Fig. 3 Cine na Rua [Cinema on the Street]

2. Conceptualizing the Simultaneity of the ›Streets‹ and the ›Net‹

> »Only groups, social classes and class fractions capable of revolutionary initiative can take over and realize to fruition solutions to urban problems. […] The first thing to do is to defeat currently dominant strategies and ideologies.«[1]

Social movements are agents of change that trigger social transformations. Throughout history, social movements have challenged »conventional wisdom« and proven their power to pave the way for alternatives – even when power-holders have argued that there is no alternative (TINA).[2] For Robin D.G. Kelley, »[c]ollective social movements are incubators of new knowledge«.[3] But knowledge production inspired by revolutionary movements transcends these social movements themselves. Stevphen Shukaitis and David Graeber argue that scholars who have aimed to explain the functioning – or, more often, their »failure« – of revolutionary attempts have created some of the most innovative works, such as Karl Marx's post-1848 writings.[4]

1 Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 154.
2 The slogan that »there is no alternative« can be traced back to the government of Margret Thatcher in the UK in the 1980s and has been a consistent argument of neoliberal politics. However, David Graeber emphasized that the massively increased share of »guard labour« to sustain the unsustainable levels of inequality is coming to a breaking point (Graeber, »A Practical Utopian's Guide to the Coming Collapse,« 29).
3 Kelley, *Freedom Dreams: The Back Radical Imagination*, 8.
4 Shukaitis and Graeber, *Constituent Imagination*, 17.

Henri Lefebvre and Manuel Castells are two scholars whose work likewise bears the traces of their experiences of revolutionary movements in Paris in 1968 and their subsequent attempts to explain their experiences of the upheavals. Both Lefebvre and Castells focus on the relationship between urban social movements and the media, a relationship which I aim to disentangle conceptually in presenting the theoretical framework for my research. While I argue that Castells' recent works illustrate the problems that can arise from a lack of conceptualization, Lefebvre's oeuvre is well-suited to constructing a conceptual framework for understanding the emancipatory potential of the practices of video activism.

The social contestations examined in my research formed part of the wave of protests that erupted at the beginning of the 2010s, through which digital communication and the occupation of central squares became »the trademarks of contemporary protest culture«.[5] The »repertoires of contention«[6] employed by social movements do not strictly distinguish between the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹ since both overlap in practices such as video activism. Consequently, this chapter proposes a conceptual framework that is capable of addressing the simultaneity of the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹.

While the empirical investigation presented in Chapters Four to Eight places activist practices at the center of knowledge production, this chapter builds on the production of academic knowledge. The importance of developing a conceptual framework for examining audio-visual »repertoires of contention« by urban social movements is first illustrated by showing how the »dominant strategies and ideologies«[7] of knowledge production hamper an understanding of video activism and negatively affect urban movements by misrepresenting their practices. Second, I introduce Lefebvre's *the right to the city*, a concept which forms the lens through which this research places practices of visualizing urban struggles for emancipation at the heart of my analysis. The third section provides a critical conceptualization of digitalization with reference to the work of Christian Fuchs, Jodi Dean, Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias. Finally, I will turn to the question how my theoretical assumptions aid the understanding of contemporary video activist practices.

5 Gerbaudo, *Tweets and the Streets: Social Media and Contemporary Activism*, 12.
6 Tilly, *Regimes and Repertoires*.
7 Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 154.

2.1 Manuel Castells and Liberal Narratives of Progress through Technology

> »It began on the Internet social networks, as these are spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of governments and corporations that had monopolized the channels of communication as the foundation of their power, throughout history. […| From the safety of cyberspace, people from all ages and conditions move toward occupying urban space, on a blind date with each other and with the destiny they wanted to forge […] The movements spread by contagion in a world networked by the wireless Internet and marked by fast, viral diffusion of images and ideas.« [8]

Andy Merrifield describes Castells' journey from a Marxist scholar to a social movement scholar to one of the »ablest and most eloquent commissar[s]« of Silicon Valley's »gospel« by tracing the epistemological shifts in Castells' writing.[9] As a student of Henri Lefebvre, Castells had shaken up urban studies in the 1970s through his analysis of his experiences from Paris in 1968. In *The Urban Question*,[10] he drew on the structuralist Marxist Louis Althusser to insist on the primacy of the economic contradictions and consequently class relations that should determine the analysis of the urban. Castells earned great respect through his first book and became one of the key figures in the field of urban studies.[11]

An epistemological shift occurred when he turned to the study of »urban social movements« in the early 1980s, first in *City, Class and Power*[12] and then in *The City and the Grassroots*.[13] During this phase, Castells positioned urban social movements as agents of change, which meant swinging the pendulum, by turning away from arguing for structural changes and instead emphasizing the agency of actors.[14] Castells' notion of urban social movements enjoyed a widespread but mostly uncritical adoption by authors who identified with radical political approaches. As Pickvance argues, this was not unproblematic: »The term urban social movement thus entered that subgroup of social science

8 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, 2.
9 Merrifield, *Metromarxism. A Marxist Tale of the City*, 132.
10 Castells, *The Urban Question: A Marxist Approach*.
11 Merrifield, *Metromarxism. A Marxist Tale of the City*, 114–22.
12 Castells, *City, Class and Power*.
13 Castells, *The City and the Grassroots. A Cross-Cultural Theory of Urban Movements*.
14 Merrifield, *Metromarxism. A Marxist Tale of the City*, 123–28.

terms which are too easily applied and appear to provide a ready-made analysis but which in fact serve as substitute for thought.«[15] In fact, it is difficult to define urban movements precisely. In this study I approached new social movements that are based in urban spaces and whose claims and demands can be reconciled – or even explicitly reference – emancipatory calls for a right to the city as a concrete utopia.[16]

The third epistemological rupture in Castells' work is that which most concerns my research the most and is emblematically inscribed in the thesis of *Networks of Outrage and Hope*: his techno-deterministic description of social media as liberation technologies. Castells, who had become a professor in California at Berkley University in 1979, began to reject his earlier adherence to Althusser, and with it all forms of Marxist theorizing, replacing this with a positivist empiricism. In Castells' trilogy *The Information Age*,[17] which he published from 1996 to 1998, Merrifield argues that »technology became the new structure, the new God« which »now sets terms, puts everything in place, and all else follows, including peoples' identities and political passions.«[18] As such, Castells has transformed himself from a critical Marxist to a proponent of the »gospel« which uncritically praises the Silicon Valley giants. An academic transformation that in the view of Shukaitis and Graeber is a critical feature of the way academic knowledge production tames radical thinking and distances academics from activists.[19] Given that Manuel Castells

15 Pickvance, »From Urban Social Movements to Urban Movements: A Review and Introduction to a Symposium on Urban Movements,« 103.

16 The openness of the concrete utopia of the right to the city enables a rich set of specific appropriation from the bottom-up as the discussion later in this chapter illustrates. A useful overview of the links between urban movements and the right to the city is provided by Domaradzka, »Urban Social Movements and the Right to the City«. The Rhodes Must Fall student campaign is arguably the furthest removed from the immediate demands typically associated with the right to the city. However, I would argue that its call for decolonization constitutes a clearly emancipatory claim, one that is literally expressed in the demand to transform urban space – specifically, through the removal of the statue of Cecil Rhodes at the University of Cape Town. Stefan Kipfer and Kanisha Goonewardena offer an interesting discussion on the possibility and problems when aiming to combine Lefebvre's work with decolonial writings such as Frantz Fanon or Aimé Césaire (Kipfer and Goonewardena, »Henri Lefebvre and ›Colonization‹: From Reinterpretation to Research«).

17 Castells, *The Rise of the Network Society: The Information Age: Economy, Society and Culture*.

18 Merrifield, *Metromarxism. A Marxist Tale of the City*, 131.

19 Graeber and Shukaitis draw on a comparison of Jean Baudrillard and Guy Debord to argue that authors like Baudrillards who retreat in theoretical debates are warmly welcomed in liberal academic contexts in the USA and

is one of the most cited authors[20] in the social sciences and has consequently had a critical influence on discourses in the three most important fields for my research – urban studies, social movement studies and digital media studies – his research deserves attention as it exemplifies potential pitfalls in studying video activist practices.

