

## BOOK REVIEW ESSAYS

# Latin American Urbanism after a Right to the City

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This essay reviews the following works:

**Learning from Bogotá: Pedagogical Urbanism and the Reshaping of Public Space.** By Rachel Berney. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2017. Pp. 190. \$40.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781477311042.

**Spectacular Modernity: Dictatorship, Space, and Visuality in Venezuela, 1948–1958.** By Lisa Blackmore. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2017. Pp. ix + 268. \$28.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780822964384.

**São Paulo: A Graphic Biography/Una biografía gráfica.** By Felipe Correa. Austin: University of Texas Press, 2018. Pp. 7 + 336. \$65.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9781477316276.

**Shaping Terrain: City Building in Latin America.** Edited by René Davids. Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2016. Pp. xii + 261. \$79.95 hardcover. ISBN: 9780813062679.

**El Mall: The Spatial and Class Politics of Malls in Latin America.** By Arlene Dávila. Berkeley: University of California Press, 2016. Pp. vii + 215. \$29.95 paperback. ISBN: 9780520286856.

**Improvised Cities: Architecture, Urbanization, and Innovation in Peru.** By Helen Gyger. Pittsburgh, PA: University of Pittsburgh Press, 2019. Pp. xvii + 438. \$55.00 hardcover. ISBN: 9780822945369.

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## How a Right to the City Changed Latin American Urbanism

Latin American urbanism is shaped by physical geography, colonization, and informality. Yet it is also influenced by a right to the city, or “the right to change ourselves by changing the city.”<sup>1</sup> The right to the city arose from social movements against the inequitable conditions of cities formed under conditions of capitalism, building up to the 1967 Paris riots. At that time, French sociologist Henri Lefebvre cited a right to the city in his seminal text *Le droit à la ville*, which called for an urbanism that would radically transform how and where people live in cities—particularly in neighborhoods overlooked by modernist, functional planning regimes.<sup>2</sup> A right to the city was an invitation, then, to not only reject globally dominant paradigms but to reconceptualize shantytowns, slums, and tenements as strategic fronts for constructing an alternative spatial politics within the *actually existing* city—often unplanned and irregular.<sup>3</sup> Few contexts were as receptive as Latin America, where in the wake of mid-twentieth-century mass urbanization, cities were morphing into large agglomerations and some megacities, of which approximately 30 percent are constructed informally. There, the influence of a right to the city can be observed in a range of physical forms, such as informal environments that are punctuated with recreational programs, infill multifamily housing, and schools designed to adapt to the surrounding neighborhood. These projects result, in part,

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<sup>1</sup> David Harvey, “The Right to the City,” *New Left Review*, 53 (2008): 23–40.

<sup>2</sup> Henri Lefebvre, *Le droit à la ville* (Paris: Anthropos, 1967).

<sup>3</sup> Neil Brenner and Nik Theodore, “Cities and the Geographies of ‘Actually Existing Neoliberalism,’” *Antipode* 33, no. 3 (2002): 349–379.

from the right to the city's institutionalization amid transitions from military dictatorships to democracy. For example, Brazil's eponymous 2001 Statute of the City sought to establish the legal conditions for a right to the city, with planning boundaries called Zones of Special Social Interest (Zonas Especiais de Interesse Social, ZEIS), and the land use tool *solo criado* (created soil) for leveraging new development to redistribute resources from high- to low-income neighborhoods.<sup>4</sup>

Notwithstanding achievements, rights-based urban agendas are increasingly vulnerable to development pressure and even total hijack by special interest groups.<sup>5</sup> First, community organizations drawn into so-called participatory processes are often subordinated to private real estate ventures, reducing their service to the urban poor and very poor.<sup>6</sup> Second, projects constructed to improve low-income neighborhoods have been stalled, and even entirely aborted, amid alternating political cycles, corruption, and recent economic decline—leading to ever-deteriorating conditions. Third, national mass housing programs launched to improve access to shelter are actually exacerbating sociospatial segregation.<sup>7</sup> These are not conditions emblematic of a right to the city, but they are urban realities which the six volumes reviewed here contextualize with narratives that lead up to, parallel, and depart from Latin America's social urbanism turn.

