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# Cities of Choice: Elective Affinities and the Transformation of Western European Urbanity from the mid-1950s to the early 1980s

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MORITZ FÖLLMER

## Abstract

*This article discusses the meanings and effects of personal choice and elective affinities in Western European cities from the mid-1950s to the early 1980s. The first section shows how the notion of choosing one's surroundings and relations underpinned the development of 'modern' apartment buildings, suburban homes and road networks but also attracted significant criticism. The second section argues that this notion soon was not only criticised, but came under pressure by New Left activists, whose emphatically different elective affinities led them to create alternative spaces such as communal apartments and squatted houses. In so doing, they reinvigorated urban life, but also diluted their initial political project and triggered a conservative counter-reaction.*

'These days, the focus of interest is on the individual (whatever that means)', observed a somewhat disillusioned leftist activist in the southern German city of Nuremberg in 1980.<sup>1</sup> His slightly quipping remark encapsulates much of what the present article discusses. The quest to create space for and realise oneself was a major driver behind the transformation of urban societies across Western Europe from the mid-1950s to the early 1980s. However, 'the individual' rarely lived in isolation, but rather aimed to relate to neighbours, relatives, friends and strangers, as well as to the domestic interior and built environment. The concept of 'elective affinities' seeks to grasp this tendency to pursue and realise individuality in relationships of one's own choosing.<sup>2</sup>

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<sup>1</sup> Werner Hempel, 'Neue Subjektivität und alte Innerlichkeit: Vorläufige Bemerkungen über die Lust am Biographischen', *Pläner: Illustriertes Stadtmagazin Nürnberg-Fürth-Erlangen*, 1980, no. 2, 24–5.

<sup>2</sup> The term as it is used here comprises persons choosing how they are related to other persons, to things or to urban societies more broadly. It thus differs from Max Weber's notion of 'elective affinities'

Therein lay an overarching continuity spanning the period at issue. At the same time, Western European cities were sites of ambivalence, controversy and open-endedness. For, depending on time, location or political context, alongside gender, class and age, 'the individual' looked, thought and acted in very distinct ways. Leftists turning to self-fulfilment around 1980 were evidently miles away from a married couple moving into their first flat a quarter-century earlier, or indeed from their more conservative contemporaries, yet all of them contributed to defining, shaping and reshaping what one might label 'cities of choice'.

As the first section will demonstrate, in the age of unprecedented affluence that began approximately a decade after the end of the Second World War, many urbanites strove for greater privacy, which they hoped to find in newly built apartment buildings or suburban homes. However, such choices were never uncontroversial. As early as the 1950s and 1960s, many doubted whether domestic retreat constituted a desirable form of individuality and consequently deplored that cities were becoming impersonal environments. The second section will describe how, expanding on this critique and boosted by the 1968 revolt, leftist activists had a major impact on cities across Western Europe. In the 1970s and early 1980s, they fought for alternative spaces, enabling a life that differed emphatically from conventional standards, while also striving to transform urban societies as a whole. This constituted a radical challenge to the order of Western European cities, but was one that could not transcend the ambivalent logic of personal choice, which made any concerted and large-scale change difficult to implement. Therefore, the long-term effects of this urban activism entailed vibrant subcultures and more diverse cityscapes alongside the preservation of nineteenth-century neighbourhoods and a sizeable conservative counter-reaction. The seemingly self-evident principle of elective affinities resulted in greater complexity than either the privacy-oriented modernism of the 1950s or the utopias of the radical left in the 1970s had envisioned.

Attention to personal choice and elective affinities can thus help to account for the non-linear trajectory of Western European cities in the post-war period. The rapid shift in planning after 1968 from modernism to preservation would remain difficult to understand without taking this broader cultural context into account. The same goes for the urban appeal of radical contestation and communal living, as well as the fact that this appeal did not last longer than it did and triggered different results in different places. This article diverges from the theoretical perspective prominent in urban studies, which amounts to continuing and updating the critique of modernity developed by the New Left.<sup>3</sup> Instead, the seminal writings of Henri Lefebvre and others will be treated as historical sources that reflected agreed broader cultural trends and had more in common with conservative voices than is evident at first glance. Rather than adopt authors from the period under study, the approach here is informed by another

between certain types of Protestantism and capitalism. See Andrew McKinnon, 'Elective Affinities of the Protestant Ethic: Weber and the Chemistry of Capitalism', *Sociological Theory*, 28 (2010), 108–26.

