passages to well-defined areas, that may be taken to represent an alternative spatiality of emancipation. It is more about crossroads, thresholds connecting separated potential destinations. The spatiality of threshold represents a spatiotemporal experience that can be constitutive of the spaces urban conflicts, as the Athens December uprising, secrete.

A "city of thresholds" might be the term to describe a spatial network that provides opportunities of encounter, exchange and mutual recognition (Stavrides 2002). Those spaces of encounter are the alternative to a culture of barriers, a culture that defines the city as an agglomeration of identifying enclaves (Marcuse and Van Kempen 2002). Thresholds, by replacing check points that control access through interdictions or everyday discriminating practices, provide the ground for a possible solidarity between different people allowed to regain control over their lives.

We can therefore understand the spatiality of threshold as a possible characteristic of transformed urban space. Urban conflicts that create this kind of performed urban spaces, actually transform the city, no matter how temporary this transformation might be. Urban conflicts can, in this way, introduce to the existing city of secluded enclaves and regulated flows a new spatial quality that may threaten the imposed spatial order. This spatial quality can be conceptualized as an emergent urban porosity.

Urban porosity redefines the city as a network of thresholds to be crossed, thresholds that potentially mediate between differing urban cultures as mutually recognized. Urban porosity can thus be the spatio-temporal form that an emancipating urban culture may take (Stavrides 2007: 177-178).

Urban porosity can be approached both as a potential characteristic of spatial arrangements and as a corresponding characteristic of the spatial practices that constitute the inhabiting experience. W. Benjamin's seminal essay "Naples", catches this inherent relation between the form of a city and the culture of its inhabitants as performed daily: "As porous as this stone is the architecture. Building and action interpenetrate in the courtyards, arcades, and stairways" (Benjamin, 1985:169). For Benjamin, porosity essentially refers to a continuous exchange (spatial as well as temporal) between the so called public and private realms and actions. We can extend this porosity effect to today's metropolitan spatial and temporal divisions, if we intend to discover practices and spatial forms that perforate barriers and create osmotic spatial relations.

Urban porosity, then, may become a prerequisite of a "relational politics of place" as proposed by Doreen Massey (Massey, 2005:181). Explicitly departing from the image of space as container, we may understand space and action as mutually constitutive and therefore focus on porosity as a process rather than as a physical characteristic of specific places. Urban porosity can thus result from urban struggles and can motivate those struggles through memories of collective past experiences or collective dreams. Urban porosity can become a form of experience that activates relationality rather than separation, considered in terms of space as well as in terms of

time. In urban porosity different spaces as well as different times become related and thus compared.

Urban porosity can describe a possible alternative to the dilemma present in various urban struggles. This dilemma can be formulated thus: are we to defend a right that establishes redistribution demands of space-bound goods and services (f.e. transport, health facilities, job opportunities etc.), or are we to defend the right to hold to or develop situated collective identities? It can be shown that "distributional issues colour the politics within explicitly identity based movements" (Ballard et.al.: 2006:409) as for example proves the case of the identity based gay movement of South Africa that cannot but deal with "the distributional questions raised by the poverty of significant proportion of their members" (op.cit.411). Urban porosity can extend or enhance access rights, developing possibilities of urban-spatial justice or "regional democracy", to use one of Edward W. Soja's terms (Soja 2000). Urban "pores", in principle connect, establish chances of exchange and communication, eliminating therefore space-bound privileges. At the same time, urban porosity can provide the means of acquiring relational identity awareness.

Not choosing to defend strongholds but rather attempting to create spaces of encounter, spaces of collective protest and inventive alternative critique, the December rebellious youth has transcended the limits of a specific struggle in the name of a specific group. Exarchia has ceased to be a fantasized liberated enclave. Demonstrations and occupied sites were scattered all over Athens, all over Greece. Solidarity acts appeared in as many as 150 different places all over the world.

In all its differentiated modes of collective expression, the December youth has tried many forms of collective action, has experienced many forms of solidarity. That is why young immigrants found ways to connect with the struggle and participate in their own manner in the conflict. That is why young and older precarious workers recognized in this conflict stakes that mean a lot to them.

