

THE LONG 1968

Revisions and
New Perspectives

EDITED BY

**Daniel J. Sherman,
Ruud van Dijk,
Jasmine Alinder,
and A. Aneesh**

The Long 1968

IS VOLUME 7 IN THE SERIES

21ST CENTURY STUDIES

Center for 21st Century Studies

University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee

RICHARD GRUSIN, GENERAL EDITOR

INDIANA UNIVERSITY PRESS
BLOOMINGTON AND INDIANAPOLIS

This book is a publication of

Indiana University Press
Office of Scholarly Publishing
Herman B Wells Library 350
1320 East 10th Street
Bloomington, Indiana 47405 USA

iupress.indiana.edu

Telephone orders 800-842-6796
Fax orders 812-855-7931

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Manufactured in the United States of America

Library of Congress Cataloging-in-Publication Data

The long 1968 : revisions and new perspectives / edited by Daniel J. Sherman, Ruud van Dijk, Jasmine Alinder, and A. Aneesh.

pages cm. — (21st century studies; v. 8)

Includes bibliographical references and index.

ISBN 978-0-253-00903-6 (cloth : alk. paper) — ISBN 978-0-253-00910-4 (pbk. : alk. paper)

— ISBN 978-0-253-00918-0 (electronic book) 1. Nineteen sixty-eight, A.D. 2. History, Modern—1945–1989. I. Sherman, Daniel J., editor of compilation.

D848.L66 2013

909.82'6—dc23

2012049783

1 2 3 4 5 18 17 16 15 14 13

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ACKNOWLEDGMENTS

This book grows out of a conference, “Since 1968,” organized by the Center for 21st Century Studies, University of Wisconsin–Milwaukee, from October 23 to 25, 2008, to mark the fortieth anniversary of the founding of what was then called the Center for 20th Century Studies. We would like to thank Kumkum Sangari, who, along with the four editors, helped to organize the conference; her global vision and broad interests helped inspire the broad range of topics in this volume. We deeply appreciate the support and assistance of all kinds of the Center’s then interim director, Merry Wiesner-Hanks; former deputy director Kate Kramer for her able service as conference coordinator; the Center’s former business manager, Maria Liesegang; and its graduate student project assistants. It is also a pleasure to acknowledge the role played by a number of conference participants whose contributions could not be included in this volume but who played a vital role in the dialogue this book continues and seeks to perpetuate: Carolee Schneemann, who led off the conference with a memorable keynote, and speakers Rose Brewer, Yoshikino Igarashi, Tamara Levitz, Ann Reynolds, Carol Siegel, Dina Manaz Siddiqi, Fred Turner, and Kath Weston.

Thanks are also due to Rebecca Tolen, who is responsible for the Center book series at Indiana University Press, for her support for the project; to the Press’s external reviewers, for their helpful comments; and to the Center’s current director, Richard Grusin. We are grateful above all to John Blum, the Center’s associate director for publications, for his patience, doggedness (notably in securing illustrations and permissions), and expertise. John has made our lives easier and this book better. Finally, we would like to thank our life partners, Aims McGuinness, Erica Bornstein, Eduardo Douglas, and Joan Dobkin, for being a part of this project from the beginning.

68. Michael Foucault, *Remarks on Marx: Conversations with Duccio Trombadori*, trans. R. James Goldstein and James Cascaito (New York: Semiotext[e], 1991), 119.

69. The text in question here is Friedrich A. Kittler and Horst Turk, eds., *Urszenen: Literaturwissenschaft als Diskursanalyse und Diskurskritik* (Frankfurt am Main: Suhrkamp, 1977). For its place in the history of German reception of Foucault, see Holub, *Crossing Borders*, 51.

70. It should be emphasized before concluding that Negt and Kluge do proceed in *Geschichte und Eigensinn* charitably in their engagements with French thinkers like Foucault. On the one hand, they incorporate Foucault's ideas as points of reference for their political economy of labor (74, 694n74); on the other hand, they cite Foucault's histories of penalization and sexuality as authoritative (590n4, 908–909, 912–13); and elsewhere they enlist, using Marxian language, Foucault's post-Marxian thought for their own project (622, 622n3, 921n37, 941n56). Holub is thus incorrect when he states that West Germany would have to wait till the publication of Habermas's *The Philosophical Discourse of Modernity* (translated in 1987) and Honneth's *The Critique of Power* (translated in 1990), both from 1985, before German critical theory engaged French thought meaningfully; Negt and Kluge were already doing this in the late 1970s while working on *Geschichte und Eigensinn*. See Holub, *Crossing Borders*, 63–64.

71. For examples of the former, see Stefanie Carp, *Kriegsgeschichten: Zum Werk Alexander Kluges* (Munich: Wilhelm Fink Verlag, 1987), 105–35; and Wolfgang Bock, "Exemplarische Reflexionen einer Dekade: Maßverhältnisse des Politischen," in Schulte and Stollmann, *Der Maulwurf kennt kein System*, 107–30. For examples of the latter, see Jameson, "On Negt and Kluge"; and Christopher Pavsek, "History and Obstinacy: Negt and Kluge's Redemption of Labor," *New German Critique* 68 (Spring–Summer 1996): 137–63.

CHAPTER THREE

What's Left of the Right to the City?