<sup>3</sup> Prominently and explicitly in David Harvey, *Rebel Cities: From the Right to the City to the Urban Revolution* (London: Verso, 2012).

prominent strand in the theory of modernity. This strand highlights the interplay between depersonalisation and individualisation, dis-embedding and re-embedding, and is associated with the sociologies of Georg Simmel and Anthony Giddens.

In his seminal article ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, first published in 1903, Simmel depicted the big city as an anonymous environment driven by a clockwork-like rationality. This logic was simultaneously depersonalising and individualising in that it rendered urbanites far less noticeable and important than villagers and, by the same token, liberated them from older forms of social control.<sup>4</sup> Simmel thus highlighted, but arguably still underrated, the complexity of Berlin – the city he lived in and took as a model. Whereas the sociologist foregrounded isolated individuals, who fended off the multitude of strangers through ‘blasé’ behaviour, his less theoretically-minded contemporaries not only frequented large public squares and crowded suburban trains, but lived in neighbourhoods and involved themselves in various self-chosen collectivities of sports fans, newspaper readers and amateur historians.<sup>5</sup> The dynamic of individualisation, depersonalisation and repersonalisation at work in Berlin around 1900 recalls Giddens’s theory of modernity, according to which social relations become, on the one hand, ‘dis-embedded’, i.e. more spatially distant and dependent on abstract systems, but are, on the other, ‘re-embedded’ through trust in persons.<sup>6</sup> It is the aim of the present article to explore how this basic dynamic played out in a different context, namely that of Western European cities from the mid-1950s to the early 1980s. However, both the debates on the city and the perspectives of ‘ordinary’ urbanites (or those who insisted on being ‘different’) are taken more seriously here than tends to be the case in sociological accounts such as Simmel’s or Giddens’s.<sup>7</sup> For these did not constitute a separate realm from ‘social reality’, but instead informed choices and constructed urban societies as individualised or deindividualised, resulting in tangible political and spatial outcomes.

Foregrounding the role of personal choice and elective affinities also allows for a broader contribution to the contemporary history of cities and of Western Europe. The few urban historians to have ventured into the post-1945 decades neglect this crucial dimension.<sup>8</sup> This is due largely to their conceptual reliance on a dichotomy between vibrant localism and ‘technocratic’ modernisation, as well as their methodological preference for empirically dense studies set in particular cities.<sup>9</sup> By

<sup>4</sup> Georg Simmel, ‘The Metropolis and Mental Life’, reprinted in *The Sociology of Georg Simmel* (New York: Free Press, 1950), 409–24.

<sup>5</sup> Peter Fritzsche, *Reading Berlin 1900* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1996); Katja Zelljadt, ‘Alt-Berlin in the Kaiserreich: History as Object of Consumption and Marketing Concept’, in Thomas Biskup and Marc Schalenberg, eds., *Selling Berlin: Imagebildung und Stadtmarketing von der preußischen Residenz bis zur Bundeshauptstadt* (Stuttgart: Franz Steiner, 2008), 117–34.

<sup>6</sup> Anthony Giddens, *The Consequences of Modernity* (Cambridge: Polity, 1990).

<sup>7</sup> For a sociological approach that integrates discursive constructions – though not agency –, see Niklas Luhmann, *Theory of Society*, 2 vols. (Stanford: Stanford University Press, 2012–3).

<sup>8</sup> With the notable exception of Joe Moran, ‘Early Cultures of Gentrification in London, 1955–1980’, *Journal of Urban History*, 34 (2007), 101–20.