The arc of this trajectory begins with texts by cultural historian Lisa Blackwell (*Spectacular Modernity: Dictatorship, Space, and Visuality in Venezuela, 1948–1958*) and architect René Davids (*Shaping Terrain: City Building in Latin America*), prehistories of movements toward a right to the city: the authoritarian legacies and physical geographies that distributed cities across Latin America's vast terrains, and their cultural hybridization relative to European modernism. Architectural historian Helen Gyger (*Improvised Cities: Architecture, Urbanization, and Innovation in Peru*) and urbanist Rachel Berney (*Learning from Bogotá: Pedagogical Urbanism and the Reshaping of Public Space*) introduce programs for reshaping urban form to support a right to the city. Introducing new geographies of the social, anthropologist Arlene Dávila (*El Mall: The Spatial and Class Politics of Malls in Latin America*) and architect Felipe Correa (*São Paulo: A Graphic Biography*) highlight that the decline of rights-based agendas is giving rise to large urbanisms that engage social experience on different terms. Conditions before, during, and after a right to the city problematize Latin American urbanism's historic framing as only geographic, colonial, and informal, and provide insights for structuring the future of a right to the city.

## Before a Right to the City

Blackwell's monograph *Spectacular Modernity* analyzes the construction and representation of modernist architecture by post–World War II dictatorial governments. Her narrative is punctuated by a robust set of archival photographs and reproductions that highlight how multimedia facilitated nuanced forms of political suppression. Blackwell concentrates on a prolific period of authoritarian-aesthetic reciprocity in Venezuela, namely the Marcos Pérez Jiménez dictatorship (1952–1958), and argues that the interrelated tactics of architectural production and visualization dominated citizens long after the dictatorship's decline. These processes gave rise to a “spectacular modernity” that involved built artifacts and powerful propaganda designed to project Venezuela as a global military front capable of “dazzling displays of progress” (20). As evidence of this progress, “document-monuments” of housing, schools, and trade union centers became “metonymic relays of name and form that connected inaugural ruptures to the materialization of modernity” (43). The adaptability of the colonial grid ensured that new buildings could always be superseded by larger forms. For example, Raul Villanueva's Reurbanización El Silencio plaza (1949) was succeeded by the grander Centro Simon Bolivar twin towers, which extended historical grid blocks to honor, and instrumentalize, the transition from *primeira modernidade* (first modernity) to *plena modernidade* (full modernity) (12).

<sup>4</sup> Edísio Fernandes, “Constructing a Right to the City in Brazil,” *Social Legal Studies* 16 (2007): 212; Raquel Rolnik, “Democracy on the Edge: Limits and Possibilities in the Implementation of an Urban Reform Agenda in Brazil,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 35, no. 2 (2011): 239–255; Abigail Friendly, “The Right to the City: Theory and Practice in Brazil,” *Planning Theory and Practice* 14, no. 2 (2013): 158–179.

<sup>5</sup> Jeroen Klink and Rosana Denaldi, “On Urban Reform, Rights, and Planning Challenges in the Brazilian Metropolis,” *Planning Theory* 15, no. 4 (2016): 402–417; Ermínia Maricato, “The Future of Global Peripheral Cities,” *Latin American Perspectives* 44, no. 2 (2016): 18–37; Abigail Friendly and Kristine Stiphany, “Paradigm or Paradox? The ‘Cumbersome Impasse’ of the Participatory Turn in Brazilian Urban Planning,” *Urban Studies* 56, no. 2 (2018): 1–17.

<sup>6</sup> Alejandra Reyes, “Housing Access and Governance: The Influence and Evolution of Housing Organizations in Mexico City,” *Cities* 74 (2018): 327–333.

<sup>7</sup> Kristine M. Stiphany and Peter M. Ward, “Autogestão in an Era of Mass Social Housing: The Case of Brazil's Minha Casa Minha Vida Entidades Programme,” *International Journal of Housing Policy* 19, no. 3 (2019): 311–336. <https://doi.org/10.1080/19491247.2018.1540739>.

Along this trajectory, Blackwell notes that the “spectral presence” of large-scale productions became a fundamental dimension of modernism under dictatorial regimes. Initially, governments consolidated power through isolated building projects; however, they adopted larger shapes and sizes whose persistent relevance suggests that “the correlation of built space to progress still holds sway over political discourses in Venezuela. Their reappearance in public debates also demonstrates that the political conditions of dictatorship are apt to be forgotten so the ideal of building modernity can be preserved intact” (213). Thus to resuscitate the regime’s diminishing political persuasion in the late 1950s, the megaproject El Helicoide was launched as symbolic and practical “twofold spectacle, staging consumer culture and industrial development as the two faces of Venezuelan modernity” (204). Its tiered form reified the domination of pre-Columbian cultures and the regime’s own engineering feats to reconfigure large terrains in the image of power. Yet these ambitions were never to be; El Helicoide’s immense scale precluded completion, and vacancy over decades hastened its conversion into a prison. Modernist relics that survive their authoritarian progenitors represent a minority share of urban building stock. Yet such assets could be leveraged toward new modes of cultural production and adaptive building reuse for large contemporary programs such as housing and recreation.

