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# *Reinventing Urban Social Space in Times of Unemployment and Exclusion: Solidarity Practices in the Case of the ALTER TV Network, Athens*[1]

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This article deals with the way public space has been used, on the one hand, as a means of putting forward employees' demands and, on the other, as a silencing mechanism on behalf of authoritarian structures. This took place during the closing down of the ALTER TV Network, a popular TV channel in Greece. On the basis of ethnographic data, we argue that 'virtual communities' intended as socially created spaces go beyond the unequal communication imposed by the TV networks, as they contribute to rebuilding multiple and multi-level 'virtual' spaces, shaping an alternative mobility within the city and producing both new spatial realities and new uses for the old ones. In this light, we explore the extent to which these processes are radicalized and substantial interventions take place in the 'real' space through the use of virtual space.
**Keywords:** Media, network, solidarity, virtual space, precariat.

## Introduction

Anthropologists are relatively late urban researchers compared to urban sociologists and geographers (Pardo and Prato 2012). This is largely due to the established priorities in the academic division of labour, whereby anthropology used to be engaged almost exclusively with non-Western societies. Although anthropologists have at times conducted research in cities of Africa and Latin America, it was not before the late 1960s that the discipline in general acknowledged the significance of urban studies (Prato and Pardo 2013). Since the 1970s, monographs and papers have been published, attempting to deal with the conceptual and theoretical definition both of the city and of urban anthropology, issues that are still of high interest and dominate the disciplinary agenda (Prato and Pardo 2013). This development is related to two different but parallel processes. On the one hand, non-Western societies are increasingly becoming part of the global financial system, a process which has led to massive emigration to cities and the emergence of new social, economic and ethnic issues. Up to the 1960s, anthropological studies of urban space focused mainly on the *urbanisation* of rural populations, their establishment and their adaptation to the city rather than on *urbanity* intended as urban way of life, a concept that was introduced by Louis Wirth (1938) in his essay, 'Urbanism as a Way of Life'. Due to this focus, the perception of the city as an urban system was side-lined and the production of data was based on the traditional fieldwork methodology (Foster and Kemper 2010, Pardo and Prato 2012). On the other hand, apart from the aforementioned social and demographic processes, the critical dialogue developed within the discipline criticised its relation with the history of colonialism and the way ethnographic research used to serve as a means to control colonised populations, both assisting and justifying European sovereignty. At the same time, on the other side of the Atlantic anthropological research was focusing on the so-called 'salvage anthropology', whose

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objective was to record and rescue the native American cultural practices, thought to be vanishing due to the cultural practices of people 'with history'. Therefore, in response to past criticism, since the mid-1970s anthropology steered clear of colonisation and shifted its critical focus away from the notions of 'the Other' and the exotic. Somehow, at that point, the research practices of anthropology were based on a tautology: the further a culture's study expanded in terms of space, the more 'the Other' was perceived as such, and vice versa. However, the realisation that diversity — in spatial or temporal terms — was nothing but another hegemonic Western construction (Gupta and Ferguson 1997) signalled the post-colonial era of the discipline, which emphasizes on the return of anthropology to the cities of Western Europe and USA; that is, the places where anthropology had formulated its research programme and academic perspective. Although this 'revisit' has been criticised for the ambiguities it generates (Coleman and Collins 2006), the context of the above reality, which is none other than the unequal relationship of the West with what is hypocritically referred to as 'the developing world', has led to new theoretical processes and research practices which take into account this inequality, recognizing that it results from a refracted projection of the Western self into the aforementioned societies. This contribution to the self-reflection of social sciences, and more specifically of anthropology, has been particularly important considering that the discipline was born amidst an identity crisis and the contradictions of the Western world itself. The transformation processes of the structures of industrial production (Harvey 1990), the transition from Fordism to the flexible 'era', the de-territorialisation of production and consumption, the reduction of the welfare state, the rise of unemployment and economic migration, the fluid boundaries between high and popular culture, the globalisation of cultural patterns and their empowerment through the rise of new nationalisms, the imposition of the Western 'democracy' on other regions and the scepticism of the citizens of the developed West about the quality and the orientation of their governments, have all abrogated a Western point of reference. The historical process of 'post-colonialism' as reinstated in the West, led to the postmodern period, which for many — and not unjustifiably so — creates confusion about both its form and its content (Gledhill 1995). In any case, the West's 'meta-period' has shown that the anthropological endeavour as a whole had been struggling with its self-understanding and, ironically, more research is now called upon to study aspects of its own self as a new field that needs to be examined. This is significantly positive, as anthropological instruments seem now to be revisiting their 'roots' equipped with the experience of their relation with non-Western cultures. Anthropology, in short, is called upon to explore peoples 'with history' and this 'revisit' also entails an engagement with issues and processes that take place in the urban space (Pardo and Prato 2012, Prato and Pardo 2013).