Castells' impressive empirical study *Networks of Outrage and Hope* draws on all three fields of expertise to discuss in detail »the new forms of social movements and protests that are erupting in the world today, from the Arab Spring to the *indignadas* movement in Spain, from Occupy Wall Street movement to the social protests in Turkey, Brazil and elsewhere«.[21] Castells recent study and reading of the revolutionary moments in at the beginning of the 2010s is problematic in three ways, as I will argue. At first its empirical grounds are shaky, secondly it reiterates a liberal narrative of progress through technology and thirdly implicitly re-imposes the binary of online and offline.

Castells claims that the contemporary wave of protests »began on the Internet«.[22] Although the breadth of empirical evidence that Castells offers is impressive, Christian Fuchs argues that his »formulated hypotheses are highly speculative«.[23] For Fuchs, »empirical results deconstruct the myth that the Arab Spring was a social media revolution, a Twitter revolution, a Facebook revolution or a revolution 2.0«.[24] To counter Castells Fuchs presents evidence of the over-exaggeration of social media's role in social mobilization. For example, only just over a quarter of Egyptians (26.4%) had internet access in December 2011.[25] A quantitative study from the Tahrir Project found that 93% of respondents cited face-to-face as the most important form of communication, in contrast to only 42% who did so for Facebook.[26] This is not to say that social

elsewhere, while scholars that demand radical change and make »calls to action« are seen with suspicion. (Shukaitis and Graeber, *Constituent Imagination*, 23). An argument that seems to apply to Manuel Castells' later works too.

20 Social Science Citation Index, »Relative Ranking of a Selected Pool of Leading Scholars in Communication by Number of Citations in the Social Science Citation Index, 2000-2017.«

21 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*, Book cover.

22 Castells, 2

23 Fuchs, »Some Reflections on Manuel Castells' Book ›Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age,‹« 795.

24 Fuchs, 790.

25 Fuchs, 782.

26 This study by Wilson and Dunn offered respondents the possibility to tick multiple options in the survey. The quantitative study concluded that although social media mattered, they are insufficient to explain the mobilization of organized social movements (Wilson and Dunn, »Digital Media in the Egyptian Revolution: Descriptive Analysis from the Tahrir Data Sets«).

media does not matter, but it might not have been there on the internet where social movements began.

This leads to a second problem that confronts Manuel Castells, who envisions the internet as a sphere of public debate. His liberal narrative of the internet as an »autonomous space«[27] that promotes democratization and freedom has gained enormous traction in academia, but it has failed to question the hegemony of social media corporations. Instead of critically reflecting on the vested interests and ownership structures of the corporate social media, Castells becomes another »evangelist of social media«.[28] Castells' lack of theoretical depth in conceptualizations lends itself to misinterpretations of events like the Arab Spring and runs the danger of naturalizing the dominant positions of corporate social media by reiterating liberal narratives of progress through technology.[29] Fuchs sees Manuel Castells use of social theory as deeply problematic.[30] Rather than a »weak spot« in his work, Castells' neglect of social theory in *Networks of Outrage and Hope* appears to be a »blind spot«.[31] This has been a problem since his third epistemological shift, which promoted conceptual notions such as »network society« or of »communication power« without a sufficiently clarified theoretical framing as Andy Merrifield argues.[32] Media scholar Christian Fuchs criticizes the empiricism of Castells more harshly, when he argues that Castells' »approach is neither a social theory nor adequately theoretically grounded, but rather an arbitrary and unsystematic form of conceptualizing and a collection of observations«.[33]

However, I argue that the major conceptual limitation of Castells' arguments lies deeper, namely in his theoretical positioning of the ›online‹ or the ›internet‹ in the »space of flows« that is opposed to the physical »space of places«. In the *Information Age*, Castells develops a binary distinction reverberating with divisions such as digital/analog, virtual/real and online/offline.[34] Dichotomies such as these constituted the

27 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope,* 2.
28 Gladwell 2010, »Small Change. Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.«
29 Fuchs, *Social Media,* 787–88.
30 Fuchs, »Some Reflections on Manuel Castells' Book ›Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age.‹« For a broader critique of Castells' concepts of communication power and mass self-communication, see also Fuchs, *Social Media*, 72–85.
31 Fuchs, »Some Reflections on Manuel Castells' Book ›Networks of Outrage and Hope. Social Movements in the Internet Age,‹« 782–85.
32 Merrifield, *Metromarxism.* 123–28.
33 Fuchs, *Social Media*, 72.
34 See, for example, Laer and Aelst, »Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires.«; Langman, »From virtual public spheres to global justice: a critical theory of internetworked social movements«; Ogan, Giglou and

»dominant strategies and ideologies« which Lefebvre questioned.[35] Dichotomous thinking relies heavily on value-laden binaries. For instance, examples of binaries popularized during colonial times include culture/nature, mind/body, modern/traditional, civilized/savage and urban/rural. » As James and Manda contend, the problem with the »deployment of binary logic both as an epistemological device and as an ontology« is that it is always in danger of re-imposing a divide between the »civilized« and »uncivilized«, with the former label reserved for the »self« and the latter attached to the »other«.[36] Ulises Mejias sees in »these kinds of arguments [that] essentialize […] the online and offline worlds as two distinct realms of reality, with no intersection between the two social realms«, a major flaw in efforts to theorize digitalization.[37]

Having long researched the city, urban movements and digitalization, Castells would seem like a perfect guide for me in my attempts to approach my field of study from a conceptual perspective; however, this is not the case. First, Castells' techno-determinism, which uncritically celebrates the »Internet social networks as […] spaces of autonomy«, runs the risk of repeating modernization narratives and ending in a simplistic »technological utopia«.[38] Second, the empiricism that Castells promotes serves the neo-capitalist political interests of social media corporates.

There is a need for theory to explain the use of audio-visual tools by contemporary urban social movements. The next two sections aim to establish this conceptual ground for my empirical study into the emancipatory potentials of video activism. Here, Lefebvre's writings will provide the foundation to develop a theorization of video activist practices that enables their grounding within his theory of the ›production of space‹ to avoid falling into the trap of dichotomous and fragmented conceptions of space. Furthermore, Lefebvre offers the emancipatory claim of a right to the city, a concept which since its initial publication in 1968 has been effectively tested by social movements and theoretically developed by scholars. However, Lefebvre, who died in 1991, was not in a position to provide a conceptualization of digitalization. The next section therefore presents first Lefebvre's contributions to theorize urban spaces and the right to the city as a concrete utopia in section 2.2, before looking at current theories on digitalization in section 2.3, and how to interweave these two threads of theorizing urbanization and digitalization in section 2.4.

d'Haenens, »The Relationship between Online and Offline Participation in a Social Movement: Gezi Park Protests in the Diaspora.«

35 Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 154.

36 Jones and Manda, »Violence and ›Othering‹ in Colonial and Postcolonial Africa,« 198.

37 Mejias, *Off the Network*, 57.

38 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 8–9.

2.2 Henri Lefebvre Theorizing Space

> »Capitalism and neocapitalism have produced abstract space, which includes the ›world of commodities‹, its ›logic‹ and its worldwide strategies, as well as the power of money and that of the political state. […] Within this space the town […] has disintegrated.«[39]
>
> »If space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production.«[40]
>
> »A revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential; indeed it has failed in that it has not changed life itself;«[41]

In the following sections, I introduce the oeuvre of the French sociologist and philosopher Henri Lefebvre. A »utopian intellectual *engagé*«, Lefebvre »moved with the times yet helped shape and defy these times.« [42] He intensively struggled with the French Communist Party – from which he was expelled in 1956 – mingled with the Situationist International movement in the 1960s,[43] was involved in the May 1968 movements[44] and had fought as a partisan during the Second World War in the Pyrenees. Lefebvre sought to permanently confront theory with practice and vice versa.[45] As humanist Marxist, he wrote over 60 books touching on philosophy, sociology, geography and history and

