FORUM

Forging the urban commons

Transformative cities: The three urban commons

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Abstract: Drawing on Lefebvre and others, this article considers contemporary urban social movements with a selective review of urban research and suggestions for future ethnographic, cultural, and sociological questions. Under a generalized post-Fordist regime of capital accumulation, cultural workers and laborers, service workers, and community activists have all participated in urban movements. We consider such collective action, generated in the crucible of urban life, as a reflection of three urban commons: labor, consumption, and public services; public space (including mass communications and the virtual); and art, including all forms of creative expression. We suggest that the three urban commons outlined here are not necessarily perceived everywhere, but as they momentarily come together in cities around the world, they give us a glimpse of a city built on the social needs of a population. That is the point when cities become transformative.

Keywords: art, city, commons, public service, public space, social movement

Social movements and the transformative city

As we watch social movements travel from Tunis to Cairo to Bahrain to Tripoli to Madrid to New York, we might almost be reminded of the student movements of 1968, from New York to Paris to Prague, Mexico City, Lusaka, and elsewhere. We might remember descriptions of 1848 in cities across Europe, from Paris to Prague to Budapest to Vienna. We need once again to understand the transformative forces of cities, captured by Lefebvre (2003) in his idea of the urban revolution, by Castells (1977) in the *Urban Question*, and by Marshall Berman (1983) in his humanistic recreations of transformative inspirations from the Nevsky Prospect of St. Pe-

tersburg to the streets of New York City. These concepts have been revisited by Harvey (2003) in his understandings of Paris as the capital of modernity and adopted as a rallying cry in the global social movement for the “right to the city”. What makes cities the foyers of contests and uprisings (Harvey 2012)? Aren’t cities instead the realm of an advanced capitalism exacerbating inequalities worldwide?

Clearly, global capitalism and neoliberal development have indomitably shaped contemporary cities (Sassen 1991; N. Smith 2002; Castells 1989). However, cities are both political/economic entities and cultural/social constructs, with each underlying the other. City centers as loci for the accumulation of resources are centers of cultural development, communication,

commerce, and spectacle. In addition, cities have become home to a larger and larger proportion of the world's poor, the new labor force of sweatshops, building construction, retailing, and international manufacturing. Cities have become spaces of political inequity, social and economic deprivation, and sources of environmental damage. Poor populations, huddled together, make up the immense "reserve army of labor" of globalized regimes striving to keep wages at a minimum (Harvey 2007).

Here, we ask whether the massive populations streaming into cities in many parts of the world (UN-Habitat 2011; United Nations Centre for Human Settlements 2003) may indeed be transformed by the urban environment, and, more importantly, may themselves find ways to transform these cities in new ways. Since the early implementations of neoliberal policy, following the fiscal crisis in New York City in 1975 and then more systematically by Thatcher in the United Kingdom and internationally by Reagan through the Washington Consensus at the World Bank and the International Monetary Fund (IMF) in the 1980s, industrial work has been relocated to the Global South (Harvey 2007; Susser 2012). As a result of such policies, accompanied by the information age, the wages of workers in the Global North have stagnated while elites have grown up in the Global South linked with the elites of the Global North. Thus, questions of class have indeed become international. The widening gap between rich and poor the world over, accompanied by the shrinking of the middle classes, has allowed for the emergence of claims for the 99 percent by Occupy Wall Street protesters in New York City and protesters with different names in other cities internationally. While major differences exist between those in professional or unionized service or industrial employment and those in the precariat, in a privatizing world most of the population are still crucially dependent on public services for health, transportation, and education. We argue that this has remade collective interests and reconfigured our understandings of class and possible alliances over the past three decades. Such rethinking of class in what

we have previously called the wounded cities of the neoliberal era (Schneider and Susser 2003) leads us to focus on the centrality of the urban commons in transformative social movements of today. We see this as a possible route out of neoliberalism.

The uneven structuring of places, the municipalities, the organization of infrastructure, the zoning, the transportation and the pollution are politically determined characteristics that vary with the governance of the city. Struggles over these collective interests of urban populations in ecological decisions, such as water use and water level, frame the lives of inhabitants in the new cities (McDonogh 1999; Susser 2002; Khan and Pappas 2011). Will dams be strengthened or will the disaster of Katrina in New Orleans be repeated, as the lives of millions of people in Pakistan have been disrupted by water levels rising to flood cities? Will governments provide the infrastructure to fight fires or will, as threatened for Moscow in 2011, cities burn in the worsening drought conditions, with the added danger of burning nuclear waste thrown in? Will the residents of Japanese cities rethink their use of energy in the effort to protect themselves from a repeat of their 2011 nuclear reactor catastrophes? Such decisions with respect to collective interests will determine the health and survival of the millions who now inhabit the increasing number of cities of this era. Rather than outline the destructiveness of neoliberal governance in wounded cities (Schneider and Susser 2003), this article points, instead, to the ever-more crucial emergence of social movements, based, we suggest, on collective everyday experiences, at work and at home, in public spaces and through creative arts, which make up the urban commons.

