# Northumbria Research Link

# A renewed right to urban life: A twenty-first century engagement with Lefebvre's initial "cry"

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**Abstract**

This paper is concerned with how space is socially produced and the vigorous struggles that this process entails. Critically engaging with some different readings of Henri Lefebvre's spatial notion of the "right to the city" we contemplate its radical potency to reconstitute a renewed *right to urban life.* We argue that the right to the city – trialectically interpreted as a theoretical concept, call for action and cry – has substantial contemporary relevance and import, extending to spatial practitioners such as architects. This conclusion is reached by exploring the neoliberal imperative to conquer space, grappling with the issue of social justice as a means to decipher *who* (re)produces the city and in what particular *ways*. Highly visible strategies are contrasted with some less visible counter-practices, by developing a conceptual framework that emphasises ACCESSING, BEING and PARTICIPATING in the city. We contend that "little victories", offer locationally-specific insights into alternative methods of production, and pose some unsettling questions for architects.

**Key words:** Lefebvre, right to the city, counter-practices, little victories and producing space

## Introduction

The French theorist, Henri Lefebvre, published the polemical *Le droit à la ville* (The right to the city) in 1968, 1 taking inspiration from the social uprisings and student demonstrations that same year. Over recent years, the Lefebvrian cry and demand for a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*, have popularised by scholars, activists and human rights organisations. More recently, the taking to the streets and subsequent revolutions concentrated in the Middle East and North Africa have brought issues of spatial justice and (re)producing the city to the forefront of the global media and popular discourse. This paper is concerned with how space is socially produced and the vigorous struggles that this process entails. Despite appearances of permanence and relative stability, urban space and spatial formations are embroiled in a continuous process of restructuring and emergence. 2 However, what de Certeau terms spatial *strategies* and *practices*, which (re)produce the city, are neither geographically nor even socially uniform. 3 Indeed, these processes are engaged in the capitalist production of space and uneven development. 4 The purpose of this paper, however, is not to construct a meta-theory of space, but to utilise a comprehension of (socially produced) space as a "tool" for exploring spatial forms and practice: an instrument that can be applied to untangle the intricate role(s) of heterogeneous *actants*, including architectural agents, mediating politics, ideology, capital and culture.

The (neoliberal) imperative to conquer space is actively producing new forms of spatial reference, as cutting-edge architectural practice, policy innovations and shifting cultural demands are rapidly reordering urban spaces, albeit in a highly selective manner. Spatial practitioners – encompassing architects, planners and designers – are using a vast array of strategies for re-imaging the city, including iconic edifices, 5 the staging of spectacular urban events, 6 arts, 7 design, 8 leisure and culture, 9 place promotion, 10 and so on. All of which contribute towards a range of both problems and potentials, demanding a rethink of how we could collectively design, inhabit and (re)produce the city.

In response to the pervasive commodification of urban space, catering predominantly to the insatiable desires of the contemporary consumer, which in turn have displaced the needs of the everyday user, David Harvey 11 questioned "whose city is it?". This in turn raises crucial questions about the "right to the city", when particular users, uses and activities are

privileged over others. This right, according to Lefebvre, 12 "manifests itself as a superior form of rights", a right of all *citadins* (visitors as well as residents) to participate in urban life and produce space: to access, to be, and to participate.

Critically engaging with some different readings of Henri Lefebvre's spatial notion of the "right to the city" we contemplate its radical potency to reconstitute a renewed *right to urban life*. Through our own interpretive reading of Lefebvre's concept, we argue that the right to the city – trialectically interpreted as a theoretical concept, call for action and cry – has substantial contemporary relevance and import. We explore some recent struggles unfolding across some "public" urban spaces in a selection of international city centres by drawing on selective examples of highly visible state-managed strategies, which are contrasted with some less visible counter-practices. These examples are intended to provide glimpses into social practices, city processes and contested discourse. As a result they provide partial accounts that would benefit from more detailed case study and comparative analysis. In this respect, the paper implicitly sets out an agenda for further research (and action). Through an analytical critique of neoliberal-infused discourses that organise the spaces of citizenship within a narrow field of who is "deserving", we aim to challenge hegemonic strategies that often displace the needs and desires of those deemed to be "undeserving". We contend that counter-practices, characterised as "little victories", offer locationally-specific insights into alternative methods of production.

The remainder of this paper is organised into six sections. Drawing on some of Lefebvre's work, and specifically *The Production of Space*, 13 the first section theorises space as being open, eventful and political. This relational interpretation of space as continuously produced through social practice provides the ontological frame for a theoretical engagement with Lefebvre's concept of the "right to the city" in section two. Identifying different aspects of the right to the city, the third, fourth and fifth sections examine the right to access, be and participate respectively, before posing some concluding thoughts in section six.