39 Lefebvre, The Production of Space, 53.
40 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 36.
41 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 54.
42 Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction, XXIV.*
43 In 1957, Lefebvre lectured a course at Nanterre University in which his then teaching assistant Jean Baudrillard. During this time, he also met the much younger Guy Debord and Raul Vaneigem, who became key figures of the International Situationists art movement. A close friendship between the four men developed (Shukaitis and Graeber 2007, Constituent Imagination, 21–22).
44 Lefebvre wrote an interesting but often neglected discussion about the ›moments‹ of contestation and their spontaneity shaping protests in Paris in May 1968 in his book *The Explosion. Marxism and the French Upheaval*. This epochal moment impacted his further thinking during the phase of 1968 to 1974 when he focused attention on urban space.
45 Having grown up in the small town of Navarrenx, close to the Pyrenees – before moving to Paris in the late 1960s – Lefebvre fought a bitter struggle with the French Communist Party over its dogmatism, which led to his expulsion from the party. The debates and close relationship that he had with Debord and other members of the Situationist International artistic

offering »brilliant analyses on dialectics and alienation, everydaylife and urbanism.«[46]

The reception of Lefebvre's oeuvre can be divided into three waves.[47] First, Lefebvre's writings were interpreted within a French context as unorthodox Marxist social analysis while being sidelined in English-language academic debates by the influence of Manuel Castells.[48] Thanks to translations of Lefebvre's major works into English in the 1990s,[49] his ideas then spread into the Anglophone academic community, where they were first received as post-modern and post-structuralist. This type of reading was inclined to displaying a »reductionist tendency« in its interpretations, such as in the writings of the post-structuralist Edward Soja.[50] The third wave of responses to Lefebvre has been to engage his theories in an »independent and open debate«,[51] which has produced numerous insightful applications of his ideas to empirical contexts. My conceptual approach to research is based on Lefebvre and aims to be positioned in the third wave of Lefebvre interpretations.

My goal is to use the theoretical foundations of Lefebvre's work and transpose them to my empirical study of video activism. The next three sections thus elaborate on Lefebvre's theorizing and how this is translated into my conceptual approach by focusing on his writing during the period from 1968 to 1974, when Lefebvre focused his attention on questions of urbanization and space. I start with a discussion of *The Production of Space* (1974), before turning to *The Urban Revolution* (1970) and the essay *The Right to the City* (1968). This reverse reading of Lefebvre's publications allows me to proceed from the theoretical and abstract claims in the *Production of Space* to the more concrete and political propositions found in his earlier works and their interpretations.

revolutionary movement significantly influenced his ideas, such as those on the importance of the »moment« and »fête«.

46 Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*, XXI.

47 Schmid, »The Trouble with Henri,«, 28.

48 Schmid, »The Trouble with Henri,« 28.

49 The translation of the right to the city from French to English by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebos, which was only completed in 1996, was predated by the translation of The Production of Space in 1991. The urban revolution was only translated in 2003. The response to these publications in the Anglophone world has been criticized for taking a much narrower view of Lefebvre's work than its reception in German-, Italian-, Portuguese- and Spanish-speaking contexts: Elden, *Understanding Lefebvre*. Theory and the possible.

50 Schmid, »The Trouble with Henri,« 28.

51 Schmid, »The Trouble with Henri,« 28.

From the Science of Space to the Production of Space

»(Social) space is a (social) product.«[52]

If, as Lefebvre posits, we avoid a »simplistic model of one-to-one or ›punctual‹ correspondence between social actions and social locations«, then »social space works […] as a tool for analysis of society«.[53] That promise builds on his fundamental claim that »space is a (social) product«, a key assertion with five implications that require closer examination: (1) a rejection of dichotomies and fragmentations of space; (2) an emphasis on recognizing specificity; (3) the importance assigned to practice; (4) methodological considerations of dialectical transduction; and (5) his call to replace the production of abstract spaces with the utopia of differential spaces.

1. Rejecting dichotomies and fragmentations of space implies moving beyond Cartesian models of space as an a priori given, ahistorical three dimensional container, on the one hand, or as interpretations of a multiplicity of spaces that lack theoretical coherence, on the other.[54] To approach space as a social product means that it becomes possible to analyze spaces as the products of particular modes of production, such as feudalism or capitalism. However, this is a dialectical claim which insists that space is not only the outcome of a mode of production, but also the setting in which a mode of production is formed. As such, a revolution that fails to have a spatial impact remains irrelevant. Moreover, it does not make sense to speak of ›digital spaces‹ nor to make a binary distinction between online and offline spaces. Instead, digitalization as a process must be analyzed in relation to how it affects the production of space and how it is being affected by the spaces in which it is taking place.
2. For Lefebvre, a »second implication is that every society […] produces a space, its own space«.[55] As such, a universal logic which explains the production of all (social) spaces loses its intelligibility; each individual space should instead be examined in its own specificity and in relation to its own history. By recognizing the specificity of (urban) spaces, it becomes possible to explain why the technological innovations that have enabled contemporary video activism produced different different repertoires of audio-visual contention in Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro respectively. Although the tools used for digitalization – fiber-optic cables, computers and

52 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 26.
53 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 34.
54 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 3.
55 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 31.

smartphones, social media platforms – are technically similar in both contexts, they have different effects in the specificity of the contexts in which they are inserted.

3. Lefebvre's third implication is that »social space ›incorporates‹ social action«,[56] implying that space shapes social practices and vice versa. Space is »both a field of action […] and a basis of action«.[57] For Lefebvre, practice must be at the heart of any meaningful analysis. »Au commencement fut l'action«[58] is a call to oppose static views and for a »praxis« that is always »a vénir«, becoming more than being. Practice is the changing of nature, production and creation as well as imaginaries and thought.[59] My research thus examines the ›doing of video activism‹ rather than merely analyzing the content of videos. My goal is to understand how the practices of filming and watching videos shape political mobilization.
4. Lefebvre's methodological approach builds on transduction and dialectics. With the method of »dialectical transduction« Lefebvre intended to produce a »critique of the concepts through practice; and a critique of practice through concepts.«[60] In this sense, my research aims to analyze the practices of video activism with concepts which explain how space has been abstracted through neoliberal urbanism and communicative capitalism. And vice versa, the practices of video activism can be employed to expand theories and enrich conceptualizations by examining practices. As Lefebvre contends, »[i]f space is a product, our knowledge of it must be expected to reproduce and expound the process of production.«[61] There is a need for theory in order to avoid Castells' error of re-imposing neoliberal politics through the backdoor of knowledge production.
5. Lefebvre distinguishes between absolute, abstract and differential space as the results of three different modes of production. From a historical perspective, he examines how up until the end of feudalism absolute spaces dominated, before accounting for the transformation from absolute to abstract spaces with reference to the rising

56 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 33.
57 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 191.
58 Lefebvre in: *Schmid 2010, Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft: Henri Lefebvre und die Theorie der Produktion des Raumes*, 80. Merrifield sees Cartesian thought as static in contrast to the dynamic reasoning of dialectics, which »emphasize[s] process, movement, flow, relations and, more particularly, contradiction« (Merrifield, »Place and Space: A Lefebvrian Reconciliation,« 517).
59 Schmid, *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft: Henri Lefebvre und die Theorie der Produktion des Raumes*, 80.
60 Schmid, *Stadt, Raum und Gesellschaft,* 36.
61 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 36.

> hegemony of capitalism. Abstract spaces are based on the ideology of exchange value, with the implication that in capitalism »space itself has begun to be bought and sold«.[62] For Lefebvre, the production of abstract spaces entails a process of »homogenization« and »fragmentation«. Homogenization reduces the quality of a particular place into an abstracted exchange value, while fragmentation produces encapsulated space divided into fenced-off parcels of private property. However, in contrast to the production of abstract spaces the production of differential spaces promises a utopian vision in which the use value of space is prioritized. Those who occupy, inhabit, work and live in a certain space, produce differential spaces, in acts of autogestion – self-management – in which use value is privileged of exchange value. To examine video activism as an emancipatory practice entails a search in contemporary abstract spaces for residues that enable »practicing, or practiced, utopia« to produce differential spaces.[63]

To read video activist practices as part of the production of urban space is to argue that videos can actually influence political mobilizations and thus transform urban spaces. To analyze both Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro requires that close attention be paid to the particular ways in which video activism is being produced in specific spaces and in turn how these specific spaces produce particular repertoires of audio-visual contention.

