

# **‘The right to the city’ reversed: the Athenian right to the city in a crisis era**

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In 1968 Lefebvre’s book “The right to the city” was published. Ever since the notion “right to the city” served both as an inspiration for several scholars, academics, activists and researches like Castells, Harvey, Soja, Marcuse, Smith and as a point of departure for several struggles, urban social movements and revolts across the world. While it has become extremely popular or even fashionable as de Souza suggests, it often appears detached from its original meaning.

Forty five years after the first publication of Lefebvre’s book, the Athenian metropolis, a city in the (epi)center of the crisis turmoil, is governed by a municipal authority party that goes under the name of “Right to the City”. The municipal party gained the 2010 elections adopting much of Lefebvre’s revolutionary rhetoric such as “the city as oeuvre” and since then is applying a political program based on a rather distorted interpretation of “the right to the city”.

This paper aims to examine urban policies and tactics that are applied under the cloak of “the right to the city” and form the everyday life urban space of Athens. We seek to lift the veil of propaganda and claim that the assimilation of radical contexts on behalf of municipal authority does not lead to emancipatory urban policies but aim to cover up sovereignty. At the same time, we consider the several practices of resistance and occupation that strongly oppose to the rise of fascism, are in direct confrontation with the municipality’s policies and form different specialities in the city core. We trace the potentials that open new forms of social relations, therefore new city spaces, and explore contemporary antagonistic movements that don’t demand rights from the dominant sovereignty but occupy and reclaim the city of crisis. Furthermore, we deal with the transition from demanding the city to occupying the city as a contemporary act of resistance. Therefore, we discuss how the “right to the city” appears in the Athenian metropolis either misinterpreted or surpassed. Finally, inspired by the work of several radical scholars like Harvey, de Souza and Pasquinelli we make an argument on the perspectives beyond the Lefebvrian notion and an attempt to approach Athens as an emerging rebel city.

Key words: ‘The right to the city’ Athens, urban space, crisis

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## **1. Introduction**

Ever since the book of Henri Lefebvre “Right to the city” was published in 1968 it served as a great inspiration for several scholars, researchers, academics and activists. Being the point of departure for various urban movements, it contributed to a wave of resistance and destabilization of sovereignty in many parts of the western world during the turbulent decades of the 60s and 70s. Various forms of sovereignty, however, used its revolutionary and innovative rhetoric in an attempt to grand radical contexts in their political agendas.

In this direction, a Greek political party, under the name of “Right to the City”, adopted aspects of the Lefebvrian rhetoric in order to form its political agenda and win the municipal elections of 2010 in Athens.

This paper aims to confront two approaches of “the right to the city”. On the one hand the Lefebvrian notion of the 1960s and on the other hand Kaminis’ (the Athens mayoral candidate) appropriation of 2010. We consider the first approach as an effort to introduce the Marxian thought in spatial thinking, in order to contribute to the emerging emancipatory movements, and the second as a fine example of distortion of contexts in favor of gaining power and promoting neoliberal policies. Consequently we intend to demonstrate that divisions between form and content can often lead to the complete inversion of primal meanings.

Through the indexing of local Athenian press during the period of Kaminis’ administration (2010-2013) and on-site observation, we unfold the political program of Kaminis and examine its applications versus its title and theoretical context. Following Lefebvre’s analysis we consider space as a product of social relations, therefore, we examine the production of the Athenian space in relation to its inhabitants and visitors. Furthermore we introduce a dialectical approach of space, through the schema of inclusion-exclusion of people from the city spaces in order to explore the production of the Athenian city space.

We will never be able to attend a live debate between Lefebvre and Kaminis. Still the contexts of the Kaminis work appear to be in direct antithesis with Lefebvre’s notion of ‘oeuvre’. Bringing to surface neo-interpretations of Lefebvre’s analysis is not just for enlightening the subversion of the original contexts or highlighting them as stolen contexts from sovereignty. We point out that not only is it a great opportunity to explore once again and rethink what Lefebvre was teaching and writing during the 60s but also a motive to question, think beyond and challenge it in the contemporary contexts of urban uprisings and revolts.