JUDIT BODNAR

An undeniable legacy of 1968 is the proclamation of the *right to the city*. What happened in Paris, Prague, and many other cities, however, was merely the crystallization of long-existing conditions: even the concept was formulated earlier. Henri Lefebvre finished *The Right to the City* in 1967, on the centenary of volume 1 of Marx's *Capital*, as Lefebvre himself noted, but it was not this temporal coincidence or the intellectual kinship that determined its significance. The concept of the right to the city came into its own with the events of 1968; it received justification in people reclaiming the streets for radical politics, people who acted as if they had all read Lefebvre and were staging his work in the streets of Paris. The right to the city has informed urban theory and inspired urban justice movements ever since. Some also note the radical transformation this notion has gone through since its conception, what with the "undeclared vulgarization" of some of Lefebvre's ideas, and their circulation in severely abridged forms undermining their original meaning.¹

With regard to 1968, "legacies of watershed events are always complex phenomena," remarks Immanuel Wallerstein. "For one thing, they are always ambiguous. For another, they are always the object of struggle by various heirs to claim the legacy, that is, the legitimacy of a tradition."² As part of the package of 1968, the right to the city is no different; it became a slogan with a life of its own and has indeed left a complex legacy behind. It became an anchor to initiatives of official urbanism as well as radical social movements, and it saw not only the evacuation of politics from the urban but also some of the most inspired political moments when people stood up for *their* right to the city. In a word, it both has been a blatant success and has worked in support of claims

diametrically opposed to its creator's general intent. It is this complex legacy and mixed success story that I would like to outline and explain here.

In Lefebvre's formulation, the right to the city is couched both in his overall critical theory of capitalism and in the analysis of the contemporary constellations of the system at a specific place—it is both general and very timely. It is a comment on the city of his time, Paris, at the beginning of economic restructuring that saw a gradual reevaluation of the central districts commanding the reinvigorated attention of planners and developers, the experience of which many felt directly in their own lives and rents, including Lefebvre. His criticism thus echoed with both lay and professional audiences, ordinary urban dwellers and theoreticians of the city, Marxists and conservatives—all alarmed about the speed of change and the loss of their old city and neighborhood.

The right to the city is inclusive, it pertains to everyone who lives in the city, and it is amenable to a wide range of applications, yet it sounds more concrete and practical than “general human rights.” It is, however, much more than a claim to a fair share of the city—its services, buildings, and institutions. It is a new composite right that escapes the usual classifications; it is a mixture of claim rights and liberty rights, both negative and positive; it implies elements of political, economic, social, and cultural rights, but it is none of them. “It is . . . a superior form of rights,” writes Lefebvre: a “right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the oeuvre, to participation and appropriation (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city.”³³ It “cannot be conceived of as a simple visiting right or as a return to traditional cities. It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed right to urban life,” “to renewed centrality, to places of encounter and exchange, to life rhythms and time uses, enabling the full and complete *usage* of these moments and places.”³⁴ The city is an oeuvre, the sense of which “art and philosophy contain,” yet it is not merely a work of art; for Lefebvre, both work and art seem equally crucial. The city is an oeuvre not simply by being a product; it is also use value in opposition to the exchange value of the product. City building is embedded in commodity production, but it also offers the possibility of overcoming alienation and appropriating lived time—the “capacity to produce a new humanism . . . of *urban man* for whom and by whom the city and his own daily life in it become *oeuvre*, *appropriation*, use value (and not exchange value).”³⁵ While the contradiction between use value and exchange value underlies the broader order of capitalism, it has specifically urban aspects: “One of the latest contradictions of our time . . . is between the socialization of society and generalized segregation.”³⁶ Generalized segregation has a particular bearing for some social groups, since “what identifies the working class on the ground is segregation and the misery

of its ‘to inhabit.’”³⁷ Lefebvre was not simply an urban scholar, and his interest in the urban follows partly from his spatialization of thinking about capitalism. The history of capitalism can be seen as survival and expansion through the production and occupation of space, in which urbanism becomes a force of production. As a result, Lefebvre notes, a “vast displacement of contradictions” took place, and the capital/labor contradiction became primarily the contradiction of urban society, not industrial society.³⁸ His “postindustrial” theorization of sorts does not “post” industrial society, nor does it replace it with urban society; rather, it identifies the new spirit of capitalism in a reconfigured emphasis on the production of space and urbanization. Political strategies need to be adjusted accordingly: the social revolution against capitalism must be a spatial revolution—an “urban revolution,” as the title of his 1970 book suggests.³⁹

Lefebvre's interest in capitalism and the critique of everyday life intersected in the “urban,” producing his specific kind of Marxism. He conceived of the urban as a strategic level linking everyday life—the immediate level of totality—and the larger structures of the general social order. The urban thus was crucial to the transformation of both everyday life and the general social order. In disrupting the bureaucratically programmed life of the inhabitants and sometimes the working of the system, festivals and revolutions have unique capacities. In fact, play and festivity are integral to the city: “The eminent use of the city, that is, of its streets and squares, edifices and monuments, is *la Fête* (a celebration which consumes unproductively, without other advantage but pleasure and prestige and enormous riches in money and objects).”⁴⁰ It thus does not belong only to those who can engage in the formal consumption of urban space in carefully designated manners—sitting in sidewalk cafés, lingering in museums, or going on guided tours—but to all who can creatively make parts of the city their own, often in unrecognized ways. The right to the city entails also a “full and complete usage” of moments and places in the festival, the appropriation of urban space and time by the people: the workers who were pushed to the periphery in the historical remaking of the city by the bourgeoisie in the nineteenth century and are being relegated to the outskirts once again. For Lefebvre, a prominent example of the reconquest of the city by its dispossessed was the Paris Commune in 1871. It was “an immense, epic festival . . . a spring festival in the Cité, a festival of the disinherited and the proletarians, a revolutionary festival and festival of the Revolution, a total festival, the grandest of modern times” during which the insurgents became masters not only of their city but of their history.⁴¹

The year 1968 became another paradigmatic example. It read as the appropriation of urban space (factories, universities, streets) by the workers and

students. The script was partly written by Lefebvre, but it was definitely not staged by him. He in fact had a contradictory relationship to the May events: he was skeptical about the aims of the movement, and the demonstrators' demands were not comprehensive enough for him, yet it was an urban festival seductively reminiscent of the Commune. He was reproached for not taking part by people who did not do anything else but "put his lecture and writings into practice."¹² The implementation of his ideas belonged more to the Situationists, who took some of Lefebvre's main themes and developed them further. As authorship was a source of contention between them, it may be more correct to say that Lefebvre was assimilated seamlessly by the Situationists and vice versa.¹³ Even though the urban assumed importance foremost as a privileged place of capitalism, the Situationist critique of the extreme functionality of the modern city was instrumental, imaginative, and appealing. The small tactics of the urban dweller—*détournement* (diversion) and *dérive* (drift)—were conceived in opposition to the everyday of this city, its programmed operation and consumption. The Situationist idea of "unitary urbanism" opposed the abstraction of cities and also worked against exchange value in a very Lefebvrian manner. Guy Debord's *Society of the Spectacle* came out in 1967 and was even more influential in the revolutionary *détournement* of May 1968 than *The Right to the City*. The streets acquired importance in their capacity of "disruptive and militant spontaneity" against the "society of the spectacle": they became the stage for spectacular "counterspectacles."