The City, the Urban and Urbanization

> »Urban space gathers crowds, products in the markets, acts and symbols. It concentrates all these, and accumulates them. To say ›urban space‹ is to say centre and centrality, and it does not matter whether these are actual or merely possible, saturated, broken up or under fire. For we are speaking here of a dialectical centrality.«[64]

After having introduced into Lefebvre's conceptualization of space, this section examines his conceptualization of the urban and proposes a way to integrate digitalization in discourses on urbanization. The book *The Urban Revolution* starts with a strategic hypothesis: »Society has been completely urbanized. […] This urbanization is virtual today, but will become

62 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 154.
63 Lefebvre, »Theoretical Problems of Autogestion,« 151.
64 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 101.

real in the future.«[65] Lefebvre then goes on to dissolve the city and call attention to the process of urbanization. This hypothesis, which he formulated in 1970, gained traction in contemporary debates. But if, as Lefebvre envisioned, the city is being superseded, what is taking its place? His answer was a sprawling urban fabric. »This term ›urban fabric‹ [does not] narrowly define the built environment of cities, but all manifestations of the dominance of the city over the countryside,« as Lefebvre argued.[66]

Neil Brenner and Christian Schmid observe how »…the erstwhile boundaries of the city – along those with larger, metropolitan units of agglomeration – are being exploded and reconstituted as new forms of urbanization reshape inherited patterns of territorial organization, and increasingly crosscut the urban/non-urban divide itself«.[67] The city as an entity conscribed by the medieval stonewalls has become a historical and ideological object.[68] The dismantlement of the city through the long 1980s has led to its implosion and explosion of the city as an object to study. In their concept of »planetary urbanization«, Brenner and Schmid consequently demand »a radical rethinking of inherited epistemological assumptions regarding the urban and urbanization.«[69]

Lefebvre's metaphor of the urban ›tissue‹ or ›fabric‹ is useful for grasping where to position digitalization in the process of planetary urbanization. I argue that digitalization forms a thread of the urban tissue. It is interwoven into the urban fabric, which it in turn helps to weave. Social media is consequently neither outside of space, as the online/offline dichotomy implies, nor is it a fragment of space. Instead, social media and all other manifestations of digitalization plays into the production of space.

The experience of digitalization has shown that urban centers have not disappeared. Indeed, they have become ever more central nodes of decision-making. This means that even if the ›city‹ has been dissolved as an entity, urbanization continues to produce centralities. In fact, as the nodes of global economic, political and cultural networks have increasingly been knight together ever closer, »global cities« concentrate enormous

65 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 1.

66 Lefebvre in: Merrifield, *Henri Lefebvre: A Critical Introduction*, 82.

67 Brenner, *Implosions / Explosions. Towards a Study of Planetary Urbanization*.

68 Wachsmuth argues that Merrifield's end of the city thesis goes too far – since the city remains a major lens through which the urban is perceived – but concedes that it does point to the ideologies that underpin discourses about the city. Wachsmuth identifies the urban-rural divide, the city as coherent entity, and the city as ideal type as three enduring discursive frameworks that may blind studies on urbanization (Wachsmuth, »City as Ideology: Reconciling the Explosion of the City Form with the Tenacity of the City Concept«).

69 Brenner and Schmid, »Towards a New Epistemology of the Urban?,« 151.

power with global effects.[70] Cape Town and Rio de Janeiro are two such nodes in global networks. To occupy, appropriate and politicize these centers of decision-making thus carries with it the potential for wielding significant power. If digitalization has become an important thread in weaving the contemporary urban fabric, then video activism can play a crucial role in attempts to democratize the centers of decision-making from the bottom-up. The right to the city is a »cry and demand«[71] for access to differential centralities[72] that as slogan, concept and concrete utopia has inspired experiments in bottom-up city making worldwide.

Fig. 4 Land for profit, not for people

The Slogan, Concept and Utopia of the Right to the City

> »The right to the city is far more than the individual liberty to access urban resources: it is a right to change ourselves by changing the city. It is, moreover, a common rather than an individual right since this transformation inevitably depends upon the exercise of a collective power to reshape the processes of urbanization.«[73]

In my research, however, I have insisted on taking the right to the city seriously. As a slogan, the right to the city has a unifying capacity that

70 Sassen, *The Global City: New York, London, Tokyo*.
71 Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 158.
72 Differential centralities are produced in differential space as opposed to the centralities which are produced abstract space.
73 Harvey, »The Right to the City,« 23.

has promoted effective political mobilization since the late 1960s demanding »cities for people, not for profit«.[74] Second, the right to the city as a concept offers a profound theoretical framework when integrated with Lefebvre's theories and their continuous development. Finally, the concrete utopia of the right to the city can successfully move us beyond ephemeral moments of encounter by pointing towards an emancipatory vision in which differential spaces are produced. This is particularly crucial, because a »revolution that does not produce a new space has not realized its full potential«.[75] To discuss the innumerous interpretations[76] of the right to the city since the publication of the essay in 1968, the next looks at its use as a slogan, concept and utopia.

From an institutional perspective, the right to the city has served the purpose of agenda-setting. In 2001, it was incorporated into the Brazilian constitution via the »City Statute«,[77] while during the World Social Forum in Porto Alegre in 2005 a »World Charter on the Right to the City« was adopted.[78] However, attempts to institutionalize the right to the city have received considerable criticism. One major critique has been that, by mainstreaming and institutionalizing the right to the city, the

74 The edited volume by Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer, *Cities for People, Not for Profit,* brings together leading scholars in critical urban theory to discuss the ongoing relevance of the right to the city.

75 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 53.

76 For example: Brenner, Marcuse, and Mayer, *Cities for People, Not for Profit. Critical Urban Theory and The Right to the City*; Fernandes, »Constructing the ›Right to the City‹ in Brazil«; Harvey, »The Right to the City,«; Huchzermeyer, »The Legal Meaning of Lefebvre's the Right to the City: Addressing the Gap between Global Campaign and Scholarly Debate«; Lopes de Souza, »Which Right to Which City? In Defense of Political-Strategic Clarity: Response to Harvey«; Marcuse, »Rights in Cities and the Right to the City?«; Mitchell, *The Right to the City*; Merrifield, »The Right to the City and Beyond«; Morange and Spire, »A Right to the City in the Global South?«; Parnell and Pieterse, »The ›Right to the City‹: Institutional Imperatives of a Developmental State«; Purcell, »The Right to the City: The Struggle for Democracy in the Urban Public Realm«; Samara, He, and Chen, »Locating Right to the City in the Global South«; Schmid , »Henri Lefebvre, the Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream; Sugranyes and Mathivet,*Ciudades para tod@s*; Shaw and Graham, »An Informational Right to the City? Code, Content, Control, and the Urbanization of Information«; Mullis, *Recht Auf Die Stadt: Von Selbstverwaltung Und Radikaler Demokratie*; Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans, »Cities and Social Movements: Theorizing beyond the Right to the City.«

77 Cities Alliance, »The City Statute of Brazil. A Commentary.«

78 Brown and Kristiansen, »Urban Policies and the Right to the City: Rights, Responsibilities and Citizenship.«

idea has been co-opted. As such, the »vulgarization and domestication« of Lefebvre's concept is easily turned into a catchy »umbrella phrase« as Lopes de Souza argues.[79] Without questioning the logic of capitalism, Margit Mayer adds, the right to the city runs the risk of becoming a slogan for »neoliberalism with a human touch«.[80]

However, before the right to the city was incorporated into institutional settings, social movements all over the world had repeatedly appropriated it as a slogan and a number of right to the city activist networks have emerged.[81] These include, for example, the Right to the City Alliance in the USA,[82] the Recht auf Stadt Netzwerk in Hamburg[83] or Basel[84] or Abahlali baseMjondolo in South Africa.[85] Many of these organizations explicitly relate their political struggles to Lefebvre's radical proposition. At the same time, given its widespread adoption as a slogan, the right to the city has given rise to a diversity of demands.[86] These range from issues relating to housing and public transport to the basic rights of migrants and the marginalized as urban citizens. Instead of seeing this multiplicity of claims to a right to the city as a weakness or sign of the idea's incoherence,[87] the manner in which it has been appropriated in a wide variety of contexts can equally be read as a strength of a unifying but flexible call to action.

