

Infrastructures of dissensus: repartitioning the sensible and articulating the political through the occupation of Greece's public broadcasting service

EPC: Politics and Space
2023, Vol. 0(0) 1–19
© The Author(s) 2023



Article reuse guidelines:
sagepub.com/journals-permissions
DOI: 10.1177/23996544221150077
journals.sagepub.com/home/epc



Lazaros Karaliotas 

School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow, Glasgow, United Kingdom

Abstract

This article engages with contemporary debates around the politics of space and the spatiality of politics by exploring how the fabrication of emancipatory infrastructures shapes the articulation and reconfiguration of the (urban) political. Moving beyond the prevailing emphasis on urban uprisings, the article focuses on the occupation and self-management of Greece's Public Broadcasting Service (ERT) in response to New Democracy's government decision to dismantle it in June 2013. In this juncture, ERT workers and multiple movements and activists in solidarity occupied the Service's buildings across the country and recuperated its infrastructures to broadcast TV and Radio programmes. ERT's buildings became key political spaces and nodal political infrastructures in the struggle against austerity. Drawing on Jacques Rancière's conceptualization of politics as a world-making activity, the article reads these occupations as the opening of new spatialities for politics through the fabrication of infrastructures of dissensus. In this, it foregrounds the spatial and infrastructural dimensions of urban politics, explores how such infrastructure spaces reconfigure the partition of the urban sensible and traces the challenges and limitations that emerge from their encounters with the police order.

Keywords

dissensus, infrastructure, urban political, Rancière, spatial politics

Introduction

On the night of 11 June 2013, thousands of people assembled in front of the headquarters of Greece's Public Broadcasting Service (ERT) in Athens to be joined by rallies in front of ERT's buildings across Greece. Protesters were gathering in solidarity with ERT's occupation by its

Corresponding author:

Lazaros Karaliotas, School of Geographical and Earth Sciences, University of Glasgow, Room 507, East, Quad Main Building, Glasgow G128QQ, United Kingdom.

Email: lazaros.karaliotas@glasgow.ac.uk

workers. A few hours before, spontaneous workers' assemblies had decided to occupy the infrastructure of the Service and broadcast self-managed TV and Radio programmes in protest to New Democracy's (ND) government decision to dismantle ERT by that night. On midnight, despite popular discontent, the government proceeded in disconnecting the power in ERT's transmission centres. However, the government's authoritarian logic was met with the protesters' and workers' conviction to maintain the occupation and continue to broadcast online. In the days and months that followed,¹ ERT's buildings, computers, cameras, microphones, monitors, cables and transmitters were transformed into infrastructures of dissensus: physical and virtual, embodied and non-human, infrastructures that enabled the staging and circulation of democratic disagreement against the twin logics of austerity and post-democratic closure that scripted the 'Greek crisis' and dictated ERT's closure. On the one hand, the working existence of ERT's occupation prefiguratively enacted alternative ways of doing and saying in-common revolving around the democratic self-management of public media in dialogue with society. On the other, ERT's infrastructure spaces became a key node in the articulation of the broader political struggle against austerity acting as a meeting space for multiple movements and a key infrastructure in circulating their discourse and practices.

In this article I mobilize ERT's occupation as a living laboratory for embodying and further exploring the spatialization and articulation of the urban political. Over the past decade, the concomitant unfolding of the 2008 economic crisis and urban uprisings across the globe spurred renewed interest in (re-)thinking the urban political (Swyngedouw, 2018). Rather than focusing on urban uprisings – as much of the literature does – however, occupied ERT offers an entry point to analyze the continuous efforts to open and sustain emancipatory urban political spatialities. It serves to unpack how urban emancipatory politics “move from outbursts of indignation to the slow process of sustained transformative strategies through which a new socio-political spatialization becomes imagined, practised and universalized” (Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017: 9). Indeed, the opening of new spatialities is a pivotal element of contemporary urban movements and collectives seeking to disrupt post-democratic neoliberalization and experiment with egalitarian and autonomous ways of organizing urban life (Arampatzi, 2017a; Minuchin, 2016). Foregrounding such spatialities draws attention to the infrastructures that make emancipatory politics possible. For as Judith Butler argues, living and material infrastructures “not only condition the action, but take part in the making of the space of politics” (2015: 127). The renewed emphasis on “political infrastructures” (McFarlane and Rutherford, 2008) and the “politics of infrastructure” (Young and Keil, 2010) in recent geographical debates, however, has largely focused on how infrastructural configurations become tools for governance and control, paying less attention to their role in the articulation of the (urban) political (cf. Vasudevan, 2015; Minuchin, 2021).

This article seeks to advance our understanding of this latter aspect by foregrounding the opening of infrastructure spaces and arrangements as a key node in the articulation of emancipatory politics. Building and critically expanding on Rancière's understanding of politics as a world-making activity (2015), I propose the notion of *infrastructures of dissensus* to account for the socio-technical assemblages and spatial arrangements that make possible the staging of democratic disagreement. I position the fabrication of infrastructures of dissensus as a generative part of political activity that disrupts the language, practices and institutions of the police by opening up the scenes for the articulation of alternative ways of doing, being and saying in-common. Foregrounding the fabrication of such infrastructures enables a nuanced understanding of the staging and circulation of emancipatory politics and the inevitable challenges and limitations they face in their everyday encounters with the police.

The article proceeds in four parts. The first section revisits Rancière's conceptualization of politics to argue that while his emphasis on the staging of politics foregrounds questions of spatiality, his schema can be fruitfully expanded through an engagement with the material and infrastructural dimensions of these stagings. The following two sections recount occupied ERT's

story as an infrastructure of dissensus. The second section situates the event of ERT's occupation and self-managed trajectory in the conjuncture of the 'Greek crisis'. The third section analyzes ERT's occupation through three interrelated entry points: the prefigurative materialization of an emancipatory political imaginary and praxis that disrupts the order of the police by staging democratic disagreement; the convergence and articulation of diverse political movements and struggles that re-configures the distribution of the sensible; and the encounters and relations between emancipatory politics and the police. The concluding section brings the insights of the previous sections together to reflect on the possibilities and challenges of an emancipatory politics of infrastructure.

Fabricating infrastructures of dissensus: Spatialization, infrastructure and the re-partitioning of the sensible

A substantial body of geographical scholarship engages with Jacques Rancière's work to inform readings of emancipatory politics. Schematically, there are two key focal points within this corpus. First, Rancière's work informs accounts of the staging of dissensus and the emergence of new collective political subjects through the wave of urban uprisings unfolding since 2011 (eg. Davidson and Iveson, 2014; Dikeç and Swyngedouw, 2017; Karaliotas, 2017). Here, Rancière's emphasis on politics as the disruptive staging of the 'part that has no part' allows foregrounding the spatiality of protests and how they challenge dominant politics. Second, geographers draw on Rancière's work – albeit more sporadically – to analyze the contestations and disruptions of the police order by the sustained everyday activities of movements seeking to re-distribute the sensible order of our cities through the enactment of the presupposition of equality (Uitermark and Nicholls, 2014; Karaliotas and Kapsali, 2021). This paper expands and contributes on both these strands of work by tracing how Rancière's understanding of politics as a world-making activity can be productively expanded through an emphasis on the virtual, embodied and material infrastructures that make possible the enactment of the presupposition of equality that disrupts the dominant scripting of our world. I begin with unpacking the work that space does in Rancière's thought.

