To Inhabit Well: Counterhegemonic Movements and the Right to the City

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Abstract: A right to the city, understood as a conjoint claim to a right to inhabit urban space well, can be an effective starting point from which diverse urban movements can begin to build broad counterhegemonic coalitions for alternative urban futures. In this article, I argue that the right to the city supports the project of establishing relations of equivalence among members of coalitions—balancing relations of sameness/difference and interdependence/autonomy. [Key words: right to the city, urban social movements, autogestion, urban politics]

INTRODUCTION

This article is situated within an ongoing intellectual and political project to imagine and bring about alternative urban futures. There are multiple ways to imagine such alternatives, and there are multiple movements working to bring them into being. Movements to resist police racism and brutality imagine a racially just alternative. Movements to resist neoliberalization imagine a noncapitalist alternative. Movements to resist discrimination and violence against gay men and lesbians imagine a nonhomophobic alternative. Many other movements mobilize for their alternative urban futures. This article explores how it might be possible for such movements to construct together a substantial, though not total, agreement about the city around which they can build counterhegemonic coalitional movements that act in concert to resist various forms of domination and inequality and open a path toward a more co-operative and democratic urban future.

Building such broad coalitions is not easy and requires a great deal of experimentation and thought. This article contributes to that project by developing a particular way to imagine relations among many different oppositional urban movements, a concept I call networks of equivalence. Equivalence, as I discuss below, is a simultaneous relation of interdependence and autonomy. Networks of equivalence are broad counterhegemonic alliances in which each group acts in concert with others to achieve common projects; however, each group also remains autonomous from all the others, even as they work together. Such alliances are counterhegemonic in that they aim to dismantle existing hegemonies and construct instead a counterhegemonic understanding of the city. That understanding must be developed collectively by the network, in their particular context. They must work out together what for them constitutes a good city. At the same time, it is both possible and useful to propose certain initiating ideas, what we might think of as political starting points,

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from which networks of equivalence can begin building their agenda. The main argument of this article is that the concept of a right to the city can be an effective starting point from which to construct relations of equivalence. I conceive of a right to the city as a conjoint claim by the users of urban space to take greater control over its production. As such, the right to the city is a deeply spatial idea, one rooted in the everyday practice of inhabiting urban space. It should never be assumed to be a fully formed agenda that networks merely adopt; it should be seen rather as a general concept movements can begin with, one they can use to initiate their discussions and struggles over what their counterhegemony entails, over what they desire the city to be (Lefebvre, 2003a, 253).

METHOD

The article is primarily made up of a theoretical argument, but that argument has been developed in dialogue with the political practice of actual movements. I have constructed the argument through a "directed engagement" with particular theorists, in which my examination of the theory is directed toward discovering a way to imagine political movements that can be useful for specific movements I have in mind. My larger project undertakes a directed engagement with the work of Laclau and Mouffe (1985, 2000), Mouffe (1979, 1993, 2005), Laclau (2000), Gramsci (1971, 2000), Foucault ([1979] 1975, 1980, [1990] 1976), Deleuze and Guattari ([1977] 1972, [1987] 1980), Ranciere ([1995] 1992, 1999, 2001, 2003), and Lefebvre (1968, 1973, [1991] 1974, 1996, [2003c] 1970, 2003a, 2009). The analysis in this article, of the relationship between networks of equivalence and the right to the city, focuses more specifically on the work of Laclau and Mouffe, Gramsci, and Lefebvre. The primary movements guiding the engagement are the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition, an alliance of civil-society groups struggling to increase popular power over a complex, multiyear Superfund cleanup of Seattle's main river, and the Right to the City Alliance, a coalition of diverse urban movements across the United States, that is trying to build a coordinated struggle against displacement, gentrification, racial and sexual discrimination, and environmental degradation.

The arguments the article presents are only a moment in a wider dialogue between theory and practice. The concrete cases frame and guide, to an extent, my analysis of the theory. I intend for the theoretical arguments that result from that analysis to offer useful ideas for informing and rethinking political practice. This renewed political practice can then guide a rethinking of theory, and so on. These projects, my theoretical one and the concrete political projects of the movements, are certainly interrelated in the sense that they have an influence on each other. However, they are also autonomous from each other. This is not a method of participant observation where the roles of scholar and activist are isomorphic. My theoretical work is not guided only (or even primarily) by the experiences of the movements, nor is its purpose only (or even primarily) to support their particular struggles. The opposite is even more true, of course; their work is not guided primarily by my theoretical arguments. I therefore understand my project and their projects to be autonomous from each other but engaged in relations of mutual support.