It is not by chance that a few hundreds of Roma people, those second class citizens who often have a taste of injustice and police brutality, attacked a police station in one of their areas: the December uprising gave them the opportunity to express their own anger and to reclaim their own space (rather, their own distinctive spatiality: their own way of creating, understanding and inhabiting space).

During the December uprising, osmotic relations between spaces of collective action were expressing and producing at the same time osmotic relations between identities. Students were not simply students, workers not simply workers, immigrants not simply immigrants. People participating in different collective actions were finding ways to meet and communicate without simply expressing their imposed social identities, without necessarily adhering to closed political, ideological or cultural identities. In open assemblies organized in all occupied places, people tended to describe proposals for action, to describe dreams and values rather than passively describe disempowering situations or criticize others just for being others.

For Manuel Castells, social movements, in a "network society" are characterized by "a networking, decentered form of organization and intervention" and "their impact on society rarely stems from a concerted strategy, masterminded by a center" (Castells 2004: 427). However, his diagnosis that "people resisting economic, cultural and political disfranchisement tend to be attracted to communal identity" (ibid. 421) appears to be denied by the experience of December uprising. Movements were indeed decentered and networked, however, their constitutive element was not the defense of an identity-enclave but rather a common symbolic target. Thus, ad hoc symbolic attacks against situated emblems expressed a common contempt for recognizable symbols of social injustice (banks, expensive cars, police forces, expressive

chain stores etc.) It is in this way that those struggles and symbolic acts can be considered as producing and distributing new cultural codes (ibid. 427).

Reclaiming public space after December

The December ephemeral city of thresholds left its mark in various urban struggles that followed the riot days. One of them, the most characteristic, is the struggle to transform a large parking lot in Exarchia to an ad hoc urban park. People from the neighborhood as well as activists and environment sensitive people from other neighborhoods (not all of them directly or indirectly involved in the December uprising but deeply influenced by it), have decided to reclaim this urban site. And they managed to create a truly alternative public space, open to all. Everybody can participate in the open meetings where the layout of the park is being formed, where the rules of the park's use are decided, where the problems are discussed and different views find ways to negotiate with each other.

This collective initiative is still flourishing while managing to keep the essentially threshold character of the place. As no one or no group is expected to be the owner or the sole user of the area, the rules of coexistence and mutual respect have to be collectively invented. And these rules are put to test every day. Identities thus have to be negotiated too. What does it mean to be a user of the park? Who's needs defined by whom and in which process should be satisfied? Who's rights, prevail? Who becomes a subject of urban rights, especially in the case of a collectively self-governed outdoor public space? How can these alternative rights be expressed? Isn't this, after all, an experiment concerning the right to the city?

Many people wonder about the December legacy. And many become disappointed observing how the months which followed look like "a return to normal" to remember a famous May '68 poster (depicting a flock of sheep and the phrase "*retour a la normale*" – created after the ending of the demonstrations). The December spirit was not however only present in the spectacle of the violent clashes with the police. People, and especially young people, have somehow realized those days that they have the power to mobilize, the power to self-organize and create without the need of any enlightened political leadership.

The December spirit was a force of resistance inspiring people to see and act beyond the closed horizons of the mainstream politics, transcending sometimes even the certainties of existing anti-capitalist movements.

The created Exarchia park was only one among many analogous initiatives which have actively proven that people can demand and create new public spaces. People in Zografou area (relatively near the center of Athens but separate as a municipality), for example, have successfully obstructed the local mayor's decision to construct multistory parking buildings in five of the neighborhood's squares. Although municipal authorities have described them as "minority vandals", young people have managed to destroy this stigmatizing identity perimeter and inspire many of the Zografou inhabitants to join this struggle.

Others have occupied an abandoned botanical garden in Petroupoli reclaiming it as a public space or have successfully defended various areas of public use targeted by gentrification and development mechanisms.