Space is pivotal in Rancière's conceptualization of both politics and the police. Rather than conceptualizing space as closure and fixity (Dikeç, 2015), space for Rancière "is (...) a medium of distribution but also of co-existence" (2016: 58). Space is an integral part of what he calls the "distribution of the sensible" (*le partage du sensible*): "a certain cutting out of space and time that binds together practices, forms of visibility, and patterns of intelligibility" (2009: 31) to shape "the forms of part-taking by first defining the modes of perception in which they are inscribed" (Rancière, 2016: 44). Politics and the police are, for Rancière, two ways of distributing the sensible: "two ways of framing a sensible space" (2015: 100). The police is an always contingent spatio-temporal order (Dikeç, 2015) consisting of "all the activities which create order by distributing places, names, functions" (Rancière, 1994: 173). It "distributes bodies within the space of their visibility or their invisibility and aligns ways of being, ways of doing and ways of saying appropriate to each" (Rancière, 1999: 28). Politics, contrarily, is the disruptive engagement with such spatio-temporal orderings. It is "whatever shifts a body from the place assigned to it or changes a place's destination. It makes visible what had no business being seen and makes understood as discourse what was once only heard as noise" (Rancière, 1999: 30). As Rancière suggests in an interview with Peter Hallward:

"In the end, everything in politics turns on the distribution of spaces. What are these places? How do they function? Why are they there? Who can occupy them? For me, political action always acts upon the social as the litigious distribution of places and roles." (2003: 201)

Politics, then, is a profoundly spatial activity. “The essential work of politics”, Rancière writes, “is the configuration of its own space. It is to make the world of its subjects and its operations seen” (2015: 45). Rancièrian politics revolves around opening “polemical scenes” where “subjects that do not count” in the police order (Rancière and Panagia, 2000: 125) stage dissensus. Such dissenting subjects open up the spaces for politics where a ‘wrong’ can be addressed by staging and performatively enacting their equality qua speaking beings (Dikeç, 2013; Swyngedouw, 2011). This emphasis on the opening of spaces foregrounds politics as the configuration of a specific world; a world-making activity (Dikeç, 2013). And yet, the world of politics is not in isolation from the world of the police (Karaliotas, 2021). Conceptualizing space not only as a medium of distribution but also as co-existence, enables Rancière to think of politics as “the manifestation of dissensus, as the presence of two worlds in one” (2015: 45). Indeed, for Rancière, there are two contrasting structurations of the common world: one produced by the logic of the police and one that “empowers artifices of equality, that is, forms enacted by political subjects [that] re-figure the common of a ‘given world’ (...) by configuring a different world-in-common” (2015: 100).

This emphasis on the spaces, scenes and stages of politics is not merely metaphorical. As Davidson and Iveson argue, politics, for Rancière, are “fabricated through space” (2014: 141). Artifices of equality are precisely that: socio-spatial acts and forms that disrupt and reconfigure the distribution of the sensible through the embodied enactment of the logic of equality (Rancière, 2015: 93). In *Proletarian Nights* – his groundbreaking exploration of workers’ political subjectification in 19th century France – Rancière demonstrates how proletarian emancipation consisted precisely in workers’ re-appropriation of the times and places of the police to do what they were not supposed to do: instead of sleeping to reproduce their labor power reclaiming the night to debate political texts and recite poetry in theatres and cabarets; instead of working reclaiming the spaces of work to contemplate emancipation (2012). As Laura Quintana highlights, in focusing on such re-appropriations Rancière’s thinking foregrounds the embodied and material dimensions of emancipation (2019).

Nevertheless, Rancière’s primary interest on individual rather than collective political subjectification (Karaliotas, 2017) together with his predominant focus on the utterances stemming from such re-appropriations has resulted in less attention being paid on the work that infrastructural and spatial arrangements – what I propose to call infrastructures of dissensus – do for the staging and articulation of politics. Maurizio Lazzarato has, for example, powerfully argued that:

“Nowhere in their analyses do we encounter those technical and social machines in which ‘humans’ and ‘non-humans’ function together as component parts in corporate, welfare-state, and media assemblages. Rancière and Badiou have radically elided them altogether” (2014: 13).

Lazzarato correctly points out Rancière’s lack of engagement with the machinic. In light of the preceding discussion on the work that spaces do for Rancière’s thinking, however, Lazzarato’s conclusion that Rancière’s work “fail[s] to problematize the relationship between the discursive and the existential” and by extension the material (2014: 16-17) seems somewhat misplaced. The opening up of political spaces, Rancière insists, “is at once a material and a symbolical matter[;] (...) it is a new form of (dis)connection between the material and the symbolical” (2011: 6). Contra Lazzarato, then, I argue that Rancière’s conception of politics as a world-making activity opens up productive pathways to explore the role of infrastructures in the staging and articulation of politics. If (emancipatory) politics is a world-making activity, then, what are the socio-technical and spatial arrangements that bring this world to life and sustain it? What are, in other, words the infrastructures that support the staging of dissensus and the enactment of the logic of equality? In expanding Rancière’s thinking toward this hitherto unexplored dimension, the paper moves beyond merely equating infrastructures with the machinic, the non-human or the means of production and

understands infrastructures as socio-technical assemblages and spatial arrangements of human and non-human actors.

The voluminous literature on infrastructure has highlighted how these complex socio-technical networks assemble material, people, imaginaries and spaces to not only make life possible but also shape it in profound and pervasive ways (Larkin, 2013; McFarlane and Silver, 2017). As Keller Easterling highlights, “[I]ike an operating system, the medium of infrastructure space makes certain things possible and other things impossible ... dictating the rules of the game in the urban milieu” (2016: 14). A significant body of geographical work has demonstrated how socio-technical infrastructure networks mediate and propel state-political projects (Swyngedouw, 2007), shape deeply uneven and exclusionary life-worlds (Graham and Marvin, 2001), promote new forms of governance and governmentalities that choreograph everyday life and subjectivities (Graham and McFarlane, 2014). This latter aspect has also usefully included an engagement with the social infrastructures that urban dwellers assemble to support their life, often reworking and challenging the uneven infrastructural landscape of contemporary urbanism in creative ways (McFarlane and Silver, 2017; Simone, 2015). While infrastructure scholarship has productively highlighted how all infrastructure is in effect “political infrastructure” (McFarlane and Rutherford, 2008) and foregrounded the politics of urban infrastructure, less attention has been paid on the role that infrastructures might hold in articulating and circulating emancipatory politics (see also Vasudevan, 2015; Minuchin, 2021).

“The task”, however, Judith Butler convincingly argued in the aftermath of Occupy protests, is “to let the infrastructure become part of the new action, even a collaborative actor” (2015: 127). Indeed, politics and political subjectification cannot be fully separated “from questions of infrastructure[s] (...) [as] they not only condition the action, but take part in the making of the space of politics” (Butler, 2015: 127). In a similar line of argument, I contend that emancipatory politics entails the assembling and fabrication of infrastructures of dissensus: the physical and virtual, embodied and non-human, socio-spatial arrangements that make possible the staging of dissensus and the reconfiguration of the sensible through the “enactment of the egalitarian trait” (Rancière, 2015: 93). Infrastructures of dissensus do not emerge outside the police but are rather fabricated through “relocating, reshaping or redoubling” (Rancière, 2011: 5) its places and infrastructures. Thus understood, infrastructures of dissensus are pivotal in the articulation and circulation of emancipatory politics in three interrelated ways.

Firstly, infrastructures of dissensus provide the *stage* for becoming visible and audible and for prefiguratively enacting alternative imaginaries and practices. Scholarship on the Occupy protests, for example, documents how the re-claimed streets and squares were not a mere container for these movements but rather constitutive in the formation of new collective political subjects (Davidson and Iveson, 2014; Kaika and Karaliotas, 2016). In these reclaimed spaces imaginaries and practices of a political subject in-the-making were traced and negotiated – often through internal tensions and spatial differentiations (Karaliotas, 2017). My emphasis on Occupy protests and the occupation of space more broadly here is not limited to the role of occupied spaces qua infrastructures, though this is, indeed, an important dimension. Rather, it also foregrounds the role that socio-technical infrastructures play in making such occupations possible and ensuring their reproduction (see Iveson, 2017). It is through the assembling of infrastructures that supported the sustained occupation of the squares – the camp of tents, the solidarity kitchens, the media tools and teams and the makeshift hospitals – that protesters began to imagine and craft new spatial and political constellations. But infrastructures of dissensus are not limited to the protest camp. Vasudevan, for example, reflects on how occupation as “a radical politics of infrastructure” assembles “bodies, objects and practices” to re-imagine and re-construct a “common spatial field” (2015: 318) wherein the “ongoing interactions of participants continually produce sentiments, ideas, values and practices that manifest and encourage new modes of being” (Gould, 2009: 178). Furthermore, Arampatzi’s work on “struggle

communities” in austerity-marked Athens draws attention to how everyday solidarity initiatives fabricated the spaces and socio-material support networks for the articulation of an emancipatory everyday praxis against the austere city (2017b). Here, rather than a purely technical question, “the fabrication and the arrangements of infrastructures for association, exchange, circulation and expression” become a means for the articulation of a new political language and praxis (Minuchin, 2016: 897).