**Thinking Space Relationally: The Social Production of Space**

The quotidian application of the term "space" unintentionally downplays its multivalent strength, vitality and importance. Space is multiple: a folding of experiential layers, a plurality of temporalities and subjectivities; embodying the imaginative, the representative,

and the material. Space is eventful: folded in complex dimensions. We interpret space from a Lefebvrian perspective as being "alive" and "active". Contrary to modernist thinking and Cartesian logic that consider space to be a neutral conduit or container, 14 Lefebvre refutes spatial closure, keeping it radically open and therein retaining the promise of liberation, critique and difference. 15 Understanding space to convey power, ideologies and symbolism we, therefore, adopt a relational understanding of space, as "[n]othing exists without exchange, … without relationships". 16 Therefore, "thinking space relationally" can be administered as an important political tool: an interjectory device to contest essentialist place-bound notions of space that always exclude some "other". Helen Liggett argues that such an approach can combat the limitations of a modernistic-absolute notion of space "to open the door of admission in a way that is prepared to learn something new about what's out there. This is a different goal from arriving at any final destination". 17

The material arrangement of urban space – the planning, architectural-design and development process – is mediated and managed through political decisions, economic interests and ideological representations. Spatial formations, as a product, are therefore part of a social process involving the folding together of mental, material and social spaces. Spatial formations, in this paper, are viewed through a social lens, stressing that places are articulated moments or knotted strands of movements, relations and understandings. Urban social space can be imagined as a network of cross-cutting, overlapping and interwoven multiplicity of meanings, related in a dynamic process. This framework exposes the notion that place has a singular static character as a strategy for controlling space.

One of Lefebvre's major achievements was his reassertion of the importance of space to critical studies: "To recognise space, to recognise what 'takes place' there and what it is used for… will reveal the contradictions of space". 18 Perhaps more importantly, this was achieved without dislodging the social and temporal elements by way of a "trialectic" interpretation. 19 According to Soja, 20 the organisation, production and meaning of space are a product of the process of social translation, transformation and experience. Linking the material and the conceptual, Lefebvre demonstrates how space possesses its own dialectical moment as both a material product of social relations (the concrete) and a manifestation of relations, a relation itself (the abstract). Our reading of the Lefebvrian triad (*dialectique de triplicate*), which marries human experience, knowledge and the imagination, understands:

- *Spatial practice* as "perceived" to be tangible, generated and used;
- *Representations of space* as "conceived" of mental concepts, bureaucratic abstractions and rational knowledge;
- *Spaces of representation* as "lived" and experienced, culturally and symbolically coded with meanings.

For Lefebvre, spatial practices, representations of space, and spaces of representation stand in direct relation to the perceived, the conceived, and the lived. The fluidity of Lefebvre's triple dialectic is a great strength and weakness of this conceptual tool. It remains vague because he is demonstrating "the unmappability of the dialectic". 21 The Lefebvrian triad is not to be understood as three compartmentalised spaces – it cannot be deconstructed and then quantified into three polemics. Hence, we are interested in the complex relations and interactions between each of these three expressions or moments of space. Each is a synthesis of the simultaneous dimensions of space; each space incorporates the others, providing a unitary theoretical structure. Whilst distinguishable, each expression is inseparable, though the relations between the three are never stable. Each moment is meant to convey the complexities of space; entering social relations at all scales and vice versa. One cannot talk about social relations without entering into a debate about spatial relations. Lefebvre's tripartite view of space exposes the traditional (modern) dualism of *material space* versus *mental space* for its profound neglect of a third element: *social space.* This triadic arrangement represents the space of social practice as process: continuously produced in inseparable yet shifting historical, physical and social contexts. Following Henri Lefebvre, 22 it is the production of space (as a process) rather than space itself as an object, which is of primary concern. Investigating the production of space is as much about the assembly process as it is about the assembled product. In accordance with Lefebvre, what is proposed is "not so much to construct a model of the urban as to open a pathway toward it". 23

**The Lefebvrian Right to the City: A Theoretical Introduction**

> We live in an era when ideals of human rights have moved centre stage both politically and ethically. A great deal of energy is expended in promoting their significance for the construction of a better world. But for the most part the concepts circulating do not fundamentally challenge hegemonic liberal and neoliberal market

logics, or the dominant modes of legality and state action. We live, after all, in a world in which the rights of private property and the profit rate trump all other notions of rights. 24

