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# English-speaking reception of « Right to the city »: Transpositions and present meaning

Claire Revol

Using an author's concepts implies not only using his or her words, but also establishing an understanding of the author's work in general and the subsequent reappropriations of his or her concepts. Henri Lefebvre described his *Critique of Everyday Life* as the application of Marx's writings in a new context, despite the fact that Marx himself never used the words "everyday life". We approach the problem from the standpoint that adapting concepts and ways of thinking is not an evident task. We run the risk of committing two errors: first, using concepts without taking the care to analyze either the context in which they emerged or the ways in which they have changed, thus freezing thought in a dogmatic system; and second, distorting the concept to the degree that the initial thinking becomes unrecognizable. It was Lefebvre's mission to "prolong the thinking without denaturing it" (« *prolonger une réflexion sans la dénaturer* », Lefebvre, 1958). If we want to use the term "right to the city" today, we need to consider Lefebvre's advice. We need to consider historical change as well as geographical displacement, especially given the fact that most current readings and appropriations of Lefebvre's work take place in the English-speaking world.

We wish to explore the understanding of the term "right to the city" and determine which distortions are needed to adapt it without denaturing it. This supposes not only an analysis of the context of the translations and the receptions of right to the city but also a description of the major changes that the concept itself underwent. From this we will attempt to create a panorama of the different reappropriations of right to the city in order to see how the concept was adapted to the specific conditions of its usage. Three themes become apparent from this panorama: socio-spatial justice, citizenship and participation, and, finally, appropriation and struggle. Their development shows how they are interconnected as well as how they contradict each other. Hopefully, this will create a model by which to evaluate conflicting reappropriations of right to the city and guide future approaches.

## Translation and reception

When Lefebvre wrote the majority of his books on urban theory in the 1970s, he was very famous in France for his particular Marxist approach, for he was both "revolutionary" and "romantic". Urban theory was just an aspect of his work, which spans many aspects of modern society. His influence declined in the 1990s, as Marxist theory no longer had the same status in intellectual circles in France. During the 1970s, he was not well known in the English-speaking world. He was only mentioned in Marxist debates, which focussed on other authors (Althusser, Debord, Marcuse...), and his books on urban theory and space were not translated.

The work of David Harvey and Edward W. Soja was determinant in bringing Lefebvre into the debate in spatial theory. Both David Harvey and Edward W. Soja are geographers and they established a reading of Lefebvre through the lens of spatial theory. Harvey (1973) uses Lefebvre as a key thinker for Marxist geography, which was not Lefebvre's project. He discusses the relation between space and society from the standpoint of radical geography and through the notion of social space that he takes from Lefebvre. Radical geography is also influenced by authors such as Manuel Castells who criticizes Lefebvre's views. The second author who made Lefebvre famous within English-speaking circles was Edward W. Soja, with his groundbreaking book *Postmodern geographies* (1989). Soja borrows the idea of postmodernism from Jameson (1984), who also worked in Los Angeles, and who invited Lefebvre to the University of California as a guest lecturer in 1983. But whereas Jameson's interest for Lefebvre lay mainly in his connection to the Situationist movement, Soja quickly determined the relevance of Lefebvre's work for spatial theory by means of his development of socio-spatial dialectics (Soja 1980). *Postmodern geographies* develops the idea of a "spatial turn", understood as the reassertion of space in social theory, which Soja relates to Lefebvre's thinking:

"[The spatial turn] is an increasingly spatialized dialectic, an insistent demand for a fundamental change in the ways we think about space, time, and being: about geography, history, and society; about the production of space, the making of history, and the constitution of social relations and practical consciousness." (Soja 1989, 52)

By means of this theoretical alliance, Henri Lefebvre is associated with the spatial turn. The success of Soja's book and the notoriety he accorded to Lefebvre lead to the translation of *La production de l'espace* in 1991. As a result, the reading of *The Production of Space* in the 1990s is oriented uniquely towards the themes of space and its conceptualization in the spatial turn. Since then, Lefebvre has become more and more influential in urban studies, while he was almost forgotten in France.

There is a particularity to the reception of « right to the city » in the English-speaking world: the chronology of the publications. *Le Droit à la ville* was published in France in 1968, thus opening a debate on spatial, architectural and urban issues, which culminated in the writing of *La production de l'espace* in 1974. Inversely, *The Right to the City* (1996) appeared shortly after the *The production of space* in 1991, as Lefebvre gained in notoriety, and it was included in an anthology, *Writings on Cities* (Kofman and Lebas 1996).