Secondly, infrastructures of dissensus provide *the socio-technical means* for circulating the re-configuration of the sensible. If politics revolves around disrupting the distribution of the sensible and articulating alternative sensible worlds, then, the sound of what is uttered and the image of what is performed is constitutive of political activity (Butler, 2015). The technologies and infrastructures that enable circulating such images and sounds become an integral part in performing political activity. From ‘low-tech’ means like political posters and newspapers to TV and radio stations to social media, “‘media’ is not just reporting who the people claim to be, but media has entered into the very definition of the people” (Butler, 2015: 20). The extensive use of social media to popularize Occupy protests from the Arab Spring to Southern Europe to the US is indicative (Juris, 2012). In these events, social media were in and of themselves a terrain for both challenging the police ordering and negotiating the ongoing political action (*ibid*). Beyond communication infrastructures, the theaters, cabarets and pubs where Rancière’s nineteenth century workers assembled to recite poetry and debate political texts (2012) can be read along similar lines: they provided the grounds for debating and disseminating ideas playing an integral role in proletarian subjectification. Similarly, the multiple solidarity initiatives that dot the urban landscape in the aftermath of recent uprisings also enable the circulation of emancipatory imaginaries in and through their spaces by making visible and palpable an emancipatory praxis in the everyday life of the city.

Thirdly, infrastructures of dissensus act as “convergence spaces” (Routledge, 2003) for diverse political actors and the material and virtual articulation of diverse political practices and movements (Featherstone, 2008). On the one hand, the physical spaces opened up in and through infrastructures of dissensus embed political activity in the urban fabric enabling and facilitating the coming together of diverse political actors. Diarmaid Kelliher’s work on the 1984-85 miners’ strike, for example, documents how Unemployed Workers’ Centers initiated by the Trades Union Council, radical and alternative bookshops and social and community centers were politicized to bring together diverse groups in solidarity with the miners (2017). Such meeting spaces, from community and social centers to squats and occupied workplaces, commonly attract activists involved in other political initiatives, thus propelling the forging of solidarity bonds and connections among diverse struggles. In this, such spaces connect to one another forging solidarity networks that span the whole urban fabric and formulating trans-local connections. The extensive networking of solidarity initiatives – from solidarity kitchens and health clinics to occupied workplaces and local assemblies – within and across Greek cities during the ‘Greek crisis’ is a prime example of such convergences and connections (Arampatzi, 2017a; Karaliotas, 2017). The networking of these socio-spatial infrastructures and their practices played a pivotal role in sustaining and promoting their activities. Simultaneously, the articulation of their practices also enabled the fabrication of an alternative infrastructure network that prefigured new ways of (self-)organizing and sustaining urban everyday life, thus, opening and literally building an alternative city of solidarity in and against the austere city. Hence, the articulation of “prefigurative tactics, which facilitate the unfolding of alternative practices of exchange, labour, association and learning, provide the components and experiences from where to articulate an urban political programme” (Minuchin, 2016: 906).

Importantly, however, this reference to specific places and infrastructures like the squat, the social center and the radio station is not an effort to fix the location of politics. Infrastructures of dissensus are not the pre-existing and/or ever-lasting foundations of politics and equality but exist as

such only if they remain the embodied enactment of the logic of equality that challenges the logic of the police (Rancière, 2015; Davidson and Iveson, 2015). It is, therefore, important to unpack how infrastructures of dissensus encounter and intersect with the police order, transforming it and being transformed by it (Karaliotas, 2021). In what follows, I read ERT's occupation and self-management as the fabrication of such an infrastructure of dissensus.

The event of ERT: From the logic of the police to “something bigger than ERT”

In the following sections I mobilize the case of ERT's occupation and self-management as a living laboratory to embody and further explore the work that infrastructures of dissensus do in the articulation and circulation of emancipatory politics. This analysis draws from research around ERT's occupation between 2013 and 2017. This included my observant participation in the spaces and assemblies of occupied ERT in Thessaloniki – mostly between June and August 2013 –, interviews and informal conversations with participants in ERT's occupation as well as activists and citizens in solidarity, and a close reading of the material – pamphlets, manifestos, public statements, and programmes – produced by occupied ERT. Occupations of ERT's buildings and the broadcasting of self-managed programmes unfolded throughout Greece since June 2013 but lasted for varying periods and had different degrees of intensity. The occupation of ERT's buildings in Athens, for example, lasted until November 2013 while its Thessaloniki counterpart – the most prolific of the occupations – up until June 2015 when ERT was re-instituted by SYRIZA. In the following analysis I focus on the full period of these 2 years discussing both Athens' and Thessaloniki's experience as this enables a more nuanced analysis of the trajectory of the occupation that also traces the transformations of ERT's infrastructure of dissensus as a result of its encounters with the police order (from the eviction of Athens' occupation by the ND government to SYRIZA's decision to re-open ERT). I begin with briefly situating the event of ERT's occupation in the conjuncture of the 'Greek crisis'.

The 'Greek crisis' ushered an era of deep politico-economic transformations that radically altered the discursive, institutional and material co-ordinates of politics. The symptom of Greece's failure was the accumulation of public debt. Debt, however, was also the nodal point in the articulation of hegemonic discourses aiming to legitimize the imposed policies. A massive discursive operation staged by national and international media and elites (Kouki and Liakos, 2015) sought to construct Greece and its citizens as indebted subjects who have enjoyed a lazy and hedonistic lifestyle on the back of financial mismanagement and irresponsibility. And if debt was the symptom of the country's sickness, the underlying cause was 'Greek exceptionalism': the proliferation of an extensive and inefficient public sector and the ever-present corruption and political clientalism that led to the country's deviation from 'normal' European states. The successive memoranda between Greek governments and the EU-IMF-ECB troika, revolving around the neoliberal mantras of austerity, privatization, deregulation of working conditions and downsizing the public sector, were portrayed as 'the bitter medicine' that would enable Greece to become a 'normal' European country.

It is against this background that the decision to dismantle ERT was introduced by the coalition government led by ND and supported by PASOK (Panhellenic Socialist Movement) and up until that point the Democratic Left (DEMAR)². The government's decision to liquidate ERT and dismiss all of its 2656 workers constituted a continuation and deepening of the twin logics of privatization and vilification of the public sector that underpinned much of the memoranda policies (Hadjimichalis, 2017). The government's spokesman Simos Kedikoglou – ironically enough himself a former ERT employee – clearly articulated the message when announcing ERT's closure on 11 June 2013:

“At a time when the Greek people are enduring sacrifices there is no room for delay, hesitation or tolerance for sacred cows. ERT is a typical example of unique lack of transparency and a heaven of money-waste (...) ERT will stop broadcasting on midnight” (2013: n.p.).

Kedikoglou’s announcement also exemplified the government’s “hatred of democracy” – as Ranci re (2014) would have it: its intolerance for democratic public media, public goods, culture, freedom of thought and creation. By dismantling ERT without having established another public broadcaster, Samaras’ government acted as if ERT was just another malfunctioning business owned by the government and bypassed constitutional provisions that posited the existence of public TV and radio stations as a cornerstone of democracy (Christopoulos, 2013). The decision-making process also constituted a qualitative shift in governance co-ordinates. The ratification of laws implementing the memoranda through summary procedures was one of the pivotal shifts in the re-organization of governance unfolding since 2010 (Karaliotas, 2021). However, the fact that ERT’s liquidation was introduced through “a ministerial decree, without parliamentary discussion or approval, constitute[d] an unprecedented act of authoritarianism” (Athanasidou, 2013: n.p.). This was made palpable when Samaras’ government cut off the power in ERT’s transmission centers turning TV screens black and silencing radio stations across the country; an inescapable sensorial manifestation of the impacts of austerity in every home across the country. As Stavrakakis argued, “[t]he thoroughly unexpected and violent blackening of the screens” symbolically condensed a governance logic and practice that was “not based on any type of ordinary hegemony” (2013: n.p.). It exemplified the government’s conviction to continue with the imposition of austerity through a brutal and nihilistic “decisionism” (*ibid.*).