Similar to the "space" produced by this paper, space and its production is not "innocent", 25 but the "point of collision" 26 in the ongoing struggles of capitalist accumulation. "Control" is a contentious term in the context of urban space. Its dynamic nature suggests that only partial control can ever be exercised. This line of reasoning is supported by a number of researchers who recognise that there is no final result with the production of space, "only a continuous succession of phases". 27 Some form of spatial control has "always" existed, 28 yet over recent decades the control and stratification of urban space has intensified. 29 Across many cities spanning different continents and cultures, contemporary spatial re*ordering* (and control) has involved the proliferation of city centre spaces of consumption aiming to bring the perceived "deserving" middle classes and tourists (back) to the city, as perceived "undeserving" counter-publics (such as begging for food or money) have been removed from the public gaze to appropriate interstitial spaces at the socio-spatial margins. Increasingly, Harvey argues, 30 the right to the city is being strangled by the privileged few, including property developers and financiers, as new forms of urban governance coalesce state and corporate interests (see, for example, Kirkpatrick & Smith). 31

We contend that the Lefebvrian concept of the "right to the city" can be invoked to challenge hegemonic practices that seek to control urban space. According to Lefebvre, 32 urban democracy and the right to the city:

> Manifest [themselves] as a superior form of rights: right to freedom, to individualization in socialization, to habitat and to inhabit. The right to the *oeuvre,* to participation and *appropriation* (clearly distinct from the right to property), are implied in the right to the city. 33

The most fundamental of all rights, this notion was developed by Lefebvre over several years of philosophical urban enquiry and a number of books dedicated specifically to the "city", 34 but it was the publication of *Le droit à la ville* in 1968 that most fully developed this concept, 35 which we draw on. The concept cannot be confined to the right of accessibility - physically, mentally or symbolically – to what pre-exists, but entails a right to *change*: a

social right to access, be and participate. The right to the city entails a sociospatial revolution, grounded in the actualities of everyday life. 36 According to Peter Marcuse, Lefebvre's right is indeed both "a cry and a demand"; 37 "a cry out of necessity and a demand for something more… the demand is of those who are *excluded*, the cry is of those who are *alienated*". 38 It is the 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… moments and places". 39 It is thus a spatial right, a "right to space", 40 dependent upon quality of urban space (see, for example, David Harvey who has examined the geography of injustice). 41

Mayer argues that the radical Lefebvrian notion of the right to the city is about democratising the production of space and participation in urban society: a moral right. 42 Rights are multiple and can be contradictory, producing conflict among rights, especially the right to totality. 43 Mayer identifies a variety of versions of the "right to the city" concept, distinguishing between two common interpretations, the first a radical Lefebvrian version, and the second a more depoliticised and institutionalised version. 44 She problematises the second as a participatory-delimiting notion which seeks to absorb praxis into the existing capitalist framework, arguing that official charters, irrespective of intentions, tend to dilute the politically contested right to the city. It is suggested that the first interpretation presents more radical opportunities for urban social movements. A literal reading of the concept misses the radical arguments that Lefebvre was making. Capron for one, translates the right to the city as one of use and access to urban resources. 45 In a similar vein, Mitchell narrowly equates such a right with the right to access public space. 46 Instead, we read the notion in a way that goes beyond the rights of ownership and access to embrace the progressive politics of "use value", which is use in respect of active presence and appropriation, a "right *to claim presence in the city, to wrest the use of the city from privileged new masters and democratize its spaces*". 47 It is the right of citadins to access, be and participate in urban space: a collective right "to change ourselves by changing the city". 48 To "be" in the city emphasises the temporal aspects of producing space. Whilst the right to "access" offers or constrains opportunities, the right to be is accomplished through active presence. Commensurate with the production of space, the right to the city requires collaboration and, potentially, contestation; social relationships "between very different kinds of people" in order to produce a "counter-space". 49

Not only a right to "return to traditional cities", 50 the right to the city as we interpret it is a right to unsettle the present city and produce a different future city: "the right to a radically different *world*". 51 The right to the city includes aspects of the right to participation. In addition to the right to be, such as occupying already-existing urban space, the right to participate is to constitute the (social) production of new space through a renewed right to urban life. This emphasises the point that rights are the product of continuous struggle and do not necessarily have a logical end-point. 52 The right to the city is thus an "active" process of continual struggle, negotiation and contestation.