## **2. “The Right to the City”: two contradictory approaches**

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

In the late 60’s Henri Lefebvre wrote his famous work the “The Right To The City” for the 100th anniversary of the publication of Marx’s Capital, just before the revolutionary

outbreaks in Paris, Prague, the rest of Europe and the US. (Leontidou, 2010:1180) The Right to The City was influential in several radical scholars and urban movements. One of the basic thesis and point of departure of Lefebvre (1996: 109) was that

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

In the previous quote Lefebvre demonstrates the trialectical character of space as conceived, perceived and lived, which he farther analyzed in his later work “The Production of Space” (Lefebvre 1974). According to several scholars (Collinge, 2008; Soja, 1989; Shields, 1999) Lefebvre’s analysis constitutes a break to the former aspatial dialectic of historical materialism of orthodox Marxism. Lefebvre thematised space and suggested that the dialectic can be “raised up” from a temporal to a spatial medium. For our purpose the most significant contribution of Lefebvre’s point of view is that he identifies the space and the city as a result of social class antagonisms.

Furthermore Lefebvre clarifies that the right to the city it’s not a typical right to nature and the countryside but in the words of Lefebvre (1996: 158) “in the face of this pseudo-right, the right to the city is like a cry and a demand” and he (1996: 173-174) continues

“the right to the city manifests itself as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city”

Lefebvre aims not only to understand the city but also to encounter all those forces able to change it. According to Stavrides (2007:8)

“Lefebvre, like so many other scholars and artists of the interwar period and of the mythical decade of the 60s, encountered in the city not only horror but also hope, not only orderliness but also disorder, not only the reproduction of the sovereign principles but also challenge, not only the normalization of routine but also the liberation feast.”

Moreover Lefebvres’ concept of “the right to the city” challenges the notion of citizen. In his thought, citizenship is not defined by membership in the nation-state but is based on membership in inhabitance. As Purcell (2003: 577) notes “Everyday life (Lefebvre’s *‘la vie quotidienne’*) is the central pivot of the right to the city: those who go about their daily routines in the city, both living in and creating space, are those who possess a legitimate right to the city (Lefebvre 1991a)”

## **2.2. “The Right to the City” and the sovereignty approach (Kaminis’ manifesto)**

In 2010 a new party appeared in the Athenian political arena. Under the leadership of George Kaminis, a former ombudsman, the party participated in the municipal elections of

Athens. In the first round of the November 2010 elections Kaminis' party came in second but managed to win the second round, gaining 52% of the popular vote against the conservative party of the former mayor, Nikitas Kaklamanis, mainly due to the support of the centre-left. It is also noteworthy that, for the first time, a Nazi political party entered the town council.

The manifesto of the party "Right to the city" focus on citizens, public space (cleanness and security), private property, social services, green development and innovative entrepreneurship. Within this optic, Kaminis (2010a:5) considered the city as a "collective oeuvre created by the inhabitants, the visitors and everyone that lives and works in the city and creates its actual wealth". Moreover, Kaminis (2010b) adhered:

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

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

However following Lefebvre (1991b: 2342, translated in Kofman and Lebas, 1996: 34)

"the right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (citadin) and user of multiple services. It would affirm, on the one hand the right of users to make known their ideas on the space and time of their activities in the urban area; it would also cover the right to the use of the center, a privileged place, instead of being dispersed and stuck into ghettos (for workers, immigrants, the 'marginal' and even for the 'privilege')

In contrast to Lefebvre's approach Kaminis manifesto conceptualize nature as a supportive element of urban development. Furthermore there is a certain approach of the Athenian urban space. Kaminis endorses the analysis of the ghettoization of the city center and introduces security, urban development and entrepreneurship as a response. Thus, his is in

accordance with gentrification processes that appear as a salvation of the so-called “city’s decay”. In fact, gentrification policies and the rhetoric for “creative cities” are much older than Kaminis’ party and as Pasquinelli (2010a) felicitously points out:

“The name of this newborn chimera is ‘creative cities’—an asymmetrical chimera, as the mask of culture is used to cover the hydra of concrete and real-estate speculation. Throughout (...) the whole of Europe, we are witnessing the condensation of a peculiar form of cultural capital as the leading force behind real estate and the ‘creative cities’ strategy of city councils eager to attract both investments and highly skilled workers.”