The stated intention of the anthology, *Writing on Cities* (1996), points to a certain disequilibrium in the reception of Lefebvre's work only five years after the English publication of *La production de l'espace*. As Kofman and Lebas (1996) explain in the introduction, aptly entitled "Lost in transposition – Time, Space and the City", their intention is to rectify contemporary readings of Lefebvre: "[Lefebvre's] increasing recognition in Anglo-American cultural studies has tended to focus on the production of space, and to a lesser extent urbanism (Harvey 1973; Soja 1985; Soja 1989)" (Kofman and Lebas 1996, 5). Reading authors that predate the English translations of Lefebvre, Koffman and Lebas point to a tendency to accentuate part of Lefebvre's thinking at the expense of the whole. The "right to the city" and other of Lefebvre's texts, subsequently translated and published in Kofman and Lebas' anthology, aim to widen this narrow interpretation of Lefebvre's writings on spatial and urban questions. As they explain in their introduction,

"Our selection was guided by a number of considerations. The intention was firstly, to redress a balance in translation of his writings and in particular the urban which has been subordinated to the spatial. His urban vision remains relevant for the developed world despite all the transformations in urban life and structures. And secondly, through this urban writing to raise questions about the conceptualization of the city, the rights of its citizens and articulation of time, space and the everyday." (Kofman and Lebas 1996, 6)

Because of the sequence of translations and interpretations, Lefebvre's urban writings come to enrich what was considered to be his position on the creation of urban space by the subsequent integration of aspects such as time and rhythms, everyday life, and difference. These considerations are translated and presented as a sort of afterthought to the main theoretical contributions that he was accredited with by the proponents of spatial theory. A bigger part of Lefebvre's thinking thus becomes available to English-readers in line with the evolution of urban theory in the Anglo-Saxon world. It is perhaps not surprising, then, that Kofman and Lebas insist on the fact that Lefebvre's writings must be contextualized in order to be properly used. It is in fact the principal aim of their introduction: "We wanted to give a stronger sense of changing places and contexts than might be conveyed by

the term translation. As editors as well as translators, the choice of texts introduces a strong element of filtering and mediation” (Kofman and Lebas 1996, 3). In other words, by applying a concept to a different context –in terms of space and time – we run the risk of distorting the initial concept. However, beyond the considerations of translations and interpretations, we must equally consider evolutions in cities to understand the shift in usage and therefore in meaning of right to the city.

According to Stuart Elden, Kofman and Lebas' introduction “was instrumental in bringing a wider range of Lefebvre's concerns to an English audience” (Elden 2003, 12). New possibilities for using Lefebvre’s ideas were created by the publication of these writings, and yet, if Kofman and Lebas called for the contextualization of Lefebvre's texts, they did not focus on the possibilities for current practices of right to the city –in other words, the contextualization of the activities of right to the city. Since the 1980s, massive suburbanization and the eruption of global cities invite us to rethink right to the city: whereas Lefebvre's urban concepts were mostly applied to what was then considered the developed world of the 1970s, the international distribution of important urban centres has changed.

What can it mean to be Lefebvre-inspired in today’s context? In order to attempt an answer to this question, we must ascertain how right to the city was received and appropriated by English readers in order to see what possibilities lay at the heart of current reappropriations. As we have seen, the English reception has largely been dictated by the usage of Lefebvre’s theories that we have outlined above. We must ask ourselves if the overshadowing presence of *The Production of Space*, as it was presented in the initial context of spatial theory, had an impact on the manner in which the right to the city was generally appropriated in Anglo-Saxon theory?