Alternatively, Davids’s *Shaping Terrain* examines the physical geographies that form at the nexus of architecture, landscape, and the circulation of continental modernism. With one of the world’s most diverse and dramatic geographies, Latin America is shaped by five million square kilometers of Amazon rainforest, the Andes mountain range along the Western South American coast, and northern territories swept by the Sonoran and related desert systems along the US-Mexico border. In his edited volume, Davids argues that this geography is the medium from which cities are made and which has engendered critical changes in architectural production. The volume is organized in three sections: “Buildings, Terrain, and Form”; “Cities and Water”; and “Hills, Infrastructure, and Social Order.” Each section includes essays by the editor in collaboration with others, with the exception of Edward Burian’s stand-alone chapter. Chapter 1 examines modernism’s diverse hybridizations relative to large monumental projects. The reader observes in Mexico the forms, murals, and spaces through which the Universidad Nacional Autónoma de México drew from its pre-Hispanic history to project higher education as the progenitor of a new “Mexicanness” (32). Conversely, Panama’s Universidad de Panama embraced continental modernism through classic elements: the superblock, *brise soleils*, generous orthogonal walkways, and a central organizing library. Latin America’s reception to modernism is further discussed in chapters 4 and 5, however from the ambivalent perspective of Brazil. This is because, as Fernando Lara has previously argued, the country’s political economic conditions uniquely reconciled the modern and vernacular—evident in how the Catacumbas and Pedregulho housing projects feature Le Corbusier’s five points and “resemble aqueducts and retain characteristics typical of Portuguese colonial urbanism” (86). Still following Lara, such hybridizations evidence why, despite dominant colonial paradigms, Latin American modernism remains in perpetual construction or, “ever avant, never arrière” (ever in front, never behind).<sup>8</sup>

Latin American cities are characterized by these cultural juxtapositions, whose physical forms continue and drastically interrupt existing colonial grids. These physical negotiations are influenced by successive administrative cycles yet also stem from biophysical systems; this is the focus of Edward Burian’s chapter about environmentally responsive architectural interventions in Mexico City. Burian traces the promotion of ecological management techniques that challenge dualities such as city/nature and developed/developing. Instead, Burian foregrounds design reciprocities as an “opportunity to rethink the interrelationships of urbanization and infrastructure, as well as anticipate the possibilities of the city’s future development” (104). To take one of Burian’s references, Alberto Kalach proposed to reconstitute Mexico City’s lakes into recreational areas for cleansing air and expanding access to social services for residents of informal settlements.<sup>9</sup> Across Latin America, efforts to upgrade informal environments with physical projects have been ongoing since the 1980s, when municipalities adopted global “context sensitive” development policies,

<sup>8</sup> Fernando Luiz Lara, “One Step Back, Two Steps Forward: The Maneuvering of the Brazilian Avant Garde,” *Journal of Architectural Education* 55, no. 4 (2002): 211–219; Luiz E. Carranza and Fernando Luiz Lara, *Modern Architecture in Latin America: Art, Technology, and Utopia* (Austin: University of Texas Press, 2014).

<sup>9</sup> See Nabor Carrillo’s 1966 Proyecto Texcoco, which proposed that Mexico City’s lakes act as a network of natural detention zones for assimilating social and environmental concerns. See also Marcos Boldarini’s Parque Linear Cantinho do Céu and Base Urbana’s Parque Linear Sapé, both in São Paulo.

and in some cases participatory practices, as part of a rights-based agenda.<sup>10</sup> Although the outcomes vary spatially across cities and even within communities, their attempted synthesis is presented across several chapters. Chapter 11, for example, highlights the case of Rio de Janeiro's famous slum-upgrading project Favela Bairro. Davids extends allied scholarship to demonstrate that upgrading's premise of integrating the informal and formal cities ultimately led to greater divisions and few benefits to residents.<sup>11</sup> As elsewhere, over the course of being upgraded, slums evolved from being illegal and invisible to being designed. However, following construction they often remain in limbo; many residents never receive legal title (the necessity of which has been debated elsewhere), which then generates different development pressures.<sup>12</sup> On the basis of these and other concerns, the third section calls into question the role of rights-based interventions for concretely improving housing prospects and urban livability for marginalized populations.