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

In addition to the above, the right to the development of the city, in other words the right to a touristic city, is directly linked to entrepreneurship and for this reason Kaminis announces measures against excessive bureaucracy. In the memorandum context though, the overcome of any possible delays in order to facilitate investments or entrepreneurship is directly connected to new investment laws the so-called “fast track” policies, a governmental tool that invented in order to skate over any legal difficulties or oppositions concerning private investments. Consequently Kaminis’ “right to the city” is in fact the “right” to fast track policies.

We claim that the selection of the name “Right to the City” by George Kaminis and his partners is neither incidental nor coincidental, but maintains direct links and references to Lefebvre’s oeuvre. This assumption is strengthened by the fact that at least twelve candidates of Kaminis’ party (Kaminis 2010b) are architects or involved in space and art sciences. After all, the adoption of radical raisons and contents has been the strategic for numerous power mechanisms. The lack of a critical engagement with Lefebvre’s Idea has often led to an overstretching of the concept.

Unsurprisingly, Kaminis promotes the aestheticization of the “right to the city” by cutting off quotes and propound them as romantic thoughts of his political manifesto. He identifies himself and his party by using the terminology of an ideology he has very little in common.

In this point we agree with Pasquinelli (2010b: 3) who notes that “the strategies of overidentification too often simply deal with the very surface of ideology and, contrary to the Lacanian credo, never touch its obscene subtext. ”

On deconstructing Kaminis’ manifesto, the ostensibly radical intentions are ultimately weathered. The patchwork of rights, from private property to public space, along with strong indications of neoliberal policies and governance, leave no doubt that there is no common space between Kaminis’ right to the city and Lefebvrian "the Right to the City".

Moreover we feel associated with Marcuse (2010: 88) who points out that the right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources.

“It is a cry, a demand, a claim. It was a political slogan, intended to broaden the scope of demands for social change to encompass a vision of a different society (...) the right to housing, to an ecologically sustainable environment, the right to education, to inclusion, to participation etc., implying a unitary vision of a city that meets the needs and satisfies the desires of all its inhabitants.”

Likewise, Harvey (2008:26) adheres “it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city”.

### **2.3 “The Right to the City” and the sovereignty practice**

In order to perceive the politics applied to the Athenian metropolis over the past three years we will examine the placement of citizens-subjects in the city. With the term placement we are not implying that any authority is truly capable of placing and thereby determining the subjects, since the subjects are self determined and therefore position themselves in space according to their social relations. Mostly we refer to the intentions and practices of the authorities to act in the name of the inhabitants. In this direction, we use the dialectic schema of inclusion-exclusion, which will help us understand the municipality practices and distinguish the intentions of Kaminis’ party, as well as the relation to the notion introduced by Lefebvre in 1968. We claim that the municipality's declarations of population reclassifications, by bringing “the young and the restless” Greeks to the city center, directing migrants to ethnic markets and displacing “the decadents” to the outskirts are indicative of their intentions. Subsequently, not all the inhabitants are considered as equal citizens, some of them are not considered citizens at all, and not all of them have the same rights to the city. The Kaminis’ “right to the city” is connected with race and class prerequisites and this constitutes one of the primary distortions of the Lefebvrian notion.