NETWORKS OF EQUIVALENCE

I have argued elsewhere that networks of equivalence are a particularly fruitful way to imagine contemporary political movements in the contemporary era (Purcell, 2008, 2009a).[2] To define them succinctly, networks of equivalence are counterhegemonic combinations of differentiated but equivalent popular struggles. They seek to establish simultaneous relations of interdependence and autonomy. As such, networks of equivalence are an attempt to grapple with a well-known problem for left politics. After the explosion of "new social movements" beginning in the 1960s, it has become increasingly unworkable to retain a reductionist model of mobilization, in which a variety of identities, experiences, and claims are subordinated to one overarching subject position, which historically has been class. But, of course, fears of class reductionism do not necessitate the opposite extreme of radical fragmentation, in which local movements proliferate but have no interest in connecting with other, similar movements. Both options are unacceptable; we cannot retreat into a reinvigorated reductionism that expunges difference, nor can we succumb to a nihilistic acceptance of fragmentation that does not seek broader political change. The challenge is how to act politically without reductionism or radical fragmentation. We need a way to combine local struggles into something larger without reducing each struggle to a homogenous unity. I think the question of how to do this well is a question that preoccupies much of contemporary left political theory, and it is one that is not at all easy to answer.

In my view, at least two approaches offer some promise for building such coalitions: contemporary anarchism and radical pluralism. Contemporary anarchist movements, inspired greatly by the work of Deleuze and Guattari and their heirs in the Italian autonomist movement, are actively working on how we might build a global movement for another world, while at the same time respecting the autonomous agency of each local struggle (e.g., Notes from Nowhere, 2003). Radical pluralism, as I develop below, is similarly concerned to imagine how we might build wider networks without reducing multiple groups to a single whole. Where the two approaches diverge, I think, is on the question of hegemony; anarchists want a nonhegemonic politics while radical pluralists embrace hegemonic struggle. For the purposes of this article, I explore only the radical pluralist approach. In doing so, I do not mean to imply it is necessarily superior to anarchism. The ongoing debate between the relative merits of nonhegemonic and counterhegemonic politics is lively, meaningful, and one I engage elsewhere. By focusing on radical pluralism, I am not trying to weigh in on the debate, but merely to bracket it. My argument is that

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[2]In this article, I focus primarily on the question of equivalence rather than networks. The concept of networks is, of course, extensively debated (e.g., Castells, 1996; Amin, 2002; Hardt and Negri, 2004), and I have discussed networks in the context of equivalence at more length elsewhere (Purcell, 2009a). In that work, I make the case for imagining networks neither as purely centered and rhizomatic, as in Deleuze and Guattari (esp. 1987), nor as centered strongly on some stable entity, such as a political party (as in Gramsci (esp. 2000, 209)). Rhizomatic networks maintain relations of equality among elements of the network, but they lack a clear organizational structure that allows for decisive and swift action when conditions are right. Centralized networks can act more swiftly, but privilege some elements over others as leading elements. I have argued for an in-between network, one that is partly centralized, but in which the centers are not permanent, and they are not occupied always by the same element of the network.

within a counterhegemonic politics inspired by radical pluralism, the right to the city can be a productive starting point to construct networks of equivalence to advance counterhegemonic urban futures.[3]

In an approach they call radical pluralism, Laclau and Mouffe (1985) develop a political ontology that helps address the tension between multiplicity and unity. They begin with the ontological assertion that society cannot be integrated into a seamless whole; that the variegated field of social relations cannot be "sutured," in Lacan's term, into a single "society." Instead, the social field remains necessarily differentiated and marked by relations of antagonism. That difference and antagonism are ineradicable. Laclau and Mouffe affirm, in a stance that goes back at least to Rousseau's *Second Discourse*, that difference is prior to sameness, that the appearance of unity is always constructed out of an original condition of difference. As a result, they reject the opposite idea, an Enlightenment idea, that there exist transcendental realities that underlie and unify a world of perceived difference. Although they do not reference them directly, they are actually quite close to Deleuze and Guattari on this point. In *Anti-Oedipus* Deleuze and Guattari urge us to

> no longer believe in the myth of the existence of fragments that, like pieces of an antique statue, are merely waiting for the last one to be turned up, so that they may all be glued back together to create a unity that is precisely the same as the original unity. We no longer believe in a primordial totality that once existed, or in a final totality that awaits us at some future date. (1977, 42)