ERT’s occupation unfolded against this backdrop. After Kedikoglou’s announcement, a spontaneous workers’ assembly was organized in ERT’s headquarters in Athens also including activists in solidarity. As participants in the assembly describe, the meeting lasted only a few minutes with everybody agreeing on the proposal for a working occupation of ERT’s buildings and infrastructure (Interview ERT Journalist 29/6/2015). From Athens the decision spread across Greece inspiring the organization of workers’ assemblies in ERT’s infrastructures in Thessaloniki and 19 other cities hosting regional ERT radio stations and journalists. The announcement of the General Assembly of ERT’s Journalists in Athens set the tone:

“ERT should be open: to society, its contradictions, its problems, its agonies, its ideas and actions.

ERT should be open: to culture, its world, its different tendencies, quests and dynamics.

ERT should be open: to every citizen of the world (...)

ERT should be open, real property of all Greek citizens. (...)

ERT IS AND WILL REMAIN OPEN”

(2013:n.p; emphasis in original).

ERT’s workers were determined to keep ERT open in a twofold sense. Firstly, ERT’s occupied infrastructure would serve as the platform for broadcasting TV and radio programmes voicing disagreement with the government’s decision and highlighting ERT’s role as a public media. Secondly, ERT journalists would mobilize the occupied infrastructure to address calls to citizens to gather in ERT’s buildings to protest the decision. And so it happened. Within hours thousands of people in solidarity gathered in ERT’s courtyard in Athens. In the evening of the same day, a massive solidarity concert was organized by ERT musicians and the now tens of thousands of people together with ERT’s workers made clear that they would not conform with the government’s

decision. The people's and the workers' conviction to keep ERT open did not wither away when TV screens went black and radio stations were silenced at the midnight of the same day. Rather, the government's "brutal nihilism" (Stavrakakis, 2013: n.p.) triggered a massive political struggle for ERT that would impact the broader political landscape in the country. It also fueled, however, "something bigger than ERT", as one of the workers put it: "a struggle for democracy and the commons, an exciting political experiment revolving around equality, self-management and the forging of networks of solidarity" (Interview ERT Journalist, 25/6/2016).

In the days and months that followed ERT continued to broadcast self-managed TV and radio programmes building on the embodied and material support of a massive solidarity movement. Simultaneously, ERT's courtyard in Athens remained packed with people in solidarity, artists and musicians as well as international visitors who came to speak to the public live and online (Leontidou, 2014). A solidarity assembly was held every evening in ERT's courtyard in Athens and a number of grassroots unions and movements against austerity held their assemblies and rallies in front of ERT's buildings. ERT's infrastructure across the country was re-allocated from its role in serving the interests of the state and the markets and transformed into an infrastructure of dissensus: a socio-technical assemblage that articulated the scene for staging disagreement with austerity policies through direct democratic practices, solidarity and the self-management of the commons. Importantly, however, ERT was not an isolated experiment. Occupied ERT's imaginaries and practices were drawing their inspiration from the wider politicization around the 'Greek crisis' (Mullis, 2021) and notably the squares movement against austerity and the multiple solidarity and struggle communities that emerged in its aftermath (Arampatzi, 2017b; Karaliotas, 2017). Besides, the people who supported ERT's experiment were also coming from a background of participation in such initiatives. Hence, ERT can be seen as the continuation of the process of political subjectification that was inspired by the squares movement and carried through the various infrastructures of dissensus that emerged in its aftermath (Karaliotas, 2021).

ERT's headquarters in Athens remained occupied for 5 months, up until 7 November 2013, when riot police forces evicted the occupation. Meanwhile, a new state broadcasting service, NERIT, was established attracting applications for employment from almost half of ERT's former workers. These developments, however, did not signal the end of ERT's experiment that continued to broadcast up until June 2015 when SYRIZA's newly elected government re-instituted ERT and re-appointed its former employees. By virtue of being still occupied, ERT's infrastructure in Thessaloniki was now transformed into the central node in ERT's experiment as it provided the studios to host and the equipment to broadcast most of the programmes. Simultaneously, the arrival of workers from Athens gave renewed life to Thessaloniki's initiative and fueled a further round of experimentation. The following section focuses on these 2 years of ERT's working existence as an infrastructure of dissensus.

Occupy, resist, broadcast: ERT as an infrastructure of dissensus

In her insightful analysis of "the power of infrastructure space" in *Extrastatecraft*, Easterling argues that the disposition of infrastructure space "results from the circulation of (...) active forms within it" (2016: 73). Tracing the active forms within infrastructure space, she suggests, can "make more palpable the dispositions they inflect" but also provide important insights in discerning and manipulating the political character of infrastructures (*ibid.*). The "switch/remote" and the "wiring/topology" of infrastructures are two active forms that Easterling identifies. While the former "modulates the flow of activities" acting like a remote control that can "suppress or redirect", the latter refers to "expressions of relative position and sequence in a network" that favor certain "activities and routines over others" (Easterling, 2016: 75–77). Thinking ERT's infrastructure through these two active forms can help illuminate its political disposition as a

mass-media network. In the radial network of ERT's television and radio stations the wiring is such that one "single central point", a switch, "controls the flow of information" (Easterling, 2016: 77). This wiring of ERT's infrastructure allowed ND's government to silence the radios and blacken the TV screens when disconnecting the power in ERT's transmission centers. The occupation of ERT's infrastructure, in juxtaposition, enabled workers and activists in solidarity to assemble an alternative wiring that bypassed the government-controlled switch to broadcast their self-managed programmes. More than that, the occupied infrastructure became a hub in an alternative spatial wiring that enabled the articulation of political activities throughout Greek cities and the configuration of an alternative sensible world. Notably, this alternative political wiring of ERT's infrastructure was neither fixed nor purely horizontal: for as long as it existed, ERT's occupation in Athens – by virtue of its visibility, the people it brought together and the infrastructure it controlled – was the key node in a rather vertical topology wherein TV and Radio programmes but also imaginaries, practices and events were emanating from Athens and circulated to the other occupations across the country. The eviction of Athens' occupation in November 2013, in turn, led to a new wiring that saw Thessaloniki becoming the key node in ERT's experiment. In this section, I unpack the possibilities, challenges and limitations around the fabrication and operation of this infrastructure of dissensus.

Prefiguration and the staging of disagreement: Self-managed ERT open to society

The role of private media in legitimizing austerity policies in Greece and supporting the political elites implementing them is well documented (Mylonas, 2014; Nikolaidis, 2017). In an unregulated electronic media landscape, where private channels have been operating unlicensed since their establishment in the 1990s, a media oligopoly with close ties with political elites dominated the country's media (Nikolaidis, 2017; Iosifidis and Papathanasopoulos, 2019) setting the tone in discourses around the 'Greek crisis'. ERT for its part, while respecting formal processes of equal representation of political views, has over the years often been mobilized as a propaganda tool for successive ND and PASOK governments. In fact, ERT was effectively running as a state rather than a public broadcaster as its executives and managers changed following government alternation and ministerial censorship was a rather common practice (Iosifidis and Papathanasopoulos, 2019). The state's tight control over ERT coupled with the concentration of private media in the hands of construction, shipping and oil capital created a suffocating landscape, silencing disagreement with the memoranda and glossing over the devastating consequences of austerity (Nikolaidis, 2017).