## **Contextualizing the spatio-temporal migration of right to the city**

In his article “Race, Protest, and Public Space, Contextualizing Lefebvre in the U.S. City”, Eugene J. McCann takes the example of racial and social segregation in the U.S. to show how Lefebvre's concepts must be adapted to shed light on this urban problem (McCann 1999). It must be noted that Lefebvre omitted race as a constitutive element of the city, for in 1968 it was not integrated as part of the greater urban question in France. This initial position, however, does not exclude the pertinence of Lefebvre’s thinking of race for McCann, who contends

“... that Lefebvre's work *does* lend itself to a thorough discussion of race and racial

identities in U.S. urban settings through its attention to the central role imagination and representation play in producing space” (McCann 1999, 164)

According to McCann, the right to the city is understood as the right not to be excluded from the city centre and public spaces on the basis of race, thereby supposing a fight against spatial segregation. The right to express difference becomes a function of right to the city, implying individual freedom from identity classifications. Right to the city can thus be enriched by the Lefebvre inspired notion of “right to difference” (Gilbert and Dikeç in Goonewardena et al., 2008). Today, racial segregation has increased world-wide due to the multitude of issues surrounding intensive global migration. Questions of difference have become important in thinking the right to the city today. Moreover, we can consider gender issues as a constitutive element of right to the city (Fenster, 2005). These perspectives have been largely guided by the relevance of such questions for cultural studies. McCann's reading follows his interpretation of *The production of space*, in which he chooses to expose the socio-spatial production of exclusion and segregation instead of evoking citizenship problems and appropriation.

Apart from these theoretical shifts, we must also consider that a globally urbanized world elaborates different readings of history. When Lefebvre wrote *Le Droit à la ville* in 1968, he sensed the importance of the historical link between industrialization and urbanization. Not only did he devote the first chapter of his book to this idea, but he subsequently developed this connexion in *La Révolution urbaine* in 1970 (tr. *The Urban Revolution*), forecasting that urban society would emerge from historical cities and sprawl globally. Urban considerations were to provide the global framework for understanding societies. This has proven to be the case today, even in countries that have undergone rapid urbanization without the historical link between capitalist industrialization and urbanization that Lefebvre described. Social problems have become urban problems, without necessarily being expressed through the social structures created by industrialization along the European model. Consequently, even though Lefebvre elaborated his theory in 1970s France, it can be extended to other urban societies even if industrialization was not an important factor in their urbanization. The call for a renewed urban society can be extended to all cities in the world, especially in parts of the world that have urbanized rapidly in the last decades (Asia, South America, Africa...)

Globalization and urbanization have drastically transformed the notion of Nation States, and there is a need to consider this new spatiality from a political standpoint. Neil Brenner, inspired by Lefebvre, was the first to conceptualize this spatial shift in what he termed “New State Spatialities” (Brenner 1997, 2000, 2004). The Nation State, faced with globalization, is confronted with the rising power of cities as major political decision makers, for they have become the receptors of globalization. Cities and not nations are confronted with the impact of

immigration, the complexity of international economic relations, frequent travel and the upsurge in telecommunications. This is the consequence of the emergence of neoliberalism that changes the way capitalism works and its link with the State (Brenner, 2001). Citizenship must also be adapted to this change, as urban governance has come to deal with issues that were once uniquely of national concern. For these reasons, right to the city can be understood to include a significant political dimension, that of citizenship. Traditionally understood as equal access to the rights of a national community, could citizenship be remodeled on the scale of a city? This dimension of citizenship in the global city age has to be taken into account in any contemporary reading of right to the city (Young, 1989; Purcell, 2003).

Finally, cities have had to face the challenges of environmental problems and sustainable development as a result of environmental shifts that have occurred in the twenty-first century. These problems are by definition social problems because of the correlation of environmental inequality and social inequality. Poor neighbourhoods have traditionally been more vulnerable to environmental disasters –the example of Hurricane Katrina in New Orleans comes too easily to mind. Furthermore, polluting industries are often situated near underprivileged areas, notably because of their damaging impact on property values. In Western Europe, since the nineteenth century, many of the rich neighbourhoods of industrial cities were built in the West, because the smoke from manufacturing plants was pushed east by the dominant winds. We can see that environmental problems can be considered social problems, which must also be taken into account in the right to the city.

Recent urban evolutions influence the way in which the right to the city can be understood and applied today. On the one hand, the world is not the same place that it was thirty years ago. And as times change, so does the relevance of ideas thought in previous contexts. In the case of right to the city, there is a second peculiarity, which is that it did not have a specific content, so to speak, when Lefebvre wrote it. Right to the city can best be understood as an open-ended concept that could be used to crystallize varying kinds of social demands. This formulation was intended by Lefebvre to counter a purely technical understanding of planning, and to define it as social *praxis*. Any scientific or technical approach could no longer dictate how the city was to be built, for the city had to be considered above all as a social *oeuvre*. Urban societies emerge from modern industrial ones by means of this social *oeuvre*. This aspect, which Kofman and Lebas (1996) equally put forward in their introduction, is perhaps the most difficult aspect of right to the city to apply, if not portray, today. What does it mean to create a city as a social *oeuvre*? Partial answers can be obtained by exploring experimental utopias, which integrate urban reform and the building of urban projects (Lefebvre 1968). How and where can we locate this strategy today? Even

though right to the city is not specifically defined in the writings of Lefebvre, its reappropriation requires specific criteria. We will see how “right to the city” is formulated in different contemporary readings to clarify its usage today.