### Materializing a Right to the City

Such is the focus of Gyger's *Improvised Cities* and Berney's *Learning from Bogotá*, texts that reorient discourse from specific design interventions to the prolonged social struggles that coalesce amid conditions of urban transformation. Both volumes move beyond well-rehearsed endorsements of slum upgrading, bringing needed critical perspectives about the technologies and politics of spatial coproduction among civic, public, and third-sector actors.

In *Improvised Cities*, Gyger examines aided self-help. Aided self-help is an incremental housing development model premised on state-constructed "core" houses that residents adapt and extend over time and as resources permit. Gyger draws on a highly innovative period of aided self-help in Peru (1960–1980), when architects and anthropologists studied how home-construction processes evolved in relation to circumstances after the designation of lots and core houses. The blurred lines between sanctioned and unsanctioned forms of housing production generated spillover effects—namely displacement—that were exacerbated by state withdrawal and global liberalization. Gyger traces the trajectory of a model that builds physical artifacts yet, as she argues, fails to construct the scaffold for connecting residents to broader channels of social mobility. Gyger argues that these challenges reflect the true reality (and elusiveness) of a right to the city.

Gyger's volume is organized around key phases of Peru's aided self-help experience, state efforts to identify, engage, and manage *barriadas* (squatter settlements) amid Lima's rapid urbanization (1954–1958); the response of (and change within) the discipline of architecture in the late 1950s; and the formation of a global model (and its export by international agencies) in the late 1960s. Gyger examines the tension that arises amid any effort to formalize the informal; however, she does so uniquely through the architects, housing designs, and community plans of the PREVI housing program (1969–1975). She also reveals the perspective of a lesser-known informant, Peruvian anthropologist José Matos Mar, whose study of Lima's Huarochirí Project influenced the application of ethnographic techniques and analytical methods to slum regeneration, and architect John Turner's subsequent efforts to institutionalize aided self-help (78). These disciplinary cross-pollinations substantiate Gyger's claim that "Peru and self-help housing—viewed as a marginal location and a marginal mode of practice—became legible to the larger world of architecture discourse" (95). Critiques of Turner and self-help have been widely covered.<sup>13</sup> However, it is important to reassert the persistence of projects that reproduce inequity by requiring the poor to physically build their own housing and communities—whether a core house that residents incrementally expand, or a housing development that is abandoned by an ousted state and/or bankrupt private developer.<sup>14</sup> These conditions require consideration of urbanism's contemporary aspirations: Is it merely an extension of architecture? Or is it a unique epistemology for investigating urban transformation amid conflicting building cultures?<sup>15</sup> Gyger's volume is refreshing for leaving these questions open-ended, and critiquing a process that is often

<sup>10</sup> Peter M. Ward, "Self-Help Housing Ideas and Practice in the Americas," in *Planning Ideas That Matter: Livability, Territoriality, Governance, and Reflective Practice*, ed. Bishwapriya Sanyal, Lawrence J. Vale, and Christina D. Rosan (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2012), 283–310.

<sup>11</sup> Janice Perlman, *Favela: Four Decades of Living on the Edge* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Ananya Roy, "Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71, no. 2 (2005): 147–158.

<sup>12</sup> Ann Varley, "Private or Public: Debating the Meaning of Tenure Regularization," *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 26, no. 3 (2002): 449–461.

<sup>13</sup> Peter M. Ward, ed., *Self-Help Housing: A Critique* (London: Mansell, 1982), 55–97.

<sup>14</sup> Rod Burgess, "Self-Help Housing Advocacy: A Curious Form of Radicalism. A Critique of the Work of John F. C. Turner," in *Self-Help Housing: A Critique*, ed. Peter M. Ward (London: Mansell Publishing Ltd., 1982), 55–97. Kristine Stiphany, "Mutirão: The Architecture of Agency," *Journal of Architectural Education* 73, no. 2 (2019): 258–260.

<sup>15</sup> Steven A. Moore considers similar questions as relates to public interest design in "Knowledge, Education, Power, and Production: Public Interest Design in North America," *Journal of Architectural Education* 71, no. 1 (2016): 46–56.



blindly celebrated within the design disciplines, a position made clear when Gyger plainly states that “aided self-help has often been more powerful as an idea than as a practice” (376).