## Conceptualising the Urban Social Space

Inserting the notion of space — both as an analytical instrument and an ethnographic field — in the study of social relations was described as 'spatial turn'. While in positivism, space was

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seen either as a mental abstraction or as the geographical and physical' base of social activity, Lefebvre's (1991 [1974]) dialectical influence on the social sciences was decisive. From the 1980s, the bidirectional relation between 'social' and 'spatial' became prominent (Pardo and Prato 2012). As a result, social relations are studied on the basis of their spatial existence, while at the same time space is conceived as a product of social relations, especially relations of power (Stevenson 2003, Murdock 2006). Bourdieu (1996), for instance, defines space as a set of distinct and coexisting positions and proposes a relational reading, introducing *habitus* in the dualistic view of subject-object. He notices the relation of different forms of capital with the construction of social space and aims to analyse the interrelation between social positions, dispositions and stances; so, his theory mainly highlights the correlation between space (physical and social) and people's choices (position-taking). This 'spatial turn' seems to have uncovered fields that were previously neglected, such as physical movement and its significance in the social production of space. It has also brought out the relational character of space: fluid and multilevel social relations form a physical space that is undetermined and open to different social contexts (Massey 1999, 2005).

However, it is beyond any doubt that capitalism has all the necessary means to shape social relations and impose them upon space. What are those means, though? A primary instrumental technique is the distinction between private and public space. As Lefebvre demonstrated, the relations between production and consumption concern private space, while in the public space the role of the state is more definite. The state can shape public space through institutional provisions, establish it through the use of symbolic codes (for example, Monuments) and determine its uses. Urban space is the product of the aforementioned division, which is also accompanied by regulatory behaviours regarding the use of private space and access to it. This results in the formation of a social attitude in accordance with the rules of power, which have been collectively assimilated and therefore enjoy consensus (Lefebvre 2009).

On the other hand, the emergence of the mass media, especially television and internet, has led to a different approach to space from a technical point of view. Space is now produced by a more specific form of social relations, identified as 'virtual reality' (Lévy 1998), through the formation of the so-called 'mediating landscapes' (Scarles 2004). For Lévy, the virtual representation of space, as attempted with its 'virtualisation', does not clash with reality. On the contrary, it is an interpreted dimension of reality, unveiling specific meanings attributed to it through its virtual representation. He says:

> 'Virtualisation is not a de-realisation (the transformation of a reality into a collection of possibles) but a change of identity, a displacement of the centre of ontological gravity of the object considered. Rather than being defined principally through its actuality (a solution), the entity now finds its essential consistency within a problematic field.' (Lévy 1998: 26).

The introduction of 'virtual space' and its use by the wheels of power brings to the fore the debate on networks and the so-called 'network analysis'. According to Zaimakis,

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> 'The concept of the network allows us to overcome the geographical definition of social space and study the human experience through a wider network of relations formed in a supra-local level [...] Network analysis can highly contribute to the study of social change (in terms of a group, a community or a social space) by examining the changes of its inner relational conditions as well as the external milieu's influences' (Zaimakis 2009: 348-349).