We are thus looking now not at a more "just city" (Fainstein 2010) but at a transformative city where inequalities, social conflicts, and mobilizations may be perceived and expressed differently than in less publicly exposed environments (see Low 2003, on gated communities). For example, world urban summits like the International AIDS Conferences or the World Social Forums seek exposure in cities. In contrast,

financial summits, such as those of the World Trade Organization in Davos, or elsewhere, seek invisibility in mountains, small towns, or remotely accessible places, directly as a result of the outpourings of protesters who most effectively and surprisingly took over the streets of Seattle in 1998 and later Genoa and elsewhere (Della Porta 2008). We recognize an echo here of the necessary publicity of justice. Movements with a “just cause” do not fear public exposure, whereas those with less avowable or expressible aims will seek secrecy.

But the visibility of social contrast does not necessarily precipitate understanding or resistance. Although inequalities may be more striking in the city, their underlying cause or systemic production may be confusing or too complex to grasp. This often makes for an easy indignation but more difficult mobilization, a disempowering of the disadvantaged (Auyero and Swistun 2009). Nevertheless, we suggest that social movements are transformed as they pass through cities. They become more exposed, more collective, and, we would argue, more common.

The three urban commons and the right to the city

In this article, we draw on the idea of an urban vision developed by Benjamin and Lefebvre, present in the Chicago school and even the work of J. C. Mitchell (1959) in the early cop-belt studies. All of these theorists suggest in different ways that the urban generates diverse forms of communal values and new visions. As people experience their everyday urban lives, they begin to collectively recognize and demand a “right to the city” and the streets become the sites of social struggle. In these ways, we can understand the city as transformative. Today, as global cities undermine the local practices, daily lives, and health of the citizens (Khan and Pappas 2011), urban settings continue to generate resistance, critique, and transformation. As Rogers and Gumuchdjian (1997) argued, cities have the potential both to brutalize and to civilize.

The lived experience within the spatial organization of cities transforms social relationships among the inhabitants and can contribute to particular social formations. Membership in such cities is largely constituted by pragmatic economic considerations and modes of livelihood (Anderson and O’Gorman 1998). The city thus brings urbanites a community of experience that not only crosses class lines, but also can, in fact, rework them. This produces a different kind of city belonging based on recognition and interaction and civic responsibility for one’s environment, creating scores of inadvertent political communities organized around shared problems. Such urban protomovements are grounded in city neighborhoods, rural cooperatives, and historical collective action across multiple issues. We suggest such movements are better described in terms of a theory of “commons,” “common property,” collective consumption, or collective needs and a grounded culture of common experiences such as Castells (1983) developed in *The City and the Grassroots*, than by superimposed ideas of identity politics (Castells 1997) or its derivative, ethnoscaping (Appadurai 1996) (these points are elaborated further in Susser [2006]). In broad terms we might perceive the contemporary city as an essential, if narrow and class-defined, door to the commons.

The commons is an old term describing a specific regime of property management for spaces such as grasslands, fisheries, and other natural resources collectively held by a community. As historian Elizabeth Blackmar (2006: 51) defines it, “common property is an individual’s right not to be excluded from the uses or benefits of resources.” Traditionally located within the bounds of a given community, it manifests the belonging of its members through a sharing principle, which is neither private nor public. Widespread all around the world until the twentieth century (Ostrom 1990), the commons have suffered from the joint rise of both the private and the public domains, which have laid the ground for the marketization of nearly all objects and resources. There have been continuous charges of inefficiency, which Hardin

identified as the “tragedy of the commons” (Hardin 1968). He argued that, rather than limit their use, agents would behave as “free riders” and selfishly exhaust resources. Nevertheless, practices that might be interpreted as constituting a commons have survived in many little-known places, thanks to long tested and ad hoc mechanisms of social regulation, as Elinor Ostrom (1990), a scholar who devoted her career to the study of the resilience of the commons, has shown. In 2009, the economic validity of the commons and the ability of regular people to self-organize was indisputably recognized when, in the midst of global financial turmoil, Ostrom was awarded the Nobel Prize in Economics. With the renewed interest in this concept, the idea of the commons has been adapted to encompass a new scale of resources, such as open systems of knowledge for scholarly communication or public infrastructures, like water distribution systems (Bond 2008), public transportation networks, and even the earth’s atmosphere (Rabinowitz 2010). The difference between knowledge and, say, a cooperative fishery is the non-depletability of the resource and the size of the group of users. But what matters really, to quote David Bollier (2007: 29), is that “[t]o talk about the commons is to say that citizens (or user communities) are the primary stakeholders, over and above investors, and that these community interests are not for sale.” Of course, the mechanisms of regulation preventing monopolistic appropriation of the resource and overexploitation, two different forms of free riding, become more complex to figure out as the scale of a commons reaches wider communities of users (Dietz et al. 2003). And one of the practical as well as theoretical challenges is to invent, for each commons, the right mix of institutional and community controls and their reach (Harvey 2012).

