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Chapter 9

Representations of space and representations of emancipation

Creating images of freedom and emancipation has always been a crucial way in which people shaped their common hopes and aspirations for a better future. Exploited and disempowered people have used these images at least to escape temporarily from their everyday miseries. And critical writers and activists have used such images in attempts to inspire enslaved people to react to their oppression.

It is not the possible history of liberation-oriented images that this chapter will try to trace. What it will attempt to sketch, though, is a possible rethinking of the politics implicitly or explicitly connected to the creation of such images. Are the representations of a liberated future we construct indicative of the values and the promises we project to this future? And are there hidden in the shape and qualities of the imagined spaces of liberation the very limits and potentialities of a different future? Do these imagined spaces, furthermore, permit people to transcend dominant mythologies that capture and enclose individual and collectively expressed imagination in this effort to grasp a 'beyond'? And do imagined spaces of liberation necessarily or possibly coincide with attempts to prefigure common spaces as spaces distinct from public as well as private spaces?

Perhaps one of the dominant modern images of emancipated communities presents them as barricaded in a liberated

stronghold, always ready to defend themselves. This image, embedded in the collective imaginary of the oppressed, tends to survey the geography of emancipation through a map clearly depicting free areas 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 definable and traceable. Utopias described through extensive plans of ideal cities are only the most consistent versions of such an imaginary geography of emancipation. There is, however, nothing inherently emancipating in a well-defined area declared as free.

Modern utopias, starting from those of the so-called utopian socialists, were conceived as harmonious communities inhabiting well-ordered cities with regulated mechanisms of production and distribution of goods. Fourier's *phalanstères* were utopian cities conceived as extended massive building complexes meant to house strictly specified (in terms of social characteristics and levels of income) ideal communities. It is not by chance that Fourier's images of these buildings have a striking similarity to the Versailles palace complex. In a city-building complex of monumental proportions a clear and recognizable geometry would characterize the overall layout, putting each and everyone in his and her place. A complex and self-sustainable world would include people from different classes but in numbers explicitly defined in order to guarantee and sustain a sought-for social harmony. This community, depicted in and through space, would then become the prototype of a liberated, harmonious and peaceful society.

Fourier's ideas were not only expressed through a manifesto for a future society (Beecher 1986). They took shape in explicit images through which this society was exhibited in its details.

The most important characteristic of these images, however, is that the future communities were meant to be identified with the specific imagined utopian city which would not expand or be developed through its history but would be built and maintained in its ideal dimensions as a city outside history.

It is not by chance that one of Fourier's followers, Victor Considerant, developed this idea of a city beyond history as well as beyond the specificities of any existing urban or geographical context by suggesting that it can be identified with a large steamship in the middle of the ocean (Frampton 1981: 22) – a free-floating community liberated from the restrictions of space and time.

'There is an entire series of utopias or projects for governing territory that developed on the premise that the state is like a large city' (Foucault 2001: 351). This idea is implicit in the reasoning of the so-called utopian socialists. They don't want simply to describe possible ideal communities but they try to solve the problem of governing them by recognizing the power that spatial arrangements have to regulate people's lives and social relations. Those social reform visionaries, then, depicted a future ideal society through images of a future ideal city. Although, however, they appeared to think about such future societies by developing these images, they were not able to control the semantic potential of the images employed. The Versailles-like building images of Fourier were already contaminated with connotations identifying them with a hierarchical spatial arrangement suitable for a hierarchical 'community', the palace. Outside this community was a completely different world. No matter how egalitarian or, at least, harmonious the relations we could suppose might be organized in and through Phalanstère, its outside would be absolutely defined as outside.

Godin's *Familistère* was a similar model city which was supposed to house a self-contained harmonious community. An enthusiastic American follower of Godin praised this social experiment as 'a social system based upon liberty and sympathetic human love' (Hayden 1982: 97). Considering Godin's *Familistère*, Foucault remarks that there is no architecture of freedom, as there are no liberating machines (Foucault 2001: 356). A *familistère* could become a well-intended, however terrifyingly effective, panopticon. Conceiving emancipation as being contained in specific spaces and attempting to imagine emancipating mechanisms through spatially embedded regulations eventually reduces emancipation to a localizable essence. True, emancipation has to do with a radical transformation of the existing social worlds. To locate it, however, in the image of a totally absent site (absent spatially as well as temporally) means to accept a kind of spatializing ethics: what is outside the evil existent is by definition unpolluted, purely 'other'.

Projecting the problem of the organization of an ideal society onto the problem of efficiently arranging different spaces in an ideal city implicitly presupposes that a city or a settlement may reflect the society which inhabits it. If an ideal city, then, is envisaged as a planned, unalterable urban territory with clear boundaries and specified areas for urban 'functions', then the society for which this city is to be built will equally be envisaged as 'eternal', clearly separated from its outside and functioning as a machine that never falters. To think of such a liberated, harmonious, emancipated, autonomous, et cetera society as a self-sufficient and self-perpetuating whole directly affects any struggle for emancipation that uses (or is inspired from) such ideal city images. Exactly as commoning is bound to be transformed to practices

of enclosure if it is limited by the strict boundaries of a closed society, emancipation can be transformed to its opposite when it is forced to (or chooses to) be enclosed within the boundaries of any symbolically or literally barricaded enclave.