Although we could refer to more formal networks to highlight their exploitation by centres of power — in particular the capitalist mode of production — in this article we are most interested in 'virtual' production networks, mainly television. The supra-local status of a television network is substantiated by the simultaneous broadcast of an image in completely different spaces through a transmitter-receiver system. However, given, on the one hand, the hierarchical and centralised production of the communication message and, on the other hand, the incapacity of such a communication to reverse the roles of the transmitter and receiver, the television network operates unequally, transforming space into 'a political product, a product of administrative and repressive controls, a product of relations of domination and strategies decided at the summit of the state, but also at the international and worldwide scale, the scale of the planetary state system. Hence the harmony and cooperation that is manifested in inspection and surveillance procedures.' (Lefebvre 2009: 214).

From the point of view of space production, this process has significant consequences; most important, the integration of a rather complex and socially produced space, such as the urban space, through the simultaneous consumption of a particular image. For example, a live transmission of a football match unifies spaces which are highly diversified in social terms and remote from the field of sports itself, thus transforming hundreds of thousands of indoor or outdoor private or public spaces into an extension of the stadium bleachers. In this context, the 'virtual' supporters are spatially approached through the TV image.

However, if space is the product of social relations and specifically of power relations, then its study can also be used to measure not only the sovereignty of power but also any disobedience towards it. Actually, the subdued employ the same techniques as power does to produce their own space (spaces ranging from those of everyday life to those of 'virtual reality'). Let us take a look at some versions of this social space. Michel de Certeau (1988), for example, suggests a series of day-to-day activities through which the 'weak' attempt to offend the 'order' of sovereign space, despite the fact that they are 'under surveillance'. Alternative 'emic' street names and points of reference throughout the city, the city walks, the memory of the city from below (Phillips 2005), the appropriation of public space for private actions, the repeated use of public space by 'strangers', like immigrants, and so on are some of the practices of the agents, which take place in the cracks of the predominant rationale of space production. According to de Certeau, the 'weak' lurk to seize the opportunity to act. So, the city is transformed into a plethora of living places, unseen by the panoptic surveillance.

**Defining Unemployment and Exclusion**

Who are, today, the 'weak', though? After the 'golden era' of welfare capitalism contemporary western societies experienced a steady tendency related to the transition from an 'ex-affluent' society to a qualitatively different one, in which increasing insecurity and employment deprivation prevailed. As the notion of full employment seemed to be a past luxury, the new guises took a 'naturalised' form for a considerable part of the workforce pushed to the edge of poverty, social exclusion and unemployment. A number of studies in the social sciences have shown that social rupture is one of the most deleterious effects of unemployment. One of the most relevant classic studies — that of Marienthal in Austria in the 1930s — provides a useful basis for our discussion. Marie Jahoda's research team singled out five categories of deprivation suffered by the unemployed. Those who lost their job suffered from the loss of structured time; the absence of a regular activity; the reduction of social contacts; the lack of participation in a collective purpose; and the gradual decay of personal identity (Jahoda et al. 1982). A number of scholars (Paugam 1991, Edgell 2006) conceptualise unemployment as a way towards 'social de-skilling', which is experienced as a condition of social humiliation. The central hypothesis is that the unemployed experience multiple forms of deprivation and a condition of social decline is created, resulting in deregulation and in ruptured social relations (Demazière 2006). This experience, it is argued, leads to an antisocial way of being where agents not only are alienated from existing social networks but do not attempt to enter new networks. This is what Castel has called 'disaffiliation' (Castel 2003).