Here, we argue that the commons help delineate three specific components of the right to the city as advocated by Lefebvre (1968) and developed by others (Purcell 2002; Stanek 2011): the right to urban everyday life, the right to simultaneity and encounters, and the right to creative activity (or the city as *Oeuvre*). The first

urban commons revolves around issues of production, consumption, and use of public services and public goods reframed as a common means for a decent everyday life. The second urban commons comprises the public spaces of mobility and encounter collectively used and claimed by citizens, such as streets, subways, cafés, public gardens, and even the World Wide Web. Next, we contend that the city can also offer a third type of urban commons under the form of collective visions within which each individual may find a place. This is illustrated by the work of artists in mobilizing communities, and redefining the conditions of perception of their social and spatial environment. This “redistribution of the sensible” (Rancière 2000) makes up the last ingredient of the right to the city, creativity. It helps urbanites to conceive of the city as a collectively produced living place. Finally, when brought together, these three urban commons set the conditions for a renewed right to the city in all the dimensions elaborated by Lefebvre and, we argue, set the stage for social movements. Following these concepts, this article is organized into three parts: an introduction, a discussion of each of the three urban commons and a conclusion on their effects.

Of course, the commons as we outline them here are not usually directly perceived as such. However, we believe precisely that it is by creating and recognizing commonalities that urbanites and their city are brought together. In this regard, public services and public goods, such as social housing or schools, are only potential urban commons. In the same way, public spaces need to be reclaimed and reframed as collectively managed before they can become common space (Tonnelat 2013), a social practice that Harvey calls “commoning”:

At the heart of the practice of commoning lies the principle that the relation between the social group and that aspect of the environment being treated as a common shall be both collective and non-commodified—off limits to the logic of market exchange and market valuations. (2012: 73)

As we will see below, the passage from public, or private, to common is not automatic. In fact, it is precisely at this junction, we argue, that current social struggles are the most crucial between the more established forces of capitalist extraction and the growing but still unorganized aspirations to a different way of sharing collective resources and rights. But as public goods, public services, and public spaces are numerous in the cities, they represent a strong potential toward the commons. If recognized and worked upon, as is already the case in many unknown ways, these aspects of urban life could become the commons of tomorrow.

Urban social movements: Labor and public services as commons

One issue that arises from this conceptualization of the three commons is, where does the traditional concept of labor mobilization fit in? In recent decades social movement literature has revolved partially around debates with respect to the mobilization of labor and issues of collective consumption, framed as working class movements or urban social movements (USM), and what has sometimes been labeled new social movements (NSM)—those that are defined in terms of collective consumption or identity issues (Edelman 2001). We see women at the forefront of the contemporary combination of labor and consumption. Here, we recognize that labor movements are an important form of mobilization (Kasmir and Carbonella 2008). In fact, we understand Marx's original formulation, about working class consciousness emerging on the shop floor, as a spatial concept. Working-class trade unions of the nineteenth century confirmed the power of factory workers uniting in the workplace. Marx offhandedly dismissed the peasantry as a sack of potatoes scattered across the countryside; he saw them as unable to come together to fight for progressive transformation. However, the history of peasant rebellions (Wolf 1969; Moore 1993; Goodwin and Skocpol 2000) leads us to doubt this conclusion. Engels argued that women would not

mobilize until they too were subject to the privations of wage labor (Engels and Hunt 2010). As with the peasants, here we see again a neglect of other forms of organizing that historical experience has led many to rethink. Women's community and informal labor as well as their role as the providers of food in the household led to many city uprisings in the nineteenth and twentieth centuries and to battles over health care and housing in the twentieth and twenty-first (Bookman and Morgen 1988; Kaplan 2004). Some communities, as in China and other industrializing cities of the world, are newly brought together on the shop floor of factories, and there we have seen a rising awareness of labor power and struggles. In other places, indeed most of them, labor structures and workplaces may be shifting too fast for such struggles to take on issues of labor and production (Aronowitz and Cutler 1998). Hardt and Negri (2004) are more optimistic and still believe that labor is a door to a common built by a multitude of workers now more engaged than ever in a service industry, which pushes them to exchange, thus building a new communication shared across the planet. If this is accurate, obstacles are still many. In many urban areas shifting from an industrial to service economy, the stability of employment has been eroding, dividing the work force into categories differentiated by their contractual relationship to their employer (Collins 2012). As Bridget Kenny (2004) shows well, there is not much solidarity between regularly employed workers and more casual employees who have a hard time asserting their belonging to the workplace as a productive workforce. What is common, however, is the workplace as part of an increasingly urban ecosystem also encompassing the home and many other places of exchange and services.