ERT's occupation introduced a radical rupture in this media landscape. The central element was the online broadcast of Radio and TV programmes. ERT's infrastructure provided the necessary material and technical means to produce the programmes as open studios operated in ERT's premises across the country. The practice of occupation was opening the infrastructural networks and spaces (Vasudevan, 2015) for a prefigurative praxis (Minuchin, 2016) seeking to construct and realize a public and democratic media. This prefigurative praxis revolved around self-management and self-organization, on the one hand, and the fabrication of solidarity networks and a dialogue with society, on the other. Concerning the former, the guidelines and framework for ERT's broadcasts were consensually discussed and agreed in the workers' assemblies that brought together all of ERT's workers including journalists, technicians, musicians etc. In this respect, ERT's occupation constituted "a formidable example of workers' control of the means of production" (Sheehan, 2016: 86). Concerning the latter, ERT's broadcasts would have been impossible without the material and technical support of people in solidarity. Most prominent in this respect was the hosting of ERT's broadcast by many bloggers and alternative media websites from the moment the power was cut from ERT's transmission centers. It is through this practice and with the support of

bloggers and activists that the online platform ERTOpen was created hosting ERT's broadcast and also acting as a news outlet. The internet, thus, acted as an infrastructure space that enabled occupied ERT to bypass the government's control of the 'switch' of the transmission centers and fabricate an alternative wiring/topology that reached every home in the country.

The content of the programmes radically challenged the dominant scripting of the 'Greek crisis'. Occupied ERT's studios made visible and audible the movements and solidarity initiatives customarily excluded from mainstream media. In the early days of ERT's occupation in Athens, for example, various movements and labor organizations hosted their rallies in front of ERT's headquarters to voice their demands through the re-appropriated infrastructure (Leontidou, 2014). This practice was even more pronounced in the operation of Thessaloniki's occupation that produced a series of documentaries and hosted the press conferences of multiple movements active in and around the city: Thessaloniki's platform against auctions, Thessaloniki's social solidarity health clinic, the movement against gold-mining activities in Halkidiki and the occupied and self-managed factory of VioMe. Such broadcasts were increasingly being accessed by more people as the black screens and silenced radios were pushing the public to seek alternative sources of information online (Leontidou, 2014; Sheehan, 2016). The alternative practices of producing, circulating, and accessing the commons of information assembled in and around ERT's occupied infrastructure, thus, constituted a platform for the staging of democratic disagreement; for re-configuring what could be said and heard around the 'Greek crisis', for changing who could speak and be recognized as a legitimate interlocutor in debates around it. In this sense, if politics is about who and what is visible and audible, as Rancière would have it, the role of infrastructure spaces like ERT in the articulation of politics cannot be overstated.

ERT's prefigurative experimentation around public and democratic media was further consolidated and radicalized after the eviction of ERT's occupation in Athens. While up until November 2013 the prospect of re-instituting ERT defined the horizon of the occupation, occupied ERT's repertoires, discourses and practices shifted after the eviction. It was by then apparent that the government had no intention to re-open a fully functional public broadcaster but was rather creating a far more clientelistic state propaganda mechanism through NERIT. It was also evident that the struggle for ERT would last for long and face everyday practical and political challenges. In the face of these challenges, Thessaloniki's occupation decided to deepen and systematize its direct democratic practices of self-government and to further open ERT's infrastructure to citizens and movements.

In June 2014, Thessaloniki's workers' assembly published its proposal for a new public and democratic ERT (ErtOpen, 2014). Thessaloniki's proposal was not an abstract utopian treatise on self-management and organization but the crystallization of an embodied practice that emerged from the everyday experience of running ERT (Interview ERT Journalist, 25/6/2016). The proposal was articulated around direct democratic practices and sought to provide a framework for the self-managed production of the information and cultural commons in the service of the public. The philosophy of management for the new ERT was based on the central role of the general assembly as well as the rotation of the heads of various departments and their direct revocability. Executive and managerial positions were replaced by elected sectoral coordinators directly accountable to the general assembly (*ibid.*). In parallel, the manifesto insisted on safeguarding the open character of ERT and proposed ways for society's involvement in the participatory formulation of broadcasts. Specifically, it instituted a platform where representatives of various social movements, solidarity initiatives and neighborhood assemblies together with representatives of professional bodies would feed the opinions of their respective collectives to ERT's general assembly and programme committees (ErtOpen, 2014). It is through this open attitude that Thessaloniki's ERT continued to challenge dominant politics while also acting as a nodal point in the articulation of movements and struggles against austerity.

Occupied ERT as a node in the articulation of political struggles and a different distribution of the sensible

On Thursday 13 June 2013, two days after Kedikoglou's announcement, a general strike was organized by the public (ADEDY) and private (GSEE) sector Unions to protest ERT's closure. The Unions understood the government's decision as a "coup-like action" that threatened "media pluralism and democracy", as an "attack to workers' and citizens' rights" that foretold further "layoffs, cut backs and deregulation in the public sector" (ADEDY, 2013: n.p.). The rally was held in ERT's courtyard in Athens. This was just one of the many instances when ERT's spaces served for the meeting of diverse movements and political actors. As already mentioned, from the first day of the occupation ERT's courtyard in Athens and the streets in front of ERT's infrastructure across the country were packed with movements and people in solidarity. In the days and months that followed, ERT's infrastructures of dissensus became nodal convergence spaces (Routledge, 2003) for the struggle against austerity. The re-appropriation and re-purposing of ERT's infrastructure, as the previous section discussed, has opened ERT's microphones and cameras to these movements, thus, creating meeting spaces that both relied upon and developed networks of solidarity (Kelliher, 2017) between ERT, anti-austerity initiatives and citizens.

It would be misleading, however, to assume that the convergence and articulation of struggles is a smooth and frictionless process that necessarily results from the opening of infrastructures of dissensus. The diverse trajectories of ERT's occupation in Athens and Thessaloniki are telling. From the early days of ERT's occupation in Athens, it became apparent that the links between the solidarity assembly and the workers' assembly as well as between people in solidarity and what was happening inside ERT's buildings were extremely fragile. As one of the votes by the solidarity assembly narrates: "while we have actively sought to establish links between the two assemblies our contacts have remained limited to just a few of ERT's workers who participated on a personal basis and could not express the decisions of the workers' assembly" (ERT Solidarity Assembly, 2013: n.p.). Efforts by the solidarity assembly to have a more influential say over the TV and Radio broadcasts were also practically ignored. Established journalists and high ranking ERT Union (POSPERT) members had a decisive role in this respect. This was particularly true for the TV programme. This was also expressed in the spatiality of the Athenian occupation as ERT's buildings were also guarded by POSPERT members, at times, creating barriers in people accessing them (ERT Solidarity Assembly, 2013). Arguably, this failure to consolidate the links between the two poles of the occupation played a key role in the withering away of the massive solidarity movement. This, in turn, fed the self-referential and particularistic trends that already existed within the struggle, positing ERT's re-institution as the ultimate horizon. Consequently, the call for support when the government decided to evict the workers from ERT's headquarters had only limited success.

ERT's occupation in Thessaloniki, in juxtaposition, was more successful in opening its infrastructure to movements and citizens. A reciprocal and mutually empowering relationship developed between the occupation and solidarity initiatives in the city, playing a pivotal role in both strengthening them but also in influencing their further development. The production of a series of documentaries on Thessaloniki's urban movements by ERT workers and the hosting of movements' press conferences in ERT's infrastructure, described above, is a prime example of this relationship.

A further key manifestation of this network of solidarity around Thessaloniki's ERT was staged in September 2014, during, the then Prime Minister's, Samaras visit to Thessaloniki's annual EXPO. Thessaloniki's EXPO traditionally serves for the announcement of the government's plans for the financial year with media attention customarily focusing squarely on the Prime Minister's speech. In September 2014, however, ERT's workers and political movements from across the country mobilized ERT's infrastructure – less than 500m away from where Samaras' speech was held – to coordinate and propel their actions. This co-ordination was achieved through a series of

open general assembly meetings in ERT that brought together activists, ERT workers and Thessaloniki's citizens. ERT's building was also used as the meeting point for the demonstration held during Samaras' speech and live broadcasted by ERTOpen. On the next day, a movement press conference parallel to Samaras' press conference was held in Thessaloniki's ERT. There, activists documented the consequences of the memoranda deconstructing Samaras' claims and put forward an alternative vision for organizing urban everyday life through the articulation of the multifaceted solidarity initiatives, self-managed and self-organized experiments and local assemblies unfolding in the city (Interview ERT Journalist 25/6/2016). ERT's infrastructure was not just the container for these activities or the amplifier of their visibility but also a prime example of articulating such alternative modes of being and doing in-common. Brought together, these activities succeeded in hijacking the spotlight from Prime Minister's visit, making dissenting voices audible and turning attention to the political struggles and experiments in Thessaloniki and beyond.