The right to the city represents a socio-political right to participate in urban society in concrete (perceived), abstract (conceived) and symbolic ways (lived). 53 Lefebvre's radical right to "difference" 54 can be applied as a conceptual and political tool to mobilise against economic dominance and urban oppression, 55 and those who "already *have* the right to the city". 56 If realised, the concept has the potential to restructure the power relations underpinning the production of space. Indeed, the actualisation of the right to the city would reorder the relationship between exchange and use values, favouring the latter. Drawing on the above interpretive analysis of the right to the city, the remainder of the paper examines three facets of this concept that are of particular pertinence. The first is the right to ACCESS the city; often materialised by way of an open invitation or curtailment of the right to enter. The second is the right to BE in the city; a right to stay put, to dwell and occupy already existing space. The third, and most important for the purposes of this paper due to its revolutionary potential, is the right to PARTICIPATE in the city; to *produce* space in new and different ways. Whilst it is necessary to distinguish each facet for analytical purposes, the intent is not to polarise these facets as each interpenetrates and collides with the others.

**The Right to ACCESS the City**

Conceptualised as a continuum, the right to access is arguably one of the least radical aspects of the right to the city. Yet it should not be dismissed as less powerful, as it is a foundational spatial right; without access, to be and to participate in (re)producing the city would be much less viable. The fact that urban space in a historical sense has been a place for communality indicates that it is "more public" and "less private" in nature. Whilst these terms are themselves contested and spatio-culturally contingent, the idea of "public" urban space communicates "openness", and as such represents a democratic forum for citadins and

society. Public urban spaces convey centrality, 57 in terms of social relations, providing meeting places and social melting pots. This space not only reflects the cultural identity and character of an area, but also shapes identities and dispositions – by way of a mutually constituted socio-spatial-historical trialectic. 58

Viewed as a democratic forum, public urban spaces collectively help comprise "the city", providing opportunities and potentials for social activities. According to Mattson, citadins have made a clear cry and demand for open and accessible public urban space where they can share views and debate. 59 In this respect, curtailed public urban space is an insidious expression of lack of democracy. It is no coincidence that authoritarian regimes and dictatorships frequently control access to the city, such as carnivals or processions, as a means to control being and participating in the city, and hence the right to (re)produce space. As Lefebvre has noted, particularly in relation to the medieval town, public urban space is invested with symbolic power and consequently evokes pride and public interaction. 60 A crucial role for architects and other spatial practitioners in a democracy is the creation of public space that encourages civic interaction and discourse. Further, a democratic mode of design would extend beyond the privileged professions to help realise counter-spaces. Specifically, the question of a democratic architectural practice arises. Could a practice be envisaged and deployed that would seek to work with different symbolic inscriptions and social meanings in a manner more open, in a creative sense, to any tensions between the right to access deemed appropriate by the client (i.e. land owner or developer/investor) and that sought by citadins?

The economic trends of neoliberalism have increased social polarisation, economic inequality and spatial fragmentation. 61 While the neoliberal capitalist system, which structures spaces of privilege and disadvantage, requires the many to work for low wages, the elite minority are often not content to share urban space or to permit access to those less fortunate. The many citadins, including the working class and urban underclass, are often alienated as a form of "residual community" out of sight of affluent enclaves or displaced elsewhere to provide access for the capitalist elite to "accumulate by dispossession". 62 As a global phenomenon, gated communities can engineer a public pretence of access, such as "community" facilities, but invariably these mask the private control imposed via security personnel, for example, as well as ownership. It is in this sense that architects, planners and designers tend to take a more *passive* role in the production of space; as technocratic "doctors of space" 63 their role

is often reduced to being hired technicians of capitalist development. 64 Alternatively, they can take a more *proactive* stance in response to recognition that the design of buildings, spaces and other spatial formations is a social practice. Such a stance, conceives the city as an oeuvre, where the abstract space of capital does not override all other spaces and rights.

There has been an increasing tendency for the "public" urban spaces of cities to be systematically eroded and recapitalised by private actors. 65 Whilst the most ostentatious private (re)productions of the city have been well publicised, and are associated with US cities such as New York and Las Vegas, more subtle erosions receive far less critical attention. Take for instance, the enclosure of city streets and squares. The resultant malls have the illusion of being "public", especially as they tend to occupy sites of historical public urban space, but are increasingly owned and operated by private interests, and thus under private control. 66 Eldon Square shopping mall in the heart of the city centre of Newcastle-upon-Tyne, England, is a case in point; partly owned by the local council (which is itself quite unique), yet still managed in a private manner that curtails access at particular times (e.g. those outside of regular commercial rhythms), forbids particular uses (e.g. sitting on the floor or busking) and even restricts particular types of users (e.g. skateboarders and 'hoodies' – hood wearing young people). Conversely, the adjoining outdoor Old Eldon Square provides open access. Imbued with strong symbolic and cultural meanings, Old Eldon Square is widely considered to form the "heart" of the city. 67 Indeed, access has been improved over recent years through the adoption of "shared space" for pedestrians and vehicular traffic on a nearby street. Although profit-seeking motives were a crucial factor in the redesign of Old Eldon Square (i.e. to attract more consumers), the shared space design provides opportunities for greater access across many levels beyond that of the pedestrian-driver relationship. It is accessible to a variety of city publics, with consumers interacting and sharing the space with non-consumers, such as Goths and Skateboarders.