Although works such as Katznelson's *City Trenches* (1981) and many a study in Europe long demonstrated the interrelationships of home and community, a resurgent relationship between home and work may enable new collective visions organized not just around issues of labor and production but also of labor and consumption. As much production in the new

global cities takes place in small family shops, where people live and work in the same room, one of the central issues may be not so much how many rights workers can claim but what kind of life they can aspire to, or in other words, what process of social reproduction they have access to, as a member of a given urban society. Thus, many urban social movements cohere around issues not only of production, but also of collective consumption (Castells 1983), or as we would rather put it, of collective use and needs. We would differentiate this from the forces of individual consumption, outlined by Daniel Miller (1998) and Sharon Zukin (2004), which also bring city residents together through coffee shops, shopping, and privatized consumption and may, in fact, also precipitate shopping boycotts and other events with respect to social issues (see Nash's 2001 description of the Citarella boycott in New York City).

We suggest here that struggles over labor and consumption are a crucial form of social movement, which become significant at certain moments of capitalism. But in the light of the deindustrialization of the United States and parts of Western Europe, the organization of labor, while still powerful, as we saw in 2011 in Wisconsin, has to be considered in the context of other forms of social movement that have recently precipitated major transformations (see the debate around G. Smith's article in *Identities* in 2011). In the organizing in Wisconsin, or Oakland, California, where the port was shut down by the cooperation of Occupy and the unions, or in France where the unions cooperated with broader demonstrations against the raising of ages for pensions, unions joined with other protesters. In Wisconsin, service providers such as teachers, firefighters, and nurses joined with the users of services, often members of the same families, to maintain the right to collective bargaining (Collins 2012). In order to take account of these collaborative social movements, we suggest a broader approach that would bring labor organizing together with the redistribution of resources through collective consumption and public services as the first form of urban commons. Women are central to this formulation, as they are involved on all fronts: or-

ganized labor, public services, reproduction of neighborhoods, domestic care, and consumption (Bookman and Morgen 1998; Buechler 2004; Kaplan 2004; Susser 2012; Collins 2012).

Public services are the closest to the traditional commons of the rural United States and Europe, such as grazing lands and lakes, albeit at a much larger scale. Not only do they fulfill collective needs, but they also bring people together as a possibly concerned public. Schools, hospitals, and buses, especially in dense cities, remain among the most resilient forms of commons collectively used and cared for in the city. Public services are ubiquitous in the city and re-emerge under different forms in different regions of the world. Indeed, there is something urban about the idea of collective use, needs, and management. According to Isin and Wood (Isin and Wood 1999; Isin 2007), the "rights to the city," which urbanites are claiming as a basic "renewed right to urban life" (Lefebvre 1968), meaning "a right to an equitable usufruct of cities within the principles of sustainability, democracy, equity, and social justice" (Lefebvre, quoted by Busà 2009) is intimately tied to a "right of the city" (emphasis added), in other words, rights granted to the city by the state and extended to urbanites by virtue of their dwelling within the city limits. These rights, from the antique city of Greece to the Middle Ages merchant town of the Hanseatic League, to the contemporary incorporated territories of the United States, have been under constant threat and negotiation between city governments and states regarding issues such as legislation, justice, taxation, and local currency, military power, and property (Frug 1980). Today, as cities' legal independence has largely been reigned in by national ruling powers, their economic resurgence as the seats of transnational corporate and diasporic powers and as demographic heavyweights opens up a new worldwide round of bargaining where cities tend to regain political independence.

Many cities indeed are struggling to regain municipal control over such common resources like water, transportation, or even housing. Cities in the United States also approved the Kyoto Protocol independently of the federal gov-

ernment, recognizing the ecosystem as a commons that needs to be collectively used and cared for in order to protect its heritage. At a smaller scale, following the example of Porto Alegre, many cities now give an emerging role to local councils of inhabitants who provide opinions or even take decisions regarding the local budget (Cabannes 2004) and the design and management of public facilities such as schools (Bacqué et al. 2005). This step toward a more participative democracy finds in the fields of local planning and design a privileged terrain of experimentation (Bacqué et al. 2010).