## **The « Right to the city » is...**

### **... socio-spatial justice**

Right to the city cannot exist without spatial justice. In this sense, spatial justice can be considered the first component in the formulation of right to the city. Soja (2009, 2010) insists on the fundamental spatial aspect of justice and retraces this idea in Lefebvre's “right to the city”:

“Paris in the 1960s and especially the still understudied co-presence of Henri Lefebvre and Michel Foucault, became the most generative site for the creation of a radically new conceptualization of space and spatiality, and for a specifically urban and spatial concept of justice, encapsulated most insightfully in Lefebvre's call for taking back control over the right to the city and the right to difference.” (Soja, 2009)

Once again, we find the open-ended nature of Lefebvre's definition in the call for spatial justice. Mustafa Dikeç attempts a definition in his paper “Justice and the spatial imagination” (Dikeç 2001). He retraces the concept of spatial justice through geographical formulations such as territorial social justice, citing Harvey (1973), and proposes theoretical perspectives that could establish a spatial understanding of social justice. Spatial justice has often been conceived as distributive, meaning that it is concerned with the spatial distribution of activities and wealth. Injustice in this context can be easily recognized, for it implies a conflict resulting from an unequal spatial distribution of activities and wealth. According to Dikeç, Lefebvre-inspired approaches take the argument further by analysing how spatial justice or injustice is produced through the production of space. This production of space, which “is inherently a conflictual process, not only manifests various forms of injustice, but actually produces *and* reproduces them” (Dikeç 2001). According to Dikeç, then, the spatial dimension of injustice must include an analysis of how physical spaces are created. It is not enough to simply describe spatial segregation, regardless of the social, racial or gender-defined factors seen to be at its root, we must understand how the space itself is produced.

The need to include an analysis of the production of physical space also



partially explains why Lefebvre did not consider the criteria of racial identity in right to the city. Right to difference is not about each particular community's claim to receive an equal distribution of wealth, it is the right not to be identified in categories established by a homogenizing power, including those categories created by the community itself (McCann 1999, Dikeç 2001). This is notably the case in neighbourhoods that have poor reputations, that is to say neighbourhoods that have been singled out for poverty, crime, and other social problems such as drug abuse, violence, etc. The right to difference, according to Lefebvre, is essentially the right to differ from pre-established groups. The right to difference, as it has been interpreted and firmly linked to the right to the city, is not a vindication for the liberty from an imposed definition, but rather a protest against a more general exclusion from a pre-defined social norm. In this sense, the fight against segregation has become, in essence, the project of emancipation.

Lefebvre's position helps us to understand why in his opposition of the spatial effects of segregation, the fight against socio-spatial injustice does not necessarily imply political action from the State. Dikeç illustrates this point with the example of the French urban policy, *Politique de la ville*, whose definition was inspired by Lefebvre's ideas, although its policy did not fulfill their objectives. *Politique de la ville* aims to fight segregation and exclusion in parts of the city that are seen as having inadequate access to resources, be they economic, educational, cultural, etc. "Exclusion" in this context is defined by the concentration of a population with socio-economic problems in a particular perimeter. However, the policy requires pre-determined zones in order to be applied. It thus both equates integration and social-mixity, which is insufficient to define right to the city, and stigmatizes the neighbourhood in which it is applied. Moreover, *Politique de la ville* is applied to what could best be defined as a symptom of social injustice, for the neighbourhood already physically exists, and does not combat the underlying processes that were responsible for the creation and the reproduction of inequalities in this urban space. As Dikeç concludes: "The socio-spatial exclusion problem is constantly produced and reproduced by the ways in which the society is spatially organised" (Dikeç 2001, 1799). In this case, *Politique de la ville* only serves to recreate the phenomenon of social exclusion without fighting it efficiently, that is to say, determining its underlying causes.