The right to access the city for a more heterogeneous array of socio-cultural pursuits, including outdoor markets, concerts, political meetings, charitable collections, theatre, religious gatherings and other spectacles, is hampered not only by the physical restrictions of enclosed quasi-public spaces but perhaps more so by the security-focused and market logics of private controllers. Regulations and legalities in many countries are also used to prevent access to temporary and more spontaneous public spaces. A case in point is the British Royal Wedding in 2011. With many neighbourhoods wishing to host "street parties", some

councils, such as the London Borough of Camden, used strategies including the refusal of "temporary traffic orders", on grounds such as "public safety" and "local opposition", to in effect curtail access. The increase in health and safety legislation, together with the developing litigation culture, has prompted local authorities to curtail events and activities considered to present "risks". As a result, according to widespread media reports, such prospective street parties were banned; preventing communal being in the city and possibly other forms of participating in the city. An alternative mode of production could see the public sector occupy a more explicitly proactive role as the custodian of the city for the enjoyment of citadins.

In many cases, these sorts of excessive controls result from privatisation processes occurring through public sector-induced private "regeneration" initiatives, with resulting spatial formations often entirely owned and managed by private landlords with the power to restrict access and control activities. 68 Such processes also offers the private sector another opportunity to operate a form of social control through segregation, and the attendant growth in private security enables a reduction in police costs and enhanced tax revenue (which is particularly appealing to governments in austere times). What is left of public space is often rented-out for commercial purposes (in what has been termed "café-creep") 69 whereby pervasive commercial interests seep deeper into the city's "public" urban spaces. Moreover, many city centres across far-flung places are becoming increasingly similar with the same chain stores (e.g. IKEA, Starbucks and McDonald's) appearing in ever growing privatised shopping space – signifiers of neoliberal globalisation facilitating the (re)production of cities as commodities. 70 While commerce is a key part of a city, and part of everyday public life, the commodification of the city, defined by limited forms of consumer activity, has significant and direct implications for the right to access the city. A challenge for architects and designers is to seek, explore and experiment with creative alternatives of enabling a renewed access to the city. However, the scale of such a challenge should not be underestimated, although "little victories" may offer some possibilities, which are discussed below.

Through this section we have demonstrated how the right to access the city is increasingly curtailed and circumvented by some visible and less visible private sector forces. The right to access is a key thread in producing an alternative city; a counter-space tolerating (and perhaps necessitating) difference. Whilst physical access through *spatial practices* is a key concern,

we have also explored how access to the city is sanctioned through *representations of space*, codes and rules often less visible. Exploring the right to be and participate in the city in the following sections, we highlight how little victories can emerge from *spaces of representation.*

**The Right to BE in the City**

Negotiating the right to access the city, to access space – be that housing, public urban space or governance space, for example – is insufficient on its own to produce a new city bearing the hallmarks of Lefebvre's radical thoughts. The right to be in the city; a right to stay put, to dwell and occupy is also necessary. In some parts of the world, the city has enjoyed a type of "renaissance", albeit extremely exclusive and spatially selective. 71 Life on the edge, cityness or cosmopolitan stimulation has inspired the works of scholars such as Richard Florida, who asserts that the "creative class" are attracted to such vibrant cities and urban locales that offer maximum excitement short of the tipping point into fear. 72 Madanipour notes that the imperative for protection of private investment and safe urban environments led to a demand for a more stringent management regime, often undermining freedoms of the city. 74 Technologies such as CCTV surveillance provide confidence and reassurance to those "deserving" that the "undeserving" and unwanted social "others" will have their right to be curtailed, and will be forcibly removed or displaced if required.

According to Fainstein, urban spaces have become increasingly contested, and there has been a role reversal of sorts as the traditional perception of a community being invaded by strangers has been overtaken by one in which visitors and tourists are more likely to be perceived as conforming, or what Cresswell terms "in place", 75 than some of the city's own citadins, and surveillance can be used to protect the former groups from the latter. 76 In this sense, the city dweller has become the stranger in *their* city. As Camus has shown, L'etranger can come from within as much as from outside. 77 In addition, global trends of suburbanisation and ever lengthier commuting patterns have caused former city dwellers to lose much of their attachment to the city and often behave like visitors themselves – creating a new group of strangers. This contradictory picture introduces notions of – whose city is it, and who has a right to it? There is a further argument that it is the "community of strangers" that now inhabits urban space, rather than the "community of citizens". 78 This has been shown in demonstrations taking place in London during 2011 against public sector cutbacks,

where strangers to the demonstrating citadins seized control the events with anarchic rampages of violence and criminal damage. These actions give licence to the authorities to act with even more force. 79 For many years state powers have been taking arbitrary action against those who are perceived to be "different". This can include anything from unconventional appearance to being a member of a particular ethnic group. Consequently, some citadins have become increasingly familiar with what are known as "stop and search" tactics. 80 In England, for example, the authorities now have a whole new raft of terrorist legislation through which to exercise social control. 81