However, even if difference and antagonism are ineradicable and original, for Laclau and Mouffe that does not mean there is no role in politics for *claims* of totality or universality (Laclau is especially interested in this question, e.g. 2000). Claims of "one nation, under God" or universal human rights are common practice in politics. But the ontology of irreducible difference allows us to understand such claims *as claims*, not as true statements about the world. It allows us to understand arguments about universality (or unity or totality) as *political* projects, as attempts to impose a construction of unity on the real ground of difference, or a construction of agreement on the real ground of antagonism (see also Ranciere on this point, e.g. [1999] 1995). These political projects are understood by Laclau and Mouffe in a distinctly Gramscian way. That is, for them claims about unity are attempts by particular groups to extend their control over the social field. Such groups represent their particular interests as universal interests. Such claims are, for radical pluralism, efforts at establishing hegemony over the broader society (Laclau and Mouffe, 1985).

This Gramscian notion of hegemonic politics is central to the way Laclau and Mouffe understand the political *relations* among various groups. Establishing a wider hegemony, for Gramsci, was necessarily a process of making alliances. He argues that no one group, not even the bourgeoisie or proletariat, can assert control over society on its own (1971,

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[3]I suspect also that the right to the city can be useful for establishing equivalence in an anarchist context, but that claim is beyond the scope of this article.

52–120).[4] Rather any particular group must form alliances with other groups. It must, in his words, "widen itself out" beyond its narrow self-interest, to incorporate an ever-larger portion of society under its leadership (2000, 382). It must progressively "propagat[e] itself throughout society," broadening its political identity to incorporate the perspective and interests of other groups (1971, 181). That incorporation and broadening out is essential to forming what Gramsci calls a "hegemonic bloc" of allied groups that rules the wider society through a combination of coercion and consent.

But for Gramsci, alliances in hegemonic blocs are not reductive; this not a matter of one group merely absorbing another into its political program. The way he imagines a proletarian hegemony, for example, does not involve workers dissolving other elements of society (peasants, artisans, petty bourgeois, and soldiers) into a proletarian whole. Rather he urges that the interests of other groups be "welded" to those of the working class; this is a metaphor Gramsci uses often. The implication is that each element remains distinct, but it is connected firmly to the others, and through that connection, the many parts form a new whole. Gramsci's phrasing is that "two 'similar' forces" can be "welded into a new organism […] binding them to each other as allies" (2000, 220) and "a multiplicity of dispersed wills, with hetero-geneous aims, are welded together with a single aim, on the basis of an equal and common conception of the world" (2000, 348).

Laclau and Mouffe take up this idea of "welding" together disparate interests, developing what they call a process of "articulation." Gramsci's welding metaphor implies that each group is self-contained and integral, that it is not remade through the process of linking up with others. Laclau and Mouffe's "articulation" stresses that each social group is not a discrete thing that remains the same as it joins with others or separates from them. Rather for Laclau and Mouffe, the process of coming together to form a specifically *hegemonic* force involves each group being partly transformed. Each is transformed because it increasingly takes on board elements of the agenda and identity of other groups, and it comes to partly adopt the interests of others as its own. However, that does not mean that each group dissolves into a homogenous unity. Rather each group also remains distinct and partly autonomous even as it is partly remade by the process of coming together. Despite his welding metaphor, Gramsci agrees that each group is partly remade in coming together with others. For him, the key example is the northern Italian industrial proletariat joining with the southern peasantry. He argues that the workers cannot merely add the peasantry as a strategic and temporary ally, as a subordinate partner that will help them realize proletarian goals. He argues instead that the concept of

> hegemony presupposes that account be taken of the interests and the tendencies of the groups over which hegemony is to be exercised, and that a certain compromise equilibrium should be formed—in other words, that the leading group should make sacrifices of an economic-corporate kind. (1971, 161)

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[4]That claim might sound self-evident to us, but Gramsci was engaged in a real debate with a determinist Marxist position (e.g., Karl Kautsky), which held that the progress of capitalism would eventually proletarianize such a large majority of society that workers would not need allies to bring about a proletarian revolution.