According to Dikeç, what is more likely to ensure the right to the city is the return of politics to urban citizens. The answer to the socio-spatial problem is a civic one, based on participation and struggle in the *polis* in order to constitute an active space for politics. In the pursuit of the creation of this space, Dikeç proposes an analysis of a combination of the spatial dialectics of injustice, the right to the city and the right to difference. He does not consider socio-spatial justice as the core element of right to the city, but rather as a matter of citizenship:

“The right to the city implies not only the participation of the urban citizen in urban social life, but, more importantly, his or her active participation in the political life, management, and administration of the city. (...) The right to the city, therefore, is not simply a participatory right but, more importantly, an enabling right, to be defined and refined through political struggle” (Dikeç 2001, 1790-1791)

Dikeç also develops these arguments in his article “Police, politics and the right to the city” (Dikeç 2002), in which he argues that people living in underprivileged areas are disconnected from the possibility of engaging in a right to the city. In his article, questions of security find political answers, for public safety is a matter of democratic concern rather than an issue for the police. How can right to the city be defined in terms of citizenship?

### **... citizenship and participation**

The relationship of citizenship to urban governance was posed in the framework of right to the city at the turn of this millennium, in the context of rapid globalization and its diverse exchanges, including patterns of migration. Engin F. Isin was the first to discuss these problems in his *Democracy, Citizenship and the City* (Isin 2000). Considering the City in political terms, he argues that globalization has transformed definitions of citizenship and democracy, traditionally justified by the territorial functions of Nation States. The expansion of citizen group rights (minorities, gay and lesbian movements, women’s rights activists), a postmodern characteristic according to Isin, is a sign of the changing relationship of citizenship to politics. He invokes Lefebvre's right to the city in order to argue for the transcendence of citizenship and rights, which were traditionally defined by and for the individual male bourgeois, but has come to include a collective right to appropriation. The issues cited range from the political problems of citizenship and sovereignty in global cities to government or the governance of the city, and the fight against marginalization and exclusion in the urban politics. In all instances, it is the inclusion of urban-dwellers in a renewed urban society that is at stake. Dikeç and Gilbert (in Goonewardena et al., 2008) also call for this new, inclusive citizenship to be based on the idea of sharing a common space and the act of living together. They justify their call for a new social ethics in terms of this right, implying that the right to the city, when based on the “politics of citizenship”, can ensure socio-spatial justice.

In 2002, *GeoJournal* published a special issue entitled *Social Transformation, Citizenship and the Right to the City* (*GeoJournal*, Vol58, N2-3, 2002), also addressing all of these issues. Lefebvre's right to the city is the common element of

these reflexions and provides the touchstone for the many approaches developed to answer “questions of who belongs to the city and how people can be *in* the city” (Staheli and Dowler 2002). According to MacCann, this issue is particularly sensitive in urban planning (MacCann 2002).

But the question still remains: how can we concretely interpret the right to the city in terms of citizenship today? Its openness can lead to a diversity of interpretations, making it at once useful and frustrating in its application to urban spatial analyses. Quoting Harvey, MacCann insists on this “frustratingly undefined” (MacCann 2002, 78) right to the city. For example, one could consider participatory urban planning as a way to realize the inclusion of citizens in the decision-making process. However, the ideology of participation was vigorously attacked by Lefebvre, who considers it a way of obtaining consensus from citizens without considering the entire scope of the problem, which may, in the long run, undermine their interests. Citizens cannot participate fully in the decision-making process, according to Lefebvre, and participation is therefore misleading, as it can create consensus on false grounds and prevent true opposition to projects that may eventually be seen as undesirable. Lefebvre does not propose any “middle range alternatives” (MacCann 2002, 78), even though, according to MacCann, Lefebvre concedes that participation is better than authoritarian decision-making. MacCann is more optimistic about participative democracy and the political opportunities that it provides, under the provision that elements of utopianism underscore all activism.