It is not by accident that the counterspectacle (starting with the March 22 Movement) erupted at Nanterre. Nanterre not only hosted the authoritarian institutions of bureaucratic capitalism, such as the university, but incarnated the very repressive urbanism that Mourenx came to typify in Lefebvre's writings: the prototypical French New Town, an ordered, enclosed, finished world that provides for basic needs but is boring to the extent of being inhuman. However, this new town, Lefebvre warns, has certain capabilities: "Here . . . boredom is pregnant with desires, frustrated frenzies . . . unrealized possibilities."¹⁴ It creates the prospect for an oppositional culture to arise. In the proximity of Nanterre to Paris, the dispossession of both the students and the immigrant workers of Nanterre from the centrality of urban life was especially striking. Reclaiming urban space started in the new town but soon extended to the renewed center of Paris, which was now taken back by the city dwellers from developers, urban officials, and professionals. The May events clearly looked like an enactment of Lefebvrian and Situationist ideas. The *Society of the Spectacle* got written on the walls of the city. With the strike and the breakdown of the machinery of urban life, the revolutionary spectacle became the greatest disruption of postwar routine, a grand *détournement*. Leisure time

was reclaimed; time and space were reappropriated and lived as in 1871. The city became the insurgents' oeuvre.¹⁵

The streets were claimed by counterspectacles all over Europe and the Americas. Paris, Baltimore, Mexico City, and Prague had a lot in common, but the immediate politics of their counterspectacles differed. Indeed, Prague was a supreme manifestation of the Situationist International's (SI) ideas and a "perfect example of the revolutionary *détournement* of repressive urbanism," as the SI came to admit a year after the events.¹⁶ Following the calls for action, which were aired first through the state radio and then through clandestine stations, people pulled down street signs, changed street names, took down house numbers, and made the city their own, that is, accessible to those who knew it and lived it, excluding those who did not belong, such as the occupying Soviet Army.¹⁷ "Overnight, the country had become nameless," recalls Milan Kundera, who incorporated the story in the dissident fiction of the time. "For seven days, the Russian troops wandered the countryside, not knowing where they were. The officers searched for newspaper offices, for television and radio stations to occupy, but could not find them. Whenever they asked, they would get either a shrug of shoulders or false names and directions."¹⁸ The apocryphal story is recorded of an old woman telling the Soviet troops that the Radio Czechoslovakia headquarters was a sewing factory, and a tank shot the National Museum, thinking that it was the Parliament building. With the removal of all street signs and house numbers Prague was transformed into a "veritable 'urban labyrinth,'" and "the walls were covered with May 1968-style inscriptions."¹⁹ "Walls and sidewalks became a protest gallery of political art," and "Prague became the home of freedom" just like Paris.²⁰

Popular resistance in Prague, however, had different tones, aims, and enemies. It was a puzzlement of sorts for the Situationist International that "distinctly revolutionary methods of struggles" were taken up for the defense of a "reformist bureaucracy."²¹ Even though the Czechs and all dissidents in Eastern Europe would talk about "socialism with a human face," for the Situationist International it was still bureaucratic socialism. What made the front lines clear and what mobilized almost the entire population was that the counterspectacle was in defense not only of a "reformed government" but of national sovereignty from the invaders, the Warsaw Pact countries, and especially the Soviet Union. While the dissatisfaction that erupted in 1968 was widespread and had common structural conditions, the immediate reasons for the explosion varied from place to place, just like the faces of official politics that played on the other side. Regardless of these differences, 1968 was an exceptional moment of urbanity in both Paris and Prague as well as many other places: a supreme manifestation of a renewed right to the city, its collective appropriation,

the coming together of the creation of political and artistic oeuvres, a moment of revolutionary spontaneity, and the dominance of the use value. In most cases, activists were not building on Lefebvre's ideas consciously, yet his *Right to the City* resonated so perfectly with their reading of the events that it took off as a powerful political slogan, a popular framing of demands during 1968 and afterward.

It has also inspired urban justice movements and accommodated demands for participation in all kinds in urban affairs. In fact, its use has reached a scope and popularity no one had predicted. It made serious inroads into academic discussions, social movements with a variety of political tones and agendas, various levels of the state (rarely the national level, though), and, in general, large bureaucratic organizations of the kind Lefebvre was so critical of. It is equally evoked in UN documents and founding texts of radical organizations by different brands of officials and activists alike. The United Nations Educational, Scientific and Cultural Organization (UNESCO) put together several high-profile conferences with the term in the titles, the Brecht Forum in New York runs a Right to the City series, and the City University of New York (CUNY) organizes teach-ins on the topic.