<sup>9</sup> This even goes for the outstanding books by Rosemary Wakeman, *Modernizing the Provincial City: Toulouse 1945–1975* (Cambridge, Mass.: Harvard University Press, 1998); *The Heroic City: Paris 1945–1958*

contrast, the present article stresses both the choices driving the demand for modernist environments and those that later led to a preference for communal living and neighbourhood preservation. And it proposes a geographically and chronologically broad argument that relies on specific secondary literature alongside a selection of published primary sources, thus filling a crucial yet underpopulated space between case studies and broad-sweep surveys. Such a mid-level urban history has the potential to relate to the broader concerns of contemporary European historians. While the latter have certainly addressed the themes discussed here, they have tended to underrate the crucial context of cities. Both the quest for privacy in the 1950s and 1960s and the leftist challenge from 1968 onwards were located in urban space, and to highlight this can bring their forms, effects and partial co-existence into sharper relief. Hence the historiographical interest in elucidating how Western European cities enabled, and were shaped by, personal choice and elective affinities.

## I

‘How was your day?’ ‘Good, everything as usual. What’s for dinner?’ With this exchange began one evening in the life of the Kuypers, a young family of four living in Amsterdam’s *Nieuw West* in the late 1950s. After eating and putting the children to bed, Mrs Kuyper made coffee while Mr Kuyper had a quick look at the newspaper. She switched on the radio, although neither of the spouses really listened to the voice informing the audience about the current situation in divided Berlin. The Kuypers seemed happy. Furnishing the flat had been expensive, heating costs were high and space was hardly excessive given the Catholic couple’s desire for a third child. But the neighbourhood was decent enough, with some shops in the vicinity as well as playmates for their two girls. Nothing indicated dissatisfaction with the clearly assigned gender roles, rather basic marital interaction and limited contact with the outside world. To all intents and purposes and within the usual financial limitations, the Kuypers lived the life they chose. Yet, the magazine *Good Living* (*Goed wonen*) which portrayed them in early 1959, seemed unsure whether life in *Nieuw West* really qualified as ‘good’. While it did not question (and indeed promoted) the picture of quiet domestic bliss, it was more critical of the atmosphere outside the building itself. Such a peripheral, functionally designed area, the anonymous author mused, doubtless allowed many people of modest means to enjoy the privacy of a home. But this came at the cost of almost complete isolation from the rest of Amsterdam as well as an ‘egocentric effect’ that made anyone who did not live there feel excluded. By contrast, in the city centre with its cinemas, pubs, restaurants and billboards ‘the stranger too can feel part of a community’.<sup>10</sup>

(Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2009). By contrast, Leif Jerram’s *Streetlife: The Untold History of Europe’s Twentieth Century* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2011) incorporates the widespread aspiration for privacy in modernised domestic spaces as a factor in its own right.

<sup>10</sup> ‘Wonen in Nederland’, *Goed wonen: Maandblad voor wonen en woninginrichting, orgaan van de stichting goed wonen*, 12 (1959), 3–10.

This example serves as a starting point for elucidating the relationship between individuals, couples and families on the one hand and urban societies on the other during the 1950s and 1960s. There is little doubt that most of those Western Europeans who enjoyed access to modern living were as positive about their new situation as the Kuypers. The notion of a couple choosing with whom to interact and who to keep at a distance had been current for some time. For instance, in Berlin during the mid-1930s, single-family homes proliferated in the outer areas of the city, supported by low taxes and mortgage rates and advertised in local newspapers. Some of those readers who were unable to afford such comforts wrote to the editor to complain about noisy neighbours, pointing out that they did not appreciate unannounced evening visits or share their doubts about their mother-in-law's plans to move in.<sup>11</sup> Of course, the Nazi regime's priorities produced outcomes that were starkly different from the steady expansion of domestic privacy envisioned by these Berliners, both in the German capital and in most parts of Europe. After the war, years of inhabiting small, often insufficiently insulated and heated flats ensued. There were strong pressures to take in extended family members or, worse, billeted strangers. And life on urban streets or squares often seemed fraught with ambiguities, from large and transient crowds through black-market trade to the humiliating presence of American soldiers. But in the course of the 1950s and 1960s the situation changed fundamentally as a result of economic affluence, government support and the absence of violent conflict, so that the dream of choosing one's own surroundings and interactions came increasingly within reach.