Mark Purcell also attempts to develop a concrete version of the right to the city in his article “Excavating Lefebvre: The right to the city and its urban politics of the inhabitant” (Purcell 2002). Agreeing with Isin, Purcell marks the point of departure with the onset of globalisation. Neoliberalism, in this case, is seen as the threat to a traditionally democratic Nation State. Right to the city offers a way to locally redefine citizenship in order to fight against the disenfranchisement of cities and neoliberal urbanism. It provides the answer to the political shift that has been caused by globalisation. Local governance has shifted from redistribution to competition in the rescaling of governance to supra-national levels, with the result that populations have lost control over their own governance by the increasing dependence of local governments on firms. Political power is what is at stake for Purcell. He considers that “Lefebvre's right to the city is an argument for profoundly reworking both the social relations of capitalism and the current structure of liberal-democratic citizenship” (Purcell 2002, 101). Because power relations of both the Capital and the State participate in the production of space, the right to the city is seen by Purcell as a way to empower citizens by reorienting this decision-making process in terms of the considerations of the production of space. This interpretation of the right to the city by means of its spatial production seems to answer questions about physical manifestations, or instances of right to the city

–keeping in mind that the dialectical relationships between perceived and conceived space at the heart of the production of space were never fully conceptualized by Lefebvre when he wrote *The right to the city* in 1968.

Following the reasoning of these authors, right to the city relates to the creation of the “urban citizen”. Decision-making would concern those living in urban spaces and citizenship could be applied on the national *and* local, or city level. Purcell develops what he considers to be two fundamental aspects of right to the city, namely the right to participation, seen as a challenge to traditional citizenship, and the right to appropriation, understood as a challenge to individual property rights. Consequently, citizenship based on “inhabiting” rather than born or acquired rights, establishes the basis for another type of nationality that serves to legitimate participation in the decision-making processes of the cities in which we live. The question becomes how to delineate the time required to establish “inhabitant-status”? Can migrant workers and people who live in multiple cities, or have multiple homes, parents, etc. be considered inhabitants of more than one city, or do we consider that they have no city at all? It is unclear whether or not empowering inhabitants can lead to the anticipated results. Mark Purcell considers these difficulties to be those of “scalar politics”. That is to say, which scale can be seen as relevant in determining right(s) to the city? Or more precisely, what is the relevant level of participation in each instance? In terms of perimeter, is it a neighbourhood, a Town and/or its suburbs? How to decide which areas can be considered town suburbs? Should we include the countryside, which has links to towns and competes for available land and resources such as water?

These technical problems are not the only ones. Empowering residents could create segregation if they are to use their new rights in order to exclude others. Decisions taken by inhabitants in some neighbourhoods could affect others. For example, would it be fair that the residents of the city center make decisions concerning public space in their neighbourhood, given that this public space is often used by the entire city? This *démocratie du sommeil* (democracy based on where you sleep) can have various repercussions, for it does not take into account the urban resident usage of the city, but rather the place in which one sleeps and votes, as Fleury explores in the case of Paris (Fleury, 2010).

The difficulty arises in the uncertainty of whether or not a new scale of citizenship based on proximity, as Purcell calls for, would ensure the right for all inhabitants to the city. It is important to note that Mark Purcell not only defines right to the city in terms of the right to participation, understood as citizenship, but also as a right to appropriation. How has this right to appropriation been understood?

**... appropriation and struggle**

Purcell (2002) defines the right to appropriation as “the right of inhabitants to physically access, occupy, and use urban space” (Purcell 2002, 103). Some authors have focused on the occupation or use of public space as a primary element in the appropriation of the city. This is the position of Don Mitchell, author of *The Right to the City: Social Justice and the Fight for Public Space* (2003). This book was written in the wake of the 9/11 attacks in New York City and the ensuing debate about the security of public space. Mitchell claims that right to the city “is dependent upon public space” (Don Mitchell 2003, 5) and that public space is constrained by security laws that have their origins in social exclusion. Public space is considered the central concern for activists who care about social justice and a shared city. Right to the city, as Mitchell reads it, requires the possibility of using public space regardless of property rights. Mitchell explores the different disputes around public space, sometimes contradictory, citing the example of protests for/against abortion. This means that public space must ensure the possibility of free speech that is fundamental for democracy. Some public spaces are particularly important, such as parks, for example, and some problems can be particularly sensitive, such as the issues surrounding homeless people. These questions address the use of public space and represent what is allowed in these spaces and what is forbidden.