Nineteenth-century 'socialist' utopias were envisaging new kinds of rationally planned and controlled community spaces. Spaces for common use were explicitly identified with the community of the inhabitants. In Godin's Familistère ('social palace') in Guise, floor galleries and a huge inner court with a glass roof created for the building's inhabitants bounded spaces which could be defined as enclosed common spaces. In the self-contained utopian cities of utopian socialists, common space was the means of expressing a community's closed identity rather than a shared place to be shaped through practices of commoning.

Utopian attempts to describe and depict the future society as accurately as possible were based on the belief that the maladies of exploitation and lack of freedom will be eliminated by an efficient, centralized and rational form of organization of both society and the space it inhabits. To this vision implicitly pertains a view about state (or equivalent) authorities as producers and guarantors of what all people need to use and enjoy. By not opening the possibility for future imagined communities to devise their own ways of defining, producing, using and symbolizing the spaces (as well as the goods) to be enjoyed by all, utopian thinkers were limited to a reformulation of the problem of the public realm and failed to open roads towards a reinvention of the realm of the common.

The imaginary representation of human emancipation and freedom in the form of an ideal city owes a lot to the criticism launched against the existing industrial cities. Romantic

criticism deplored these cities for their anti-human qualities and the alienating effects that machine rationality had imposed on urban life (Löwy and Sayre 2001, Larmore 1996). Modernists, on the other hand, as we have seen, criticized urban chaos and asked for rational planning of cities divided into functional zones. Both criticisms, although seemingly quite different (or even conflicting), converged in certain utopian models for a future urban society, as the 'garden city' movement (Howard 1902, Giedion 1982: 782–5) indicates.

A different kind of representation of freedom and emancipation, which was less critical of the vices of the industrial city and more enthusiastic about some of its manifestations, emerged mostly in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries. This kind of representation identifies freedom with unobstructed mobility and sees the modern city as the locus of unprecedented and ever-expanding movement flows. Nineteenth-century boulevards, considered as spatial arrangements which cracked opened the labyrinthine city neighbourhoods and 'freed' vehicle and pedestrian movement, offered the emblematic images of this new mobility culture. Twentieth-century highways added a new dimension to this representation of freedom: cars would become both the means and the symbols of mobility-as-freedom. According to Urry, 'a civil society of automobility, or the right to roam where and when one wants, involves the transformation of public space into public roads' (Urry 2000: 193; 2004 and 2007).

Images which eulogize continuous and unobstructed movement as freedom and emancipation tend to focus on individuality rather than on collective or shared experiences and practices. The imaginary representation of an enclave of freedom in the form of an ideal city presupposes an ideal community as a

possibility. Culminating in the imagery of the free car-rider (not easily distinguished from the motorbike 'easy rider' hero in this perspective), representations of freedom-as-mobility focus on individual trajectories and 'adventures'.

In a possible genealogy of contemporary mobility myths, the Romantic praise for walking has a prominent role. 'The peripatetic poetry of Wordsworth and Coleridge' has indeed 'turned walking into an experience of virtue' (Cresswell 2011: 166). The lone walker, discovering nature in long walks outside the alienating metropolis, was the predecessor of the heroic *flâneur* who plunged himself into the metropolitan crowd 'as into a reservoir of electric energy' (Benjamin 1983: 132) to discover the city as an exciting world. Both types of walkers had the aura of brave individuals who dared to go against the current and free themselves from the constraints of everyday urban routines. Both were lonely observers of life (the life of nature or humans) who emphatically expressed a detached form of individuality: public space was for them a place for discoveries and adventure but not a space for collaboration or collective appropriation. Romantic strollers avoided the crowd and modern *flâneurs* were fascinated to observe it and even mix with it only, however, to corroborate their unique individuality as aesthetes. For both walkers the practice of purposely wandering randomly was an expression of the freedom to discover, the freedom to create oneself the freedom to imagine beyond mundane life and beyond the metropolitan crowd's habits.

It is highly questionable if Benjamin wanted to present *flânerie* as a potentially collective practice in the way Situationists attempted to do many years after in the practices of *derivé* and psychogeography. Benjamin, however, did not simply admire the

flâneur's power to redeem the liberating promises of the modern city through his hypersensitive sight. *Flânerie* was for Benjamin a paradigmatic reflexive practice which sought to make chance and contingency the tools for an illuminating archaeology of urban modernity. We might say, then, that this idiosyncratic thinker was trying to construct through a self-conscious programmatic *flânerie* a knowledge to be used collectively in the reclaiming of modernity's emancipating potential.

Bauman explores a more recent culture of mobility connected to the important changes developed in modern societies. What he terms 'liquid modernity' is a period during which 'it is the most elusive, those free to move without notice, who rule' (Bauman 2000: 120). In this view an interesting distinction that divides the field of representations of freedom-as-mobility becomes important. According to Bauman, two figures dominate the images of continuous movement: the 'tourist' and the 'vagabond' (1998). The tourist is the true imagined hero of liquid modernity because he travels when he chooses to; travelling is the tourist's freedom. The vagabond is the one who is forced by circumstances to be always on the move. His freedom is more like a nightmare, although movement offers him at least the possibility of escaping specific burdens. Vagabonds may be considered to be those refugees who are forced to flee from an area of disaster or war, immigrants in pursuit of a more decent life and all the precarious workers who are always in search of work in different cities or countries.