He is saying here that the workers must adopt, to an extent, the identity and agenda of the peasants; they must decide to see the peasants' struggle as different from and yet also embedded in their own. In doing so, workers must make some sacrifices of their narrow self-interest (what Gramsci calls "economic-corporate" interests in the quote) to incorporate the particular interests of peasants. The peasants must reciprocate, as must all groups who join the hegemonic formation. Their joining produces a new linked bloc, with an agenda distinctly different from the agenda of any one of the groups, a broader counterhegemonic agenda that seeks a transformation of existing society. Politics, in this radical pluralist imagination, is a constantly developing process of groups combining, un-combining, and recombining, being partly remade in that process, and struggling together to both undermine the existing order and establish an alternative one.

Against the background of this idea of politics, we can imagine movements and political mobilization in the following way. In the social field, a range of different political movements are simultaneously engaged in "widening themselves out" by entering into political common cause with other groups in society (Gramsci, 2000, 382). None of these movements is entirely self-contained and autonomous, rather each is partly transformed by the process of coming together with others. Each is *partly* transformed, but not *entirely* transformed, as each must also retain a measure of autonomy that prevents it from being reduced to a homogenous larger group. This process of being transformed involves each group taking on board the interests of the other groups. Each group, *in part*, makes the interests of the other groups its own. It is a process, in other words, of establishing relations of equivalence.

The goal in building this particular form of combination is radical political change that can destabilize the current political hegemony and build up a new counterhegemony. In order to give specific content to that counterhegemony, to develop the wider agenda of the coalition, groups must work together to forge a shared vision, a vision that allows each to understand their cooperative project in an equivalent way. They do not form a collective, unitary body with a single will; nor do they form an association of entirely autonomous groups with equally many wills. Rather the will of each resonates or harmonizes with the others around an organizing vision, and that vision is the core of their cooperative, counterhegemonic project. That vision is not something pre-existing that needs to be revealed. Rather it must be actively and intentionally *forged* by members of the coalition as they struggle and negotiate with each other on an equal footing.

We could summarize this way to imagine political mobilization by saying that each group engages all the others in what I call relations of equivalence. Through conscious action, their wills become articulated with each other such that they become simultaneously the same and different; they become dependent on and autonomous from each other—unified yet distinct, obligated yet free.

RIGHT TO THE CITY

For contemporary urban movements to forge relations of equivalence and to build up a shared vision for their counterhegemonic project, it is important to have a productive starting point. It can only ever be a starting point, because groups must forge their shared vision together through actual discussion and struggle. But at the same time, this intentional process can start from some ground, some set of ideas that others have built up in

other intellectual and political contexts. The main contention of this article is that the concept of the right to the city is well suited to play this role.

The right to the city concept bears some exposition, since it is often invoked but rarely explained in the burgeoning discourse surrounding it. It is important not to assume that its meaning is self-evident. When thinking about the right to the city, I find Henri Lefebvre to be a productive source of inspiration (Purcell, 2002, 2009b). In relying on Lefebvre, I do not mean to argue that his right to the city is more true or foundational than other interpretations, or that we can't move beyond Lefebvre. I only suggest that he offers us a wealth of productive ways to understand rights, the city, inhabitance, and urban space, and his work repays sustained examination. In 1968, Lefebvre argued that "the *right to the city* is like a cry and a demand. […] It can only be formulated as a transformed and renewed *right to urban life*" (Lefebvre, 1996, 158; Lefebvre, 1968). The idea of a "cry and a demand" is clearly an inspirational call, an evocation of activist crowds in the streets. He wrote about the right to the city a bit before and during the actions in Paris in 1968, and so the image and ethos of large popular demonstrations is fundamental to his way of understanding the idea.

However, we can also read this formulation as a particular way to understand the notion of rights. It suggests we understand rights as *conjoint claims*[5] made throughout history by mobilized groups, as demands made by part of society on other parts, or on the whole. This concept is, of course, different from the idea of rights as individual freedoms codified in the laws of the liberal-democratic state. It is, in a sense, a way of "rediscovering the blood that has dried in the codes," as Foucault (2003, 56) would say, a way to understand rights that emphasizes the mobilized struggle that gave rise to a right, rather than the particular outcome of legal codification. Of course, understanding rights as conjoint claims does not mean they should never be codified. It is to say instead that rights should be conceived first and foremost as conjoint claims. The right to the city *must always* be a conjoint claim, because that is its necessary animating force. It *can* also be codified in law, if mobilized groups decide that is a desirable strategy in their particular context (e.g., in Brazil, see Fernandes, 2006).