The articulation of movements in and through Thessaloniki's ERT moved beyond the coming together to protest government policies. Rather, different movements, practices, and infrastructures were materially and discursively articulated in a wiring/topology that supported and shaped their actions (see [Minuchin, 2016](#)). In her work on "emergent solidarity spaces" in Athens, Athina Arampatzi documents how the physical and virtual networking of diverse initiatives and movements was central in the exchange of ideas and practices, in devising common strategies, and in sharing resources (2017a). Occupied ERT both supported and benefited from this articulation. The formulation of the Collective of Friends and People in Solidarity with ERT, in October 2014, provides a key example of how ERT's occupation was maintained and shaped through its linking with other movements and solidarity initiatives. Bringing together activists and volunteers from various groups and initiatives across the city, the collective sought to materially support ERT's experiment through voluntary labor, the offering of services and products for free, the organization of fundraising events and even offering direct financial support. The reproduction of the occupation (see [Iveson, 2017](#)) was, thus, being made possible through a wiring of alternative infrastructures. This has been particularly important as the occupation was becoming protracted and financial difficulties and 'burn out' were becoming common problems for ERT's workers (Interview ERT Journalist 28/6/2016). Simultaneously, the collective also served as a temporary platform for the dialogue between ERT and Thessaloniki's society that the workers' manifesto posited as a key component in formulating ERT's programme ([ERTOpen, 2014](#)).

ERT also played a pivotal twofold role in articulating the everyday practices of the self-managed experiments and solidarity initiatives unfolding in Thessaloniki. On the one hand, the opening of political meeting spaces in Thessaloniki's occupied ERT created room to exchange experiences, discuss common practical and political challenges and forge long-lasting solidarity bonds between movements, ERT's workers and Thessaloniki's citizens. These exchanges, often facilitated through key activists participating in the different collectives, enabled the diffusion and sharing of ideas, practices, imaginaries and resources ([Arampatzi, 2017a](#)). On the other, these practices were also further articulated and popularized as occupied ERT's documentaries and broadcasts began to map the technical and practical knowledges involved in putting together alternative modes of production, distribution and exchange. Different movement practices and initiatives were, thus, virtually and materially articulated to allow egalitarian "urban visions" beyond austerity "to be presented as managed extrapolations of existing experiments and prefigurative interventions" ([Minuchin, 2016](#): 906). In other words, they were – to paraphrase Rancière – assembling a city of equality in and against the city of austerity and the police.

From infrastructure of dissensus to re-institutionalization: Occupied ERT and the police order

ERT, as an infrastructure of dissensus, was not outside the police order and immune from institutional politics, but rather their encounters and intersections were mutually constitutive. To begin

with, the rupture in the political co-ordinates that ERT's occupation brought about was also reflected in institutional politics. From the early days of ERT's occupation, SYRIZA and ANEL (Independent Greeks) – the left- and right-wing populist anti-memorandum parties that formed a coalition government after the January 2015 elections – eagerly supported ERT's occupation. SYRIZA and ANEL MPs regularly participated in ERT's programmes while SYRIZA MPs took rotas ensuring that twenty of them will be present in ERT's headquarters in Athens to prevent an eviction by riot police (Sheehan, 2016). On Monday 17 June 2013, SYRIZA organized a rally in Syntagma Square to protest ERT's closure. In SYRIZA's discourse ERT's black screens became a nodal signifier of the coupling of austerity with an authoritarian governance logic during Samaras' premiership. In fact, "to do away with the government of the black [screens]" became one of SYRIZA's main mottos in the years leading up to the January 2015 elections. In turn, the frequent promotion of the party's discourses and members through occupied ERT's broadcasts significantly contributed in circulating and amplifying its narratives (Karaliotas, 2021). ERT's closure also created an internal split in the governing coalition as the small centre-left party of DEMAR decided to withdraw its support for the government in protest of the decision.

Moreover, ERT's occupation continuously encountered and intersected with the police order. The different trajectories of ERT's occupations in Athens and Thessaloniki are telling. Returning to Easterling's remarks around wiring/topology can help illuminate these differences and how they shaped the two occupations' encounters with the police. Athens' ERT was the central node both in the wiring/topology of the country's broadcasting infrastructure and in the alternative wiring/topology articulated by the movement. Concerning the latter, Athens' occupation was the key terrain in and through which the imaginaries, voices and practices of the broader ERT movement were articulated but also the most visible of the occupations as it was located in the heart of the country's capital. Concerning the former, the infrastructure of Athens' ERT was a huge investment fixed in space consisting of the majority of the state-of-the-art broadcasting infrastructure (studios, cameras, consoles, etc.) available to the Greek state and paramount to the operation of the new state broadcasting service NERIT instituted by Samaras' government in August 2013. As a result of this wiring/topology, Athens' occupation was from its very first day under the permanent threat of eviction. The establishment of NERIT would bring a more substantial blow to occupied ERT's trajectory as for various reasons, ranging from personal financial concerns to politico-ideological views, almost half of ERT's former employees would apply for work in the new institutional broadcaster (Interview ERT Journalist 29/6/2016). This has led to the withering away of Athens' occupation – as most of ERT's employees were based there – which also made easier the eviction of the occupation in November 2013. The relative lack of centrality of Thessaloniki's occupation, contrarily, meant that it attracted a less urgent and hostile response from the state creating room for longer-lasting and more radical experimentation. This is not to deny the importance of the practices developed through Thessaloniki's ERT in ensuring the occupation's longevity but to highlight how the room for these practices to flourish was created in the first place.

Samaras' NERIT was short-lived. Soon after its electoral win, SYRIZA embarked upon re-opening and re-institutionalizing ERT. The new ERT began to broadcast on 11 June 2015, exactly 2 years after ERT's liquidation and the blackening of the screens. For SYRIZA MP, Sia Anagnostopoulou "the re-institution of ERT [was an act of] accountability to the demos" (2015: n.p.). "Apart from the re-appointment of the violently dismissed workers", Anagnostopoulou went on to argue in her speech in the Parliament plenary discussing ERT's re-institution, "public service broadcasting is once again becoming a field for the continuous democratization, of both the public sphere and the citizens" (2015: n.p.). However, SYRIZA's ERT, was rather close to the ERT that Samaras liquidated. Following fragmented and sporadic negotiations with POSPERT, mostly concerning who is going to be employed in the new Service, SYRIZA re-instituted an ERT hierarchical and under the state's control, rather than a public and democratic broadcaster "based on

critical and creative programming and workers self-management” (Sheehan, 2016: 118). SYRIZA’s ERT practically ignored the detailed proposals developed by Thessaloniki’s experiment. At that time, SYRIZA was in the middle of tough negotiations with Greece’s creditors and was facing severe pressures from the European political elites and institutions as well as from the country’s private media and politico-economic establishment. It thus made sense to want to have a public broadcaster that would try to provide a somewhat more sobering picture against the looming chaos that the mainstream media were portraying. But this inevitably led to rush action on the ERT front. We might want to put it this way; for SYRIZA’s government, within the hegemonic struggle that was unfolding at the time, experimenting with self-management and self-organization was a luxury. What mattered was to ensure that ERT would be the government’s ally in the ensuing battle.

Conclusion: Toward an emancipatory politics of urban infrastructure?

Today, with ND back in power, ERT has fully returned to its hierarchical organization operating under the state’s close control and far from the democratic media prefiguratively enacted through ERT’s infrastructure of dissensus. But ERT’s trajectory should neither be seen as a reason to fully dismiss the emancipatory potentialities of political experiments like ERT nor accepted as the foretold conclusion of all similar experiments. Rather, it calls for a nuanced account of the possibilities, challenges and limitations facing emancipatory politics that seek to construct alternative spatial and infrastructural arrangements.