May images connected to those two contrasting figures be used to convey potential prefigurations of common spaces? We know very well that mass tourism is a predominant model of contemporary travel. Only very few may or even want to travel

alone (either as idiosyncratic aesthetes or as jet-flying managers and academics). Mass tourism usually crafts recognizable and familiar contexts of consumption in which individual consumers will be encouraged to buy individual experience trophies. 'Consumers are first and foremost gatherers of *sensations*; they are collectors of *things* only in a secondary and derivative sense' (Bauman 1998: 83).

Programmed participation in pseudo-events, which allegedly happen spontaneously in the visited places, develops a sought-for atmosphere of communion in tourist groups. Obviously one would not talk of common spaces in this case but perhaps of spaces staged as common or even of spaces deliberately presented as nostalgic substitutes for a lost community feeling. Organized mass tourism sometimes creates temporary quasi-utopias of commoning: boat cruises, for example, are often organized in this spirit by temporarily converting the boat into a floating ideal city of social harmony.

Vagabonds are individuals looking for hope and some kind of security. Immigrants and refugees more often than not seek forms of collaboration and mutual help in their journeys to potential freedom, potential well-being or, at least, survival. Images of these dark and inverse figures of tourists often present them as homeless, not belonging to a society ('*sans papier*') and victims of a fate that they were forced to share. Any kind of collective action on their part is thus either interpreted as the pure result of helplessness and common essential needs or (in racist xenophobic imageries) as a form of mafia-like mutual support. However, Bauman's vagabonds, who always constitute a destabilizing threat to the 'utopia of the society of tourists' (Bauman 1998: 97), create their own networks of commoning and their

own communities even during the time when they travel and lack any permanent shelter.

Although often secluded in their metropolitan enclaves, they largely contribute to a reinvention of the common space because official public space either is not secure for them or explicitly excludes them. Self-enclosed community spaces can indeed be corrupted common spaces created out of fear or solidarity inside ethnically defined groups of metropolitan pariahs. But they can become nodes in an underground network of collectively used spaces that tacitly reinvents or reactivates public space. A barbecue organized by Philippino families in a small park on Sunday, a group of card or domino players from Russia that brings new life to a small neighbourhood square, Albanian mothers collectively watching their children playing in an almost abandoned public playground and an informal market of Nigerians in front of an underground station: these images of Bauman's vagabonds in today's Athens prove that common space can be created in and through official public space even by people on the move, even by uprooted or chased people and even by people who desperately look for a place to create a life no matter how 'often the site ... is pulled from under their feet' (Bauman 1998: 87).

Drawing images from contemporary city life, a different representation of space focuses on multiplicity and diversity as means to describe a spatiality of emancipation. Strong roots support this view. 'Critiques of everyday life' (Gardiner 2000) and everydayness, already put forward during the 1960s, have 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). Spaces of otherness proliferate in the city because of diversifying or deviating practices. Spatialities of otherness thus become inherently time-bound. According to this view, space is reduced neither 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. Discontinuous and inherently differentiated space gives ground to differing social identities allowed thus to perform and express themselves.

In De Certeau's understanding of this proliferation of differences and 'delinquencies' departing from the social order (ibid.: 130), 'space occurs as the effect produced by the operations that orient it, situate it, temporalize it, and make it function in a polyvalent unity of conflictual programs or contractual proximities' (ibid.: 117). Contrary to space, place represents order: spatial and social order alike. Place is the learned language that a society's members use in the different contexts of their interaction: space is a spoken or 'practiced place' (ibid.). It is in and through space that people develop their differentiated trajectories. Exactly as the spoken word may depart from the canonical meaning of dictionaries, so space may become a reinvented place, a reappropriated place. Unfortunately, there is no place for common space in such representations of emancipation. An emphasis on molecular everyday differentiation, which is depicted as hidden behind a prevailing homogeneity and anonymity, tends to search for liberation in the latent trajectories of individuals.

Molecular differentiation and dispersed particularity do not seem, however, to escape the traps of normalizing identification. The social inculcation of diverse and finely nuanced human interaction patterns is a very important part 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 seems to have resumed this role in post-industrial societies too, 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 embodied reactions are learned through using metropolitan space. Identifying oneself means being 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.

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 (identity, that is, which is multifarious and open) has to be, on the contrary, a loosely determined space, a space of transition.

We know from social anthropology that many societies are well aware of the ambiguous potentialities of these 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. Ritual acts aim, above all, to ensure that an intermediary experience of non-identity (Turner 1977: 103, 169), 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.

However, liminality, this experience of temporarily occupying an in-between territory as well as an in-between non-identity, can provide us with a glimpse of a spatiality of emancipation. Creating in-between spaces might mean creating spaces of encounter between identities instead of spaces characteristic of specific identities. When Simmel was elaborating on the character of door and bridge as characteristic human artefacts, 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 between emergent identities. Difference thus is not connected to privilege but to potentiality.