The official appropriation of the slogan and Lefebvrian ideas started right after 1968—often without recognition of proper authorship.²² In general, official urbanism in France in the 1970s and the 1980s relied selectively on the Lefebvrian heritage, and the 1988 creation of the French Ministry of the City seemed to take Lefebvre's dictum about the importance of the urban to heart—in its own way.²³ French urbanism was one of the few cases in which the term reverberated with the national state. The 1991 Urban Development Act, commonly known as the *antighetto* law, which prescribed a certain proportion of subsidized housing in large municipalities, referred explicitly to the right to the city in combating segregation. It rightly evoked Lefebvre's concern with segregation as a major obstruction of people's right to the city but decontextualized and compartmentalized the problem in a non-Lefebvrian spirit, in a manner very typical of the afterlife of his ideas.²⁴

The point is not to scold politicians, activists, or even theoreticians for using, in a distorted manner, the term that was coined by Lefebvre, untrue to the spirit of the original formulation. An analysis, however, of the ways the term was appropriated and the systemic truncations it has gone through in the process can be informative of the politics of its use and the current historical context. The right to the city has become an all-encompassing slogan; it is all too easily applied to enfranchise people with respect to all decisions that are related to urban space.²⁵ It resonates with a politically liberal rights-based discourse and came to be widely used in framing demands for integration and

participation. It is evoked in demands for participatory urban planning and budgeting and in claims to participatory democracy in general. Participatory budgeting, a more radical version of participatory planning (as it not only goes beyond planning but also favors poor neighborhoods in redistribution), started in Pôrto Alegre, Brazil, in 1989.²⁶ The success of this practice led to the emergence of a global pattern. Participatory budgeting models and tool kits, perceived as “an embodiment of direct deliberative democracy,” are taught equally in the classrooms and NGO crash courses of the First, Second, and Third Worlds. The right to the city became codified in the constitution first in 2001 with the City Statute of Brazil, which defined the city as collective property to which everyone has a legal right. The social function of the city is promoted through land management, tenure regularization procedures, and requirements for public participation in urban planning.²⁷

The right to the city has gone through a transnationalization of sorts and has become the staple of various UN-affiliated organizations and international NGOs in the new millennium. It underlies such documents as the European Charter for Women in the City; the European Charter for the Safeguarding of Human Rights in the City; UN-HABITAT's Strategy for the Implementation of the MDG (Millennium Development Goals) 7, which links sustainability and poverty reduction to urban participation; and the NGO-initiated World Charter on the Right to the City, which insists on “equal access to the potential benefits of the city for all urban dwellers, democratic participation of all *inhabitants* in decision-making processes and realization of [their] fundamental rights and liberties.”²⁸ In response to criticism concerning the truncation of the right to the city, a recent UNESCO document emphasizes a holistic approach: “UN-HABITAT and UNESCO are keen to see local governments active in promoting the *holistic* notion of the ‘Right to the City’ at the international level and to take a strong role in supporting inclusive urban governance.”²⁹

In the wholesale appropriation of the term, it is often forgotten how radical the right to the city was in the Lefebvrian formulation—that it went beyond the simple right to urban services, and its implementation entailed a revolution against neocapitalism in which urbanism and real estate came to play increasingly vital roles. In fact, Lefebvre rarely mentions urban dwellers in their capacity as users of urban services, and when he does, it is with the explicit purpose of going beyond it: “The right to the city, complemented by the right to difference and the right to information, should modify, concretize and make more practical the rights of the citizen as an urban dweller (*citadin*) and user of multiple services.”³⁰

Reducing this right to participation is an even more ironic twist in the history of the term if we recall that Lefebvre launched a devastating critique of

integration and participation, to which he would unabashedly refer as “obsessional themes.” Integration—“itself an aimless aspiration”—pairs up with participation, which “is not a simple obsession. In practice, the ideology of participation enables us to have the acquiescence of interested and concerned people at a small price. After a more or less elaborate pretence at information and social activity, they return to their tranquil passivity and retirement. Is it not clear that real and active participation already has a name? It is called self-management.”³¹

Reductions of the right to the city to participation and a better distribution of urban services have invited criticism from connoisseurs of Lefebvre as well as scholars on the left. The former would point at the richer and differently calibrated original formulation; the latter would discuss it in the general framework of the socialist critique of liberalism and note the tension between just redistribution and an unjust architecture of possibilities in the world as well as the built-in limitations of participatory politics, demanding participation without scrutinizing the structure of participation and the broader institutional setting.³² Liberal rights-based domestications of the idea stay focused on what is more a by-product of the urbanity Lefebvre proposed than its final aim. The small link between the right to the city and its wider environment is missing; it usually goes unacknowledged that the right to the city is so radical because of the changes in the nature of capitalism that bring the urban to the forefront, and we are happy to have found a common denominator for dissent without having to think about the system itself. In the process, the pleasure and playfulness of participation, so characteristic of Lefebvre’s urban imagination, are also lost, and we are left with depoliticized, sterilized, and routinized claims to participation in urban life with little sense of other than urban scales and the general social order, even if the implementation of participation invokes powers at the national level and beyond.

In all fairness, Lefebvre’s formulation was somewhat conducive to the truncated interpretations that came to characterize the afterlife of his right to the city. In his coining the term, we have a curious deployment of rights by a Marxist who is perfectly aware of how central the critique of liberalism and its emphasis on the rights of men was for Marx. Lefebvre’s composite of the right to the city is understandably different from, and often set up in opposition to, the right to liberty, equality, free exercise of religion, and especially private property. The idea of rights in general is not integral to Lefebvre’s oeuvre; it is used only in this particular context. The right to the city is less an analytical concept than a political one phrased in the language of claimants: the workers displaced to the comfortably provided uniformity of the outskirts and new cities. Demanding rights is the language of potential revolutionaries, as it has

been associated historically with movements for justice as well as greater liberty and equality, except that justice means urban justice now, which, because of the urbanization of capital, when implemented stands for a whole new world.