To provide such an account, this paper proposed the notion of *infrastructures of dissensus* to denote the physical and virtual, embodied and non-human, socio-technical and spatial arrangements that enable and circulate the staging of democratic disagreement. Bringing Jacques Rancière’s conceptualization of politics in dialogue with geographical scholarship on infrastructure spaces and the spatiality of politics, the paper advanced a conceptualization of infrastructures of dissensus as the assembling of bodies, objects and practices in space to reconfigure the partitioning of the sensible through the enactment of the logic of equality. On the one hand, this reading challenges the prevailing reading of infrastructures as just tools of governance and technologies of new modes and forms of (neoliberal) governmentalities by foregrounding the emancipatory potentialities that lie in the re-appropriation, re-purposing and fabricating of political infrastructures. On the other, it surpasses Rancière’s almost exclusive emphasis on the utterances stemming from political spaces, to expand Rancièrian scholarship on the political through an emphasis on the materialities, bodies and socio-spatial configurations that make possible and shape the articulation and circulation of the political. In this line of argument, the notion of infrastructures of dissensus pushes scholarship to unpack the work that material, virtual, and embodied infrastructures do in fabricating, circulating, and expanding political action as well as the challenges that stem from such efforts to create long-lasting political spatialities (see also Vasudevan, 2015; Minuchin, 2021). Infrastructures of dissensus can, thus, be seen as a heuristic device that enables a more nuanced, open-ended and plural reading of the everyday articulations of political action and the ways in which it encounters, intersects with and is co-shaped by the police order and assorted governance practices and logics.

Tracing occupied ERT’s trajectory, I documented how such a framing enables a rich reading of the potentialities and pitfalls of political experiments with an emancipatory politics of infrastructure. I argued that ERT’s working existence, constituted an opening of political spaces that significantly contributed to the re-politicisation of the urban at times of crisis. Occupied ERT’s infrastructure played a pivotal role in enunciating dissensus with the logic of the police and the devastating austerity policies implemented in response to the ‘Greek debt crisis’. It staged a disruption of the police order that sought to impose the logics of privatisation and enclosure as the only sensible solution for the commons of culture and information. More importantly, however, occupied ERT was not limited in resistance but also pre-figuratively imagined and materialized new ways of doing politics and of organizing

everyday life in-common. The spaces opened up in and through ERT's infrastructure of dissensus also held a pivotal role in the convergence of struggles against austerity and the articulation of multifaceted political movements and solidarity initiatives. Re-appropriating and re-wiring the infrastructure of the state TV and radio stations, ERT made visible and audible the numerous solidarity initiatives and political movements unfolding in Thessaloniki and to a lesser degree Athens, thus, supporting and strengthening them. In turn, ERT's struggle and self-managed operation would have been impossible without the unprecedented support of activists and political movements. Hence, occupied ERT emerges as an embodied, networked and porous infrastructure that played a pivotal role in assembling and circulating emancipatory politics. In other words – and paraphrasing Rancière – ERT was a key node in the articulation of a political imaginary and praxis that put a city of equality – that is always in the making – in confrontation with the city of the police (Karaliotas and Kapsali, 2021).

Reading some of the challenges that marked ERT's experiment, I highlighted that this is neither a linear nor a frictionless process but rather one without guarantees. Firstly, the convergence of movements and activists and the forging of solidarity bonds, ERT's case attests, is a slow and demanding process that can be greatly hindered if infrastructures of dissensus are not radically open to society. The fundamentally different trajectories of ERT's occupation in Athens and Thessaloniki clearly demonstrate that exclusionary lines might well be reproduced within such experiments posing significant limitations for emancipatory politics. Infrastructures of dissensus, and emancipatory politics more broadly, Rancière would insist, should never be understood as finished products of a fixed political community but rather need to always remain open to “newcomers” to “allow new objects to appear as common concerns and new voices to appear and be heard” (2016: 68). Secondly, infrastructures of dissensus are also challenged and reshaped by their encounters with the police. As ERT's case demonstrates, this is not limited to questions of suppression and silencing but rather also foregrounds questions of institutionalization. ERT's self-managed trajectory did not end through riot police intervention but when SYRIZA re-instituted ERT as a government broadcaster ignoring the 2 years of experimentation around building and sustaining a democratic public media. This is not to suggest that ERT's case should necessarily be translated to a strategy of autonomy from institutional politics. Rather, it is to highlight that these dilemmas are inescapable, come with no easy answers, and therefore need to be kept open. In fact, it is precisely the fact that they have to negotiate these dilemmas that makes experiments like ERT the spaces in and through which the formation of new political imaginaries and practices is taking shape. Infrastructures of dissensus stage an emancipatory politics without guarantees: a politics that its outcome is never a given but that need to be kept radically open to the equality of each and everyone.

Declaration of conflicting interests

The author(s) declared no potential conflicts of interest with respect to the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

Funding

The author(s) received no financial support for the research, authorship, and/or publication of this article.

ORCID iD

Lazaros Karaliotas  <https://orcid.org/0000-0002-1473-1897>

References

ADEDY (2013) *Press Release on the General Strike of 13 June 2013*. ADEDY. Available at: <https://www.taxheaven.gr/news/news/view/id/14028#> (accessed 1 February 2019)[in Greek].

- Anagnostopoulou S (2015) *ERT's Re-Institution: Accountability to the Demos*. RedNotebook Parliament speech available online: <https://rednotebook.gr/2015/04/i-epanidrisi-tis-ert-logodossia-ston-dimo/> (accessed 9 February 2019)[in Greek].
- Arampatzi A (2017a) The spatiality of counter-austerity politics in Athens, Greece: emergent 'urban solidarity spaces'. *Urban Studies* 54(9): 2155–2171.
- Arampatzi A (2017b) Contentious spatialities in an era of austerity: everyday politics and 'struggle communities' in Athens, Greece. *Political Geography*, 60:47–56.
- Athanasiou A (2013) *E.R.T.: Greek Government Does Not Even Keep up the Pretence of Democratic Legitimacy Any More*. Chronos, 02(6.2013) Available at <http://chronomag.eu/index.php/index.php/athanasiou-ert-greek-government-does-not-even-keep-up-the-pretence-of-democratic-legitimacy-any-more.html> (accessed 5 February 2019).
- Butler J (2015) *Notes Toward a Performative Theory of Assembly*. Boston: Harvard University Press.
- Christopoulos D (2013) *A Paradigmatic Recipe of State Failure*. Enthemata. Available at: <https://rednotebook.gr/2013/11/paradeigmatikh-syntagh-kratikh-apotyxi/>(accessed 3 February 2019)[in Greek].
- Davidson M and Iveson K (2014) Occupations, mediations, subjectifications: fabricating politics. *Space and Polity* 18(2): 137–152.
- Davidson M and Iveson K (2015) Recovering the politics of the city: from the 'post-political city' to a 'method of equality' for critical urban geography. *Progress in Human Geography* 39(5): 543–559.
- Dikeç M (2013) Beginners and equals: political subjectivity in Arendt and Rancière. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 38(1): 78–90.
- Dikeç M (2015) *Space, Politics and Aesthetics*. Edinburgh: Edinburgh University Press.
- Dikeç M and Swyngedouw E (2017) Theorizing the politicizing city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41(1): 1–18.
- Easterling K (2016) *Extrastatecraft: The Power of Infrastructure Space*. London: Verso.
- ERTOpen (2014) *The ERT We Want*. ERTOpen. Available at: <http://www.ertopen.com/fakelos-ert/item/23636-%C2%ABpoia-ert-theloyme%C2%BB-keimeno-protash-ths-genikh-syneleyshs-twn-ergazomenwn-ths-eleytherhs-aytodiacheirizomenhs-ert3> (accessed 1 October 2018)[in Greek].
- ERT Solidarity Assembly (2013) *Solidarity Assembly Call to ERT's Workers*. ERT Solidarity Assembly. Available at: <https://risinggalaxy.wordpress.com/2013/06/23/%CE%BA%CE%B5%CE%AF%CE%BC%CE%B5%CE%BD%CE%BF-%CF%80%CF%81%CF%89%CF%84%CE%BF%CE%B2%CE%BF%CF%85%CE%BB%CE%AF%CE%B1%CF%82-%CE%B1%CE%BB%CE%BB%CE%B7%CE%BB%CE%AD%CE%B3%CE%B3%CF%85%CF%89%CE%BD-%CE%B1%CF%80/> (accessed 11 February 2019)[in Greek].
- Featherstone D (2008) *Resistance, Space and Political Identities: The Making of Counter-Global Networks*. Oxford: Wiley-Blackwell.
- General Assembly of ERT's Journalists (2013) *ERT Is Open*. RedNotebook Press Release Available at: <https://rednotebook.gr/2014/06/i-ert-einai-anoixti/> (accessed 6 February 2019)[in Greek].
- Gould D (2009) *Moving Politics: Emotion and ACT UP's Fight Against Aids*. Chicago: University of Chicago Press.
- Graham S and Marvin S (2001) *Splintering Urbanism: Networked Infrastructures, Technological Mobilities and the Urban Condition*. London: Routledge.
- Graham S and McFarlane C (eds) (2014) *Infrastructural Lives: Urban Infrastructure in Context*. London: Routledge.
- Hadjimichalis C (2017) *Crisis Spaces: Structures, Struggles and Solidarity in Southern Europe*. London: Routledge.
- Iosifidis P and Papathanasopoulos S (2019) Greek ERT: state or public service broadcaster? in Połńska E and Beckett C (eds) *Public Service Broadcasting and Media Systems in Troubled European Democracies*. London: Palgrave, 129–154.