In *Learning from Bogotá*, Berney extends the analysis of incremental community regeneration to encompass urban design as a platform for enabling a right to the city. Berney’s protagonists, rather than individual architects, are two intrepid “public space mayors” whose vision for a culture of civic urbanism was advanced through urban revitalization projects that were programmed for public education. Berney situates the story of the Enrique Penalosa and Antanas Mockus administrations amid government decentralization, and distinguishes their focus on civic processes from calls for an “urbanism of results,” common among neoliberal, urban management development paradigms.<sup>16</sup> She moves on to position the right to the city as a guide for what she coins “pedagogical urbanism.” The book is well structured, graphically compelling, and important for considering whether framing urbanism as a platform for knowledge production permits more fundamental solutions than pure formalism, and if so, what civic infrastructure is required.

Drawing on extensive fieldwork, Berney responds to the latter point with key sociotechnical tactics for pedagogical urbanism—distributed city making, everyday forms of occupation, integrative projects, and design as social justice. These are illustrated with maps, photographs, and drawings that thicken a mixed methodology, including a public-space survey (sample size = 465) of vendors, visitors, and public spaces of various size, shape, and scope; interviews with public officials responsible for urban development; and a content analysis that details how the public space mayors maintained a centralized vision by distributing new social spaces. These units of analysis inform a “public space typology” of pedagogical urbanism’s core elements, including equalizing networks, hybrid hubs, and civic spaces. Equalizing networks are transportation projects. Hybrid hubs use new programming to enhance public outreach, such as libraries that “were foundational for inscribing meaning into the landscape” of neighborhoods that were historically excluded from the city’s library system (91). The third, civic spaces, involve social programs for “citizen formation, increased interaction, and the learning and practice of civic behavior” through activities such as yoga, and mentorship of “civic guides” to direct community interests (64). In-depth project snapshots supplement Berney’s typology analysis with detailed accounts of how pedagogical urbanism expanded through Bogotá’s civic networks, “a visual demonstration of the [state] capacity to plan, design, and implement development projects to increase or maintain quality of life and place” (22). Taken together, aided self-help housing in Peru and Bogotá’s civic infrastructure aspired to communicate, through the design of the built environment, new ideas about citizenship. To be successful, these projects must be renovated in ways that enable low-income populations to continually participate in the small and large processes that are changing contemporary cities.

### After a Right to the City

Yet given the magnitude of urbanization today, it is unlikely that small housing and slum-upgrading projects will be effective, because such approaches often fail to account for the links between human experience and global and historical conditions. Bridging this gap is the work of Arlene Dávila in her book *El Mall: The Spatial and Class Politics of Shopping Malls in Latin America*, and of Felipe Correa in *São Paulo: A Graphic Biography*. Building on years of interdisciplinary fieldwork, both introduce methods for mobilizing larger projects to provide space within which new socially oriented urbanisms might unfold.

Dávila’s volume is a deep ethnographic account of the mall, a program that is declining in North America but proliferating globally, particularly in Latin America. The study illuminates why this is the case, building on Dávila’s extensive scholarship on urban consumption in Colombian cities and identity marketing among the Latinx middle class. In this seventh text, Dávila focuses on sites that are entirely reconfigured to accommodate global capitalism. She demonstrates how, given the limitations of small urban regeneration, malls provide safety and confidence for emerging social groups to unite, certainly to buy clothing and other global wares, but also to act and protest in ways, and around issues, that are subject to abuse in the cities of today. El Mall’s reversal of conventional mall logic entails a building type whose physical isolation is generating new opportunities for social interaction.

How this occurs is revealed through nine chapters that are bifurcated by an image folio illustrative of El Mall’s real-time transformations: a poster that claims “Now, Bogotá is a city!”; photos depicting leading industry men gathered on a stage in Cancun; family-friendly exhibits deployed at the Centro Mayor mall; clothing designed to globalize and homogenize cut, color, and texture. There are ongoing conflicts between

<sup>16</sup> Vicente del Rio and William Siembieda, eds., *Contemporary Urbanism in Brazil: Beyond Brasília* (Gainesville: University Press of Florida, 2009).