In-between spaces are spaces to be crossed. Their existence is dependent upon their being crossed, actually or virtually. It is not, however, crossings as guarded passages to well-defined areas that should interest us. It is more about crossroads, thresholds connecting separated potential destinations. The spatiality

of the threshold can represent the limit of a spatiotemporal experience that becomes the operating principle of a network of places. Thresholds, by replacing checkpoints that control access through interdictions or everyday 'rites of passage', provide the ground for a possible solidarity between different people allowed to regain control over their lives.

Those spaces essentially differ from the non-places Augé describes (Augé 1995). No matter how temporary or general, the identities imposed in non-places are effective in reducing human life to the rules of contemporary society. 'Transit identities' are nonetheless identities. Intermediary spaces can be the locus of an emancipating culture only when people assume the risk of accepting otherness as a formative element of their identities. Shared worlds and common spaces are thus envisaged and performed as meeting grounds rather than as identifying areas of belonging.

Social experiences of this kind have been actualized in various social and historical settings. Carnavalesque transgressions flooding the streets of a city have sometimes resulted in carnival riots: social acts of appropriating the city as a network of passages belonging to nobody and everybody. During the short-lived Paris Commune or the days of Chile's Unidad Popular we had acts of establishing public space as a space of encounters between emancipated otherness. Communards or Chilean *pobladores*, like Argentinian *piqueteros* or anti-globalization demonstrators, actually produced threshold spaces and not only strongholds to be defended. Zapatistas, in their long march for dignity, were also creating intermediary spaces of liberation, spaces temporally inhabited by those invisible and suppressed others.

As we have seen so far in this book, threshold spatiality can shape common spaces so long as those spaces participate in

networks of expanding commoning. Imagined spaces of liberation or emancipation are not necessarily linked, as this chapter attempts to demonstrate, with the prospect of space-commoning. Liberation can even be trapped in representations that either enclose in advance a future society of commoners or focus on individuality or identity and thus depart from the prospect of commoning. Imagining spaces of transition, spaces-as-thresholds, may, conversely, contribute to the prefiguring of possible practices of space-commoning. It seems that common space may be captured in representations of a society beyond capitalism and domination that stem from a threshold-like imagination. In between the present and the future, in between absolute outside and a recognizable inside, representations of common space are representations of liminal experiences and liminal practices. Common space is liminal, and the representations that attempt to prefigure it are bound to be equally liminal.

Prefigurative politics is a form of understanding political action that highlights a consistency between means and ends. The future society and corresponding values should be reflected in the practices and ethics of the movements that fight for such a society, according to this view, which acquired an important momentum during the sixties (Breines 1989) as well as recently in discussions about the Occupy movements (Smucker 2014). In Boggs's classic definition, prefigurative means 'the embodiment, within the ongoing political practice of a movement, of those forms of social relations, decision making, culture, and human experience that are the ultimate goal' (Boggs 1977).

Do the self-organized settlements of Latin American homeless movements prefigure a different kind of communal bond or do they actualize it? Does not the parallel existence of

antagonistic community models – hegemonic and counter-hegemonic – make some less real or less functioning than the others? Is the production of common spaces part of prefigurative politics or the actualization of new relations in space and through space? Probably the answer is both: even if collective actions have prefigurative aims and aspirations they sometimes contribute actively to real changes in the life of those involved and even provoke changes in the society itself. One should not forget that a network of self-managed homeless settlements or of occupied factories already creates, actualizes, a parallel network of social and economic relations. Common space may thus be both an example that shows the potentialities of commoning and a concretization of those potentialities in a specific time and place. As we will see in the extensive discussion of the occupied Navarinou Park case that follows, prefiguration and actualization of the liberating potentialities of space-commoning emerge in different ways depending on the representations shared between those who use and mould the park as a common space.

An occupied threshold common space

Let us try, then, to explore the way representations of common space may interact with practices of space-commoning by examining a concrete example. In the case of the occupied Navarinou Park in Athens, which has already been briefly mentioned, close observation of the acts and shared representations of those who have created it may possibly show that the idea and the experience of threshold crossing correspond to the project of expanding commoning. Navarinou Park may thus become an example of liminal space performed and represented as liminal, in search of space-commoning forms that gesture towards an emancipated society.

Perhaps the most important manifestation of the enduring power of the spirit of the December 2008 youth uprising in Athens was the creation of the occupied Navarinou Park. It was a case of collective action that was characterized by both a decisive distantiation from state-supported policies (and relevant demands asking for the state's intervention) and a genuinely creative spirit. Those two important characteristics, as we will see, make the Navarinou Park initiative an important experiment in collective autonomy. It was early in March 2009 that a handful of activists issued an open invitation to people to squat a car park in the Exarchia neighbourhood of Athens. The idea was to transform this outdoor space into a small park open to all. The plot belongs to the Technical Chamber of Greece (TEE) which bought it in 1972.