If we see it as a conjoint claim, the right to the city appears as something in historical motion, as something that is continually being remade as new groups initiate new claims in new contexts. But those new claims are always made against the background of those who have come before; new claims never totally remake the right to the city. They always respond to, resist, or redefine existing habits of thought about the concept. The right to the city is, therefore, only ever partly remade, since it always contains meaning that has been sedimented over the course of a long history of cries and demands.

Lefebvre's phrase for that sedimented meaning, his articulation of the specific content of the right to the city, is "a transformed and renewed right to urban life." Embedded in the idea of "urban life" is Lefebvre's concern with the question of inhabitance, of the everyday acts of inhabiting urban space. He argues that the act

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[5]I use this unwieldy phrase instead of the more familiar "collective claims," because I want to emphasize that the mobilized entity, the claimant of rights, consists of multiple bodies joined together (conjoint), rather than as a single, unified body (collective).

of inhabiting the city must be the basis for making claims on it. For Lefebvre, it is the users of urban space, "those who inhabit" the city, who are in a position to claim a right to the city (1996, 158). Here, Lefebvre's Marxism is apparent; he is making a distinction between those who inhabit or use urban space, and those who own it. He developed the concept of the right to the city in the context of a wider project to understand how capitalism is a necessarily urban system, and how reimagining the city is a crucial part of a political and social revolution against capitalism. The right to the city, as a part of this wider project, is designed to undermine the dominant under-standing of urban space as owned property whose value is determined by what it can be exchanged for in the market. Instead, Lefebvre develops an understanding of urban space as the collective product of its users, as an "oeuvre"[6] produced by the everyday acts of its inhabitants (1996, 103). As they work at their jobs, share a break together on the sidewalk, shepherd their children to the park, look for a place to get out of the rain, wait for the bus, sit outside at the café, stand in line for the shelter to open, shop at the store, and move about the city, walking, riding, or driving, inhabitants are carrying out daily acts of survival. They are actively and collectively *inhabiting* the city. In order to inhabit well—to realize a full and dignified urban life—their urban environment must provide them what they need. Claiming a right to the city is claiming a right to inhabit *well*, to have access to the things one needs to live a dignified life. For users, urban space is a creative and cooperative human project, one that thrives on interaction and affective relations (Lefebvre, [2003c] 1970). For own-ers, on the other hand, urban space is a commodity to be owned, by those with property rights. Its purpose is either to be valorized in its own right, or to serve as a platform on which accumulation can occur. The right to the city is thus a counterclaim against that commodified idea of urban space.

So, we can rearticulate Lefebvre's idea of a "right to urban life" as a claim to a "right to inhabit urban space well."[7] A claim to inhabit urban space well is an integrative claim, one that necessarily brings together multiple aspects of urban life. Just to take a few concrete aspects, inhabiting well would necessitate affordable, comfortable shelter; meaningful work at good wages; convenient movement around the urban environment; stimulating recrea-tional spaces for children; public spaces to gather, interact, and demonstrate; ecologically sustainable urban development; physical safety in space, especially for women and gay men and lesbians; and affordable, high-quality food, childcare, education, and health care. None of these necessities is more significant than the others; each is bound up with the others into the complex geography of a city that actively fosters inhabitance.

It is this integrative character of inhabiting well that I think is most useful as a starting point for establishing equivalence, for drawing together diverse mobilized groups in the city. In contemporary cities, there is a wide range of activism and mobilization, but

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[6]In using this term, Lefebvre is making a clear distinction between the unique products inhabitants create and mass-produced commodities. Here, he is very close to Debord's (1983) analysis.

[7]To my mind, this claim can be generalized to become a claim to inhabit space well. While Lefebvre emphasized the particular importance of urban places, and while he wrote about a right to the *city* specifically, nevertheless his concept of the urban was much more expansive, and was never limited to the concrete geography of the city or the urban scale. Moreover, in other work (on the state, the countryside, and everyday life) his political vision for radical transformation was always meant for society at large, not merely for the city.

frequently that mobilization is segmented; movements for housing operate independently from those for good jobs, those for better transportation, those for ecological sustainability, or those against racial injustice. An integrative claim to inhabit urban space well has the potential to help those sectors see themselves as interdependent. Each could see itself as struggling for only one aspect of what is required to inhabit the city well. A good job is essential to inhabiting well, but it is by itself quite useless without affordable housing, childcare, and transportation, just to name a few, that make up the complex fabric of a whole urban life. As a result of this kind of integrative understanding, different movements might decide they need to build links to coordinate action so that they are better able to claim together a right to inhabit well.