Kaminis (2010c) notes in one interview: “Greece is a country in which-because of economic traditions-you cannot just make a sudden move, gather 5.000 people and take them to three concentration camps. This is not practically possible and does not comply with the fundamental coexistence principles of a coordinated community.” However, since 2010 (the year of Kamini’s election) hundreds of police operations have taken place in Athens. According to statistics of Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection (2013) within seven months (8/2012-2/2013) 77.526 migrants were prosecuted, that means in most cases

beaten, deported, arrested or abused. At the same time several concentration camps, the so-called “hospitality centers” by the authorities, have been created, one of them in the wider district of Athens. Since the operation was held by the state police and the Ministry of Public Order and Citizen Protection Kaminis attributed the issue to the Prime Minister’s office. Migratory populations are often thought to come from an outer sphere; therefore they appear as if they have no actual connection, references or rights to the city they inhabit. Kaminis by transferring the migrant issue in another hyper spatial structure or even in a supranational level, he practically dislocates migrant people out of the city.

The political formation of Kaminis explicitly targeted immigrants from the beginning of his administration. In his (Kaminis 2011) words: “our policy concerning migration should aim to the social incorporation, to manage illegal migration and all illegal migrants that already inhabit our country. This population should come out to light and be recorded. All the illegal migrants should return to their home countries.”

Using the “illegal trade” as a pretext Kaminis separated the indigenous populations from the newcomers. The latter became the scapegoat of the recent crisis accused for the collapse of the commercial sector. (Kaminis 2010c, 2011) Significantly, the attitude of the municipality authorities, on 2011, towards one of the biggest hunger strikes that have taken place in Greece was indicative. 300 migrants hunger strikers claim the legislation of all migrants in Greece. Kaminis washed his hand of migrants’ demands by refusing to provide them accommodation during the strike and transposed any responsibility to the government.

Subsequently next years municipal authority has been making a furious attack against migrants indicating their expulsion from the public space of the city since they are considered as non-citizens. This massive pogrom in which Nazis, racists, state police and municipal police take part has had several victims like Cheikh Ndiaye, an African street vender who died on February 2013 while hunted by municipal policemen. He either fell on the train rails while trying to escape (according to the municipal police) or was pushed by members of the municipal police (according to eye witnesses).

Such politics express certain spatialities. The expulsion from public sphere means inevitably the alteration of city public space. Since 2009 members of the Nazi party Golden Dawn have banned access to a public playground in a central migrant neighborhood. The playground remains locked until now. Ironically one of Kaminis (2010a:14) declarations in its manifest was “the right to play”, concerning accessibility and improvement of quality of the Athenian playgrounds.

The pinnacle of municipal policies which distort the meaning of the right to the city was in December 2011 when took place a vicious pogrom in the city center. Several sex workers, the majority were migrant women, were arrested and imprisoned for over a year. They were slandered of being HIV positive and accused of “transmitting diseases to the Greek family” (Loverdos 2012) by the Minister of Health. As the Minister (Loverdos 2012) distinctively declared “it is necessary to deport HIV positive prostitutes in order to stop being a threat to the Greek family (...), it is a problem of the Greek family as the disease is transmitted from the illegal migrant women, to the Greek client, to the Greek family.” A few days later

Kaminis signed a protocol of cooperation with the Minister concerning measures for the improvement of citizens' everyday life and the reassurance of a better living condition.

Moreover, the contemporary vagabonds such as drug addicts or homeless that have been increasing rapidly the last few years live in a blurred routine. On the one hand the municipality created spaces to provide them food and sometimes -on special occasions shelter- and on the other, a constant battle takes place between the authorities and those vagabonds in order to become invisible for the city tourists. All measures taken in favor of them cannot balance the intended effort for evacuation of any sign of decadence in order to achieve a "clean and clear" urban environment for the tourists to come. Several evacuations of buildings that hosted homeless people were made under the command of the municipality.