In 1990, the TEE offered the land to the Athens Council in order to turn it into a square and provided it would be reimbursed by increasing its building coefficient allowance in one of its other properties in Maroussi. Due to several delays and changes in urban development law, this exchange never took place and this piece of land remained for years leased as an open-air parking space. Once the leasehold for the parking expired in 2008, the TEE brought up again the issue of re-developing the land, and this attracted the interest of Exarcheia residents. The Exarcheia Residents' Initiative, which had already been working on the matter for a year and a half, informed the neighbourhood, took action and requested the immediate conversion into an area of high vegetation. On the 7th March 2009, along with the collective 'Us, Here and Now and for All of Us', it organized an event where all residents and enthusiastic supporters united to squat on the space and demand the obvious, that the parking turns

into a park! They broke the asphalt with drills and cutters, they brought trucks carrying soil, planted flowers and trees and in the end they celebrated it.¹⁴

If commoning is a set of relations and practices which not only produces goods to be shared under certain conditions but also a common world which contains shared values, habits and opinions, then commoning emerged in Navarinou Park as a multi-levelled and sometimes contradictory process of decisions, acts and initiatives. A common world open to newcomers is a world that is constantly reshaped by those who create it and at the same time a world that reshapes them.

Were there no limits to this openness? Obviously this initiative excluded or, rather, wanted to exclude practices of racism, profit making and collaboration with the state. Of course, equality and solidarity were declared to be non-negotiable shared values. But when it comes to specific problems connected to a predominantly hostile context of capitalist relations, then declared values do not suffice. To give an example: how does the Navarinou Park assembly treat or want to treat those who are victims of capitalism's specific horrors, as, for example, are the drug addicts? We are all crippled, torn apart by the contradictions and antagonisms that pervade us as individuals (Holloway 2002: 144–5). How can we collectively deal with this? Can drug addicts be 'convinced' to 'respect' the rules of common use of the occupied park? Are they to be thrown out (and how? by whom?) because with them come the micro-dealers (or they themselves act as micro-dealers) and then unfolds the obscure network of relations with the police? Or, in a seemingly simpler case: who is going to convince those who fantasize an area of freedom as a place in which they can

do what they want in spite of the needs of others that they must clean the place they use at night and not destroy the collectively created gardens and benches or be noisy at the times of day when the neighbourhood people are trying to rest, et cetera?

When equality becomes a stake to be negotiated between those who create and use the park, then equality becomes a principle that needs to take distinct forms in the context of concrete or potential human relations. People involved in the Navarinou Park experience soon discovered that they had constantly to invent forms of mutual awareness and mutual recognition. Commoning pushed everybody to reinvent himself or herself as well as new relationships with the 'others'.

For some, the project of liberation or emancipation may be described as a process that creates completely independent sociospatial entities which become capable of reproducing themselves with no recourse to their hostile social and political surroundings. 'Autonomous areas', thus, are meant to create their own rules of self-regulation and people inhabit them by following those rules. For some of the creators and users of Navarinou Park, this kind of autonomous status was and is imagined to be the venture's defining target. For them, this space epitomizes the very exceptional character of the Exarchia neighbourhood in which Navarinou Park is located, which is an area fantasized as a free alternative stronghold by lots of anarchist militants. The state itself along with the dominant media often project views and images which negatively reaffirm this myth by presenting Exarchia as an anomic place where clashes with the police and drug dealing prevail. It is not by chance, of course, that these views are projected especially in periods during which violent police raids are planned and executed. As if to strengthen this

myth of Exarchia's constant threat, police units in riot gear 'guard' the main entrances of an imaginary perimeter of the area.

This kind of imagined or demonized 'autonomy' was never really what characterized Exarchia. Although undoubtedly lots of events and initiatives of anti-system orientation have taken place in the area (the famous November 1973 anti-dictatorship occupation of the National Technical University of Athens buildings included), Exarchia is far from being a liberated enclave. An alternative youth culture prevails in the centre of the neighbourhood but it is heavily commodified. And certainly drug dealing is not an anti-system activity (and there is proof that the police selectively tolerate such activities, which undermines, this alternative or dissident culture).

It is perhaps possible that the state wanted and still wants to sustain this myth because it can intervene in the area when it chooses to crush paradigmatically and emblematically any dissident behaviour by giving, at the same time, the impression that these behaviours only exist in the Exarchia enclave. What the December youth uprising did was to shift the media and police focus from Exarchia to various other neighbourhoods, public buildings and public spaces in Athens and other major cities (Stavrides 2010a). The state could not present the December uprising as one more Exarchia-centred incident of 'rioting hooliganism'.

Navarinou Park was obviously not created at the edge of Exarchia by chance. As a member of the neighbourhood group remarked, '[T]he park might have also succeeded elsewhere but it probably would not have lasted anywhere else. Being in Exarchia assures the constant presence of people in the park, day and night, which in a way is its best protection' (An Architektur

2010: 3). However, the power of this collective initiative lies in its openness towards the rest of the city. From the very beginning, the established participative procedures (an assembly, working groups) had to deal with a dilemma that sometimes evolved into a fierce disagreement. Is the occupied park a place of the movement, part of the anti-capitalist movement's network of squatted places and open only to those who belong to the movement, or is the park an open common space that has to provide to different people the opportunity to enjoy and create what capitalist urbanism has deprived them of (green areas, urban gardening, free access to alternative events, open and imaginative playground areas, etc.)?

Especially during periods of direct confrontation with aggressive state policies and relevant police measures, the first view often took the form of an organized use of the park as a stronghold as well as a – mostly fantasized – 'base of operations' against the police squads stationed nearby. The second view attempted to broaden the horizon of the park's use and managed to convince lots of neighbours to consider the place as a green area for everyday use (often bringing along their children).