global brands like Zara and displaced local commerce, and the politics of security guards and occupying “purchasers,” largely composed of students and middle-class groups who stage highly performative events, such as a “kissathon” among LGBTs in Santiago or Brazil’s *rolezinhos*, strolls by low-income youth through luxury malls (167). These occupations evidence the mall’s reception of new audiences, yet more alarmingly signal the narrowing of emerging democracies into “politics, policies, and ideologies that profit from income inequality” and that require “more than shopping mall politics to challenge them” (172). Dávila contends that these inclusionary and exclusionary dualities may be symptomatic of sociospatial segregation’s expansion in the contemporary city. Time will tell if El Mall’s scale can mobilize insurgencies that extend beyond its site boundaries. If Latin American urbanism reveals anything, it is that buildings formed under circumstances outside a right to the city often provide the most profound conditions for its ongoing renewal. Shown in **Figure 1**, Lina Bo Bardi’s SESC Pompeia (1986) in São Paulo is one example.

Distinct from the veterans of the Paulista school of architecture, Bardi designed SESC—a former ice factory—not to transform society but to create a new category of infrastructure that enhances the interface between people and cities.<sup>17</sup> This is the approach proposed by Correa in *São Paulo: A Graphic Biography*.



**Figure 1:** São Paulo’s SESC Pompéia Cultural Center, an adaptive reuse project designed by Lina Bo Bardi between 1977 and 1986. Photo by Kristine Stiphany.

<sup>17</sup> Eran Ben Joseph, *The Code of the City* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 2005).

Here, Correa argues that São Paulo's transition to a service-sector city requires a parallel transformation of its industrial infrastructure for social use and ecological regeneration. The relationship between traditional and emerging built environments is a central feature of Brazil's modernization, and certainly of São Paulo's expansion from Jesuit outpost to megacity over its 450-year history. As industry and now technology centers have clustered in distinct neighborhoods, Correa describes the geographical characteristics of these places and their relationship to politically motivated architecture and massive territorial expansion. As Claude Lévi-Strauss observed, the juxtapositions that result create a physical patchwork that supports "barbarism and decadence" yet commits to neither.<sup>18</sup>

Correa's interest is in how to physically reconfigure these patterns to generate new categories of urbanism. Across the volume's five chapters ("units"), Correa provides a catalog of archival images and original drawings for understanding architecture relative to surrounding contexts that are embraced (MMBB's Jardim Edite social housing), reconfigured (Oscar Niemeyer's Copan housing), or inverted (Ruy Ohtake's Heliópolis social housing). The first generous chapter ("Unit A") provides an exciting visual history of the mechanisms that shaped São Paulo's physical juxtapositions and clear boundaries between nature/city, formal/informal, rural/urban. As texts by Alexandre Delijaicov and Renato Anelli suggest, as these boundaries dissolve, the resulting hybrid conditions provide new contextual rationales for defining architecture's normative responsibilities in rapid-growth regions. Potential agendas are explored through a series of micro essays, namely Delijaicov's "The Art of the Collective Construction of Space," in which he defines a right to the city as "the right of all human beings to the urban infrastructure of environmental sanitation, urban mobility, and public transportation" (113), and, in response to the 2016 Zika outbreak, Marcia C. Castro's "Health Challenges and Opportunities in Urban Space," which is a call to design health into cities and adapt conventional health care services to multi-sector collaboration, community participation, and smart technologies.

Overall, the volume's texts suggest that São Paulo's highly irregular grid is an asset whose utility extends far beyond historicism. Correa substantiates this claim by presenting eight physical categories produced by São Paulo's unique urbanization, including "citadels," the "garden cities" Jardim America and Jardim Europa, "points" or high-rise towers, and finally vast and large industrial "warehouses" that provide the DNA through which to understand, and ultimately redevelop, the city. Detailed analytical drawings also emphasize the capacity of São Paulo's industrial grid to physically receive projects that support both ecological and architectural programs. This is the focus of Correa's final chapter, about the Arco do Tietê, a "constellation of design concepts (that) is meant to serve as an open-ended guide" (288) for reconfiguring existing urban infrastructures to augment connectivity and social mobility. The tool kit is applied to a proposal for a 42-kilometer section of São Paulo's ring river, as "only through the rescaling of mobility infrastructure and the diversification of urban programs can these post-industrial zones be given a new lease on life" (172). If this plan advances, it will be important to examine how proposed conditions vary relative to diverse settlement patterns along São Paulo's vast waterways.