The enduring relevance of the demand for a right to the city in political struggles in the Global South is particularly noteworthy. For example, there have been interesting attempts to connect the right to the city to questions of decolonization,[88] although Lefebvre's writings are

79 Lopes de Souza, Marcelo, »Which Right to Which City?«, 316.
80 Mayer, »The ›Right to the City‹ in Urban Social Movements,« 75.
81 Uitermark and Loopmans focus their criticism on the »militant particularism« of much of right to the city activism, speaking to the difficulty of integrating single bottom-up initiatives into networks across cities (Uitermark, Nicholls, and Loopmans, »Cities and Social Movements: Theorizing Beyond the Right to the City«, 2548).
82 Right to the City, Website.
83 Recht auf Stadt, Website.
84 Stadt fuer Alle, Website.
85 Abahlali baseMjondolo, Website.
86 Margit Mayer concludes in her assessment of the appropriation of the right to the city concept by NGOs, IOs and various political movements that »there are worlds of distance lying between the struggles in the global North and South« (Mayer, »The ›Right to the City‹ in Urban Social Movements,« 80).
87 For Merrifield, Lefebvre's vision of a right to the city is »too vast and at the same time too narrow« (Merrifield, »The Right to the City and Beyond,« 478). Instead, he proposes to replace the right to the city with his concept of *The Politics of the Encounter*.
88 Kipfer and Goonewardena, »Henri Lefebvre and ›Colonization‹: From Reinterpretation to Research.«

undoubtedly characterized by a strong Eurocentric bias. Nevertheless, the richness of debates about the right to the city illustrate the relevance of the slogan to Brazilian and South African contexts.[89]

The right to the city as a concept has provoked a number of responses and promising conceptual proposals. These include a »right to rights«,[90] a »right to visibility«,[91] a »right to centrality«,[92] a »right to space« itself,[93] and a »right to difference«.[94] To capture the essence of the right to the city as a concept, I will highlight three lines of argument: urban citizenship, commons, and autogestion.

(1) Urban citizenship demands a »right to rights«, namely the recognition of all urban residents as citizens.[95] This is a form of citizenship independent of nationality, granted to an individual on the basis of living in any particular place.[96] While in the Global North this debate has mostly arisen in relation to migration and sanctuary cities,[97] in urban areas in the Global South it is closely related to calls for a basic »dignity«. For example, Branch and Mampilly see calls for dignity and the existential recognition of marginalized urban citizens – whom they label »political society« in reference to

89 Fernandes, »Constructing the ›Right to the City‹ in Brazil«; Lopes de Souza, »Together with the State, despite the State, against the State. Social Movements as ›Critical Urban Planning‹ Agents«; Lopes de Souza, »Which Right to Which City?«; Sugranyes and Mathivet, Ciudades para tod@s; Huchzermeyer, »Humanism, Creativity and Rights: Invoking Henri Lefebvre's Right to the City in the Tension Presented by Informal Settlements in South Africa Today«; Parnell and Pieterse, »The ›Right to the City‹: Institutional Imperatives of a Developmental State.«

90 Holston, »Insurgent Citizenship in an Era of Global Urban Peripheries.«

91 Jaguaribe, *Rio de Janeiro. Urban Life through the Eyes of the City*, 225.

92 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 194.

93 Schmid, »Henri Lefebvre, the Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream,« 49.

94 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 64.

95 Plyustehva offers a nuanced discussion of the relationship between urban citizenship and Lefebvre's right to the city. Particularly helpful are the differences which she identifies between the respective interpretations by Mark Purcell, David Harvey and James Holston (Plyushteva, »The Right to the City and Struggles over Urban Citizenship: Exploring the Links«).

96 Chris Butler sees in the right to the city »the basis for asserting new forms of spatial citizenship« legitimized by residents' presence in urban areas (Butler, *Henri Lefebvre: Spatial Politics, Everyday Life and the Right to the City)*.

97 In some cities in Europe and the USA, urban citizenship cards function as a bottom-up approach to redefining citizenship in the face of repressive national legislation.

Chatterjee[98] – as a defining characteristic of a cycle of contestation in sub-Saharan Africa since the mid-2000s.[99] Whether labeled as »insurgent citizenship«[100] or urban citizenship, its promised guarantee of a ›right to rights‹ to everyone and de facto has become a defining property of the right to the city.[101]

(2) The right to the city is a struggle against the production of the city as an abstract space as well as an insistence on the primacy of use value over exchange value. Current urban development policies, however, seek to promote abstract space as the dominant mode of production by prioritizing, for example, capital investment strategies over the needs of urban dwellers; the re-modelling of city centers for the benefit of tourists and in the interest of marketing strategies; the construction of expensive flagship architectural projects; the cutting of funding for social expenditure; the eviction of settlements; the construction of gated communities; gentrification; discriminatory migration regimes; the privatization of public space; and/or the militarization and securitization of cities. Such developments are opposed by right to the city movements worldwide since they impose commodification instead of allowing a bottom-up production of commons.[102]

(3) As a collective right, the right to the city demands that urban citizens be able to participate in and appropriate the urban spaces in which they live. As such, the right to the city is not an individual or juridical right,[103] but »an ongoing and collective struggle by urban inhabitants to manage the city for themselves, without the state and without capitalism«.[104] According to this vision, urban citizens should occupy the centers of decision-making and develop their own forms of radical democracy from the bottom-up.[105] Such acts

98 Chatterjee, *The Politics of the Governed*; Chatterjee, *Displacement, Revolution, and the New Urban Condition*.

99 Branch and Mampilly, *Africa Uprising*.

100 Holston, *Insurgent Citizenship: Disjunctions of Democracy and Modernity in Brazil*.

101 Mayer, »The ›Right to the City‹ in Urban Social Movements,« 71; Purcell, »Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant,« 102.

102 Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to Urban Revolution*.

103 Fernandes explores the practical possibilities and experiences with translating the right to the city into juridical law in Brazil (Fernandes, »Constructing the ›Right to the City‹ in Brazil«).

104 Purcell, »The Right to the City: The Struggle for Democracy in the Urban Public Realm,« 311.

105 Daniel Mullis wrote his dissertation on how the right to the city as a concept can be compared to and effectively combined with the appeals for

of autogestion or self-governance would help to create an »opening towards the possible«.[106] It is in this sense that Lefebvre's right to the city is a »right to centrality«[107] and a »right to space« itself.[108]

Under the premise that use value should guide the production of (urban) space, the right to the city challenges capitalist and neo-liberal developments in urban planning with the aim of »fundamentally shifting control away from capital and the state and toward urban inhabitants.«[109] The urban commons can play a potentially significant role as a series of experimental sites for producing differential (urban) space, in which urban citizens and use value are privileged over the abstraction of space and an emphasis on exchange value.[110] Acts of autogestion give »primacy to use value«[111] and can be seen as a meaningful strategy towards realizing the utopian goal of producing differential rather than abstract spaces.

The right to the city is a concrete utopia. It presents a radical vision of emancipation[112] in the form of a multifaceted »cry and demand«[113] that has already been tested in a variety of contexts worldwide. Ultimately, the right to the city is understood in this work as a utopian appeal for all urban citizens to have access to a differential centrality. This means, above all, that all urban citizens – regardless of their race, class or gender – should be able to access urban centralities. However, the claim to a right to the city does not end here, but goes on to demand a transformation of urban centralities themselves from abstract spaces, in which access to centers of decision-making are reserved for a few in the global system, to differential centralities, in which urban inhabitants have the autonomy and power to decide over the (production of) the spaces that they use.

The utopian vision of a right to the city breaks with two main traditions in utopian thought: the portrayal of utopia as an island and the fantasy of technological utopias. In 1516, Thomas More depicted the

radical democracy made by Ernesto Laclau and Chantal Mouffe (Laclau and Mouffe, *Hegemonie Und Radikale Demokratie: Zur Dekonstruktion Des Marxismus*).

106 Lefebvre, »Theoretical Problems of Autogestion,« 150.

107 Lefebvre, *The Urban Revolution*, 194.

108 Schmid, »Henri Lefebvre, the Right to the City, and the New Metropolitan Mainstream,« 2012, 49.

109 Purcell, »Excavating Lefebvre: The Right to the City and Its Urban Politics of the Inhabitant,« 101 f.

110 David Harvey provides a detailed discussion of the role of the commons and the »scale question« (Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to Urban Revolution*.)