Other studies conclude that unemployment is not experienced in the same way by everyone. In other words, there is not a single category of unemployment in which all people share similar social or economic features (Jahoda et al. 1982). Following a similar argument, Schnapper (1994) emphasises three types of unemployment which are closer to anthropological analysis as she focuses on the agents' narratives; that is, 'absolute unemployment', 'inverted unemployment' and 'diversified unemployment'. Anthropological research has shown that people of former high ranking who have lower status jobs refuse to accept their new condition and start compromising borrowing money from their children in order to get by (Newman 1999). A recent study was concerned less with ideal types and more with the cognitive framework of the experience of unemployment in three cities: Tokyo, Paris and Sao Paolo (Demazière et al. 2013). In their comparative analysis, the researchers took into account the national, social and cultural differences among the informants, focusing on unemployed mothers, young workers and managers.

All studies more or less converge to illuminate a situation where unemployment threatens one's work identity, which is not restricted to working professionals or employees but includes the non-working individuals. It has also been underlined that the experience of unemployment increases significantly the probability of a downward occupational mobility and lessens the possibility of an escape from vulnerability (Edgell 2006). Moreover, a number of anthropological studies point to the fact that unemployment is experienced as a condition

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of liminality for those who are forced to lose their former status and tumble into an insecure and precarious employment framework (Spyridakis 2013).

**The Case of the ALTER Channel**

The ALTER channel appeared in the Greek media market quite vigorously, mainly through the so-called 'internal productions'; that is, long daily shows on current affairs and the arts. This resulted in the employment of a much larger number of journalists and technicians, compared to the other Greek channels. These employees, together with the administrative personnel, formed the network's main workforce and, although they were paid in accordance with their unions' collective agreements, most were still underpaid, compared to general TV standards. This initially caused them to demand persistently and assertively that their employers should promptly meet their financial obligations, particularly for the technicians, who — on the network level — were the most 'proletarianized' group of workers.

Additionally, the vast majority of workers, particularly technicians, were young people having their first employment experience, which corresponded with a lack of a wider employment culture, union experience and political awareness. Therefore, their claims were focused almost exclusively on getting their accruals by means of taking over the network's premises and the program transmission. On 11 November 2011, the ALTER employees abstained from work, claiming their accruals. A large number of them took over the channels' transmission, mainly to control the transmitted advertisements but also to convey their messages to the public. This went on until 9 February 2012, when the signal from one of the transmitters — that on Mount Hymettus in Attica — was cut off.

During that period, ALTER was broadcasting the strikes of other workers, as well as documentaries and videos related to the financial crisis and its outcomes. The employees had also announced their intention to transmit live the demonstration outside the Greek parliament against the latest memorandum. However, despite the signal being cut-off in February, the employees remained in their workplace, guarding the infrastructure and all the technical equipment until October 2013, when as a consequence of the bankruptcy court order (following a petition of the employees themselves) they were obliged to leave the network's premises.

**Producing an Alternative Social Space**

How has this three-month process of 'independent' TV broadcasting influenced the production of space and how has it been conceptualised so far? For a typical worker, the everyday urban space (Watts 1992) consists mainly of the dipole residence-workplace — in cases where those two do not coincide — and of the space between them. For the employees of the ALTER TV, the experience of the work space had not been different, though working on reportages amplified the need to commute between various spaces. However, even in this case, the worker's space was strictly hierarchical, with restricted access to and liminal communication beyond the predefined spatial horizon of one's duties. In other words, it was a

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space fully controlled by the employer; that is, the persons in power. On the other hand, the character of this space had radically changed during the employees' abstention from work, and while they were guarding their workplace, especially during the period of their own broadcast. Let us look, for example, at the following excerpt from a young worker's interview:

> Q. How did you feel about this change in your time allocation? I mean how did you experience this change in your life?
>
> A. Actually, we were quite used to messy working hours. It is the nature of the work. It was ok. I got used to it. Moreover, we had a good time. It was crowded. It had been crazy around here. It was interesting and so it was cool. The transition wasn't that difficult. We had a good time here. We have had great moments. For example, at one time there was a bunch of us playing hide and seek. It was 4 o' clock in the morning and we were jumping over the desks, in the press room […] all those years I had never been in the press room more than once or twice since there was no reason for me to be there. And there I was now, playing hide-and-seek.
>
> Q. So you found out aspects you didn't know about?
>
> A. I hadn't been around the channel (broadcasting offices). Our job is downstairs along the corridor, the other corridor. There was no reason for us to visit any other part of the channel. Apart from a few times when I had to sign a leave. That was in an office on the other side of the building and I always needed someone to show me the way.
>
> Q. You didn't know how to get there?
>
> A. I didn't even know where it was.
>
> Q. So now you had the chance to see the space and use it differently [...]
>
> A. [...] Yes! To play hide and seek! I hadn't even been to the offices over there and we ended up playing poker and 'Palermo', not only in this particular office but in other offices too, on the upper floors. I spent the night in the offices there (Informant 12, 16-9-2012).

On the other hand, private space, as the space of one's private life but mainly as space of consumption, was displaced during the period of abstention from work and the 'safe-guarding' of the network. Another young informant comments:

> I am just optimistic as a person, and this doesn't let me get down on myself. Ok, I sat for 1, 2, 3 days just staring at the ceiling and then I said 'that's it. I can't go on this way. We will see what happens'. You know, you draw power from the next person when they've lost more than you have. It sounds carnivorous but comparing yourself to others on the brink of demise, you're thinking you're

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relatively doing OK and then you all come together like a fist (Informant 9, 15-9-2012).

This change in the use of space involved most of our informants in their daily 'guard duties': the workspace, although not fully integrated,[3] was transformed into a hybrid category, between a private and a public space. It was also a space which had to 'accommodate' the change in the employees' social relations; specifically, the merging of the private and the public, for safe-guarding the public space of the TV network required their personal (private) presence while staying in this public space required them to meet there their (private) needs (such as nutrition, sleep, entertainment, and so on). This hybridisation of space seems to have produced new social relations in more ways than even the workers themselves could ever have imagined, since their working space was transformed into a space harbouring those new relations:

Q. Did you feel closer to your colleagues before or do you now?

A. Before I didn't even know most of the guys that I am now sharing my life with in here. We didn't even speak to each other, not so much as a 'good morning'. Now I can't even imagine 48 hours passing without talking to N. for example. He used to work in the other building and I had never met him. In this sense, yes, we are closer now but I don't know if it is in terms of fellowship or it is just habit. For sure, though, I don't really care for all those former colleagues with whom I used to work, talk and laugh together and who have now vanished. It is not that I would want something bad happening to them, but I don't really care seeing them or hearing about them (Informant 12, 16-9-2012).

Moreover:

We have reached a new level here. All these people doing shifts […] we have all almost become […] one. We are very close, regardless if we are journalists, technicians or administrative personnel. This experience has brought us together and I am not even counting trade unionists. We are different, every one of us is different, but we have gone past our differences […] Since the very beginning, I said that the crisis is valuable. The crisis shows us the true colour of sky. All masks come off in times of serious crisis and the truth is revealed. I like that. Not to mention that it is necessary […]. That is how life is: it is full of crises, which we somehow manage to overcome and move on (Informant 14, 20-9-2012).

The change in the relations between the employees who took part in the safe-guarding of their workplace and the reproduction of that place through the dialectic dipoles of the social and the spatial and of the private and the public were a first step towards a new

[3] Meaning that during the safe-guarding of the work place some parts of the building (the control rooms with the expensive equipment, the accounting office and so on) were locked and secured by the workers themselves.

alternative space in terms of everyday life, the 'material geographic space'. However, this spatial core did not remain static; it gradually expanded to the neighbourhood and the entire city. Thus, the social reproduction of space, as in the ALTER case, can be schematically depicted by gradually developing concentric circles. Let us see some examples.