Despite regular attacks attempting to incorporate them in the market, these public amenities are bitterly defended by inhabitants caring for their collective quality of life (see Susser [(1982) 2012] for the case of an NYC fire station). They are also invented on a need basis, especially in times of scarcity. New systems of exchange and bartering with alternative currency (Schraven 2001; North 2007), workers taking collective ownership of their workplace (Dietz et al. 2003), neighborhood gardeners in fallow lands (Schmelzkopf 1995; Linn 1999; Eizenberg 2011), or parents organizing community day care are phenomena that testify to the possibility of reframing large chunks of the urban economic system as a commons guaranteeing any urbanite the possibility of living a decent life for herself and her kin in a sustainable social organization. Thus, what is considered a right to a decent life by most urbanites usually encompasses not only access to work, housing, and collective consumption, included under the label “urban social movements” (Pickvance 2003; Clarke and Newman 2009), but also to a series of public services, which make production and consumption possible in a collective fashion.

The urban dimensions of new social movements: Public space and public sphere as commons

The second commons includes public space, the public infrastructure, such as streets and squares, train stations, cafés, public gardens, and all forms

of space where urbanites can rub shoulders and gather. To this we must add the increasingly significant and unpredictable virtual world of the press and all networked technology, such as cell phones, Internet, and its ever-multiplying facets. These are typical open (or limited) access resources, not resources for which people must compete for access. They seem nondepletable and easily sharable as a public good. However, they are not easily made common.

Much has been written about public space or public culture—here we take the meaning of public sphere outlined in Low and Smith (2006) and look for the ways in which the streets and collective usages of the city create and transform the public sphere and provide social benefits, however difficult to measure. Here too, however, just as for the more traditional commons, users strive to limit the rise of access price in the face of regular attempts to commoditize public amenities or to make them financially self-sufficient, managed by semi-public authorities. Urban public space, the only totally free-access resource in the city, is also subjected to a trend of privatization, under the form of community control through gates, corporate control, aggressive policing (McArdle and Erzen 2001; Lippert and Walby 2013), or new forms of pollution and bridge tolls (Caldeira 2001; Low 2003).

The privatizing of public space has been nowhere more visible than in the realm of urban design. Everywhere cities are rebuilding their spatial image both for their residents and for sought-after investors. In these images, city centers are remodeled as urban mixes of work and leisure where urbanites mingle happily, basking in the social enjoyment that urban economy is lavishing upon them. City branding, of course, is highly exclusive of the poor and immigrant classes, at least in its imagery (Greenberg 2008). In addition, policing and exclusion of the poor in cities has a long and well-documented history, from Dickens onward (Susser 1996; Low 2000; D. Mitchell 2003). But despite heavy surveillance and control, city centers also develop as ecological niches where rich and poor, locals and visitors share in right of access, if not of sustainability, equity, and social

justice (Ng 2010). Despite numerous renovations and reconstruction, the iconic Union Square, the platform for the renowned progressive speakers since the nineteenth century, served as the center for New Yorkers to come together after 9/11 (Susser 2004; Low and Smith 2006). In 2012, after further incursions, corporate planning, and securitization of the square, the hip-hop poets and Bread and Puppet Theater festival preliminary to demonstrations for Occupy Wall Street met there once again. Even Times Square, given to corporate Disneyfication (Sorkin 1992), was until recently a selling ground for underground peddling of tourist goods (Tonnelat 2007). Today, more than a family-friendly riskless thrilling environment (Hannigan 1998), it is also the meeting grounds for scores of teenagers from all over the metropolitan area (Tonnelat 1999; Cahill and Katz 1998).

It is also through contacts in different venues, many public or semipublic spaces, that activists and organizers of many origins can meet and learn about their respective struggles. In this regard, as Nicholls (2008) argued, the city and its many public spaces of encounter contribute to reinforcing the weak ties that allow cooperation and sharing of resources across groups. Recent mobilizations such as the Occupy movement have indeed shown a remarkable array of activists originating from different causes, regrouped in public spaces and made visible through sheer aggregation. In this regard, social movements can be accelerated by the density of urban settings, which multiply the occasions of contacts, an old theme of urban studies (Simmel and Wolff 1950).

Finally, public space can also serve as a point of view where inhabitants and visitors can visualize a problematic situation, make it more perceptible and communicable to larger publics, notably through the help of the press and other alternative media. This is what happened on the NYC Hudson waterfront when residents reclaimed an abandoned pier and saved it from commercial development as one of the only routes to the river for all New Yorkers (Tonnelat 2003). In the Lower Ninth Ward of New Or-

leans, largely destroyed by the waters of Hurricane Katrina, a small viewing platform over a hidden bayou helped the inhabitants understand their situation in the Mississippi Delta and reclaim their natural surroundings as a commons to be protected (Tonnelat 2011, 2012). In these cases, the space was used both as a place to give materiality to a specific problem and to bring it to the attention of a larger public (Iverson 2011).