111 Lefebvre, »Theoretical Problems of Autogestion,« 148.

112 Lopes de Souza, »Which Right to Which City?«, 318 ff.

113 Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, 158.

classical utopia as an island of perfection far removed from any known place. The term is derived from the Greek »ou-topos«, which literally means »no-place« or »nowhere«, raising the question of whether such a »perfect world [can] be realized?«[114] The second common utopian representation involves »technological utopias«, in which technological innovations are seen as the means of creating a supposedly better world. This strand of utopian thought is historically connected to modernization narratives which claim that better tools and technologies will ultimately lead to a better life and society for all. Manuel Castells, who proclaims the internet as the driver of progress in his *Networks of Outrage and Hope*,[115] thus reiterates this technological utopian philosophy.

For Henri Lefebvre, like for many other Marxist scholars, utopian thinking is important.[116] However, his utopian vision of a right to the city is neither insular nor technological. Instead, Lefebvre follows in Ernst Bloch's tradition of »concrete utopias«.[117] Initially, this appears to be a contradiction in terms, not only because it goes against the old Greek meaning of the term but also because it presents utopias as tangible and material rather than idealistic. However, Lefebvre knowingly embraced these contradictions. As Eric Olin Wright explains his seminal work *Real Utopias* that utopian thinking is matters, because practices are »grounded in the belief that what is pragmatically possible is not fixed independently of our imaginations, but is itself shaped by our visions«.[118] I thus argue that the right to the city as concrete utopia has the potential to function as a ›guidebook for emancipation‹ offering important clues in developing the emancipatory potential of video activism in the early twenty-first century.

2.3 Interweaving the Digital Thread into the Urban Fabric

To design a conceptual framework that is able to describe the use of audio-visual repertoires of contention by urban social movements is the overall goal of this chapter. The previous section framed video activism

114 British Library. »Utopia«.
115 Castells, *Networks of Outrage and Hope*.
116 Examining the methodologies of three »proto-typical urban theorists« – Walter Benjamin, Manfred Tafuri and Lefebvre – Cunningham argues that Lefebvre sees in utopias an experimental framework which can be employed to practice »transduction« (Cunningham, 2010, »Triangulating Utopia: Benjamin, Lefebvre, Tafuri,« 270).
117 Bloch, *Geist der Utopie. 16*.
118 Wright, *Envisioning Real Utopias*, 6.

as a practice in urban space. The next section turns to digitalization as the second key dimension defining video activist practices in the current cycle of contestation. I will first introduce to the visions of techno-utopianism, before looking at three approaches critically questioning digitalization in its current form producing abstract space.

Techno-Utopianism and Techno-Determinism

> »Born form the marriage of counterculture idealism and Defense Department funding in the 1960s, the Internet had by 2002 morphed into a vast commercial and government surveillance platform. The goal of Tim Berners-Lee and Stewart Brand – to construct a new platform for democratic communication – had been co-opted by a new cadre of libertarian übermenschen, a group of men who believed that they had both the brilliance and the moral fortitude to operate outside the normal strictures of law and taxes.«[119]

Researchers repeatedly emphasized how »algorithmic ideologies« reproduce perspectives of Silicon Valley geeks and investors.[120] Racism, anti-poor policies, fragmentation of public opinion making, the creative destruction of journalism and tax evasion by corporate social media companies are some of its effects.[121] To discuss the role of Silicon Valley ideologies, the next section returns to the techno-utopian visions driving influential actors in the business. Techno-utopianism puts technological progress as the driver of social and political change. This means to disenfranchise political subjectivities and communities and ensure that individual man and their machineries gain control as Peter Thiel – a key figure in the digital tech world of Silicon Valley – puts it:

> »We are in a deadly race between politics and technology... The fate of our world may depend on the effort of a single person who builds or propagates the machinery of freedom that makes the world safe for capitalism.«[122]

119 Taplin, *Move Fast and Break Things. How Facebook, Google, and Amazon Cornered Culture and Undermined Democracy*, 85.

120 Mager, »Algorithmic Ideology.«

121 For example, Ruha Bejamin, describes vividly the various forms in which forms of structural racism are reiterated and in some cases intensified through contemporary forms of digitialization dominated by powerful corporations and their technologies (Benjamin, *Race after Technology*).

122 Peter Thiel in: Taplin, *Move Fast and Break Things. How Facebook, Google, and Amazon Cornered Culture and Undermined Democracy*, 75.

The »freedom« that Thiel dreams of is embedded in libertarian thought with Ayn Rand at the forefront of envisioning and her philosophy of Objectivism. Rand has been described by the Ayn Rand Institute as a writer who »spearhead a cultural renaissance that will reverse the anti-reason, anti-individualism, anti-freedom, anti-capitalist trends in today's culture.«[123] Rand's ideology had a »significant impact on politics and on business in the latter twentieth and early twenty-first centuries« particularly on leaders in the Silicon Valley such as Tesla's Eon Musk, Facebook's Marck Zuckerberg or Google's Eric Schmidt.[124] Ayn Rand ideas matter in Silicon Valley. As Jodi Dean observed as early as 2009, the ideological neoliberal visions – based on techno-utopianism and libertarian thinking – provide the frame to legitimize the concentration of power and wealth in the hands of a few:

> »Rhetoric of access, participation, and democracy work ideologically to secure the technological infrastructure of neoliberalism, an invidious and predatory politico-economic project that concentrates assets and power in the hands of the very, very rich, devastating the planet and destroying the lives of billions of people.«[125]

This global concentration poses major challenge for bottom-up video activism and emancipatory struggles. The utopian visions that key actors like Peter Thiel drive are not only disseminated by funding the Ayn Rand Institute, but are very practically being developed. Silicon Valley elites are in fact working on exclusive utopias – technologized and artificial islands – that appear as today's version of a five-hundred-year-old utopian vision: Thomas More's island of utopia.[126] In fact the Seasteading Institute actively plans and designs high-tech islands for the superfluous.[127]

Exploitation and Commodification in Digital Capitalism

The internet – or, more specifically, Web 2.0 – has yet to be sufficiently theorized, as Daniel Trottier and Christian Fuchs contend: »Thus far, social theory foundations of social media activity have been underrepresented

123 Homepage of Ayn Rand Institute in: Katz, »Reimagining a Cultural Labor Movement through Education,« 31.
124 Murname, *Ayn Rand and the Posthuman. The Mind-Made Future*, 82.
125 Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 23.
126 At the beginning of the sixteenth century, Thomas More, published an essay that describes a ›perfect‹ island where his ideals of justice, peace and the ›good life‹ were realized (More, *Utopia*).
127 The visions inscribed into Seasteading appear as a technologized and depoliticized version of Moro's original ideas (Seasteading Institute, »Website«).

in scholarly literature.«[128] Building a conceptualization of digital capitalism through a Marxist perspective, Fuchs aims to decipher the functioning of social media corporations. For him, theories about Web 2.0[129] that reduce social media functions to a purely cultural dimension are blind to the political and economic impact of social media corporations.

Whereas Henry Jenkins characterizes Web 2.0 as a site for unlimited connection and participation as part of a new »convergence culture«, Fuchs and Trottier argue that social media networks offer only a »pseudo-voice« and »pseudo-participation«.[130] In fact, the privatization of the internet through social media corporations commodifies personal data and exploits user participation as a form of free labor:[131]

> »An Internet that is dominated by corporations that accumulate capital by exploiting and commodifying users can never, in the theory of participatory democracy, be participatory and the cultural expressions of it cannot be expressions of participation.«[132]

Fuchs identifies the dominant operations of social media as commodification and exploitation, which stand in direct contrast to the bottom-up politics demanded by the right to the city. With this critical reading, he positions himself in opposition to the »evangelist[s] of social media«,[133] who propagate the idea that social media is a site of participation, democratization and freedom without mentioning how digital networks reproduce capitalist relations and corresponding socio-economic asymmetries.

128 Fuchs and Trottier, *Social Media, Politics and the State. Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube*, 48.

129 For a critique of the term Web 2.0 – coined by Tim O'Reilly in 2005 – and the discourses about participation of the Web 2.0, see: Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 4–6; Webster, *The Marketplace of Attention*, 152–53.).

