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Introduction

The contemporary urbanized world is a world predominantly ruled by interests organized around the economic extraction of profit. Urban environments, contemporary cities and especially metropolises are important shaping factors of ruling organized interests, whether they take the form of banks, corporations, state enterprises, industry complexes or trading companies. At the same time, a diverse geometry of hierarchical relations between such organized interests casts its shadow on metropolitan everydayness, dominating the city's spatiotemporal transformations.

Is it that contemporary cities have become merely the channels and the tools of such a dominating arrangement of power relations that focuses on extracting profit from each and every activity that unfolds in urban worlds? Is it that predatory capitalism in its contemporary neoliberal or even post-neoliberal phase exploits the cities and that city life merely reflects the process?

An attempt will be made in this book to explore the emerging potentialities of resistance and creative alternatives beyond contemporary forms of domination in today's cities. Whether commoning, this relatively new term, has a role to play in such a prospect is something that has to be explored: do contemporary city-dwellers discover in and often against current forms of urban order opportunities to appropriate their own city, to

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create or even reinvent shared spaces and inhabiting practices based on cooperation? Are the meanings, the stakes and the values of a possible urban civilization being questioned today in and through practices of commoning? Do people in many parts of the world fight against corrupt governments, unjust policies and everyday exploitation not only by demanding what they need but also by organizing their common life themselves?

This book attempts to study the meaning and production of spaces of commoning in the context of today's urbanized world. Understood as distinct from public as well as from private spaces, 'common spaces' emerge in the contemporary metropolis as sites open to public use in which, however, rules and forms of use do not depend upon and are not controlled by a prevailing authority. It is through practices of commoning, practices which define and produce goods and services to be shared, that certain city spaces are created as common spaces.

Commoning practices importantly produce new relations between people. They encourage creative encounters and negotiations through which forms of sharing are organized and common life takes shape. Commoning practices, thus, do not simply produce or distribute goods but essentially create new forms of social life, forms of life-in-common. That is why those practices may be projective (hinting towards possible forms of life-in-common), expressive (attempting to draw attention to the values shared by those who participate in the commoning processes) and exemplary (partially establishing social relations that exceed the limits imposed by dominant models of sociality).

Common space is a set of spatial relations produced by commoning practices. There are, however, two distinct ways through which those relations are organized. They may either

be organized as a closed system which explicitly defines shared space within a definite perimeter and which corresponds to a specific community of commoners, or they may take the form of an open network of passages through which emerging and always-open communities of commoners communicate and exchange goods and ideas.

Throughout this book an effort will be made to explicitly connect commoning with processes of opening: opening the community of those who share common worlds, opening the circles of sharing to include newcomers, opening the sharing relations to new possibilities through a rethinking of sharing rules and opening the boundaries that define the spaces of sharing. Opposed to such levels, practices and rules (or, more precisely, institutions) of sharing are the rules and practices of capitalist social organization which promotes and establishes a 'desocialization of the common' (Hardt and Negri 2009: 258). This is based not only on the appropriation of the products of commoning by capital (considered as a social relation and not simply as money) but also on an all-encompassing strategy that may be termed a strategy of enclosure (De Angelis 2004, Midnight Notes Collective 1990). This term evokes an image connected to the fencing of an area – a spatial image, no doubt. But the capitalist enclosure of the commons is not only a process of fencing in areas of production or the uses of certain goods and resources but also a process of obstructing those commoning practices that tend towards an openness of sharing: self-managed cooperation which is open to newcomers, knowledge 'production' which is not limited to those who understand it, create it or 'finance' it and festive and joyous events which do not separate consumers from artists, and so on.

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What possibly justifies the theoretical adventure of this book in focusing on common space is that enclosure in this case retains both its literal as well as its metaphoric value. This is because, as we will see, space is not only a product and therefore a stake for commoning but a means of establishing and expanding commoning practices. In and through space, dominant strategies of capturing, limiting, commanding and appropriating commoning have to face the dispersed tactics of resistance which defy, destroy or challenge the limits of literal and metaphoric enclosures.

Commoning is a process that is shaped by social antagonism that often leads to historically contingent and ambiguous results: commoning may be fenced in within the limits of a specific community that explicitly tries to keep the commoning products and advantages for its members only. In this case we can say that commoning is enclosed, although the very clear distinction between enclosure and commoning as a clear-cut distinction between two opposed poles remains theoretically valid and important. This is why, as we shall see, enclosure through literal or symbolic barriers of a community's common space may signal the death of space-commoning (and commoning through space).

Common space, defined through acts of spatial enclosure, may end up either as 'collectively private' space (as, for example, the outdoor space of a gated community) or as 'public space' managed by authorities which act in the name of a community (as, for example, the space of a municipal park or a town square). Both these forms of closed common space tend to 'corrupt the common' and to block the liberating potentialities of commoning practices.

Expanding or open common space explicitly expresses the power commoning has to create new forms of life-in-common

and a culture of sharing. Threshold spatiality, a spatiality of passages which connect while separating and separate while connecting, will be shown to characterize such spaces produced in common and through commoning. Thresholds may appear as boundaries which separate an inside from an outside, as, for example, in the case of a door threshold, but this act of separation is always and simultaneously an act of connection. Thresholds create the conditions of entrance and exit, prolong, manipulate and give meaning to an act of passage. This is why thresholds have been marked in many societies by rituals which attempt to control the inherent potentialities of crossing. Guardian gods or spirits dwell in thresholds because the act of passage is already an act that brings into potential connection an inside and an outside. Entering can be taken as an intrusion, and exiting can convey the stigma of ostracizing.

Considering common spaces as threshold spaces opens the possibility of studying practices of space-commoning that transcend enclosure and open towards new commoners. Exploring the idea of expanding commoning, this book is in search of examples of practices and experiences which may reveal the emancipating potentialities of commoning for, in and through space.