Here we see a rediscovered right, wrestled from state and corporate powers, to the city as a common space (Whyte 1998). To be sure, vendors and other street-level workers do not have an easy time defending their right, but as they assert it day after day, much in the same way that rural poachers have always resisted the power of landed bourgeoisie (Scott 1990), urban public space does acquire the quality of a commons, not unlike the central pasture of New England towns before they were privatized (Blackmar 2006). The only difference from the first commons is its open access, both physically and remotely through the media. Thus, rather than immediately concerned communities invoked by the first urban commons, the second commons of public space calls for a larger public, parts of which are only indirectly involved in the original space (Dewey 1927).

But public space does more than allow for the expression of a right of the city and its inhabitants to a self-management of common space and common issues. It also brings forth another point that we want to make about cities being transformative: exposure. Ulf Hannerz (1980) insists, in his landmark book about a search for an anthropology of the city, on a very specific effect of a social realm unique to the city, that of traffic. The streets, he argues, are the territory of serendipity, unforeseen encounters and discoveries, which can have a determining influence on individual life trajectories. He builds on Simmel's (1950) idea of the reserve affecting urbanites, as a filtering device that allows each individual to protect their integrity for unsolicited attention, but which also helps them stay attentive to details pertaining to individual and collective interests. This is how

groups interested in specific ways of life are able to form, and render themselves recognizable through categorical signs. Thus, gay men and artists, but also street vendors and stockbrokers, are able to establish “moral regions,” as described by many early studies of the Chicago school (Park et al. 1967). But the Manchester anthropologists of the copperbelt, also recalled by Hannerz, complicate this observation. In the city of Luanshya, J. C. Mitchell’s (1959) study of the Kalela dance by the Bisa people showed how traditional distinctions such as the tribe were reworked by urban living conditions to become part of an open-ended system of categorization, which allowed urbanites to relate to one another within the context of the mining town. Following Gluckman’s (1960) principle that “An African Townsman is a townsman, an African miner is a miner,” Mitchell also proposed the idea of “situational change” to explain, differently from the Chicago School idea of adaptation, that people who move to the city see their behavior and perspective transformed not because they are losing ties to their traditional values (although that may also happen), but because they adjust in practical ways to the urban condition. Thus, urban notions of tribes or other imported categorizations leave the structural realm to become categorical and used as resources to navigate the city. Indeed, the Kalela dance, performed in public spaces, involved contestation over class position. This recognition of class complicated ethnic identities and may have helped to organize the miners’ social movements for better work conditions across tribal divisions. In this perspective, the urban does not erase already-existing divisions, but it reworks them with a practical layer of interpretation that puts them on a par with new emerging ones. This contradicts both the detribalization and the acculturation respectively attributed to the Manchester school and the Chicago school, by now well disproved by the development of cities worldwide. But it points, in addition to the continuing importance of traditional, ethnic, cultural, or religious ties, to a situational reworking of these categories, which become useful in cities’ traffic and work spaces.

We argue that as urbanites have to deal with a diversity of others on a daily basis, on the street, in the subway, or at work, they develop a form of “street commonalism” which is not predicated on abandoning one’s culture at the door for a worldlier view but tied to a set of skills needed to navigate one’s way. As these daily interactions manifest each individual’s practical integration in the shared territories of the city, people also develop sentiments of affiliation to a largely anonymous collective at the scale of the city. Becoming a New Yorker, or a Parisian, is not only a generational effect, as recent literature has offered (Kasinitz et al. 2004), but also the ongoing and demanding work of rubbing shoulders with strangers, no matter how we may like it. Indeed, the routine habits of going places in the city, produced and reproduced in interaction with others (Dewey 1922), carry with them specific codes laden with strong, implicit, taken-for-granted moral values of equality, justice, and cooperation (Milliot and Tonnelat 2013). Interestingly, these values are the same as those advanced by many participants in new social movements (NSM) claiming recognition and equality for specific segments of society. But they are also consistent with the demands of international protesters such as environmentalists and antiglobalization activists, which Rauch et al. (2007) have labeled cosmopolitan NSMs. In addition to offering public spaces as a commons, the city would thus also contribute toward the transformation of a “commonally oriented urbanite”, whose form of life is consistent with the demands of many contemporary social movements.

But movements also traditionally labeled urban social movements, which we have linked to the first urban commons of labor and public service, also use public space to make their claims public, through picketing and demonstrations. The challenge, it seems, is to build a vision that allows these two commons to merge and their movements to meet (Pickvance 2003). This, we believe, requires the work of yet another commons, that of collective visions, which art can help foster.

