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Paper Proposal for the session 5, Resistance, Creativity and Planning

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**Inventive appropriations of public space in contemporary Athens, a city in crisis: In search of new forms of urban commoning**

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Two contrasting tendencies to redefine public space are being developed during the current socio-economic crisis in Athens. The first one is characterized by an effort to redefine and manage public space through dominant policies connected to the payment of public debt in a neoliberal context. In this effort, public land privatization measures are legitimized by dominant discourses focused on a post-crisis growth scenario of the Greek economy. On the other hand, public space is being redefined “from below” through practices that contribute to the emergence of common spaces, spaces of commoning. Those spaces are different from established spaces of public use because they promote forms of egalitarian social organization and become a crucial means to express collective demands. Thus, they explicitly depend upon practices of collective self-management and either develop through everyday survival initiatives or emerge in periods of collective struggle. Common spaces sustain practices of sharing (including the sharing of urban space) and activate collective inventiveness. This presentation will compare the experience of 2011 Syntagma Square occupation (connected to the worldwide “squares movement”) with the recent mobilization initiatives in support of refugees (starting with this summer’s tent city in the Athenian park of *Pedion tou Areos*) and the victims of austerity (through self managed centers focused on alternative public health, education, culture, trade etc.) in an effort to trace trajectories of inventive urban commoning that challenge and transform existing public space arrangements. Distrust for the state considered as the protector of the society’s well being. Distrust for official democratic rules and the system of “representative democracy”. Distrust for established political parties. The squares have not simply expressed such shared feelings of distrust. They have mobilized people in search of ways to take their lives in their hands. In Greece, initiatives meant to defend the most vulnerable and underprivileged (including immigrants and refugees) evolved to a loose but expanding solidarity network. Often starting with a will to satisfy an urgent collective need, those initiatives contained from the beginning the seeds of new relations between the people involved. In today’s self-managed centers for refugees who were harshly denied their rights both by the EU and the Greek government, (which admittedly differs in some aspects from certain outright racist ones

in Europe), very important acts of organized cohabitation and collective everydayness take place. Refugees are encouraged to participate in assemblies which take decisions about the way those centers will function (mostly abandoned re-occupied buildings). In this process, new subjectivities are being shaped through participation and the mutual recognition of differences. And new forms of understanding rights and obligations develop. It is by analyzing and evaluating such experiences that autonomy as a political project may be re-problematized. Spaces of autonomy, thus, may be rethought not as “autonomous spaces” but, rather as spaces of expanding commoning which potentially challenge the dominant model of the “city of enclaves” as well as the dominant taxonomies of urban and political struggles.

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