Specifically, Correa's volume omits narratives that some may consider vital to any representation of São Paulo, namely the extent to which the poor are deeply vulnerable to displacement by any urban transformation, but particularly those related to water systems, along which the majority of Brazil's slums are located. Given that neither informality nor environmental management are Correa's areas of expertise and are widely considered elsewhere, the volume should be celebrated as a valuable provocation for São Paulo's most critical development conundrum, which is how to position the city as conserving of hydrological systems for perpetuity, while redeveloping adjacent industrial tracts to improve connectivity and urban livability. Nonetheless it is critical to note that any industrial regeneration proposal is likely to occur in parts of the city where potential social impacts are important to understand.

## Democratizing Urbanism: Insights, Tools, Practices

The inclusion of social matters in contemporary Latin American urbanism is an ongoing struggle. The books profiled here highlight that before and after a right to the city, these struggles unfold in a political arena that is merging historical grids, topography, planning boundaries, and building groupings, yet often overlooking populations historically marginalized from development (or subject to imposed forms of development). A right to the city was radical for proposing that these populations more directly guide urban change. It sought to ensure that parts of the city could develop differentially as the city around them developed. Yet the right to the city did not radically change cities, and the problem for most is not

<sup>18</sup> Claude Lévi-Strauss, *Tristes Tropiques*, trans. John Weightman and Doreen Weightman (New York: Penguin, 1955).



urban law and policy (of which there is no lack) but that planning continues to neglect the “unplannable” conditions that elude normative codes and standards.<sup>19</sup> Architects and critical urbanists, Ermínia Maricato argues, “still do not have the collective experience to work within these conditions.”<sup>20</sup>

The volumes broadly reinforce what is known about physical, social, and historical challenges in Latin American cities. Yet they also provide new insights for mitigating the extent to which private interests threaten the production of the equitable urban environments envisioned by proponents of a right to the city. The first insight emphasizes agency over artifact, or paying close attention to how built environments evolve, and who evolves them. This is important for moving beyond instrumentalist arguments, whereby large buildings are singularly effective for social transformation, or, alternatively, constructivist arguments that suggest that local projects embody a right to the city simply because they are small in scale. As Berney and Gyger demonstrate, projects of all sizes induce disruption and can empower and disempower people. Therefore, the salient matter for any urban intervention is not size but the spatial scale of its intended impact.

Relatedly, the second insight concerns how geographic boundaries and social meanings relate to physical parameters: boundaries are neither inclusive nor exclusive but are negotiable by different groups for legal land protection, the creation of specific programs (such as in the case of the Brazilian ZEIS), or reconfiguring urban systems. The turn toward larger urbanisms suggests a shift from secure, a priori boundaries to overlaps that occur a posteriori among different biophysical, infrastructural, and political-economic flows.<sup>21</sup> If urbanism is to embrace such contingencies, future research must ensure that outcomes do not expose vulnerable populations to greater uncertainty.

Third, the context of Latin America highlights urbanism’s distinction from urbanization: urbanism is a designed reciprocity between different social, cultural, and physical elements to transform existing conditions into desired ones.<sup>22</sup> Measuring impacts can facilitate innovation and also prepare communities to identify and protect themselves from potential consequences such as human displacement, health risks, low access to schools and transportation, and poor project management. The fourth insight targets civic participation, specifically tools and methods for identifying where and what should change within the human experience of rapid urbanization, climate change, and political fluctuation. Rather than fixed master plans, such an approach could privilege flexible frameworks for advancing, not determining, urban transformation. Finally, the fifth insight embraces Lefebvre’s early call for *autogestão*, collective urban management, as a key strategy for democratizing tools to afford citizens greater control of urban infrastructures and the means by which cities are conceptualized, designed, and assessed.

Scholars working between urban planning and information and communication technology (ICT) are already exploring the role of technology for collective urban management. Most Latin American municipalities have been using ICTs to guide urban development since the first decade of the twenty-first century, with innovations in slum upgrading and environmental resource management. From this perspective, what matters is not that cities were unplanned but how citizens can plan them now. Different forms of ICTs are being used to ensure that citizen participation is supported but also directed to unplanned parts of the city, where infrastructure is lacking. This is the primary objective of an urban laboratory movement focused on the intersection of infrastructure, participation, and technology across the globe, but especially in the global South.<sup>23</sup> Drawing on methods from the social sciences and design, recent research is focusing on translating data that are sourced collaboratively with communities into proposals for community urban design.<sup>24</sup> An emphasis on urban data and software for solving urban problems is not new but its social equity commitments are.<sup>25</sup> As Amy Glasmeier and Susan Christopherson contend, the success of technopolitics like the smart city “will be measured in cities whose infrastructure systems are non-existent and where the governance capacity and funds for collective goods are minimal.”<sup>26</sup> In sum, initiatives to “reblock”

<sup>19</sup> Ananya Roy, “Urban Informality: Toward an Epistemology of Planning,” *Journal of the American Planning Association* 71, no. 2 (2005): 147.