Residents of the Grindel high-rises in north-central Hamburg and the Casal Palocco suburb southwest of Rome, studied by Axel Schildt and Bruno Bonomo respectively, are cases in point. Singles, couples and families alike appreciated the option to withdraw into their own private environment and have distant yet friendly relations with their neighbours. Importantly, these neighbours were part of a culturally like-minded middle class, which strongly defined itself through its aspiration for privacy. The tenants in the Grindel high-rises were glad to finally escape the forcible flatshares of the post-war period. The best thing about her studio, one of them later recalled, was 'that one had a toilet and a stove of one's own, that I could cook when I wanted'. A fellow tenant remarked that 'we were somehow beaten, you see. One was in a state to kind of say: now leave us alone!'<sup>12</sup> In Casal Palocco, a jeweller explained just how glad he was to have left behind 'the cages of clay brick, inside which you can count the steps of the old lady living upstairs, while from outside exhaust gases from buses and scooters come in, along with screams, the noise of trams, odours, and so forth'. A lawyer shared his preference for more casual, 'genuine' social interactions, devoid of 'the weight of urban formalities' prevalent in central Rome's bourgeois neighbourhoods.<sup>13</sup>

<sup>11</sup> Moritz Föllmer, *Individuality and Modernity in Berlin: Self and Society from Weimar to the Wall* (Cambridge: Cambridge University Press, 2013), 114–7.

<sup>12</sup> Axel Schildt, *Die Grindelhochhäuser: Eine Sozialgeschichte der ersten deutschen Wohnhochhausanlage Hamburg-Grindelberg 1945–1956* (2nd ed., Munich: Dölling und Gallitz, 2007), quotations 167, 183 (from interviews with tenants conducted in the 1980s).

<sup>13</sup> Bruno Bonomo, 'Dwelling space and social identities: the Roman bourgeoisie, c. 1950–80', *Urban History*, 38 (2011), 276–300 (quotations 289, taken from interviews published by *La Gazzeta di Casal Palocco* in 1969/70).

Elective affinities in an age of unprecedented affluence also entailed different relations between residents of flats or houses and the things with which they surrounded themselves. Everyone could be their own interior designer, balancing personal preferences with continuing financial and spatial limitations. In line with the trend toward a full-blown consumer society, books and catalogues advised young couples to buy timeless and flexibly arrangeable rather than old-style, heavy furniture.<sup>14</sup> This principle enabled young residents with modest means to appropriate the space they inhabited. An individualist lifestyle, one advice manual argued, might begin in furnished accommodation, which could be appropriated by adding some tasteful pieces as well as a folding-screen embellished with pictures of film stars or car models. It continued in a married couple's first flat, where the pre-existing furniture was combined with taste and skill, and new armchairs were purchased according to both spouses' respective needs: 'For each partner the one that suits them most!'<sup>15</sup> Space and finances permitting, flexibility could also result in blends of modern and 'old' taste. In Casal Palocco, some residents chose built-in cupboards or 'so-called Swedish furniture', while others opted for old-style sofas or even enquired about how to arrange a 'living room in the nineteenth-century English style'.<sup>16</sup>

Furthermore, thanks to increasing individual mobility, personal choice began to govern urbanites' way of moving in urban and suburban space. Mr Kuyper for one would have been unable to afford a car at this stage of his life, but he rode a motorscooter from *Nieuw West* to his office job in central Amsterdam and presumably could also have taken the bus. What was typical of urbanites in Western Europe was their desire to have both private and public transportation at their disposal.<sup>17</sup> The massive expansion of road networks for motorised citizens, now often condemned as an expression of 1960s 'technocracy', was widely popular and seen as the logical extension of the principle of choice.<sup>18</sup> It was deemed possible to develop smooth traffic systems that would foster rather than stifle the motorists' individual responsibility.<sup>19</sup> Consequently, more families could enjoy a suburban lifestyle while continuing to benefit from the career and consumption opportunities the city offered.<sup>20</sup> As Jan Logemann has recently demonstrated in a comparative study of West Germany

<sup>14</sup> *Wohnen Heute* [Swiss interior design catalogue, 1960], 6.