Since 2011, several groups and individuals have expressed openly a strict negation to the memorandum. Their spaces of reference have been targeted constantly from the various aspects of sovereignty, including the municipality. During the last year several evictions of squats, occupied buildings and social centers have taken place in Athens. The eviction of the anarchist social centers-squats Villa Amalias and Skaramaga showed the stigma of zero tolerance to the voices of resistance. Though the municipal authorities once again renounced any responsibility by declaring that this was an issue held by the state police, they willingly decided to reclaim the buildings once they were evicted. Still, in the case of the municipal market of Kupseli, an abandoned local market occupied by citizens in a central neighborhood of Athens and transformed into a social center, the eviction came from a direct command of the municipality. The eviction of such spaces and the dislocation and exclusion of certain people and ideas from the city equates with the production of a sterilized city environment friendly to Nazis and the police. As formulated by Kaminis (2011a) "the city center decays because of two things: illegal trade and manifestations."

The peak of this urban conflict was the eviction of Syntagma Square occupation by Indignados. The 29<sup>th</sup> of June 2011 a big riot took place in Syntagma square. The next days the mayor (Kaminis 2011b) stated:

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

And he (Kaminis 2011b) continued arguing that

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



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

Confronting the above with Lefebvre’s rhetoric we claim that while the later, inspired by the Paris Commune of 1871 flared the events of May ‘68, Kaminis’ rhetoric contributed actively to the suppression of the Indignados movement and the wave of resistance that followed in Greece.

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

Meanwhile in 2011 an architectural competition for the renewal of a central Athenian street took place. The competition was held on behalf of the private institution-foundation “Alexandros Onassis”. The competition was named “Rethink Athens” (Onassis Foundation 2011) and it urged us to rethink the Greek capital in better terms. The competition that was embraced by the authorities and the municipality interpreted the city following close Kaminis’ scenario, according to which the “creative class” should inhabit Athens, give her new breath and character along with an ethnic essence created on multicultural markets that is the only place where migrants are welcome. Thereafter in April 2013 a new plan for Athens was presented by the mayor. The plan is named “Re-launching Athens” and has as time horizon the year 2020. This ambitious concept concerns large-scale gentrifications projects in the city center funded by the EU and private investors. It is about the construction of commercial and habitat infrastructures, the renewal of abandoned buildings in the city center, the pedestrianization of central streets etc. We notice that the right to the city is once again related to huge infrastructures which will alter the urban environment in favor of the capital and will inevitably abort the redundant population. Lefebvre (1968: 84-85) noted three categories of people that practice urbanism:

“A) The planning of the men of good will (architects and writers). B) The planning of these administrators links to the public (State) sector. C) The planning of developers. They conceive and realize, without hiding it, for the market, with profit in mind (...) they are no longer selling houses or buildings but planning. With, or without ideology planning

becomes an exchange value.....They will build not only commercial centers, but also centres of privileged consumption: the renewed city.”

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

### **3. Contradictions of Lefebvrian notion the right to the city**

In order to explain the key study of Kaminis right to the city we have to examine the strengths and the weaknesses of Lefebvrian notion. Lefebvre seeks to define the oeuvre and the city, which are articulated in the right to the city through the Marx’s categories of value: use value and exchange value. He (1996: 124) argues that “if one wants to go beyond the market, the law of exchange value, money and profit, is it necessary to define the place of this possibility: urban society, the city as use value”, and he (1996: 126) states later that the city “did not have, it has no meaning but as an oeuvre, as an end, as place of free enjoyment, as domain of use value”. In the previous quotes Lefebvre seeks the characteristics of urban society and he is opposed to the categories of exchange value, money and profit, however we argue that he misinterprets the Marxian category of use value. Lefebvre tends to separate the two forms of value, use value and exchange value, and he attributes an ontological positive status in use value, thus the social antagonisms in their historical context, that he previously mentions, are lost.

Consequently, in order to unsettle the view of the right to the city, an analytical conceptualization of the categories of value and labour is required; exchange value and use value as well as concrete-useful and abstract labour. Marx in the beginning of the first volume of Capital presents the two factors of commodity: the use value and the value (or exchange value) and he argues that in the capital mode of production “in the form of society to be considered here they [use-values] are also the material bearers of ... exchange-value” (Marx, 1976: 126). According to Marx the use value is directly linked to the useful-concrete labour and “the usefulness of a thing makes it a use-value” (Marx, 1976: 126) and he continues “we use the abbreviated expression ‘useful labour’ for labour whose utility is represented by the use-value of its product, or by the fact that its product is a use-value” (Marx, 1976: 132). The different useful labours differ from each other qualitatively and not quantitatively:

“the use-value of every commodity contains useful labour, i.e. productive activity of a definite kind, carried on with a definite aim. Use-values cannot confront each other as

commodities unless the useful labour contained in them is qualitatively different in each case” (Marx, 1976: 132-3).