<sup>20</sup> Ermínia Maricato, *Brasil, cidades: Alternativas para o crise urbana* (Petropolis: Vozes, 2001), 15.

<sup>21</sup> James Corner, *Recovering Landscape* (New York: Princeton Architectural Press, 1999).

<sup>22</sup> Herbert Simon, *Sciences of the Artificial* (Cambridge, MA: MIT Press, 1969).

<sup>23</sup> Andrew Karvonen and Bas van Heur, “Urban Laboratories: Experiments in Reworking Cities,” *International Journal of Urban and Regional Research* 32, no. 2 (2014): 379–392.

<sup>24</sup> Chapa Urban Lab, [www.chapa.io](http://www.chapa.io).

<sup>25</sup> Robert Goodspeed, “Smart Cities: Moving beyond Urban Cybernetics to Tackle Wicked Problems,” *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy, and Society* 8, no. 1 (2015): 79–92.

<sup>26</sup> Amy Glasmeier and Susan Christopherson, “Thinking about Smart Cities,” *Cambridge Journal of Regions, Economy, and Society* 8, no. 1 (2015): 7.



informal settlements, map clandestine transportation networks, densify existing low-income housing stock, and measure the unevenness of environmental degradation are catalyzing a civic data movement that is challenging architecture's historical role as the primary arbiter of urban change.<sup>27</sup>

It is important to note that Lefebvre's right to the city was conceptualized as resistance to one overarching capitalist force. The dispersal of that force into the finest fabric of cities is a new, neoliberal condition to which any contemporary renewal of a right to the city must respond. The texts reviewed here offer a number of responses to redress what a right to the city means after uneven development, from distinct disciplinary perspectives, social and/or physical geographies, and visions of alternative futures. While proposals require testing to ensure adaptability at scale, their common cause is to evidence that diverse built environments can be studied to strengthen and standardize policies and practices for mitigating social and spatial segregation in cities.

Latin American urbanism has often been differentiated because it must contend with one of the deepest forms of sociospatial inequalities, informality (although informality is hardly endemic to Latin America).<sup>28</sup> It has also been said that Latin American urbanism is distinct for being dominated by "ideas out of place," yet, as the volumes reviewed here demonstrate, Latin American urbanism has leveraged a rights-based movement to evolve a unique building culture whose achievements exceed early endorsements like the Museum of Modern Art's 1945 exhibit "Brazil Builds."<sup>29</sup> While it is unclear if the political architecture erected in the wake of a right to the city has improved social experience through material form, Latin American urbanism is remarkable as the only urbanism that aspires to generate universal ideas from local conditions, providing a benchmark for democratizing how people live in Latin American cities and beyond.

### Author Information

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<sup>27</sup> Kristine Stiphany and Luiz Bettencourt, "Innovations in Slum Upgrading: New Participatory Technologies for Redeveloping Informal Settlements," United Nations Habitat III Conference, October 17–20, Quito, Ecuador. Also see MIT Civic Data Lab: <http://news.mit.edu/2019/mit-3Q-sarah-williams-mapping-urban-digital-transport-0319>.

<sup>28</sup> Jake Wegmann, "Research Notes: The Hidden Cityscapes of Informal Housing in Suburban Los Angeles and the Paradox of Horizontal Density," *Buildings and Landscapes* 22, no. 2 (2015): 89–110; Jake Wegmann and Sarah Mawhorter, "Measuring Informal Housing Production in California Cities," *Journal of the American Planning Association* 83, no. 2 (2017): 119–130.

<sup>29</sup> Ermínia Maricato, "As ideias fora do lugar e os lugares fora dos ideais," in *A cidade do pensamento único: Desmanchando consensos*, ed. Otilia Arantes, Carlos Vainer, and Ermínia Maricato (Persopolis: Editora Vozes, 2001), 121–192. Philip L. Goodwin, *Brazil Builds: Architecture New and Old, 1652–1942* (New York: Museum of Modern Art, 1943).

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