We could discern in the struggle between those two viewpoints, which still has its difficult moments, an implicit dispute about the meaning of autonomy and self-management. The first viewpoint understands autonomy as a form of separation that guarantees and ensures the consistency of the venture and its avant-garde role. According to this view the park is a liberated enclave or a 'free space', as some name it. The second viewpoint understands autonomy as a radical break with the state mechanisms, which, however, does not create barriers that separate 'enlightened activists' and 'exemplary acts' from the rest

of society. This view remained radical and inventive without losing contact with the neighbourhood. On the contrary, the first viewpoint made it at times extremely difficult for less engaged or everyday people to be in the park.

The park was from the start and because of the very material conditions of its production (with no actual dividing barriers one could possibly defend) an open space. It had an osmotic relation with its surroundings and passers-by could easily describe it as a public space. However, the park was and is something different: it is common space. It was the very people involved in the park's creation, life and maintenance who produced rules of 'good use' and organized practices of care and protection (of both the space and its users). It was those people who searched and still search for appropriate rules of expanding commoning.

In Navarinou Park, people could have created distinct working groups in which participation would be based on each one's knowledge and abilities. This, however, would latently reproduce a role taxonomy based on the 'innocent obviousness' of existing differences. What makes Navarinou Park an experiment in self-management and expanding commoning is that any form of work and cooperation is implicitly or explicitly an act of inclusive self-governance. Collecting the rubbish can become a test in such a context as can be a discussion in the park's assembly regarding direct democracy. In both cases, subjects of action and practices themselves become comparable and relevant: what is at stake is to invent forms of collaboration based not on homogenization but on multiplicity (Hardt and Negri 2005: 348–9). The rules established by the assembly formed institutions of expanding commoning as did the rules that established a rotation of duties (as, for example, in the collection of rubbish). Such institutions

try to be flexible because newcomers need to be included in them without being integrated into a pre-existing taxonomy of roles.

Navarinou Park's open assembly explicitly tried to establish equality in terms of decision making. Everyone had the right to participate. Furthermore, decision making was not based on voting but on consensus reached through extended and sometimes exhaustive debate. As happens in many similar cases, to establish equality of opinions is a difficult process. It depends on who is willing to participate, what is the stake of the decision, how decisions are linked to specific tasks, and who chooses to take the burden. And of course an important issue is how one forms one's opinion and what kind of access to knowledge, education, experience and bodily abilities one has. Frequently, advantages in all those fields latently legitimize certain opinions as superior to others. How does one treat, for example, the opinion of somebody who rarely participates in the everyday hard work of the park's maintenance? And do those who participate more frequently than others have the right to decide against the opinions of others?

The main argument of those who accept forms of concentration of power in groups or individuals involved in a movement's initiative is efficiency. Quick or coherent decisions, they say, need to be taken by representatives, who, of course, should be elected democratically. The park's experience has shown that an obstinate insistence on direct democracy can also create coherent decisions (decisions that do not change the targets or the framework all the time) and an efficient distribution of tasks collectively agreed upon.

Navarinou Park is not an island in the urban archipelago of Athens. It is not even an alternative island in a sea of urban

uniformity imposed by the dominant values and practices, as some militant activists tend to fantasize. Navarinou Park is a kind of *liminal* space which invites *liminal* practices by people who experience the creation of potentially *liminal* identities. No sanitary zone surrounds the park, although police raids and drug dealing sometimes threaten its threshold status. The park does not belong to a certain collectivity, community or authority but it is daily produced as an in-between space. It is a space in between surrounding public spaces, in between housing blocks, a space between a neighbourhood with a rich history of youth struggles and an adjacent upper-middle-class neighbourhood with expensive cafés (Kolonaki) and between university buildings and an extensive book and software market. The park is also a peculiar threshold between a dense urban fabric and a natural landscape. It belongs to a network of central streets (one of them with rather heavy traffic) but it also appears as an unexpected oasis with trees, bushes, vegetable gardens and flowers. This unexpected juxtaposition of urban and natural environment adds to the park's liminal status. Not entirely a secluded urban garden but not a city square either, the park is actually a park-square, an urbanized natural threshold. That is why it can contain so many different activities and why it can comprise so many different overlapping spaces. Even though each of the park's areas is defined by specific self-constructed urban furniture (benches, playground constructions, outdoor theatre seats, etc.), all of them blend into each other, as do their users. Different cultural or political events may often coexist with everyday uses (children play while a discussion takes place at the park's outdoor theatre, and so on).

Maybe the park experience urges us to abandon a view of common space that fantasizes uncontaminated enclaves of

emancipation (Stavrides 2009: 53; Negri 2009: 50). It seems that the dominant experiences of urban enclosures and the dominant imaginary of recognizable identity enclaves colonize the thought and action of those who attempt to go beyond capitalist hegemony. Threshold experience and threshold images offer a counterexample to the dominant enclave city. Rather than perpetuating an image of the capitalist city as an archipelago of enclave islands, we need to create spaces that inventively threaten urban order by upsetting dominant taxonomies of spaces and life types. Those spaces-as-thresholds acquire a dubious, precarious perhaps but also virus-like existence. Their power lies in their openness, in their ability to overspill their boundaries and in their gestures towards those who are not included yet.