However, even if a claim to inhabit well urges different movements into cooperation, it also, at the same time, insists on the autonomy of each. That autonomy stems from the radically equal relations among the movements. None of the aspects of urban life above is any more fundamental to inhabiting urban space than any of the others. Housing, jobs, transportation, freedom from violence, etc., all are equally necessary to inhabiting well. As a result, with respect to the question of inhabiting urban space, the various urban movements encounter each other on an equal footing. The particular concerns of each movement are entirely indispensable to any movement for inhabiting well. That equality implies autonomy, because each group is indispensable to the cooperative end. No group can be subsumed into another, none is subordinate, or subsidiary, or derivative of another. Each thus retains a measure of self-determination even as they enter into cooperation with the others.

Moreover, even if the right to inhabit implies common cause among different movements, it also underlines their irreducible difference. Even if all groups inhabit the city, they do not inhabit the city in the same way. For example, even though both women and men inhabit, the question of physical safety in urban space is very different for each. Public space has a different importance for those without secure shelter than for those who have it. Ecological restoration has a different meaning for middle-class White environmentalists than for native tribes who have been decimated by appropriation and degradation of their territory by Whites. As a result, even if they construct themselves as sharing a position as "those who inhabit" the city, the particular way each group understands what it means to inhabit well can never be reduced to being identical; it is only ever equivalent, always simultaneously partly the same and partly different. The groups are always both interdependent and autonomous.

To reiterate, I don't present this way of conceiving the right to the city as a finished agenda for movements to adopt. Rather I offer it as a useful starting point from which groups can begin to construct together relations of equivalence. This process of constructing equivalence is never finished. It must be continually renewed and reworked as each group is transformed in the context of their particular struggle, and in the context of their struggles alongside others for a right to the city. It is worth remembering that constructing equivalence is not easy. It is more common for coalitions to be either too fragmented or too unified. Either coalition members remain aloof from each other and the coalition is too loose to act effectively, or fearing disorganization they become too unified, so that one particular issue or group dominates the coalition and the rest capitulate or drop out. Relations of equivalence are rare. They are a knife's edge that is tricky to walk and requires constant effort and vigilance.

ON THE GROUND

But that difficulty need not be a cause for despair. We must not fall into the trap of thinking that equivalence is an unreachable ideal that bears little resemblance to "the real world." Rather we can understand equivalence, with Lefebvre, as a project of "urgent utopia" (2009, 288). An urgent utopia refers to the habit of looking beyond what exists, what is currently possible, toward what we might be capable of tomorrow. It is a way of conceiving, in thought, of a possible world in the future. But Lefebvre stressed that this possible world is not merely an idea conjured out of nothing, with no connection to actual conditions. Rather, the possible world that we imagine is a projection of what already exists in our present world; it is a theoretical extension of the present into the future, of the actual into the virtual. The elements of this possible world as they currently exist are difficult to perceive because they are inchoate, emerge fleetingly, and are occluded by the dominant order. The exercise of imagining a possible world in thought, of developing it as an idea, helps us to see occluded elements that are already here, struggling to emerge and be seen. A project of urgent utopia, then, requires us to develop an idea of equivalence in theory in order to help us better perceive the equivalence that is already being forged now by actual movements. This equivalence is often temporary, or weak, or obscured, but it is already here, as demonstrated so vividly in the "anti-systemic social movements" that now flourish across "northern Africa, southern Europe, and North America" (Miller and Nicholls, 2013, 2). If we carefully articulate it in thought, if we practice imagining what it looks and feels like, we will learn to better recognize it when we encounter it in actual political struggles. If we can recognize it better, we will be better able to cultivate it, to give it space to flourish. This section, then, presents three brief empirical cases. Each is an actual political project in which groups are working to forge productive alliances. In each case, in varying intensities, we can see equivalence emerging.