Nevertheless, even if citadins are not overtly expressing metaphorical ownership of the city, it still remains just under the surface. In 2011, over one million protestors occupied Tahrir Square in Cairo as part of an 18-day revolt. This globally publicised counter-practice reclaimed the streets as the citadins took "ownership" of the square. Access was initially restricted, but the protestors reclaimed this symbolically important central public space. Once the struggle for access had been accomplished the protestors continued to occupy the space. The right to be in the city, to inhabit urban space, was part of wider participatory moves to renew democratic values and produce a new space. Taking to the streets of Cairo became so symbolic in Egypt's struggle for social justice and political renewal that the citadins returned after the uprisings to repair the pavements and remove graffiti and debris – "cleansing" the city for a new modality of social production. As Lefebvre points out, the character of urban space is determined by those who occupy it: all spaces are expressions of power relationships. 82 Indeed, Lefebvre argues that architects, planners and other design professionals often preoccupied with appearance – representations of space – over substance, in terms of social use and functions. 83 A more active recognition of the right to be in the city may help spatial practitioners redress this. It is also important to recognise that symbols do not necessarily have the same meaning for visitors as they do for other citadins. For example, from the visitors' perspective, the horror of the destruction caused by the earthquakes in Christchurch, New Zealand in 2010 and 2011 was the damage to people's homes and livelihoods. It is therefore perhaps surprising that among the fires and floods, loss of homes and workplaces, much of the angst of the Canterburians was reserved for the damage to the city centre cathedral. The diversity of symbolic values alludes to the potential benefits that could arise from a fundamental shift in the mode of public sector spatial production and, specifically, local government participatory democracy. Whilst the direct implications for architectural practice are less apparent, such a radical reconstitution of local governance

could redefine the role of architects in a transformation from "doctors of space" to active translators of lived space.

The right to be in the city, predicated on the right to access, is underpinned by the notion that space is for use by all citadins. Yet, there are groups of "new masters", to whom citadins find themselves subordinated. Since the latter part of the twentieth century, international economic and political summits have brought together numbers of world leaders to meet in a selected city. Often as a reaction to perceived security issues, authorities have placed unprecedented restrictions on their own citadins. 84 In effect, such dignitaries take over the city: restricting commercial aviation, closing streets, issuing warnings that residents should remain in their houses, while helicopters patrol the skies and guards patrol the streets. 85 It is akin to a temporary invasion by a small number of superior beings. This could be interpreted as a form of occupation where the right to be is suspended. Recognising the limitations (as well as opportunities) presented by the discernible facets of the right to access and the right to be (notwithstanding their interrelationships), the next section examines the revolutionary potential of the right to participate

**The Right to PARTICIPATE in the City**

Participation through a radical Lefebvrian lens is about much more than being granted permission to partake in different spaces and the (re)production of particular urban spaces. Participation is a fundamental aspect of the right to the city: it is a right to be engaged with urban democracy, revisioning, decision-making, and thus a right to produce space in *different* ways. In terms of the design and material arrangement of urban space, this would include an active role for citadins in the formal-bureaucratic production of space. Such an active presence would look to unsettle hegemonic systems and norms; perhaps pointing to the merits of the coproduction of space – melding formal spaces of *savoir* and less formal spaces of *connaissance.* Yet even in the context of what has been termed a "post-capitalist" society in the aftermath of the global financial tsunami unleashed in 2007, it is unlikely that such a paradigm shift will occur without a series of (disparate and heterogeneous) movements or "little victories" taking place. It is here where multiform movements (ones with diverse goals such as racial justice, public transportation or neighbourhood clean water supplies) can participate in the right to the city by way of a "diverse coalition". 86 Mark Purcell argues that this inclusive, nonreductivist interpretation of the right to the city enables citadins to "share a

common purpose" whilst retaining "their distinct character". 87 Consequently, the political cry and demand for a renewed right to urban life is not reduced to a renewed economy.