Commoning the state?

Collectively recognized representations of a desired common future are shaped in and by specific cultural contexts. Imagined cities and heavenly utopias reflect shared cultural values and, even when they are used to challenge some of those values, they are created with culture-infused images. This is why perhaps the opening of the discussions and aspirations for commoning to non-Western views on community, society and 'common good' potentially creates new ways of problematizing the political meaning of practices, ideas and representations related to commons.

Referring to the experience of the 'Oaxaca commune', Esteva connects this collective reappropriation of the city to forms of understanding, representing and performing community which have deep roots in Mexican indigenous cultures. Using the notion of *communalidad*, 'coined by two indigenous intellectuals,'

Esteva shows that it describes more than a 'juxtaposition of commons and polity'. *Communalidad* is also 'a mental space, a horizon of intelligibility: how you see and experience the world as a We' (Esteva 2012:). This We permeates language, communal work, fiestas and the common symbolic ties to communal territory. In such a context then, the politics of taking back the city and taking back society are linked. *Communalidad* was alive in the experiment of self-governance that took place in Oaxaca during the days of the Oaxaca uprising. In a way, *communalidad*, as a horizon of shared intelligibility, shaped the political imaginary of those who participated. Common space did not simply 'happen' as the uprising unfolded, but also became a reinvented communal territory that actively shaped the uprising. What distinguishes Oaxaca's insurgent *communalidad* from traditional indigenous *communalidad*, however, is the fact that in the occupied city the 'we' was in-the-making. And, furthermore, this 'we' was threatening to overspill the boundaries of the city and send a message to the rest of the country that a different form of social organization is possible and effective in dealing with the small and big problems of living together. As an Oaxaca activist expressed it: 'we realized that we can do without them' (meaning the government and the institutions of the state and market).

Another important Latin American indigenous term that may be employed in ways that substantially differ from Western ideas of the common good is *buen vivir*. The term is often used to indicate a whole array of indigenous notions, as in the Aymara (Bolivia) *sumaq qamana*, the Quechua (Peru, Ecuador, Bolivia, Chile, Colombia and Argentina) *sumak kawsay*, the Peruvian Amazonian groups' *ametsa asaiki*, the Guaraní (Paraguay, Uruguay, Argentina, Brazil and Bolivia) *nandereko*, et cetera.

What all these terms share is the ‘idea that well-being is only possible within a community’ (Gudynas 2011: 441). ‘The concept does not split mankind from nature’ (Prada 2013: 145). Mother Earth is considered alive and sacred and any relationship with Nature, which is always ‘mediated by the community’ (ibid.), is based on respect and ‘a communion and dialogue’ (ibid.)

Buen vivir, then, understands the creation of community shared worlds as a process that is based on exchanges between people and nature which are not exploitative or aggressive but dialogic and expanding through dialogue. The fact that Nature may be considered as an alive interlocutor not only is important in the context of indigenous spiritual beliefs but also has direct results in the ways these people understand commons goods, ‘resources’ (a word already infused by a economocentric logic) and those practices that in a different vocabulary are called commoning.

By learning from nature’s diversity and respecting the wide range of differences between different people, indigenous *buen vivir* is both a plural idea and a world-view focused on plurality. An important principle of *buen vivir* is complementarity, ‘the underlying premise of the interdependence between different human beings’ (ibid. 146). Risking translations that possibly violate the inherent logic of the term, *buen vivir* is both an ethics of commoning and a set of community-based practices that aim at guaranteeing a certain form of collective well-being.

Buen vivir has been actively employed as a guiding principle of movement actions and aspirations in many countries in Latin America. Indigenous movements explicitly have mobilized representations and values connected to *buen vivir* in order to criticize existing colonial and capitalist relations. They have also

employed *buen vivir* mentality in the ways they shaped both their forms of organization as well as their methods of constructing social relations that go beyond dominant arrangements of power. Aymara political struggles in Bolivia and indigenous struggles in Ecuador as well as the Zapatista-inspired struggles in Mexico share critical reappropriations of *buen vivir* cosmopolitanism.

In all these cases, *buen vivir* has been a pluralistic and culture-specific way of understanding common good, a stake and a means to approach forms of social organization that attempt to go beyond Western imaginations of welfare and well-being. This has led to the recasting of future aspirations of progress, both the dominant and the counterhegemonic ones: instead of considering the future as the culmination of a process of continuous betterment, *buen vivir* urges for efforts to reinstall a lost equilibration. According to such an approach, capitalism has destroyed both the dialogic relation of community to nature and the communal bonds of complementarity. 'Development' is the sacred name given by the capitalist cult of progress to a set of practices that plunder both the earth and human energies supposedly in the process of ensuring a betterment of humankind's well-being. Opposed to such a view, which understands growth not as an organic metaphor but as a Faustian mobilization of even greater means to extract value from the exploitation of men and nature alike, is a view that reconsiders the horizon of the common: Capitalist appropriation of natural resources and human energies (affects, cognitive power and acquired skills included) is a set of violent acts of enclosing what should be shared, profiting from what potentially belongs to all and destroying whatever may become the means to achieve a different balance

between society and nature. A *Buen vivir* mentality explicitly challenges the development imaginary and puts into crisis ideas and values that have trapped the anti-capitalist imaginary by limiting it to aspirations which cannot go beyond the modernist obsession with eternal progress. It even challenges the idea of revolution as the event that will separate history to a 'before' and an 'after' completely different from each other, the idea of revolution as the quintessence of sudden genesis of the 'new'. Another indigenous term is more relevant here: *pachakutik* (Becker 2011), which 'is the beginning of a new/old cycle, the end of something and the beginning of something else, not like the tabula rasa but more akin to the restoration of What has been lost/forgotten' (Zibechi 2012: 184).