In 2001, a 5-mile stretch of Seattle's main river, the Duwamish, was declared a Superfund site by the United States Environmental Protection Agency. As is common in Superfund procedure, those responsible for the pollution (called "potentially responsible parties," or PRPs) were tasked with studying and carrying out the cleanup. Generally the PRPs work closely with the EPA to conduct the cleanup. In some cases there is meaningful input from the public, in other cases there is not. In this case, a well-organized coalition of civil-society groups, called the Duwamish River Cleanup Coalition (DRCC), has been able to effectively articulate a popular voice in decisions about the cleanup.[8] The coalition is quite diverse. It is made up of White, middle-class environmental groups, a Native American tribe, small business groups, low-income neighborhood organizations, and an environmental justice coalition. While there is some synergy among the various interests and agendas of these groups, there is also significant divergence. Despite that divergence, the DRCC has been successful in building a cohesive coalition that can act effectively in concert. Although they have not explicitly used the concept of the right to the city, they have constructed a shared vision around *the river* as an inhabited place. Against the PRPs, who imagine the Duwamish primarily as a waterway, as a transport

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[8]That influence is quite limited in that they only have advisory power, but relative to other Superfund processes, the DRCC has had significant impact on decisions about the cleanup.

channel functional for the economy, the DRCC insists instead that the Duwamish is a river: it is a riverine ecosystem that supports many different kinds of inhabitants, both human and nonhuman. In their activism surrounding the cleanup, they come together around a shared understanding of the Duwamish as inhabited, and on that basis, a vision of what the river can and should be.

This point of convergence on the meanings of the river provides a performative coherence for the coalition. This does not mean, of course, that the various members have an *identical* sense of their agenda. The DRCC shares an emphasis on an inhabited river, but different members have varied ways of understanding what it means to inhabit the Duwamish. Residents of neighborhoods along the river are concerned about the health risks of PCBs in their front yards. Middle-class environmentalists are concerned about how poisons will affect salmon migration. The tribe wants to restore particular landscapes as a way to begin reparations for colonization. Small businesses are concerned how the actual cleanup will interrupt their operations. As a consequence of these differences, none of these groups is reducible to any other; they remain distinct in significant ways. However, at the same time they have consciously chosen to understand themselves as committed together to a cleanup that results in a healthy river, a cleanup whose goal is a sustaining and sustainable ecology in which inhabitants can flourish. Negatively, they share an aversion to the spatial imagination of the PRPs, which think about the Duwamish as a waterway whose primary function is to ensure economic accumulation.

So in important ways, the groups in the DRCC have been able to build relations in which they are both the same as and different from each other, both interdependent and autonomous. They have done this by articulating a shared sense of the importance of a lived space, of an inhabited ecology. They do not articulate these relations explicitly in terms of equivalence or inhabitance, and they don't refer to Lefebvre or the right to the city. But their project exhibits sensibilities that resonate with the concept of equivalence. They have had significant success building a coordinated coalition of differentiated popular groups that remain distinct and yet can act in concert.

A similar case can be seen in South Florida, where a group called the Miami Workers Center has been organizing to build and maintain an alliance of labor, environmental, and African-American community groups in the region. More so than in the Seattle case, there is a conscious attempt to achieve relations similar to equivalence. Gihan Perera, the Executive Director of the Center, echoes Gramsci when he argues that members of a coalition must take on board the agenda of their partners, changing the content of their political consciousness in the process.

> To build this environmental/labor/community coalition, there is a low road and a high road. The low road is: labor wants jobs; the environmentalists want green buildings; the community wants houses. Traditional organizing theory is, "Just match up those self-interests and there you've got your coalition." But I feel like we are at the end of being able to operate at that low level of self-interest because if we don't *adopt each other on a higher plane*, the coalition is going to be limited to that self interest. So, for example, if the environmentalists are happy that they are building green houses but don't understand the importance of supporting the African American community's political power, it will not be a solid coalition. Once that project is over, if the threat to the African American community still

continues, those concerned about environmental issues may not be there with support. So our job is to keep the conversation going. Yes, you're here for green buildings, but you also have to be doing this to actually build the power of a black community [...]. That has to be *central to their consciousness as environmentalists*. (Heller and Perera, 2007, 24–25, emphasis added)

Perera's "high road" is not fully actualized; it remains a goal they are working toward. That goal resonates considerably with the relations of equivalence that I am advocating. For him allied groups must "adopt each other on a higher plane," each group must move beyond narrow self-interest and be partly transformed by joining with others. In this case, environmentalists must understand African-American empowerment as central to the agenda of environmentalism, just as African-American activists must understand green houses as central to African-American empowerment. The Miami Worker's Center and the DRCC, as groups working toward something like equivalence, provide a glimpse both of what equivalence is now, and of what it can be in the future.