However, “this property of a commodity is independent of the amount of labour required to appropriate its useful qualities” (Marx, 1976: 126) as “use-values, commodities differ above all in quality, while as exchange-values they can only differ in quantity, and therefore do not contain an atom of use-value.” (Marx, 1976: 128) Consequently, following Marx’s analysis the qualitatively different useful labours produce use values, which are the bearers of exchange value. As Marx states in Capital’s chapter two ‘The process of Exchange’:

“they [the commodities] must stand the test as use-value before they can be realized as values. For the labour expended on them only counts in so far as it is expended in a form which is useful for others. However, only the act of exchange can prove whether that labour is useful for others, and its product consequently capable of satisfying the needs of others.” (Marx, 1976: 179-80)

Furthermore exchange value, as opposed to use value, concerns the quantitative relations of commodities: “exchange value appears first of all as the quantitative relation, the proportion, in which use-values of one kind exchange for use-values of another kind. This relation changes constantly with time and place.” (Marx, 1976: 126) The discovery of this double character of commodities, as use values as well as exchange values, as qualities as well as quantities, runs throughout the entire work of Marx’s Capital. Illustrative is the following quote from the subchapter “Value-Form or Exchange-Value”:

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

Since Marx proved that use value comes from useful labour the next step is to explain where exchange value comes from. For this purpose, in the second subchapter of Capital, Marx analyzes the dialectical dual character of labour as concrete-useful labour and abstract labour. In this chapter Marx shows that concrete labour produces use value and the abstraction of concrete labour that means abstract labour produces exchange value. According to Marx “a use-value, or useful article, (...) has value only because abstract human labour is objectified or materialized in it.” (Marx, 1976: 129) Marx makes clear that while it is necessary for the commodities to have a concrete use value, however it is totally indifferent which exactly this use value will be: “but however important it may be to value that it should have some use-value to exist in, it is still a matter of complete indifference what particular object serves this purpose. We saw this when dealing with the metamorphosis of commodities.” (Marx, 1976: 310-1) This finding is based on Marx’s conception of abstraction

“the exchange relation of commodities is characterized precisely by its abstraction from their use-values. Within the exchange relation, one use-value is worth just as much as another, provided only that it is present in the appropriate quantity. (...) If (...) we

disregard the use value of commodities, only one property remains, that of being products of labour. But even the product of labour has already been transformed in our hands. If we make abstraction from its use-value, we abstract also from the material constituents and forms which make it a use value. It is no longer a table, a house, (...) or any other useful thing. All its sensuous characteristics are extinguished. Nor is it any longer the product of the labour of the joiner, the mason or the spinner, or of any other particular kind of productive labour. With the disappearance of the useful character of the products of labour, the useful character of the kinds of labour embodied in them also disappears; this in turn entails the disappearance of the different concrete forms of labour. They can no longer be distinguished, but are all together reduced to the same kind of labour, human labour in the abstract.” (Marx, 1976: 127-8)

Consequently, the capital mode of production is based on use value, which is abstracted, and aims in value (exchange value) and ultimately in surplus value. Marx states in subchapter (7.1) of Valorization Process: the aim of capitalist “is to produce not only a use-value, but a commodity; not only use-value, but value; and not just value, but also surplus value.” (Marx, 1976: 293) The outcome of Marx’s analysis is that the conceptualization of commodity as something dual, as use value as well as exchange value, is based on the dual character of labour, as concrete-useful labour as well as abstract labour; and “this point is crucial to an understanding of political economy” (Marx, 1976: 132)