Collective inventiveness flourishes in the production and use of threshold spaces. Comparisons between emerging identities are made possible as people use those spaces through constant negotiations. Communities which inhabit them are thus always communities-in-the-making. Entering an important discussion on contemporary forms of political subjectivation, this book will attempt to show that commoning and the creation of common spaces involve subjectivation processes which do not produce closed collective identities. J. Holloway, M. Hardt and A. Negri,

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and J. Rancière all share in their theorizations on political subjectivation a common horizon: subjects of political action emerge today by threatening, upsetting or even dismantling dominant social taxonomies and the corresponding established identities. In this process, contemporary urban space, which necessarily expresses and reproduces these dominant taxonomies, can possibly be transformed through collective action. Threshold spatiality can insinuate itself into the dominant spatial order in the same way that emergent 'non-identities' (Holloway 2002), 'newcomers' (Rancière 2010) or inherently multiple 'singularities' (Hardt and Negri 2009) can insinuate themselves into the dominant social order.

The book explores the interconnections between processes of spatial transformation and processes of political subjectivation, focusing especially on socio spatial experiences which reveal the potentialities inherent in contemporary metropolitan life. Drawing from research focused on inhabited spaces (including social housing, everyday uses of metropolitan streets, and occupied squares), this book attempts to show that common space is produced through collective inventiveness, which is either triggered by everyday urgent needs or is unleashed in the effervescence of collective experiments: in the self-managed settlements of the homeless movements in Latin America and in the encampments of the occupied squares of the Arab Spring, in initiatives which reclaim and transform public space, in building squats and in the creation of open neighbourhood centres or in self-organized 'reclaim-the-city' events (often connected to anti-gentrification struggles).

Envisaged common spaces, spaces imagined or sought for through expressive gestures, play an important role in shaping

practices of space-commoning. Possible spatialities of commoning emerge in the form of images which trigger thought. People develop ways through which they attempt to think about, imagine and express the characteristics of common space and by doing so they invent possible forms of space sharing and sharing-through-space. Can dissident politics escape the trap of the 'liberated enclave' imaginary and discover the power that the representations of common spaces-as-thresholds have for the pursuit of collective emancipation? Perhaps yes, if people attempt to think about the common through thought-images that do not trap the future in projected city-like utopias of social harmony or liberty.

Space-commoning is not, therefore, simply the sharing of space, considered as a resource or an asset, but a set of practices and inventive imaginaries which explore the emancipating potentialities of sharing. Common space is both a concrete product of collectively developed institutions of sharing and one of the crucial means through which these institutions take shape and shape those who shape them.

Experiences of space-commoning emerge latently or explosively in many places in the world. I wouldn't attempt to create a theoretical perspective on common space if I had not had the opportunity to share some of these experiences. I strongly believe that we must learn from these experiences and try carefully to develop out of them generalizations and theoretical proposals. Like every piece of research which is immersed in its subject and like every theory which is influenced by collective aspirations and enthusiasms, this book runs the risk of being more oriented towards the defence of people struggling than towards offering a distantiated look at their struggles. I really don't know

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if I have managed to develop a strong enough critique of space-commoning in order to be able to show the important stakes involved. I do know, however, that the discussions and literature on commons and commoning definitely shape a contested area. One should take sides in these discussions, and one should realize that value choices and views about the future of societies are directly involved in them.

Learning from struggles and collective experiences means, I think, being able to dwell sometimes on a threshold: the threshold that separates and connects at the same time acts and criticism, praxis and theory, experience and representation, and participation and distantiation. I am very thankful to those who gave me the opportunity to linger sometimes on such thresholds by realizing that this was my way of supporting our common aspirations and dreams. Active members of the Alexandras Prosfygika Inhabitants Coalition in Athens taught me how to remain an academic while being part of an urban struggle. People from Brazilian homeless movements and young activists in Buenos Aires *favelas* taught me how a feeling of solidarity and the sharing of common values may produce common ground for fruitful debates. In the Syntagma Square occupation in Athens I learned how important it is to participate in egalitarian cooperation, an experience that produces its own shared space. Maybe during the long night of *pasalo* in Barcelona I realized how people may almost instantly convert the city centre to common space. Maybe matatu drivers in Nairobi and immigrants and street traders in Athens showed me how important it is to observe space-commoning at the very molecular level of everydayness.

I don't know if my education as an architect and my affiliation to a School of Architecture has been the main reason for my

interest in the spatial aspect of commoning. I believe, however, that space matters a lot for commoning and that studying cities through theories and research on commoning is as important as studying commoning through theories and research on cities. Perhaps I was able to understand and experience more deeply the Red Vienna pioneer architecture which concretizes a view on a collectively organized public culture through my research on common space. Maybe this research made it possible for me to draw comparisons between this kind of architecture and the architecture of social housing in Latin America as well as in Greece, architectures that I was able to observe and study.

My 'threshold' research would not have been possible, however, if my theoretical and political trajectory had not crossed the Zapatistas' road to autonomy and social emancipation. Their social and political experiences are perhaps the most important contribution to the search for connections between today's struggles and tomorrow's just society. Without the Zapatistas, discussions on the emancipating potentialities of commoning would be less equipped with examples, less developed in concepts, less connected to the history and cultures of different communities, and probably less inspiring.

After I have said all that, maybe it is clear that thanking people and acknowledging their role in shaping this book cannot take the form of a catalogue of names. Most of those people already know that I owe a lot to them, my students at the National Technical University of Athens included. Mentioning a few by name, then, does not mean that I have forgotten all the others.

A great number of research exchanges and political discussions have influenced my explorations in space-commoning. To name some of those who offered me such opportunities:

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