- Iveson K (2017) ‘Making space public’ through occupation: the Aboriginal Tent Embassy, Canberra. *Environment and Planning A* 49(3): 537–554.
- Juris J S (2012) Reflections on #Occupy everywhere: social media, public space, and emerging logics of aggregation. *American Ethnologist* 39(2): 259–279.
- Kaika M and Karaliotas L (2016) The spatialization of democratic politics: insights from indignant squares. *European Urban and Regional Studies* 23(4): 556–570.
- Karaliotas L (2017) Staging equality in Greek squares: hybrid spaces of political subjectification. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 41(1): 54–69.
- Karaliotas L (2021) Geographies of politics and the police: post-democratization, SYRIZA, and the politics of the “Greek debt crisis.” *Environment and Planning C* 39(3): 491–511.
- Karaliotas L and Kapsali M (2021) Equals in solidarity: Orfanotrofió’s housing squat as a site for political subjectification across differences amid the “Greek crisis”. *Antipode* 53(2): 399–421.
- Kedikoglou S (2013) *Announcement on ERT’s closure*. Iefimerida. Available at: <https://www.iefimerida.gr/news/110064/%CE%BF-%CE%BA%CE%B5%CE%B4%CE%AF%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%B3%CE%BB%CE%BF%CF%85-%CE%B1%CE%BD%CE%B1%CE%BA%CE%BF%CE%AF%CE%BD%CF%89%CF%83%CE%B5-%CF%84%CE%BF-%CE%BA%CE%BB%CE%B5%CE%AF%CF%83%CE%B9%CE%BC%CE%BF-%CF%84%CE%B7%CF%82-%CE%B5%CF%81%CF%84> (accessed 11 February 2019)[in Greek].
- Kelliher D (2017) Contested spaces: London and the 1984–5 Miners’ strike. *Twentieth Century British History* 28(4): 595–617.
- Kouki H and Liakos A (2015) Narrating the story of a failed national transition: discourses on the Greek crisis, 2010–2014. *Historein* 15(1): 49–61.
- Larkin B (2013) The politics and poetics of infrastructure. *Annual Review of Anthropology* 42: 327–343.
- Lazzarato M (2014) *Signs and Machines: Capitalism and the Production of Subjectivity*. Los Angeles: Semiotext(e).
- Leontidou L (2014) The crisis and its discourses: quasi-orientalist attacks on mediterranean urban spontaneity, informality and joie de vivre. 18(4–5): 551–562.
- McFarlane C and Rutherford J (2008) Political infrastructures: governing and experiencing the fabric of the city. *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32(2): 363–374.
- McFarlane C and Silver J (2017) Navigating the city: dialectics of everyday urbanism. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 42(3): 458–471.
- Minuchin L (2016) The politics of construction: towards a theory of material articulations. *Environment and Planning D* 34(5): 895–913.
- Minuchin L (2021) Prefigurative urbanization: politics through infrastructural repertoires in Guayaquil. *Political Geography* 85, 102316. DOI: [10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102316](https://doi.org/10.1016/j.polgeo.2020.102316).
- Mullis D (2021) *A post-foundational conception of politics and space: Henri Lefebvre and Jacques Rancière revisited in Resisting Athens*. In Landau F and Roskam L Pohl N (eds) *[Un]grounding Post-Foundational Geographies*, Bielefeld: Transcript, 323–342.
- Mylonas Y (2014) Crisis, austerity and opposition in mainstream media discourses of Greece. *Current Drug Safety* 11(3): 305–321.
- Nikolaïdis A (2017) The Impact of austerity on the Greek news media and public sphere. In Davis A (ed) *The Death of Public Knowledge?: How Free Markets Destroy the General Intellect*, London: Goldsmiths Press, 33–44.
- Quintana L (2019) Jacques Rancière and the emancipation of bodies, *Philosophy & Social Criticism* 45(2): 212–238.
- Rancière J (1994) Post-democracy, politics and philosophy: an interview with Jacques Rancière. *Angelaki* 1(3): 171–178.
- Rancière J (1999) *Disagreement*. Minnesota: University of Minnesota Press.

- Rancière J and Panagia D (2000) Dissenting words: a conversation with Jaques Ranciere. *Diacritics* 30: 113–126.
- Rancière J (2003) Politics and aesthetics an interview. *Angelaki* 8(2): 191–211.
- Rancière J (2009) Contemporary art and the politics of aesthetics. In (eds), *Communities of Sense: Rethinking Aesthetics and Politics*. Durham, NC: Duke University Press, 31–50.
- Rancière J (2011) The thinking of dissensus: politics and aesthetics. In Bowman P and Stamp R (eds) *Reading Rancière*, London: A&C Black, 1–17.
- Rancière J (2012) *Proletarian Nights: The Workers' Dream in Nineteenth-Century France*. London: Verso.
- Rancière J (2014) *Hatred of Democracy*. London: Verso.
- Rancière J (2015) *Dissensus: On Politics and Aesthetics*. London: Bloomsbury.
- Rancière J (2016) *The Method of Equality: Politics and Poetics*. NY: Columbia University Press.
- Routledge P (2003) Convergence space: process geographies of grassroots globalization networks. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 28(3): 333–349.
- Sheehan H (2016) *The Syriza Wave: Surging and Crashing with the Greek Left*. New York: Monthly Review Press.
- Simone A (2015). Afterword: come on out, you're surrounded: the between of infrastructure. 19(2–3): 375–383.
- Stavrakakis Y (2013) *Brutal Nihilism*. Chronos, 02(6.2013) Available at: <http://www.chronosmag.eu/index.php/y-stavrakakis-brutal-nihilism.html> (accessed 5 February 2019).
- Swyngedouw E (2007) Technonatural revolutions: the scalar politics of Franco's hydro social dream for Spain, 1939–1975. *Transactions of the Institute of British Geographers* 32(1): 9–28.
- Swyngedouw E (2011) Interrogating post-democratization: Reclaiming egalitarian political spaces. *Political Geography* 30(7): 370–380.
- Swyngedouw E (2018). *Promises of the Political: Insurgent Cities in a Post-political Environment*. Boston: MIT Press.
- Uitermark J and Nicholls W (2014) From politicization to policing: the rise and decline of new social movements in Amsterdam and Paris. *Antipode* 46(4): 970–991.
- Vasudevan A (2015) The autonomous city: towards a critical geography of occupation. *Progress in Human Geography* 39(3): 316–337.
- Young D and Keil R (2010) Reconnecting the disconnected: the politics of infrastructure in the in-between city. 27(2): 87–95.

Lazaros Karaliotas is Lecturer in Urban Geography at the University of Glasgow. He holds a PhD in Human Geography from the University of Manchester and has been a post-doctoral research fellow at the Universities of Glasgow and Manchester. His work is situated at the intersection of debates around the urban and the political. More specifically, he draws from urban political economy, post-foundational political thought and the political writings of Jacques Rancière to explore the dominant ordering of urban spaces as well as its contestation by urban uprisings and movements. He is the Debates Papers and social media editor for *Urban Studies*.