The growing popularity of the slogan among NGO activists follows partly from an elective affinity between Lefebvre and the current spirit of the times. On the one hand, we have been witnessing a hegemony of sorts of rights-based discourses in addressing issues of injustice and the broadening of the very category of rights, that is, the deepening of rights in substance and the extension of the scope of the right-bearer transgressing the individual now. On the other hand, globalization has meant a more general rescaling of politics and the state: not only the escalation of the global but a shift from the national to the global and local scales and the corresponding politics of reallocating service-providing responsibilities away from the national state in a manner that also favors a greater involvement of NGOs.³³ Lefebvre’s right to the city talks to both trends. His use of rights echoes a generalized rights discourse, while his emphasis on the urban scale captures and incarnates the rescaling of the ambitions and responsibilities of the nation-state. The urban becomes a privileged basis for citizenship and entitlement. Lefebvre’s notion of the *citadin*, which defines citizenship by inhabiting a place rather than by belonging to a state, helps the decoupling of the nation-state and citizenship in a welcome move for citizenship studies. This has been altogether crucial in critical academic applications of the slogan, which tend to react to what is perceived as an increasing disenfranchisement of citizens amidst the changes associated with neoliberal restructuring by evoking people’s right to the city and by proposing alternatives in the framework of the politics of the inhabitant rather than that of the citizen. Such novel framing of claims responds to changes associated with globalization and the diminishing hegemony of the formally understood nation-state in defining citizenship.³⁴ Consequently, in contemporary articulations of the right to the city, the global aspect is more accentuated than it ever was in the original.³⁵

A recent 2009 policy paper by UNESCO and UN-HABITAT is a fitting illustration of the intricacies of the social life of ideas.³⁶ The text opens with a fair summary of the origins and evolution of the notion of the right to the city, relying extensively on up-to-date academic literature on the topic. In opposition to previous summaries of a similar kind, the document goes beyond a passing reference to Lefebvre, and, after providing a more comprehensive definition of the right to the city, including such elements as oeuvre, use value, appropriation, and the inherently political nature of its use, it is eager to acknowledge that his right to the city created “a radical new paradigm that

challenged the emerging social and political structures of the 20th century.” In this spirit the authors then argue for a holistic conception of this right but very correctly also point out that “his writing was disconcertingly vague as to how it could be implemented.”³⁷ Even radical geographer David Harvey’s general theory of urbanization is cited in underlining that the urban question cannot be decoupled from larger social and political processes. One clearly has the impression that, being aware of prior criticism of the reduction of the slogan, the document will propose changes closer to the spirit of the original than other reports have done before. It is somewhat baffling, then, to find a return to an ultimately rights-based approach in the summary of this new direction, which would “imply moving from a *right to the city* as it is perceived at present, to an approach that combines citizenship and human rights in the urban realm.”³⁸ The rights themselves are indeed radical, and their implementation assumes major social and political changes, yet the city seems to exist in isolation; there is no mention of the general order of society, either of capitalism or of any alternative, let alone of how these rights will be codified and enforced by the state or other organizations. In spite of opening with Lefebvre’s radicalism, the document ends up pacifying it once again. Its rights-based approach displays a strange bias, conspicuously keeping silent about a certain right—the one to private property—that may well take precedence over all those proposed in the document and work against them.³⁹ Not going beyond rights and devoid of utopian elements, the right to the city cannot reproduce the Lefebvrian spirit of the slogan. Whether we can or should replicate a Lefebvrian take on the city and social change, and whether doing so would be the task of UNESCO and related organizations, is another question.

The afterlife of ideas and the social memory of watershed events is an intricate composite of actors, interests, and genuine forgetting. What happened to the right to the city is very much in line with the general legacy of 1968. In her vivid account of May ’68, Kristin Ross demonstrates how what was originally a political event gained a mostly aesthetic and cultural meaning over the years and, accordingly, how equality—a prominent theme of 1968—became conveniently forgotten by official narratives along with violence.⁴⁰

Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello relate the strange success of some of the typical 1968 ideas and their role in paving the way to an ever more vigorous capitalism. They see 1968 as a combination of an artistic and a social critique of the system that displayed an inevitable tension between the demand for autonomy and security. Autonomy came to be exchanged for security in the new social and economic policies of France in the 1970s with the support of partisans of the artistic critique from the class of ’68, culminating in the socialists coming to power. Autonomy extolled the virtues of mobility and adaptability,

and it rhymed also with the fulfillment of human potential, but it was also a liberated way of making profit and ultimately fostered the success of the “new spirit of capitalism.” This is not to deny that the new spirit of work and the ensuing labor market indeed provided better possibilities of fulfillment for many, but such statements are worth a class analysis in terms of the beneficiaries of changes, and the statements need to be qualified accordingly. In the same vein, the ultraleftist critiques of the 1960s and 1970s (of state monopoly capitalism, existing socialism, ideological state apparatus) curiously contributed to the critique of the state, a critique that became institutionalized in neoliberal restructuring. This apparent affinity between leftist ideas and a rightist program made the process more acceptable in the beginning.⁴¹

The “class of ’68” may have had a similarly bizarre responsibility in what happened to the right to the city in the process of urban restructuring that merely started in 1968. The right to centrality, urbanity, difference, use value, the oeuvre (participation), and appropriation resonated not only with insurgents turned politicians and urban officials but with the early gentrifiers’ complex aspiration of making housing an oeuvre. Due to a lack of monetary means, this project involved reliance on the gentrifiers’ own labor and creativity and targeted risky neighborhoods. The new gentry were also in search of an alternative lifestyle in the face of monotonous suburban and housing estate living, and they wished to reclaim the city from bureaucratic state planning. Nonetheless, these alternative youngsters gradually became the carriers of gentrification at large and the promoters of an increasingly profitable production of space. As a result, some of them, who could not turn use value into exchange value and property title in time, had to leave the area in the transformation of which they were instrumental. In a culmination of this process, the class content of the right to the city is twisted inside out by full-scale gentrification: the revanchist city also makes its claim on the “renovated centrality” of the city once the central city has ceased being a risky terrain and regained its exchange value.

Neil Smith observes a recent turn in American urbanism: “This revanchist anti-urbanism represents a reaction against the supposed ‘theft’ of the city, a desperate defense of a challenged phalanx of privileges, cloaked in the populist language of civic morality, family values and neighborhood security.”⁴² In class terms, the revanchist city is the (new) bourgeoisie claiming its space—private and public—once the value of centrality has been restored following the “white flight” of the 1960s and 1970s. The lower middle class, feeling the terror of abandonment by employers, social services, and official politics, easily joins in the enterprise of upgrading the city by getting rid of “undesirable” populations and reclaiming public space from minorities and the homeless.