Collective urban visions: Art as a commons

Finally, the last urban commons is made out of the visions that urbanites, both individually and collectively, generate with respect to their own city as an environment shared among all. Following Hannah Arendt, the commonality of the public domain, the Greek polis or the Roman *res publica* is always at risk of privatization in a mass society, especially one governed by large commercial interests. In this case, the multiplicity of individual perspectives on the city as a resource to be managed are replaced by a unified vision falling from the top down, “when all people suddenly behave as though they were members of one family, each multiplying and prolonging the perspective of his neighbor” (Arendt 1958: 58). Fortunately, writers, musicians, and other artists, among many others in the city, try to offer urbanites new ways to perceive their environment (Auyeung 2008; Pugh 2008; Byrd 2012). The new “distribution of the sensible” (Rancière 2000) that some artists propose contributes to contest existing and taken-for-granted urban imaginaries in favor of “emancipated spectators” (Rancière 2008) able to form alternate visions in which they can project themselves as unique individuals belonging to an imagined community.

A crucial focus of such questions is the interface between the urban and the creative: street art, wall paintings, community plays, and concerts. As Frank Kermode has recently argued for fifteenth-century England, it was the (somewhat religious) street plays that prefigured the marginal public plays that became the established theaters such as the Globe over 100 years of social and political change in London (2005). In eighteenth-century Paris, as Robert Darnton (1985, 2010) also argued, it was the *libellés*, these pamphlets of public poetry distributed on the streets, that, in addition to the bourgeois salon and the prose of Rousseau and Diderot, prepared the ground for the French Revolution. Today, as Arenas (2011) argues, yet another form of street art, graffiti and wall frescoes, fed the social movement started by the teachers of

the Mexican city of Oaxaca and helped them reclaim the city.

As we know, the option of privatization is limited to the very wealthy. Although the wealthy may build gated sections of the ever-widening urban conglomerations, the streets of major cities are not limited to the wealthy. Even in the face of urban policing (Mitchell and Stae-heli 2006), the mass of urban residents are still represented by the moderately well off, artists and poets, as well as the working class, diverse immigrant populations, and the very poor. In order to illuminate the importance of cultural workers to alternative urban visions, we draw heavily here on Susser’s (2012) fieldwork among the artists and actors who moved to Brooklyn to escape the gentrification of the Lower East Side in New York City. Here, we see that processes of destruction and reconstruction not only destroy affordable housing, but also undermine the development of creative work. In order for art to emerge, it must be generated by many innovative groups able to support themselves at the margins of society. In Neil Smith’s groundbreaking work, the collaboration he documented in the 1990s battle for Tompkins Square Park between anarchists, artists, and homeless people is often taken as paradigmatic of the fight against the gentrification of the Lower East Side (N. Smith 1996; Marcus 2006). Smith emphasized the ways in which the cultural workers acted as the pioneers of gentrification, but his documentation of the artists who occupied the last buildings around the park also demonstrates the ways in which cultural workers joined with the precariat to fight for their rights to the city.

In Greenpoint and Williamsburg, where Susser has conducted fieldwork intermittently since 1975, in the 2000s the activists who worked on the community plans for redevelopment included some of the established working class population as well as young professionals, artists, students, and others, some of whom also owned homes in the neighborhood. These middle class in-migrants had moved to the neighborhood as they were displaced from Manhattan as part of the gentrification there. Where

buildings were in transition to demolition or renovation, innovative artists and young people turned them into concert halls, galleries, bars, and even shop-front museums. Such endeavors, like the community garden movement (Eizenberg 2011; Ikeda 2009), while often forced out by real estate development, testify to the potential for community-led activism. From the 1980s to the 2000s warehouses and abandoned facilities provided the venues for performers of all kinds, as well as allowing artists and local residents to reclaim public space and in the process develop new public spheres for community engagement (Susser 2012). According to the participants in these creative endeavors, many had themselves been evicted or simply priced out of other neighborhoods of New York City. Many of them recognized common cause with the movements for affordable housing. They supported the efforts of the Community Planning District to build a neighborhood that served both the working class and middle-income New Yorkers (Susser 2012).

In 2008, Danny Hoch, a well-regarded performance artist and a Williamsburg resident from the 1990s, wrote and performed a one-man play, *Taking Over*, which was lauded on the front page of the *New York Times* Arts section. Before it was scheduled to open commercially at the nationally known venue of the Public Theater, Danny Hoch arranged free performances in the Bronx and Brooklyn. These performances were packed with community residents and organizers, contributing to the ongoing critiques of gentrification throughout New York City. As Susser (2012) argues in her ethnography, Danny Hoch's performance captured the tensions in the new Williamsburg and was clearly an example of activism in art. At the same time, Danny Hoch himself represented the artists that had come to Brooklyn and, in Neil Smith's terms, pioneered gentrification. We argue that part of the energy and vitality of urban social movements derives from such artistic activism. Although, in one sense, we have to accept Neil Smith's (1996) characterization of artists as the pioneers of gentrification, "cow-boys" taming the Wild West of poverty, it is the-

oretically misleading to hold artists responsible for this development. In Greenpoint and Williamsburg (and elsewhere), corporate developers were subsidized to follow the displaced artists as they moved to new affordable areas. When municipal governments fail to require affordable housing or other public investment from developers while they subsidize corporate investment, both the marginal artists and the working class residents are displaced. For these reasons, we can understand the broad urban vision, including environmental, landmark, and other concerns, expressed through the cooperation of many different groups in the opposition, which has been illustrated in growing movements of "the right to the city".