The December uprising seems to have triggered urban struggles characterized by stakes closely connected to a collective reclaim of public spaces. The cry for justice, during the December days, was heard in public spaces transformed or even invented by collective actions. A demand for urban justice is just one form this cry has taken during the after-December era. This probably happens because in struggles for the defense and corroboration of public space, people can grasp what it means to take their life in their hands. Participation in such struggles is not a matter of expressing an opinion or aligning with others who share similar political projects. It is

a matter of helping to produce both the spaces for public use and a new culture of public use that goes beyond the logic of consumption and the priorities of urban "development".

December's legacy also includes forms of struggle that directly translate political aims to practices of public space transformation. During and after the December uprising another figure was to emblematize the struggles of a multifarious emergent movement. Konstantina Kuneva, an immigrant office-cleaner and secretary of the Cleaners Syndicate (PEKOP) was violently attacked, probably by hired assassins. Kuneva soon became a symbol as she epitomizes all those categories of people being attacked by neo-liberalism: a woman, an immigrant, an independent activist, a precarious worker, a person of unbelievable courage. Supporting her right to live, work and be a full citizen in Greece, along with a demand for punishing all those who profit from the exploitation of precarious cleaners' work, many initiatives had the mark of the December spirit.

Characteristically, in four different metro stations, groups of people have blocked for hours the ticket machines by their presence, explaining to metro users that the metro corporation actually uses underpaid cleaners overexploited by ruthless contractors. Isn't this a form of temporarily imposing a threshold character to the privatized and controlled public space of everyday transportation?

Solidarity with the immigrants was and still is high in the agenda of the Greek left and anarchist movement. What the December days have added is the active presence of people in some cases where the right of immigrants to shelter and to public space use was severely threatened. In the Athenian neighborhood of Ag. Panteleimon, antiracist activists had to fight against fascist groups and aggressive xenophobic residents who wanted to expel "non Greeks" from the neighborhood, public space included. A big mobilization was also able to protect a large immigrant squat in central Athens, which was being attacked by the same fascist groups with the not-so-well-hidden support of the police.

In both cases, a political struggle was from the beginning an urban struggle too, as the stake was explicitly urban. Supporting the immigrants' rights is directly connected with the effort to support their "right to the city", as the right which epitomizes all other rights. And these struggles actively attempt to convert the city to an inclusive, multiform environment, a city of thresholds.

December's legacy will possibly influence forms of social action which attempt to confront the current economic and political crisis in Greece. It is probably too early to observe and describe the characteristics of those actions, although the unprecedented mass demonstrations have already shown a generalized rage which once more expresses, as in December days, a deeply sensed in-justice. New forms of collective re-appropriation of public space can be traced in dispersed initiatives focused on collective everyday defense actions against the austerity measures: in some building squats (as in the occupied municipal market building in Kypseli neighborhood) or in open space gatherings, common meals are prepared, either in support of immigrants (as happened in the case of such a meal prepared by illegally fired Bangladesh cooks or in the case of Philippino community people preparing a meal to collect money for their community school threatened by closure) or as gestures of civil solidarity (explicitly expressed f.e. in the case of a public meal organized by a Peoples' Initiative in Kesariani, a neighborhood with a long history of political and urban struggles). The spirit of such gestures can be expressed by these words contained in the call for the Kesariani meal:

"We will cook our meal using the tasty salt of solidarity and the sweet flavor of togetherness".

Contesting the prevailing mythologies of terror and security may eventually mean contesting the partitioned city as the image and the locus of a globalized new order. In the process of opposing barricaded public space, new spatial experiences may emerge. A "city of thresholds" can be a city where public space functions as a network of intermediary spaces, of metropolitan

thresholds, where different and interdependent collective identities can be performed in mutual awareness. Actions of civil, or should we say metropolitan, disobedience may realize temporarily those urban thresholds as places of otherness, as places of new emergent spatialities of encounter. What the December uprising has shown is, perhaps, that a collective demand for justice can create new forms of active urban justice. Is the prospect of the city of thresholds an adequate description of this potentially emancipating quest? It is really too early to know. After all, a writing on an Exarchia wall justly says: "December was not an answer. December was a question".

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