The right to difference, which not only forms part of the bundle of rights under the heading of the right to the city but also underlies Lefebvre's entire oeuvre, has seen a similar minimalist appropriation and drastic recalibration of its class content. The differentialist claims of 1968 "now live in the culturalized neo-racisms and commodified centralism of metropolitan life," observes Stefan Kipfer. They became caught in a Gramscian exercise of hegemony, as "the minimal differences of the current postmodern world of difference are central for hegemonic projects."⁴³ In contradistinction, the "full and complete usage of places and moments" entailed in the right to the city implies the production and assertion of maximal difference, which has the capacity not only of temporarily disrupting the everyday routine of the system but of threatening its very premises.⁴⁴ The year '68 was a temporary assertion of maximal difference that could not be turned into the kind of sustained social transformation revolutionaries were dreaming about. Yet it contributed to social change and, as an unintended consequence, provided building blocks to the hegemonic project of late capitalism.

Lefebvre's right to the city could be so general and could mobilize so widely in 1968 as well as today because his analysis was also concrete and well timed. His call for the right to the full and complete usage of moments and places and to use value also meant insistence on multiple rhythms and diversity at a time when he saw a renewed attack on diversity as centrality was turning into a special type of spatiality of new command and consumption functions with a rehabilitated exchange value. Social diversity suffers at every escalation of class power, as it did after 1848, under the neocapitalism of the 1960s, or today, in other words, at the time of gentrification, when, as Lefebvre puts it, exchange value prevails over use value. Such juxtaposition of use and exchange value and his insistence on use value, which risk turning into a political economic oddity, are, however, more than a rhetorical device with a strong political message; they call attention implicitly to the cycles and the rhythm of capital accumulation. Exchange value is dominant when in the process of gentrification the rent gap (the difference between the actualized ground rent and a potential one under the best—most profitable—use) has reached its maximum, the use of land has turned around, and the new dynamism has started to push out less profitable land uses in an increased competition. The diversity of urban space is commanded more strictly in accordance with profitability. This happens when the exchange value of a neighborhood is on a steady rise, as it was in central Paris in the late 1960s. Both Lefebvre and the Situationists reacted to a new urbanism they experienced personally that represented the drive to rationalize, homogenize, and commercialize the diversity of Paris, the "socio-architectural unevenness of which they could still take for

granted in the 1950s."⁴⁵ The 1959 official decision to "preserve the urban and social tissue of the center," sported by writer and Minister of Cultural Affairs André Malraux, opened the way not only to preservation but also to a more commercial use of the center and the rise of the urbanist—a social type that invited Lefebvre's intense dislike—maneuvering between the state and the developer. In an ironic gesture to preservation, the old marketplace was moved in 1968 from the centrally located Les Halles neighborhood, a move that many saw as sealing the fate of the formerly working-class and bohemian quarter. Indeed, the two decades between 1954 and 1975 witnessed a textbook case of class change as the number of workers living within the city limits declined by 44 percent while the *cadres supérieurs* increased by 52 percent.⁴⁶

Full-fledged gentrification moves against social diversity, that is, against those whose market worth is low for the area, but diversity in general is not suppressed by what Lefebvre calls the dominance of exchange value. To the contrary, it can be perfectly well enhanced by the market—after all, one is struck by the number of places to go to as well as by the variety of culinary themes in gentrified neighborhoods—but in a way that adheres to the logic of commercialization more than before. This is a minimal difference that provides ammunition to the extension of the hegemony of the system, the kind of difference on which commodity production thrives.

The incorrigibly antiestablishment and antibourgeois Situationist movement has run a similar course and made inroads into mainstream cultural institutions and bourgeois entertainment: it became aestheticized, intellectualized, depoliticized, and respectable.⁴⁷ The counterspectacle dissolved in the integrated spectacle in a move that the group's signature figure, Guy Debord, foretold long ago, taking the commodity beyond criticism and alternatives.⁴⁸ Debord's wisdom notwithstanding, more and more insist that there are alternatives. Along with the spectacular domestication of the Situationist legacy, we also see movements that unite Lefebvre's celebration of the festival and the insurgent urbanism of the Situationists once again. The Reclaim the Streets (RTS) movement, which started locally but quickly went global, reclaims urban space for noncommercial purposes by creating situations that disrupt the dominant use of particular places, the participants exercising thereby their right to the city and asserting diversity and use value. These disruptions are creative, loosely organized, and targeted, and they retain the element of spontaneity and joy, which neither political demonstrations nor commercially sanctioned forms of consuming urban space tend to have, however desperately they try. The events of taking over busy thoroughfares in direct action by cyclists or street parties, the *détournement* (misappropriation) of traffic and regular function, are moments of an urban festival and the playful appropriation

of space that allude to its alternative use, obeying other than its currently prevailing commercial logic.⁴⁹ These “die-hard Situationist fans,” as Naomi Klein refers to the organizers (one could also call them post-Fordist Situationists), indeed envision the street party turning into a “permanent festival” that can have the potential to make a difference in the world.⁵⁰ It is, of course, equally possible that Debord could be proven right once again: the post-Fordist counterspectacle could seamlessly dissolve into late capitalist urbanism.

Relying more on Lefebvre than on urban interventions in the Situationist tradition, the institutionalization of urban justice movements has recently taken a new turn with the formation of the Right to the City Alliance in January 2007. This new national alliance of “membership-based organizations and allies” avowedly takes Lefebvre’s 1968 book *The Right to the City* as “a key resource and touchstone” and builds on the World Urban Forum’s related discourse and on the World Charter on the Right to the City adopted in 2004.⁵¹ The alliance has kept the inclusive framing of its demands in terms of human rights and yet clearly aims to transgress the oft-criticized limitations of such conceptualization by referring to processes that produce urban injustice and those that can change them. Among the practices that lead to the disenfranchisement of more and more citizens, rural development also figures as forcing people to migrate into megacities, and in response to criticisms concerning the fetishization of the urban scale in the right to the city discourse, rural justice enters as one of the twelve principles the organization endorses. It is a true application of Lefebvre’s extended urbanism that goes beyond the city and emphasizes processes that create the very dichotomy of urban and rural and produce space that increasingly takes up the characteristics of the urban. The alliance in general promotes “an idea of a new kind of urban politics that asserts that everyone, particularly the disenfranchised, not only has a right to the city, but as inhabitants, have a right to *shape* it, design it, and *operationalize* an urban human rights agenda.”⁵² Indeed, there may not be more to demand than fundamental human rights, including the right to live in dignity, but the implementation of those rights can take a whole world to change, and this recognition still seems toned down. The program remains suspended between the impossibility of demanding radical rights within the premises of the system and the need to operationalize this radical agenda.