As we know, after the transmission was cut-off in mid-February 2012 the safe-guarding of the workplace and the employees' abstention from work continued, but these actions lacked the impact that they had had during the period of 'independent' broadcasting. Technicians of the Greek Public Power Corporation were sent to cut off the power supply because the station's electricity bills remained unpaid for months. Yet, the presence of hundreds of employees, who enjoyed the support of the Power Corporation's trade unionists, prevented this new development from taking place. Another unsuccessful attempt was made on 23 February 2012; by then, the workers had been joined by members of the workers' federation and by inhabitants of the neighbourhood, who stayed on site in solidarity.[4] The electricity supply was eventually cut off that December. At that point, local shopkeepers supplied the workers with gas heaters, which served to heat the front part of the building (the reception office) where the occupiers were all gathered. A generator was also offered in order to keep the electricity going.[5]

Those actions, though fragmented and possibly lacking a political framework, highlight the power of the 'weak' — to use de Certeau's terminology — in the production of alternative social relations and, consequently, of alternative social spaces in the neighbourhood. However, much more coordinated solidarity movements were developed in the wider urban space. Let us consider some indicative excerpts from the interviews:

> […] when we first started (the abstention from work) on 10 November, there were workers who were starving […] three or four of them actually lived in the building; they were sleeping here. I then informed the committee.[6] I said, 'Look, guys, I will go public, asking for food supplies'. We then decided not to accept any money and started asking for food supplies. Asking and asking and asking. So, I went live on a radio show […] for more than half an hour and then on websites. This escalated into a motto: 'ALTER channel needs food', and then more and more food was offered. We must have received more than 15-20 tons of food. Despite some objections in our ranks, supplies from PAME[7] were finally accepted. I had already told people, 'Look, guys, if the tomatoes are too red, don't

[4] See http://ergazomenoialter.blogspot.gr/2012/02/7-alter.html. The attempt was broadcast live by the national TV Station (NET).

[5] The neighbourhood's shopkeepers were generally supportive of the workers, tending to their daily needs until after the evacuation of the building (October 2013). They also hosted some of the workers' meetings.

[6] The workers guarding the workplace had formed a six-member committee to represent them, mainly regarding the negotiations with the employers' side.

[7] This is the worker's branch of the Communist Party.

> take them […]' Some wanted them anyway. PAME, except from the meat (lamb) must have brought another 3-4 tons of general food supplies — and that was only from PAME. Anyone visiting the TV station could take some of the food if they felt like it. We also made an announcement through our website. Then we set up five subcommittees: one was handling the guarding shifts; another was the solidarity one dealing with the food supplies; there was the medical committee; the committee running the website; and, finally, we made a cooking committee and started to cook in the station, offering meals (Informant 2, 13-9-2012).

Moreover:

> […] we were given food supplies, especially baby food, baby clothes, etc. Since we had plenty, including diapers, we thought we could share with others, like a solidarity action, following the steelworkers' example. The steelworkers were the first to show up here to support us when the police first arrived […] So, we went to the infants' foundation, 'Mother'. It was December and the babies were freezing […] X. and N. G. asked the staff 'why is it so cold in here?' and they told them that they had no heat since no one had money to pay for petrol. So, we went to the gas station owners' association, found their president and bought petrol worth 1000 euro. It was part of the money POSPERT[8] had given us — five thousand in total — and we decided we could give one thousand for the foundation's heating […] The president even donated an extra 200 litres […] This is the human solidarity side of what we did. We can be proud of that (Informant 1, 13-9-2012).

We can monitor these two-way 'flows' (Appadurai 1991) not only regarding their movement but also their material aspects: the TV network was essentially transformed into a field of solidarity redistribution; movements from that site and towards it have redefined the city's map, forming at the same time a space within the city which did not exist before — a city of solidarity. This new spatiality was formed by the rearrangement of both hierarchical social relations and spaces, which have acquired a new dimension independent of their humanitarian side. The city centre was 'relocated' to the west,[9] based on solidarity.