Perera doesn't mention the right to the city or inhabitance in the quote above. However, he has been involved with other activists in a more explicit attempt to pursue a right to the city through a national alliance of community-based organizations called the Right to the City Alliance. In January of 2007, a range of groups from several cities across the United States, pursuing many different kinds of urban struggles, came together to consciously explore if they felt the right to the city could be what they called an effective "frame" to link together their diverse struggles into a "national movement for the right to the city" (Right to the City Alliance, 2007). In the run up to the conference activists read some of the research on the concept and invited academics to participate in the meetings. The activists were involved in many different issues: gentrification, gay and lesbian youth, juvenile justice, homelessness, racial justice, and historic preservation. But over the course of their 2 days of discussions, they saw value in understanding their diverse struggles as "common urban struggles" (Right to the City Alliance, 2007). Their struggles were about race, housing, sexuality, youth, but they were also, they decided, about urban space, about who controls it, about claiming the right of inhabitants to use it fully.. They concluded the right to the city has enough potential as a frame that they should move forward with the project of building alliances across difference. The Alliance went on to meet again at the United States Social Forum in Atlanta in June, 2007, and carried out its first national mobilization, called a "March on the Mayors" in June, 2008, and of course nearly everyone involved with the Alliance played significant roles in the Occupy movement as it spread across cities around the world in 2011 and 2012 (Harvey, 2012; Castells, 2012). It is too early to know what political and policy impact the alliance will have, or what kind of longevity it can achieve. But it seems clear the right to the city idea can at least be a fruitful place to begin building broad coalitional gmovements.

CONCLUSION

In this article, I have tried to show how the right to the city can be useful in establishing relations of equivalence among groups in a broad counterhegemonic urban alliance. I have argued that a claim to inhabit urban space well, because of its integrative character, can draw together segmented movements so that they can act together without

being reduced to a homogeneous mass. I want to end by positioning that argument in a wider political context.

For Lefebvre, the right to the city and the struggle over urban space was only one piece of his larger political vision. Near the end of his life he wrote that what the left now requires is a "new contract of citizenship" (Lefebvre, 1990, 2003b). This new contract includes many rights—rights to difference, information, self management, and to the city. It is not a dogmatic text that sets out the specific agenda the left must follow, rather it is an opening idea whose purpose is to initiate a renewal of political life (Lefebvre, 1990, 37). For Lefebvre this renewal involves a revolutionary transformation. It entails ordinary people refusing to allow others to control the conditions of their existence, and instead controlling those conditions themselves (Lefebvre, 2009, 135). In doing so, people would be pursuing what he calls *autogestion*, or self-management, the struggle to retake control of all aspects of one's own life (including the production of urban space). It is a struggle against representation, against the alienation of one's power to another entity (the state, the capitalist firm, etc.). For Lefebvre the struggle takes on a distinctly Leninist cast: he hopes passionately that *autogestion* can result in the end of capitalism and the withering away of the state (2009, especially Chapter 2). But I think we can imagine the struggle more broadly, as a struggle for all forms of autonomy and against all forms of alienated power. This struggle is continuous; it can never be "won," and *autogestion* can never be finally achieved. Rather politics must continually be renewed by an active population that refuses heteronomy and insists on managing its own affairs.

That is why in Lefebvre the right to the city, like the contract of citizenship, always appears as a starting point, as a way to initiate this continuous struggle for *autogestion*. That is how it appears in this article as well, as a way to *begin* the continuous process of forging relations of equivalence among popular groups, whose visions of urbanism, planning, and "urgent utopias" will vary widely (Carr, 2012; Sites, 2012), for whom the cry "It's our city! It's our city!" (Trumbull, 2012, 1000) will mean very different things. In this light, the counterhegemonic project I identified at the start of the article takes on a new meaning. It is not so much the desire to replace one hegemonic project of rule with a different one. Rather it is the desire to initiate a process through which popular groups forge relations of equivalence as part of a process of radical activation, a refusal to passively accept the commodified urban space of the neoliberal city, and a commitment to continually struggle to deepen their control of the conditions of their own existence. I agree with Lefebvre (2009, 135) that this struggle for *autogestion* is nothing other than the struggle for democracy. We might say, then, that the counterhegemony that networks of equivalence pursue is less an end-state than a process: perpetual democratization. While they might start with Lefebvre and the right to the city, while they must forge equivalence as a strategy, they are only ever embarking on an eternal journey. Their alternative urban future, their counterhegemonic project, is nothing more than the never-ending struggle to increase popular control over the production of urban space.

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