WHAT’S left, then, of the right to the city in the face of what one can interpret as the domestication, co-optation, pacification, and depoliticization of the idea asserted in cities where the scale of changes that had started around 1968 has expanded in an unforeseen manner?

1. We are left with a framework that suits liberal urban justice discourses of participation and has a good fit with rights talk, which one may indeed describe as a truncation of the idea. In a sense, Lefebvre prefigured that the notion of rights that are not defined on the level of the nation-state would gain prominence politically and ethically. With globalization, the idea of human rights has indeed become inescapably transnational, the right to the city being one of them.

2. We were foretold the unfolding of gentrification and concomitantly the increasing significance of space in capital accumulation, but we were also alerted that claiming the right to “renewed centrality” would be a political process that was far from harmonious. Accordingly, we see both aspiring yuppies who owe their wealth to the vagaries of the financial market and defensive members of the middle class who owe their ill fate partly to the same processes and who claim *their* right to urban space vis-à-vis the lower classes in the revanchist city.

3. But foremost, we are left with the legacy of Lefebvre’s radicalism and the brief interludes of putting his ideas into practice in 1968 and afterward to help us build urban utopias or alternatives, that is, to exercise our right to the city, which involves the right to change the city after “our heart’s desire” and “to change ourselves by changing the city,” as David Harvey paraphrases urban sociologist Robert Park.⁵³ We—citizens who do not have a sanctioned role in shaping the city, unlike planners, developers, and politicians—are left with a right to a radical urban imagination that goes beyond the urban, an imagination that strives for the impossible to achieve the possible. We are entrusted with what Lefebvre saw as the legacy of the Commune of 1871, upon which he and the ’68ers acted: “We are thus compelled to rehabilitate the dream, otherwise utopian, and put to the forefront its poetry, the renewed idea of creative praxis.”⁵⁴

NOTES

1. Monique Coornaert and Jean-Pierre Garnier, “Présentation: Actualités de Henri Lefebvre,” *Espaces et Sociétés* 76, no. 1 (1994): 5–12; Jean-Pierre Garnier, “La vision urbaine de Henri Lefebvre: Des prévisions aux révisions,” *Espaces et Sociétés* 76, no. 1 (1994): 123–45; Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, “Lost in Transposition—Time, Space and the City,” in *Henri Lefebvre: Writings on Cities*, trans. and ed. Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas (Cambridge, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 3–60.

2. Immanuel Wallerstein, *Geopolitics and Geoculture: Essays on the Changing World-System* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 1991), 71.

3. Henri Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, reprinted in Kofman and Lebas, *Writings on Cities*, 174. Originally published in French as *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1968).

4. Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 174, 179.
5. *Ibid.*, 180.
6. *Ibid.*, 157.
7. *Ibid.*, 178.
8. Henri Lefebvre, *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*, trans. Frank Bryant (New York: Saint Martin's Press, 1976).
9. Henri Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, trans. Robert Bononno, foreword by Neil Smith (Minneapolis: University of Minnesota Press, 2003). Originally published in French as *La révolution urbaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970).
10. Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 66.
11. Henri Lefebvre, "The Style of the Commune," in *Lefebvre: Key Writings*, ed. Stuart Elden, Elizabeth Lebas, and Eleonore Kofman (New York: Continuum, 2003), 188. Originally published in French as *La proclamation de la Commune, 26 mars 1871* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965).
12. Andy Merrifield, *Metromarxism: A Marxist Tale of the City* (New York: Routledge, 2002), 86.
13. Simon Sadler, *The Situationist City* (Cambridge, Mass.: MIT Press, 1998).
14. Henri Lefebvre, *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes, September 1959–May 1961*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 1995), 124.
15. Cf. "there is only for it [the mass] carefully measured space. Time eludes it" (Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 162).
16. Situationist International, "Reform and Counterreform in the Bureaucratic Bloc," from *Situationist International 12*, reprinted in *Situationist International Anthology*, trans. Ken Knabb, rev. and expanded ed. (Berkeley, Calif.: Bureau of Public Secrets, 2006). Originally published in French as "Reforme et contre-reforme dans le pouvoir bureaucratique," *Internationale Situationniste* 12 (September 1969). The Bureau of Public Secrets edition is available online from <http://www.bopsecrets.org/SI/12.Czech68.htm>, accessed January 6, 2012.
17. Some street signs were rewritten in Cyrillic, pointing the Soviet Army back home to Moscow and Almaty, Kazakhstan (<http://ru-politics.livejournal.com/15284797.html>, accessed December 28, 2011).
18. Milan Kundera, *The Unbearable Lightness of Being*, trans. Michael Henry Heim (New York: Harper & Row, 1984), 166.
19. Situationist International, "Reform and Counterreform."
20. Roger S. Power and William B. Voegelé, eds., *Protest, Power and Change: An Encyclopedia of Nonviolent Action from ACT-UP to Women's Suffrage* (New York: Garland, 1997), 134. Samples of protest art on walls and sidewalks can be found in the Pavla Macháčka Archiv (Paul Machacek Archives), Letáky a nápisy v ulicích (Leaflets and signs in the streets), and on the 1968 segment of the Český rozhlas (Czech Radio) website, http://www.rozhlas.cz/1968/fotografie/_galerie/481787?type=image&pozice=1, accessed March 5, 2012.
21. Situationist International, "Reform and Counterreform."
22. See, among others, Garnier, "La vision urbaine"; and Kanishka Goonewardena et al., eds., *Space, Difference, Everyday Life: Reading Henri Lefebvre* (New York: Routledge, 2008), esp. chaps. 11 (Andy Merrifield) and 15 (Liette Gilbert and Mustafa Dikeç).
23. Kofman and Lebas, "Lost in Transposition."
24. Liette Gilbert and Mustafa Dikeç, "Right to the City: Politics of Citizenship," in Goonewardena et al., *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*, 250–63.
25. Mark Purcell, "Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant," *GeoJournal* 58 (2002): 99–108.
26. Rebecca Abers, *Inventing Local Democracy: Grassroots Politics in Brazil* (Boulder, Colo.: Lynne Rienner Publishers, 2000); Teresa Caldeira and James Holston, "State and Urban Space in Brazil: From Modernist Planning to Democratic Interventions," in *Global Assemblages: Technology, Politics, and Ethics as Anthropological Problems*, ed. Aihwa Ong and Stephen J. Collier (Oxford: Blackwell, 2005), 393–416.
27. Brazilian Federal Law No. 10.257 (July 2001) titled "City Statute."
28. UNESCO, *International Public Debates: Urban Policies and the Right to the City* (Paris: UNESCO, 2006), 12, <http://unesdoc.unesco.org/images/0014/001461/146179m.pdf>.
29. *Ibid.*, 9, emphasis added.
30. Henri Lefebvre, "Les illusions de la modernité," *Manières des Voir* (a bimonthly publication of *Le Monde Diplomatique*) 13 (October 1991): 14–17, cited in Kofman and Lebas, *Writings on Cities*, 34.
31. Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 145.
32. See, among others, David Harvey, "The Right to the City," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 27, no. 4 (2003): 939–41; Purcell, "Excavating Lefebvre"; Eugene J. McCann, "Space, Citizenship and the Right to the City: A Brief Overview," *GeoJournal* 58, nos. 2–3 (2002): 77–79; Lynn Staeheli and Lorraine Dowler, introduction to *GeoJournal* 58, nos. 2–3 (2002): 73–75.
33. See the work especially of Saskia Sassen, Bob Jessop, and Neil Brenner, among others: Sassen, *Territory, Authority, Rights* (Princeton, N.J.: Princeton University Press, 2006); Jessop, *The Future of the Capitalist State* (Cambridge: Polity Press, 2002); Brenner, *New State Spaces: Urban Governance and the Rescaling of Statehood* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2004).
34. See, among others, Engin Isin, *Democracy, Citizenship and the Global City* (New York: Routledge, 2000); and Roger Keil, *Los Angeles: Globalization, Urbanization and Social Struggles* (New York: John Wiley & Sons, 1998).
35. The global does not figure in the discussion of the right to the city, but it underlies Lefebvre's general analysis of the production of space, as demonstrated by Neil Brenner, "Global, Fragmented, Hierarchical: Henri Lefebvre's Geographies of Globalization," *Public Culture* 10, no. 1 (1997): 135–67.
36. Alison Brown and Annali Kristiansen, *Urban Policies and the Right to the City: Rights, Responsibilities and Citizenship, Management of Social Transformation (MOST2) Policy Paper Series* (UNESCO and UN-HABITAT, March 2009).
37. *Ibid.*, 14–15.
38. *Ibid.*, 40, emphasis in the original.
39. See Harvey, "The Right to the City."
40. Kristin Ross, *May '68 and Its Afterlives* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2002).
41. Luc Boltanski and Eve Chiapello, *The New Spirit of Capitalism*, trans. Gregory Elliott (London: Verso, 2005). Originally published in French as *Nouvel esprit du capitalisme* (Paris: Gallimard, 1999).

42. Neil Smith, *The New Urban Frontier: Gentrification and the Revanchist City* (London: Routledge, 1996), 211.

43. Stefan Kipfer, "How Lefebvre Urbanized Gramsci: Hegemony, Everyday Life and Difference," in Goonewardena et al., *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*, 207.

44. On minimal and maximal difference, see Henri Lefebvre, *Le manifeste différentialiste* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970); Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, trans. Donald Nicholson-Smith (Oxford: Blackwell, 1991); and Lefebvre, *Critique of Everyday Life*, trans. John Moore and Gregory Elliott, 3 vols. (London: Verso, 2008). In the discussion of difference and diversity, I use "difference" as reference to social identities and "diversity" simply as an aggregate of different identities.

45. Sadler, *The Situationist City*, 56.

46. *Ibid.*, 55.

47. Erik Swyngedouw, "The Strange Respectability of the Situationist City and the Society of the Spectacle," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26, no. 1 (2002): 153–65.

48. Guy Debord, *Comments on the Society of the Spectacle*, trans. Malcolm Imrie (London: Verso, 1990). Originally published in French as *Commentaires sur la société du spectacle* (Paris: Éditions Gérard Lebovici, 1988).

49. It is not my insight that the RTS movement can or should be read in this way. Naomi Klein, Swyngedouw, Harvey, and others also make this point.

50. Naomi Klein, *No Logo: Taking Aim at the Brand Bullies*, rev. ed. (New York: Macmillan, 2002), 313. There are many more examples of urban interventions that share some of the features of RTS (e.g., Operation: City 2008 in Zagreb), yet in spite of their emphasis on participation and policy, they tend to remain primarily artistic and cultural endeavors.

51. Right to the City Alliance, "What We Do" and "Our History," <http://www.righttothecity.org/what-we-do.html> and <http://www.righttothecity.org/our-history.html>, accessed January 8, 2012.

52. Right to the City Alliance, "Our History," emphasis added.

53. Harvey, "The Right to the City," 939.

54. Lefebvre, *La proclamation de la Commune*, 40, as translated by and cited in Andy Merrifield, "Lefebvre and Debord: A Faustian Fusion," in Goonewardena et al., *Space, Difference, Everyday Life*, 185.

PART 2

LOCATING POLITICS