The notion of "little victories" has its origins in the praxis of citadins' participatory struggles against hegemonic systems. It is apparent, for example, in George Orwell's *Nineteen Eighty-Four*, 88 and especially in the existentialism of Lefebvre (which influenced some of his work, although he also critiqued existential philosophers and later rejected it as a philosophical project), 89 Camus 90 and others. In *La Peste*, the plague is symbolic of the Nazi occupation of France, against which Camus fought so heroically. Like Camus, Monsieur Othon in *La Peste* would not let the plague change his habits. 91 Upholding the normality of life, however briefly, in extremely abnormal situations is an existential little victory. They recur in all spaces and city life, especially in those heavily regulated and institutionalised spaces, such as prisons. It is all a matter of scale, as something as insignificant (to some) as an extra helping of pudding enables the prisoner to (re)produce space through the act of putting a dent in the system. 92 *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is replete with examples of little victories, as Winston Smith finds private ways to enact his personal revolution. Arguably one of the most significant of these occurs in the face of the massive propaganda coercing the population to love "Big Brother". He obtains outlawed pen and paper and soon discovers that he has written "down with Big Brother". 93 However, one of the lessons of *Nineteen Eighty-Four* is that even a plethora of little victories do not necessarily add up to a big victory – invariably they just remain little. There was no progressive accumulation of victories and Winston gained no real power from them. Ultimately it made no difference, as the system nearly always wins. Similarly, although little victories are endemic in prison life, nobody ever escaped from Alcatraz or Robben Island – but a significant number of people have lost their lives attempting to do so.

Fortunately, there are positive interpretations of this concept. The term "little victories" is surprisingly deeply rooted in popular culture. One music website alone displays 25 different songs with that name, including those by Matt Natanson, Bob Seger, Leeroy Stagger, Darden Smith and the Horrors. 94 In addition, it is identified in poetry and performance. 95 It appears in health, as a coping strategy for dealing with serious illness, 96 and in conditions such as autism, one sufferer of which has remarked "little victories is what I call being able to do something when another person tries to tell you – you can't". 97 It is the title of a book *Little Victories – conquering unemployment*, in which long-term unemployment is perceived as a

debilitating condition. 98 On a national political and legal scale, it appears in *Philippine Massacre: The Little Victories*, in which "little victories start to add-up in the multiple murder cases against the Ampatuans and their co-accused"; 99 and in the recent webpost "Nigeria: Our Little Victories". 100 The Basque Country in northern Spain was united against Franco's fascist regime, centred on the cry of 'Basque Homeland and Freedom'. Now a *comunidad autónoma* (autonomous community), more recently citadins of the Basque Country have been contesting some pervasive global trends. Their machine-tool industry is a case in point that has benefitted from successful small-firm partnerships between public, private and co-operative interests. By marshalling a mosaic of issues through a common purpose, the Basque Country has retained a distinct character, as have the individual interests and movements participating in the ongoing struggle. Arguably the greatest little victories in architecture are those where architects creatively negotiate the programmatic, material, financial and political restrictions within projects to produce high quality buildings for their intended users, not simply their financiers. Where the maximisation of quantities of floorspace (exchange value) has usurped the production of places for people (use value) this is most problematic.

Historically the UK, and specifically England, has been a highly centralised state, with central government (irrespective of political party) wielding significant regulatory and financial resources, perhaps to the detriment of local autonomy. 101 The Coalition Government, formed in May 2010, is championing a new notion, or rather political slogan, the "Big Society". 102 The discourse frames "the interaction of state and society as a zero-sum game", whereby it is proclaimed that the former ("Big Government") must shrink in order to create space for the latter to expand. 103 With international precedents, including China which introduced the concept over ten years ago, 104 the Big Society is based on the premise that an army of volunteers can deliver local services, such as libraries and youth clubs, more efficiently (i.e. at less cost). The nostrum for urban ills is a dose of self-help and incentives, delivered through supposedly participatory practices including community stewardship, self-governance and entrepreneurialism. The Big Society could be more appropriately described as the "Little Society". In this situation, responsibilities are dispersed, but arguably powers are retained centrally and the right to participate is presented in a predetermined way to these little societies. Indeed, participatory democracy and decision-making mechanisms could be eroded as functions are handed to powerful corporate interests either directly or through Thatcherite privatisation. Tam argues that if this trend persists, "the

presumption that more should be left to markets" will increase, as the state retracts, which disproportionately impacts the "poor" while the rich "get richer". 105 Consequently, the potency of a Lefebvrian right to participate is annulled once the illusion of participation is revealed to be a new hegemonic state-managed strategy preoccupied with reducing public expenditure at the same time as retaining control over the production of space.