130 Fuchs and Trottier, *Social Media, Politics and the State. Protests, Revolutions, Riots, Crime and Policing in the Age of Facebook, Twitter and YouTube*, 27.

131 The »innovative ways« of internet exploitation have consequences beyond the realm of online activity. For example, the internet-driven »gig economy« has impacted entire economic sectors, as witnessed for instance in Uber's challenge to the taxi industry (Graham and Shaw, »Towards Another World of Gig Work«).

132 Fuchs, *Social Media: A Critical Introduction*, 65.

133 Gladwell, »Small Change. Why the Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted.«

Communicative Capitalism

Jodi Dean agrees with Fuchs on »the necessity of analysing digital media in terms of capitalism and its categories of labour, production, and value rather than, say, bourgeois categories of information«.[134] However, her concept of communicative capitalism takes the critique of digital networks a step further. Dean posits that communicative capitalism, through its »inclusion and participation in information, entertainment and communication technologies«, absorbs its critics and strengthens neoliberal hegemonies.[135]

Drawing on Giorgio Agamben's »alienation of language« and Slavoj Žižek's »post-politics«, Dean identifies a »strange merging of democracy and capitalism«.[136] Communicative capitalism »prevents politicization« as »real antagonism or dissent is foreclosed«.[137] The digitalized network functions as a system of communication which places the exchange value of messages over their use value; content thus becomes irrelevant in communicative capitalism. What matters is that circulation flows and messages are being exchanged, although they do not necessarily need to attract a response. In this virtual environment, communication serves no goal other than the act of communication itself. The result is an inevitable move towards depoliticization.

In Dean's »psychoanalytic Marxism«,[138] participation does not only produce expropriated surplus value for social media corporations, but it is also driven by a fantasy of participation. To articulate political opinions online nurtures our »underlying fantasy wherein technology functions as a fetish covering over our impotence and helping us understand ourselves as active«.[139] Joseph Schwartz's criticism of Dean's communicative capitalism model as overly theoretical[140] inspired her to respond by exploring potentially revolutionary subjects in times of communicative capitalism.[141] Dean is not trapped in a techno-determinism that would lead her to assume that resistance is entirely

134 »Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics,« 172.
135 Dean, *Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies*, 2.
136 Dean, »Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics,« 55.
137 Dean, »Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics,« 56–57.
138 Schwartz, »Review: Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies.«
139 Dean, »Communicative Capitalism: Circulation and the Foreclosure of Politics,« 62.
140 Schwartz, »Review: Democracy and Other Neoliberal Fantasies.«
141 Dean,»Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics.«

impossible, but she sees the potential for ruptures in the agency of collectives rather than through the acts of individuals. In contrast to the dominant narrative promoted by communicative capitalism, she argues that politicization cannot be an individual act but »requires political organization«.[142] To sustain contestation beyond the moment when crowds start to dissolve and »people go home«[143] has become an increasingly urgent challenge that must be achieved while resisting the mechanisms of communicative capitalism.[144] Dean shows how social media, as capitalist media, co-opt resistance, instead of rejecting it, by trapping it in exploitative relations. Corporate social medias' promised participation in effect preempts emancipatory visions as Jodi Dean argues.

Digital Colonialism

Nick Couldry and Ulises Mejias argue that we are currently witnessing a large-scale dispossession of individuals through a process they call »data colonialism«.[145] For the authors, who consider colonialism and capitalism to have always been complementary movements, data colonialism is not a metaphor:[146]

> »That frame is colonialism, used here not as a mere metaphor, nor as an echo or simple continuation of historic forms of territorial colonialism, but to refer to a new form of colonialism distinctive of the 21st century: data colonialism. Data colonialism combines the predatory extractive practices of historical colonialism with the abstract quantification methods of computing.«[147]

142 Dean, »Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics,« 182.

143 Dean, »Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics,« 176.

144 Dean strongly rejects Hardt and Negri's proposition of the multitude as a revolutionary subject, because »[c]omplex networks are not the horizontal, cooperative and autonomous forms that Hardt and Negri imagine«. (Dean, »Critique or Collectivity? Communicative Capitalism and the Subject of Politics,« 181.)

145 Couldry and Mejias, *The Costs of Connection: How Data Is Colonizing Human Life and Appropriating It for Capitalism*.

146 Data colonialism as a metaphor is discussed by Thatcher, O'Sullivan and Mahmoudi, »Data Colonialism through Accumulation by Dispossession: New Metaphors for Daily Data.«

147 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism: Rethinking Big Data's Relation to the Contemporary Subject,« 1.

Data colonialism naturalizes the extraction of personal data and redefines social relations.[148] Building on a »large amount of ideological work«, data has been defined as »the new oil« at events such as the World Economic Forum. Discursively constructing personal data as a resource that is »just there« in a »terra nullis« legitimizes its extraction in the form of data mining. The human, social and political costs of this extraction are depoliticized via the naturalization of dispossession and thus escape critical debate.[149] To the authors, data colonialism presents itself as »a new phase of colonialism that is deeply intertwined with the long-term development of capitalism«.[150]

At the heart of this process is »the abstracting force of the commodity«, which enables the transformation of »life processes into ›things‹ with value«.[151] All actions and relations are turned into data points that can be collected, compared and exchanged. Consequently, the commodification of »the whole domain of social life and individual life too«[152] strengthens the power of global capitalism. The imposition of exchange value into all spheres of social life points to the unrestricted expansion and legitimation of these ›colonial‹ endeavors.[153] Data colonialism is characterized as invasive:

> »In the hollowed out social world of data colonialism, data practices invade the space of the self by making tracking a permanent feature of life, expanding and deepening the basis on which human beings can exploit each other.«[154]

Drawing on the work of the sociologist Aníbal Quijano, Couldry and Mejias go on to suggest that »epistemological decolonization« presents a potential path out of data colonialist regimes, namely at the point when citizens start rejecting the idea that the translation of their everyday lives into data and the subsequent expropriation of their data traces is a »normal« or »rational« process and instead name it for what it is: »data colonialism«.[155]

148 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 5.
149 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 6.
150 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 4.
151 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 11.
152 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 10.
153 The use of the historically loaded term ›colonialism‹ as a conceptual category is undoubtedly controversial. Invoking ›colonialism‹ as more than an analogy or metaphor requires further discussion, which differentiates specific historical experiences of European colonial rule on the one side, and the colonization as a concept – see for example Mudimbe, *The Invention of Africa. Gnosis, Philosophy, and the Order of Knowledge*.
154 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 15.
155 Couldry and Mejias, »Data Colonialism,« 18.

Fig. 5 The Revolution Will Not Be Tweeted

Weaving Abstractions and Sharpening Asymmetries

The three approaches to characterizing the digital thread that I have presented above stand in stark contrast to the celebration of the internet as a tool for participation, democracy and liberation. Fuchs, Dean, and Couldry and Mejias write of digital exploitation and commodification, communicative capitalism, and data colonialism respectively to demonstrate the political and economic relations that these processes (re-)produce. For example, participation through social media becomes a form of »pseudo-participation« that precludes users from genuine participation in decision-making processes as well as from ownership of the platforms. As content is abstracted into an exchange value, participation is reduced to delivering raw material in the form of data to the major tech corporations.[156]

These methods of dispossessing users of their personal data and integrating this into exchange markets is what Lefebvre called the production of abstract space. Whereas Lefebvre referred to urban planners as the drivers of the abstraction of space, Shaw and Graham see

156 These critical perspectives should not obscure the potential for resistance to forms of digitalization driven by private corporations embedded in capitalist structures. Wikipedia and a number of other online projects have proven that digitalization has great potential to grow the digital commons. Particularly as information is not being consumed in the process of digital dissemination, there is a great capacity to multiply information and consequently making them accessible to vast audiences at low costs.

information and communication technologies (ICTs) as fundamental to these new means of abstracting urban space:

> »[T]oday there is a newly dominant source and mediation of such abstract space that permeates the city: the flows of representations produced and mediated through digital information which now contribute to a densely digitally layered urban environment.«[157]

Facebook, Google, Apple and other tech corporations have secured dominant positions in the global digitalization race, which they use to drive digitalization towards the production of abstract space. Instead of fostering emancipatory opportunities, they entrench exploitation, impede real participation, and increase socio-economic asymmetries. This is not to say, however, that the digital thread could not be woven differently. The final section of this chapter thus asks what it could mean to ›digitalize the right to the city‹? Conceptually identifying the fractures in the system enables us to understand where resistance, residues and the rest can be injected to promote disruption and how video activist practices can potentially aid the development of ›concrete utopias‹.