This is, however, just one aspect of this new spatiality. The aforementioned bidirectional flows also included a series of actions of solidarity and resolutions by trade unions, social and political movements, private companies, and even individuals. Those resolutions were presented in the live broadcast that took place during the strike. In this case, the spatiality of solidarity produced an amplification effect for it not only caused the

[8] This is the Pan-Hellenic Federation of the workers in the national public media (TV and Radio).

[9] This region resulted from more than 40 support resolutions issued at that time. Among them, there were resolutions regarding many parts of Attica (Piraeus, Nikaia, Nea Ionia, Moschato, Peristeri, Koropi, and so on), as well as of Thessaloniki and the rest of Greece (for example, Chania, Ierapetra, Lamia, and so on).

relocation to the new city centre but also brought to light a series of neighbouring sites which could follow the same route. A typical example is given by the fact that the steel workers and the indignant motorcyclists not only marched outside the network, guarding its space, but as early as December 2011 they also distributed copies of the resolutions from the steelworkers to the TV workers and vice versa.

In the same context, two central events are related to the alternative use of space. In the first case, a concert was organised in a basketball stadium on 30 January 2012. This was an initiative taken by the workers of ALTER, DOL, *Eleftherotypia*, ERT and *Kosmos tou Ependiti*, the aim of which was 'to support the workers in the media in general'. A few days later, on 5 February 2012, also in support of the workers in the media (ALTER and *Eleftherotypia*), the Labour Centre of Athens organized with POSPERT a friendly football match between the teams of EKA and ERT at the 'Apostolos Nikolaidis' stadium. The money gathered from the sales of the 3-Euro 'nominal solidarity ticket' was distributed among the ALTER and *Eleftherotypia* workers; some money was given to a EKA player who was injured during the game. In short, spaces with different functions were rearranged to host spatially, in the city, the expressions of this new solidarity.

**Dialectics of Virtuality**

Considering the changes that took place following the three-month period of the network's 'independent' broadcasting, it could reasonably be assumed that the reshaping of the 'material geographic space' of the city involving this new spatiality would probably have never happened without the creation of a corresponding space in the 'virtual' sphere. It was not the workers' BlogSpot, Facebook or other social media groups that made the difference in the ALTER case study. What seems to have been determinant is the transformation of a typical broadcasting network into a network of solidarity. In spite of the fact that the majority of the workers was sceptical about the various 'attempts' by political parties to reap symbolic benefits from using the station's frequency, almost all the informants evaluated positively the extrovert use of the TV frequency:

> We then presented an alternative newscast […] Of course 'alternative' is a rather relative term, since it was the best we could do. Not all of us could work for it and we could not use the network's equipment either. We broadcasted a kind of… trade union newscast […] a workers' newscast! This was a first for Greece and it was brilliant. There were times that we'd make a record on viewer ratings! For example […] in the case of some interviews or when the Documentary of Aris Hatzistefanou, 'Deptocracy' was broadcasted […] Yes, this happened […] Of course we were immediately excluded from AGB rates. Meaning they wouldn't release our numbers […] but we could still find out from the other media […] When Deptocracy was broadcasted we reached 35% […] And then, with the government's blessing, the signal from Hymettus was finally cut off. That was it. That was a real alternative TV (Informant 1, 13-9-2012).

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On the other hand, this reversal of the network's character caused a sort of global diffusion. In spite of the Greek media's deafening silence on the issue, the independent management of the ALTER network mobilised many networks from all over the world, as they either reported on the Greek crisis or reported on a phenomenon that was unique in the media field. For most of the workers guarding the network, this was a great collective achievement. However, this worldwide diffusion did not generate an alternative network space and went never beyond mere news report in the networks' bulletins. At least, we have no fieldwork evidence to the contrary. Besides, the experiment did not last long. Could it possibly be repeated?[10] Could it possibly generate the social and spatial conditions for a general network reversal? In other words, is it possible to have an 'alternative television network' opposing the systemic media and producing alternative social spaces, spaces of solidarity and resistance in the city?