Artistic efforts are writ large in neighborhoods where people can afford to live near each other, "put on plays in their back yards, compete in poetry slams, chalk street paintings, collect junk in shop fronts, join bands to create new forms of music and survive on the margins while they pay attention to something other than money" (Susser 2012: 53). In describing the unionization of jazz musicians as adjunct professors, Andrew Ross has argued that, not only did they organize for cultural workers to be adequately paid, but that such performers were in the forefront of organizing adjuncts in general as well as university faculty (Ross 2000). In addition, artists may see themselves as part of a wider progressive movement and work with neighborhood groups to develop "community art" (Crehan 2011).

As first lower Manhattan and then Williamsburg priced creative communities out of the market, places such as Red Hook in Brooklyn, parts of Philadelphia, and areas in other cities around the United States have temporarily generated similar vital settings. The old European cities such as Barcelona, Berlin, Prague, and elsewhere, and Hanoi, Johannesburg, and other cities of the Global South also have thriving communities of this kind. Artists make visible the destruction of urban environments, as illustrated vividly by Auyeung (2008) in her research on Beijing. She describes powerful transient art created in ruined edifices at the

very moment of destruction. Artists and youth in general may disrupt the boundaries of urban neighborhoods in their own search for affordable housing, and in so doing they often provoke a change in the perception of these areas, which can shift alliances in ways contrary to the widely accepted and often advocated idea (as exemplified by the political use of the concept of the “creative city”) that artists are at the forefront of capital. This, in turn, may transform the way residents conceive of the production of space in their own neighborhood and give them a better grasp of how they can claim it as collectively built and held.

Uprisings or the effect of the three commons coming together

We suggest that the three urban commons outlined here are not necessarily perceived everywhere, but as they momentarily come together in cities over the world, they give us a glimpse of a city built on the social needs of a population. That is the point when cities become transformative. The most obvious manifestation of this social tendency can be seen in the many uprisings appearing seemingly unexpectedly in many cities, from the Arab world to sub-Saharan Africa, from China to Europe. Of course, the motives of anger, dissatisfaction, and indignation are specific to each country. They also vary within a given city according to social status, age, ethnicity, etc. However, for cities that have been reshaped worldwide by neoliberal policies, some common themes are emerging, all the more strikingly because they appear similar across societies that the pervasive discourse on the clash of civilizations suggested were irredeemably different from each other. Corruption and misappropriation of riches by an oligarchy, youth unemployment, personal indebtedness and indentured labor, information censorship or blackout, degradation of public infrastructure and services, and poor housing conditions are the recurring complaints heard from many protesters. Social movements announce the claim of urbanites to better living conditions,

and to a more transparent and democratic management of urban resources. They contest the selling out of many sectors of the urban economy by posing them as filling essential and shared needs of the population as a whole. In so doing, these protests and uprisings also reclaim the most symbolic city squares and the streets of their neighborhood as commons. In fact, this process also works simultaneously the other way around. It is indeed through the use of ecological resources such as university campuses (Zhao 1998), central city squares, and housing projects (Hmed 2008) that new perspectives emerge, again often with the help of art, and new claims and new communities coalesce. “They form enunciative collectives that call into question the distribution of roles, territories, and languages. In short, they contribute to the formation of political subjects that challenge the given distribution of the sensible” (Rancière 2000: 39–40). It is thus when the three urban commons are recognized and built as such that movements emerge. Today, as we have seen from Iran on to Cairo and elsewhere, the Internet is a new crucial public sphere. However, we would suggest that as people come out, embodied as one might stress, and put their bodies on the line in the public squares, daily but also eruptively, from Peterloo in Manchester in 1819, through Tiananmen in 1989, to Tahrir Square in Cairo in 2011, that is the point when transformation starts. However, the long-term work to institutionalize such a vision and the memories of this collective moment must perforce be a contested, erratic, and long-term process.

Acknowledgments

This article resulted from a year-long seminar, Transformative Cities, chaired by Ida Susser at the Center for Place, Culture and Politics at CUNY; Neil Smith was the director and many other faculty and doctoral students participated. The seminar generated so many exciting insights with respect to the questions discussed here that Janet Ng, Ida Susser, and Stéphane

Tonnelat initially planned to edit a volume on the topic. In the end, Stéphane Tonnelat and Ida Susser wrote this preliminary article. Perhaps this can be seen as the first publication of a series. We wish to honor the memory of Neil Smith and to thank all the members of the seminar for their inspiring contributions to these ideas. We also thank the editors at Focaal for their help and support.

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