2.4 Digitalizing the Right to the City?

Shaw and Graham argue for a merging of Lefebvre's »right to Information« with his right to the city to establish an »informational Right to the City«. They write of a »densely digitally layered urban environment«,[158] a concept which is similar to what I have labeled as ›threads of digitalization woven into the urban fabric‹. Reflecting on their short case study of Google, Shaw and Graham insist that »further developing the concept of an informational right to the city is imperative in order to understand exactly how power is reproduced through code, content, control and the urbanization of information«.[159] In the final section of this chapter, I will ask what it means to digitalize the right to the city in relation to video activism.

The aim of the chapter was to conceptualize how urban movements ›occupy‹ the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹ simultaneously and to position video activism in this theoretical framework. After arguing that we can interpret protests by urban social movements as resistance to the production of abstract space, the question remains as to what role video activist practices play in these struggles.

157 Shaw and Graham, »An Informational Right to the City? Code, Content, Control, and the Urbanization of Information,« 908.
158 Shaw and Graham, »An Informational Right to the City?«, 908.
159 Shaw and Graham, »An Informational Right to the City?«, 922.

›Repertoires of contention‹ is a phrase coined by Charles Tilly to explain the historical shift in the tools and forms of contestation in Great Britain in the period from 1758 until 1834:

> »[T]he word repertoire identifies a limited set of routines that are learned, shared, and acted out through a relatively deliberate process of choice. Repertoires are learned cultural creations, but they do not descend from abstract philosophy or take shape as an act of political propaganda; they emerge from struggle.«[160]

I contend that video activist practices are audio-visual repertoires of contention employed by urban social movements in their struggles for differential centralities online as well as offline. Tilly compares repertoires of contention to jazz improvisations: both rely on learned crafts but they are both employed in ways which differ according to the circumstances and without following a predefined script.[161] As with music, repertoires »always belong to sets of contending actors, not single actors«.[162] As a repertoire of contention, video activism has its historical roots in 1970s community video experiments and thus predates Web 2.0 and the era of digitalization. Nevertheless, its development does correspond closely with earlier technological innovations, such as the first portopak cameras in the late 1960s.

A number of scholars borrow Tilly's concept to identify »digital repertoire[s] of contention«[163]. However, as Laer and Aelst observe, »a wide digital action repertoire will not, and probably never will, be able to replace traditional forms of activism and face-to-face communication«.[164] Street protests and direct action continue to matter; rather than replacing existing repertoires of contention, online tools usually complement practices of resistance, apart from a few exceptions such as hacktivism.[165] As such, my strategy is to approach the practices of video activism as audio-visual repertoires of contention which, in their current form, are strongly shaped by processes of digitalization.

Three properties of video as audio-visual medium – whether it is being distributed digitally or not – are particularly relevant for urban social movements: accessibility, affects and authenticity. Accessibility refers to the phenomenological quality of videos as a medium. In contrast to texts, videos do not require literacy; moreover, they outperform textual sources in their capacity to attract attention. Second, videos have a

160 Tilly, »Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834,« 264.
161 Tilly, »Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834,« 265.
162 Tilly, »Contentious Repertoires in Great Britain, 1758–1834,« 268.
163 Rolfe, »Building an Electronic Repertoire of Contention«; Earl and Kimport, *Digitally Enabled Social Change. Activism in the Internet Age*.
164 Laer and Aelst, »Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires,« 1164.
165 For example: Rucht, »Protest Movements and Their Media Usages«; Laer and Aelst, »Internet and Social Movement Action Repertoires.«

powerful affective dimension, meaning that their audio-visual elements evoke strong emotions. This is a particularly relevant characteristic in the context of political mobilization, since anger, outrage and hope are important catalysts for political action. Finally, as Rasza asserts, there is often a high degree of public trust that videos will provide an authentic account of the events which they document: »Many appropriations of the technology, including those by human rights advocates, rest on the theory that ›seeing is believing‹ and understand video to be uniquely suited to forms of truth telling such as witnessing, documenting and reporting.«[166]

The major advantage as well as chief paradox of video activism is how it oscillates between resistance to and acceptance of the hegemonies of neoliberal urbanization and communicative capitalism. While social media platforms such as Facebook drive processes of abstraction, they can also – at least temporarily – be appropriated as tools for bottom-up political mobilization. Although this contradiction between video activists' emancipatory visions and their dependence on capitalist social media corporations does not disappear when they appropriate the abstract spaces of social media, it may help to create moments of rupture such as in Rio de Janeiro in 2013. The polysemy of audio-visual media gives videos a particular power. However, in the long-term interests of emancipation, the struggle against neoliberal urbanization will need to incorporate a struggle against digital capitalism, communicative capitalism and data colonialism.

Does it make sense to write of ›digitalizing the right to the city‹ for a study that examines video activism? Not if ›digitalizing the right to the city‹ means thinking of video activism as an online practice ›out of space‹; when Manuel Castells describes »the Internet social networks as […] spaces of autonomy, largely beyond the control of governments and corporations«, this is neither an empirically nor conceptually convincing proposition. The practices of video activism show how the ›streets‹ and the ›net‹ are mutually infiltrating each other in a dialectical movement. The process of weaving this digital-urban fabric is driven on the one side by dominant tech corporations and on the other side by bottom-up videographers appropriating the newly available audio-visual repertoires.

The right to the city does offer a profound conceptual framework for interpreting video activism as an emancipatory practice as I argue: first, it spatializes video activism; second, it offers tools for empirical analysis; and, third, it presents an emancipatory vision that can guide the practices of video activism.

(1) To interpret video activism through a conceptual framework that builds on Henri Lefebvre and the right to the city literature means reading video activism both in the spaces which it produces and

166 Razsa, »Beyond ›Riot Porn‹: Protest Video and the Production of Unruly Subjects,« 496.

in those in which it is produced in order to spatialize video activist practices. This offers a rich theoretical grounding from which to consider the simultaneity of two key repertoires of contemporary movements: their occupation of physical spaces and their use of social media communication channels. To spatialize video activist practices enables to embed them in the specific contexts in which they emerge without losing sight of the globally acting corporate social media networks.

(2) Methodologically, the right to the city encourages the use of spatialized video activist practices as »tool[s] for the analysis of society«.[167] As with Lefebvre's oeuvre as a whole, the right to the city offers two signposts towards a methodological analysis of video activism: its focus on practices and its dialectical transduction between theory and practice. The first entails going beyond a discourse analysis of activist videos to examine how the contexts in which videos are produced shape their outcomes. Second, the permanent tension between theory and practice is tackled in this work by bringing the empirical observations about video activist practices in conversation with the wider conceptual debates on notions such as urban citizenship, commons and autogestion.

(3) The right to the city offers an emancipatory vision that can give direction to video activist practices. Emancipatory struggles for a right to the city, as manifested in the last wave of protests faced the twofold challenge of having to overcome the constraints of neoliberal urbanism and communicative capitalism. Neoliberal urbanism works towards the production of abstract spaces through land speculation, gentrification and the militarization of whole neighborhoods as well as by setting cities off against each other in competition for ›world-class‹ status or hosting rights to mega-events. Communicative capitalism abstracts spaces by mining all social relations as points of data to be exploited and commodified. It is striking how both urbanization and digitalization are dominated by processes of abstraction, in which exchange values invariably trump use values. As a model to counter abstraction, the right to the city presents a horizon of an emancipatory concrete utopia grounded in a profound theorization as well as practical experimentations by urban movements worldwide.

Video activism is not a ›concrete utopia‹ itself, but it may be a major tool in struggles for the right of the city as a radically democratized form of bottom-up city making. Visualizing urban struggles, video activism has the potential to become a utopian practice reconnecting the streets and the net in a more democratic, just and solidary manner.

167 Lefebvre, *The Production of Space*, 34.