However, right to the city as appropriation should be understood in a broader sense, as Purcell pursues:

“Lefebvre imagines appropriation to have a much broader and more structural meaning. Not only is appropriation the right to occupy already-produced urban space, it is also the right to produce urban space so that it meets the needs of inhabitants” (Purcell 2002, 103)

In meeting the needs of its inhabitants, urban space can be characterized as not only the collective *oeuvre* that we first described, but also a place to think through issues of space and time. Reappropriation of the production of space in this context occurs with the participation of the citizenry in “city life”, defined in both its broad political sense and its “concrete” sense, because it is above all a practice. Unfortunately, these concrete practices are often constrained by power relations, with the result that appropriation of the production of space supposes a struggle to obtain rights. This is not to be confused with a struggle against others, though there may be locally designated opponents, but a struggle for the right to inhabit, to use the space as needed, and or desired. The struggle is about the social value of the *oeuvre*, the city. An example of the link between appropriation and struggle is developed by Lefebvre’s analysis of the Paris Commune. Workers were expelled and therefore excluded from the centre of Paris during Haussmann’s reconstruction of the city-centre in the nineteenth century. The resultant uprising, the Commune,

was, in Lefebvre's analysis, the reappropriation of that space of exclusion. Lefebvre explores the celebratory characteristic of this occupation of the city in terms of the creation of a collective *oeuvre*. Similar parallels can be drawn with *Mai 1968* in Paris, meaning that the *oeuvre* can be composed of struggle and revolt. The problem is that industrial society has radically changed since 1968 and workers' movements are no longer leading forms of social movements. It is impossible to federate all current social movements by means of a class-based reading.

What has become increasingly common in cities is the global financial system that they depend on. It has a significant impact on urbanization. Harvey (2008) argues that building cities is a way to integrate surplus product in order to create surplus value. He analyses the link between urbanization and surplus value in the historical examples of Paris and New York, questioning how big projects have changed the way people have come to live in these cities. He exposes how Haussmann (for nineteenth century Paris) and Moses (for post-war New York) realized their plans, and points out their financial similarities, namely the creation of global property-market bubbles and financial crises. Harvey draws a parallel with the current situation. He sees a link between current urbanization and the stabilization of the financial crises that were fueled by the financial surpluses created in the neoliberal era. The mortgage market, in his opinion, operated as a safeguard for a capitalism that became inflated by changes in the financial sector in the 1980s. Moreover, urbanization follows global tendencies of the investment markets. This new phase of urbanization, accompanied by a shift in the mobility of capital, is seen by Harvey to have radically altered urban lifestyles, producing the new city as a mirror of the knowledge-based economy and cultural markets.

Harvey details the urban consequences of these tendencies: divided cities, gated communities, slums and expropriations (Harvey, 2008)... Consequently, massive urbanization deprived a large part of the population of their rights to the city. The answer to this problem, for Harvey, finds its solution in the structure of democracies. People should have a word to say in the production of the city and be able to control the uses of the spaces that have been created in light of the shifts in local and global economies. He concludes that all local struggles against deprivation should be unified in an urban struggle, and that the right to the city could be the banner that unifies them. This struggle acts upon the very connection between financial surplus and urbanization, thereby fully taking into account the meaning that Henri Lefebvre attributed to the "urban revolution". The Revolution is no longer an industrial one, but an urban one (Lefebvre, 2003).

Purcell (2009) also concludes that right to the city could be considered a way to gather and coordinate social movements, regardless of the fact that they differ significantly. Social movements cannot be subordinated but must be federated. In this sense, the right to the city is not an absolute solution, but a good beginning.

Purcell takes the example of the movement “right to the city” in Los Angeles, which assembled different progressive movements (local movements against gentrification, for cultural identity, social claims, gay rights, etc.) and scholars who work on these questions. The right to the city is seen to be dependent not only on these struggles, but also on a vision of “urban revolution” (Purcell, 2009).

The notion of urban revolution as a pathway to social justice reintroduces the initial question of a possible consensus on the meaning of the right to the city today. Thus, we will now discuss this question : can the different definitions of right to the city that we have detailed above make a unified reappropriation of Lefebvre's right to the city ?