Once we recognize the dual and inseparable character of use value and exchange value, it makes it easy to understand the dangers of Lefebvrian “right to the city”. Indicatively are the following quotes, in which Lefebvre makes the double mistake of separating use value and exchange value and then he unhistorically prettifies the use value and consequently the city itself:

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

and

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

In the previous quotes Lefebvre makes three consecutive mistakes. First, he disconnects the use value from exchange value and he argues that the only form of commodity is the exchange value. Second, he unhistorically illustrates use value as a positive substance, which existed before industrialization, and creates only “beautiful” oeuvres. Third, he connects the city only with use value, hence attributes the city with the same unhistorical positivity. As a result of this way of thinking, Lefebvre contradicts himself with his original thesis, that the city *is a projection of society on the ground*. The meaning of this thesis is that use values and exchange values are determined at each historical time by the social class antagonism, but Lefebvre’s outcome is different.

Lefebvre repeats the same argument several times in his book "The Right To The City" and constantly seeks for the moments that "the use (use value) of places, monuments, differences, escapes the demands of exchange, of exchange value" (Lefebvre, 1996: 129). Since he has disconnected use value from exchange value, then he seeks the lost ontological primacy of use value, "use value, subordinated for centuries to exchange value, can now come first again. How?"

Lefebvre's thought although it was extremely visionary on the concepts of city and space, is however trapped in the supposed confrontation between use value and exchange value. Illustrative is the following quote

"the world of merchandise has its immanent logic of money and exchange value generalized without limits. (...) Urban society (...) has a logic different from that of merchandise. It is another world. The urban is based on the use value. This conflict cannot be avoided." (Lefebvre, 1996: 131-2)

At this point Lefebvre makes clear that conflicts for the city are the result of the confrontation between use value and exchange value. Through his ontology, Lefebvre considers that the conflict between the representatives of use value and exchange value, that is the urban society and the world of merchandise, is inevitable. Ultimately, Lefebvre builds his theoretical framework "The Right To The City" on the postulation of use values and defines as the revolutionary subject for this purpose the working class. In the words of Lefebvre:

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

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

‘improved’) representative ‘democracy’.” Concretely de Souza (2010:316) felicitously points out that the right to the city has the meaning that

“1) neoliberalism obviously is refused, but not capitalism as such (i.e. there is a certain implicit presupposition that neoliberalism should, in the best of all cases, be replaced by a sort of “left-Keynesianism”, which could in turn be supplemented by alternative, “solidarity”-oriented economic [micro]circuits); 2) protectionism (...) must obviously be challenged and overcome, but the global (capitalist) market could be “tamed” (for instance, by means of a “Tobin-tax” and the like) and not necessarily eradicated and replaced in the course of an eradication of capitalism itself; 3) a much more efficient environmental protection in the cities and worldwide must be achieved, but this in the framework of an economic policy which “seriously” tries to “bring together” and “combine” the (capitalist) market with “ecological goals” (...); 4) a “participative democracy” must be achieved, and this usually means the following: representative democracy must be supplemented and “corrected” by “participation” (that is, representative “democracy” and its premises state apparatus, “free mandate” etc. remain unquestioned).”

In contrast with the traditional movements for the right to the city, the last years we are witnessing a rising tide of urban revolts and mobilizations that have been abolishing the right to the city. In the ‘Reclaim The Streets’ movement of the late 90’s, in the uprising of Parisian banlieue in 2005, in Oaxaca 2006, in Athens 2008, in London 2011 and in the recently occupied squares of Cairo, Madrid, Athens, US, we recognize that the rebels do not claim and do not postulate the city from the sovereign power but rather they occupy it and tend to transform it. The recent uprisings were accused of having no demands and no representatives to negotiate concrete claims, or better concrete use values. We claim that the passage from the famous slogan of the 60’s “be realistic, demand the impossible” to the slogan of the recent Occupy movement in US “occupy everything, demand nothing” (see Deseriis & Dean, 2012) formulates a different culture of struggles and signifies a new era for the emancipator movements.

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