The most contradictory and unconvincing aspect of this proposal relates to the "third sector", which has operated to provide a unifying framework for a wide range of organisations and interests, including charities, voluntary and community groups, social enterprises, cooperatives, faith groups, and so on, which had previously been politically divided and ineffective. It is conceivable that the state does not wish this strategic unity of organisations and interests to continue as a "diverse coalition", 106 as it may potentially result in a much broader common purpose of resistance. While divided, segregated and isolated, small groupings can be coerced and controlled. In this sense, participation is framed in a top-down manner; prescribing *who* can participate, *how* they can participate and *when* they can participate. Participation as a general practice is therefore not inherently "good". It can be applied as a mechanism of control, although such efforts can be resisted.

An example of the demand to participate in remaking the city was provided by the resistance movements of Belgrade in the late twentieth century. In an act that could be interpreted as transforming the city into a "terrain of resistance" both metaphorically and literally (whether such an aim was intentional or otherwise), citadins produced a counter-space by drawing on the spatial tactic of walking, celebrated by de Certeau. 107 The opposition leader, Zoran Djindjic, set the tone when he proclaimed, "This is our city, it is a beautiful city. Let's walk a little through it." The cry *setati se* rose up, which offered an invitation to take a walk rather than to march; 108 the act of marching often has confrontational, even militaristic overtones, whereas walking is an everyday spatial practice. 109 In their contradictory, ambiguous and multiple ways, the walking crowds challenged the dominant geography of the city, reappropriating and reproducing the urban landscape. The participatory practice of walking, as an articulation of contestation, was a way of reproducing the city. Whilst there was no predetermined route, paths were informed by symbolic places including buildings and monuments. Challenging hegemonic symbols, the walks through the city produced liberatory spaces, supported by protest paraphernalia such as badges, booklets, posters and postcards, to help reclaim the city. Sound was also an important spatial practice. As Jansen points out, the

crowd would often whistle and the whistling would become louder as they passed one of the regime's buildings, signifying a little victory. 110 The improvised nature of the walking protests unsettled the authorities, who thrived on dealing with confrontation. Set-piece demonstrations require organisation and planning, and tend to rely on "others" entering and accessing the city. Subsequently, many demonstrations are fleeting spatio-temporal *moments*. 111 As well as their seemingly haphazard nature, it was the repetition of the Belgrade walks that was unique and which helped to disturb the strategies of the authorities. Yet, for such a campaign to produce difference and fulfil the promise of a Lefebvrian right to the city, citadins need to contest the right to access, be and participate in the city for more than a *moment* of *jouissance*. Hence, citadins must continue their struggle to transform their city!

**Concluding Remarks: Radical Opportunities for Shared Practice**

Over recent years, democratic governments have tended to energetically and enthusiastically support the speculative investment tendencies of neoliberal urbanism that are reshaping city spaces. Yet, the socially discriminatory and spatially selective manner of these contemporary transformations, playing out to different degrees and at variable velocities in cities across the globe, necessitates rethinking the dominant modes of spatial practice imbricated in the social reproduction of space. Grappling with these contextual issues, through this paper we have sought to offer glimpses, by way of locationally-specific "counter-practices", into alternative methods of the production of space. Drawing on some of the works of Henri Lefebvre, and in particular his notion of the "right to the city", as a means to produce a contemporary reinterpretation of this concept, we have illuminated several discernible though interrelated aspects of the right to the city, namely the rights to access, be and participate. These provided the analytical framework for exploring a renewed right to urban life. As Lefebvre, drawing on Marx and Rimbaud, asserts: "Change life! Change Society!" by way of "producing an appropriate space". 112

Perceiving the city as an "oeuvre", a collective social artwork, the Lefebvrian concept of the right to the city has the potency to unsettle present ways of knowing and operating, and therefore restructure existing power relations. Notwithstanding the hegemony of neoliberal discourse, drawing attention to the potential of "little victories", particularly through the coming together of "diverse coalitions", we have shown that alternative ways of (re)producing the city are possible. Yet, shaping a more socially active role for architects and

other spatial practitioners will not be easy or without struggle. A Lefebvrian-inspired challenge advocating the co-production of space and openness to counter-practices may sit uneasily with those who value formal knowledge (the space of savoir) above all others. Yet, it may be that a greater range and sustained alliance of little victories can arise from such a radically different design praxis. In an era of economic austerity that many nation-states now face, together with social movements and uprisings demanding a renewed right to urban life, a contemporary reappraisal of and critical engagement with the right to the city present some interesting opportunities for socially just shared practice. In addition to a diverse range of citadins reclaiming the city by way of entry (access), and to stay put and dwell (be); it offers scope to (re)produce the city in new and imaginative ways (participation). There is always another way: architects and other spatial practitioners may find the right to the city, trialectically interpreted as a theoretical concept, call for action and cry, to be a powerful democratic design tool.

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