ALTER's workers did not think so. For them, the media are *a priori* a means of 'the system' and an expression of power, totally depended on the market and on advertisements for their survival. Most of our informants filtered such a possibility through the rationale of hierarchical construction and not in terms of self-management: 'Who would decide what is to be broadcasted?', they wondered, 'And who would be willing to place their advertisements with us?'. Although they were passionate when they described the achievements of the 'strike period', they became condescending, computational and 'business oriented' when the discussion moved on to considering a long-term network management. Of course, many had been previously employed in other networks, especially on the internet, where, many of them believe lies the future of a free and alternative journalism.

## Concluding Remarks

The ethnographic case that we have discussed is indicative of similar problems in the Greek media in general. For example, there is an attempt to take over the management of the daily newspaper *The Journal of the Editors*, while the MEGA channel presents a case similar to ALTER's; its workers, however, have not shown the same decisiveness in their mobilisation. Similar developments have taken place in smaller newspapers and local TV networks in Thessaloniki (for example, the newspapers *Thessaloniki, Macedonia* and so on) and the mobilisation in the case of the public Greek TV network, ERT, has been overwhelming. However, the case of ALTER TV has been the longest and most vigorous and influential on public space and discourse. In this respect, the tentative analysis that we have offered has Highlighted a most typical case of the crisis of the media in Greece.

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[10] A similar venture was undertaken with even more impressive results, since it conflicted the Government's decision to cut off the only Greek public network in alignment with an austerity policy aimed at downsize the public sector. The workers' attempt to overtake the network was widely supported and lasted from June to November 2013. However, the public network's regularity was restored when it reverted to its original broadcast, but the systemic media model was not reversed.

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The reinvention of urban social space that we have discussed means, above all, that the established power relations both in the 'real' and the 'virtual' space were temporarily reversed. This reversal seems to be limited; the order of the urban structure was 'restored' once the signal transmission was cut off, ensuring a limited disturbance in the wider field of the TV network. This testifies to the direct relation between the real and the virtual space and the significant possibility that the latter may contribute to restructure the former. Thus, control of the potential space seems to be *a sine qua non* condition for the effective control of the real urban space. On the other hand, the intervention of ALTER's employees in the city's 'virtual' space as they took over their TV frequency appears to having been an extremely advanced idea for which no one was ready, not even the workers themselves or that part of the society which seeks to intervene in the urban space and re-conceptualise it.

It might be argued that the management of the public virtual space of the TV frequency constitutes the third level of self-management — following company public space and neighbourhood public space — where the connection among multiple interventions in the city may take place, as long as the other two levels are covered. This, however, would require a better organisation, a wide consensus and much clearer political starting points and targets. In other words, it would require a coherent collective subject.

Could this collective subject emerge from the 'crisis'? There is no doubt that the crisis has generated extensive unemployment and exclusion, as described here. It is also equally certain that some collective subjects — such as the ALTER employees — have become radicalised and have sought substantial interventions in the 'real' space, especially through the use of the virtual space. However, so far these movements are 'alternative proposals' with a limited spatial and temporal character; they are fragmented and lack a wider impact. This, of course, does not negate the 'dangerous' character attributed to this new subject, the precariat, which appears to be of considerable size. In any case, unemployment and exclusion may be necessary conditions for the reinvention of urban social space, but sufficient conditions for such reinvention do not yet seem to have been shaped.

Indeed, one might ask, is the TV's intervention in the shaping of a collective fantasy so important, in an era dominated by the social media and the Internet? In a society like the Greek one, which operates with significant 'inaction' and delays, the answer might be, 'yes'. However, television omnipotence has suffered a powerful blow, aptly summarised in the slogan 'punks, snitches, journalists' that was heard loudly during the rally of 3 July 2015 promoting 'NAY' to the latest memorandum that had been negotiated by the Greek government. The future of this controversial condition is still unclear, at least from an ethnographic point of view.

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