It is clear that in terms of the politics of commoning, *buen vivir*, *communalidad* and *pachakutik* introduce a view of the commons – of what is to be shared – that connects the definition of a shared world to values that challenge the capitalist logic (capitalist models of social organization included). What has been an interesting and debatable development in the political uses of these indigenous terms is their use in the new constitutions of two Latin American states, Ecuador (approved in 2008) and Bolivia (approved in 2009). Does this mark a shift in the political meaning of those forms in the context of reconceptualizing the 'common good' of a society and the practices of commoning connected to the definition and creation of common good?

Ecuador's constitution bears the marks of the anti-neoliberalism movements that overthrew the IMF's governments and changed the country's political and economic orientations. In this constitution, *buen vivir* 'is described as a set of rights, which include those referr[ing] to health, shelter, education,

food, environment and so on' (Gudynas 2011: 443). Interestingly, 'along with the "Rights of Buen Vivir" and under the same title, "Rights", is a chapter on "Rights of Nature"' (Systemic Alternatives 2011: 10). To interpret the *buen vivir* cosmovision as a set of rights to be protected and guaranteed by the state is already a way of limiting the term's power to redefine what is to be considered good for society and what is to be considered as common good and well-being.

The state is not challenged as a form of social organization and as an arrangement of power but is declared to become the most important promoter of a kind of redistributive 'development'. As the Buen Vivir National Plan for 2013–16 declares, *buen vivir* is not a new development paradigm. However, the plan explicitly focuses on economic growth by directing public investment to "sowing the oil" (reinvesting oil revenues) and harvesting a productive framework with which to build a "knowledge society" (ibid.: 12 and Ecuador, Republica de 2009).

Bolivia's constitution incorporates *buen vivir* logic mainly as a set of ethical principles that are guaranteed by the state. Those principles are connected to the construction of a 'plurinational state' that sustains and supports a plural society. According to Prada, 'this involves devolving the administration of local activities in accordance with local customs' (Prada 2013: 150). Whether this will lead to 'the deconstruction of colonial state structures and the incorporation and recognition of the community principles in state administration' (ibid.) remains to be seen. There is a common element, however, in the reconceptualization of common good and society's well-being in both constitutions. The state, no matter how much transformed, in order to be in the service of society has a leading role in social and economic

planning and a leading role in directing the change of the corresponding societies to non-capitalist or post-capitalist ones (Brand 2013, Prada 2013, Walsh 2010). The very logic of the state, which has historically shaped itself as a form of social organization in which asymmetries of power support technologies of governing and rulers are explicitly different (and separated) from those ruled, is not challenged.

Faced with this new imaginary of a benign interventionist state, which differs, of course, in certain important aspects from the established neoliberal state, movements inspired by commoning principles and forms of organization have to rethink and, perhaps, redirect their actions. Can *buen vivir*-related values and cosmovisions contribute to a rethinking of a future society beyond capitalism and domination? Could this be expressed in new state-like forms of social organization, or should we search for patterns of action and models of organization that go beyond the state as a social and political form?

Answers to these questions are actually being suggested and challenged by movements of our time. Directly connected to the very specific forms of social organization and cooperation that aspire to create open worlds of commoning, those answers shape and are being shaped by the politics of commoning expressed in movement practices and struggles. What has been considered as the historical opportunity for promoting alternative economic and social policies by the so-called left or progressive governments in Latin America (or, more recently, in Europe) may very well be a new arena for Ranciere's 'polemic over the common'. Will societies in movement produce and sustain areas of freedom that will create possibilities for the development of active, expanding networks of commoning? Will dispersed initiatives

and movement struggles take advantage of institutional opportunities created by state-directed reforms (reforms that may be influenced by *buen vivir*-like visions of the common or inspired by Western approaches to human emancipation)? History unfolds today in ways that challenge existing models of radical change. What seems to be more important, however, is that people in movement towards a post-capitalist future have to invent forms of organization and cooperation that match the very aims of their implicit or explicit mobilizations. The Zapatistas' Subcomandante Marcos once said that we need to fight capitalism in ways that don't look like capitalism. We need to go beyond capitalism through expanding networks of commoning, by employing and inventing liminal institutions of commoning and by accepting communities as plural and open worlds. We need to go beyond the historically specific form of social organization that we call the state, beyond the historically specific form of social reproduction that we call development and beyond the historically specific prioritization of the economy that has become necessary in and through capitalism's predominance. A world beyond capitalism is already being constructed, experienced and represented in the practices and networks of contemporary expanding commoning. And, if common space is not only an objective of commoning but also one of its most important shaping factors, let us carefully observe the emergence of common spaces in today's metropolises. In these spaces the seeds of a different future are being planted and taken care of.