## **Conclusions and difficulties**

The aim of this article was to show how the right to the city has been interpreted during the last decade in the English-speaking academic world. The three sub-sections of this article that decline transpositions of right to the city include different perspectives taken by various authors, and resume the difficulties encountered. They are not exhaustive, but they help us to identify problems within the different positions. There are different approaches to right to the city, which rely on different concepts: socio-spatial justice, citizenship and participation, and appropriation and struggle. They are always in some manner interlinked. All of the approaches seek to foster socio-spatial justice, but in different ways. All of them agree that those who inhabit the city should have a major role to play, but it is still unclear how this can work. For example, Dikeç puts forward participation and citizenship, whereas Purcell shows that residents can have contradictory programs: they can work for their own neighbourhood, without considering the global scale of the city. Moreover, it is not clear how participation would include all citizens, given that there are evolutions in ways of living (trans-residence, etc). Maybe participation and citizenship is not enough to define right to the city, because it applies to persons, while right to the city is about inhabiting in general. That is why it should likely neither become too formal, such as other rights (Purcell, 2009), nor be applied to residents, but rather be kept alive by social movements. It is therefore unclear as to precisely which role participation and appropriation should play. Thus, English-speaking reception of right to the city developed and adapted this concept, without creating a unified conception of right to the city.

These difficulties in adapting and applying right to the city in the current world encouraged some Lefebvre-inspired authors to abandon right to the city. For example, Andy Merrifield (2011) is skeptical about making right to the city a unifying banner for social movements. He argues that because of the urbanization

process,

« The right to the city quite simply isn't the *right* that needs articulating. It's too vast because the scale of the city is out of reach for most people living at street level; and it's too narrow because when people do protest, when they do take to the streets *en masse*, their existential desires frequently reach out beyond the scale of the city, and revolve around a common and collective humanity, a pure democratic yearning » (Merrifield, 2011, 478)

He argues for a politics of encounter, suitable in an age of *post-urban* connectivity, as evidenced by the uses of Facebook and Twitter. He gives the example of the street demonstration in Tunisia and Egypt in 2011 to surpass the right to the city as Lefebvre imagined it. Being Lefebvre inspired, then, is to find the core inspiration of right to the city that can become crystallized in other forms today.

Back to France. As french researchers rediscover Lefebvre's writings, they are largely influenced by his success in English-speaking urban studies and the applications of the concept of right to the city to current problems, especially regarding citizenship and justice. For example, the special number of the review *Rue Descartes*, entitled « Droit de cité » (2009), deals with the current meaning of right to the city. Bernard Jouve (2009) explains that french researchers are skeptical about right to the city because Marxism is no longer considered as an accurate analytical framework (Jouve, 2009, 79). According to Jouve, right to the city should be considered a utopia that cannot be realized or institutionalized, but that can empower people and fuel citizens' vindications, thus creating functional links between civil society and political institutions. Consequently, right to the city should not be understood as an analytical tool for social movements that do not revindicate it, nor should it be considered a public program for it remained a subversive notion in Lefebvre's thinking, one that could hardly be institutionalized. This discussion about the theoretical status of right to the city helps us to understand the variety of formulations we observed. In the end, being Lefebvre inspired relies perhaps more in the subversive and empowering spirit aspects of his thought.

To conclude, we can highlight some examples of right to the city as an empowering notion, transposed to the current urban world. Focusing on "inhabiting" as a collective *praxis* in order to inscribe everyday life in space and time could be an interesting way by which to surpass right to the city as a program used solely to combat the gentrification of city centres. This strategy is also adapted to the global process of urbanization. As Purcell (2009) notes, it is relevant today to talk about a right to inhabit rather than a right to inhabit the city, because urbanization is global, and people settle in different manners and often in more than one place. The "City" was strategic at Lefebvre's time. However, today, there



are also social movements in the countryside with the same ambitions as the right to the city. Purcell (2009) quotes farmer movements against cash cropping, GMO and the privatization of seeds. Another interesting case study is the current anti-shale gas movement in France and elsewhere, which fights for common goods such as water and air, meanwhile questioning our dependence on carbon-emitting energy (see Revol, Groueff, Julien, 2011). The right to the city as a right to inhabit thus implies being invested in environmental issues.

The *act* of inhabiting (rather than *being* inhabitants) is what lies at the heart of the vindications of the right to the city, and these examples show that environmental struggles could be included in a global right to inhabit. It is not an individual right, but a collective one that ensures social justice and preserves individual creativity and freedom. In this context, inhabiting is not only settling down, but also a struggle for specific values, including socio-spatial justice and the appropriation of a collective future. Thus, to prolong Lefebvre's thinking of right to the city without denaturing it can take various forms, but their theoretical interest relies on their ability to empower people by the manner in which they inhabit.

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