<sup>15</sup> Eva M.J. Schmid, *Unsere Wohnung: Einrichten und Gestalten* (Gütersloh: Bertelsmann, 1960), 21–32, quotation 32. See also, on the rise of individualised advice literature in Flemish Belgium, Els De Vos, *Hoe zouden we graag wonen? Woonvertogen in Vlaanderen tijdens de Jaren zestig en zeventig* (Leuven: Universitaire Pers Leuven, 2012).

<sup>16</sup> Bonomo, 'Dwelling space', 298 (quotations from an interview with a resident and from *La Gazzetta di Casal Palocco*, Dec. 1968).

<sup>17</sup> See, for instance, 'Scherpe reactie van de KNAC op de leus: "Auto's weg uit de binnenstad"', *De Telegraaf*, 2 Apr. 1958.

<sup>18</sup> This has been persuasively argued by Mathieu Flonneau, 'L'action du district de la région Parisienne et les "dix glorieuses de l'urbanisme automobile", 1963–1973', *Vingtième Siècle*, 79 (2003), 93–104; see 98 on planner Paul Delouvrier's rhetoric of *liberté de choix*.

<sup>19</sup> Hans Bernhard Reichow, *Die autogerechte Stadt: Ein Weg aus dem Verkehrschaos* (Ravensburg: Maier, 1959), 16–7, 28–30, 47, 51.

<sup>20</sup> Suburbanisation in Western Europe remains insufficiently explored. For a good case study on Greater Zurich, see Mario König, 'Auf dem Weg in die Gegenwart – Der Kanton Zürich seit 1945', in König

and the United States, the attachment to urban centres, residential neighbourhoods and public transportation systems remained strong, reflecting a societal choice for maintaining cities as vibrant spaces of work, consumption and social life.<sup>21</sup>

On the face of it, in the 1950s and 1960s elective affinities seemed a successful and unproblematic principle governing urban spaces and societies. Thanks to capitalist affluence combined with ample public investment (the latter with the important exception of Italy), Western European cities increasingly turned into environments driven by, and conducive to, personal choice. To be sure, class differences persisted, but they appeared far more bearable than in the interwar period, not least because one could now expect to inhabit a place of one's own, furnish it with the things one wanted and decide how close to be to others. Choice promised to be individualist without thereby undermining social cohesion or – in contrast to the 'new woman' (*Neue Frau*) or 'bachelor girl' (*garçonne*) of the 1920s – the stability of the gender order. According to some observers, the fact that most residents of recently built areas preferred to keep a distance from each other did not mean that they were isolated. They still granted their neighbours access to the telephone, accepted their deliveries or minded their children.<sup>22</sup> Such a 'thin' concept of neighbourly relations was congenial to the predominant, stability-oriented version of democracy,<sup>23</sup> and it contrasted favourably with the image of the Eastern Bloc. This was asserted in the Hansaviertel, purposely built in 1957 in the vicinity of the – then still open – border to East Berlin, while forming a quiet subtext of life in *Nieuw West*, where ideological polarisation did not intrude, and no event forced Mr and Mrs Kuyper to take more than a superficial interest in politics. Local, national or European identities did not seem threatened, given that the residents of Casal Palocco were free to combine a desire for contemporary Swedish or nineteenth-century English furniture with 'American-style' shopping excursions or barbecues, all without ceasing to be recognisably Italian and Roman.<sup>24</sup>

However, such a sanguine view was by no means universally shared. Even in a supposedly consumerist and technocratic period, strong doubts persisted as to the desirability of the emerging, revamped urban society. The first problem was with personal choice itself and the consequences to which it led. The *Goed wonen* magazine was not alone in associating an 'egocentric effect' with newly built residential areas

et. al., *Geschichte des Kantons Zürich*, vol. 3: *19. und 20. Jahrhundert* (Zurich: Wied, 1994), 350–479, here 361–3, 395, 408–12.

<sup>21</sup> Jan Logemann, *Trams or Tailfins? Public and Private Prosperity in West Germany and the United States* (Chicago: University of Chicago Press, 2013). Flonneau, 'L'action du district', 101, similarly points out that among planners in Greater Paris, the fascination for the American model remained limited and the investment in public transport considerable.

<sup>22</sup> See, for instance, Bas Roodnat, 'In de nieuwe stadswijken meer verre vrienden dan goede burens', *Goed wonen*, 12 (1959), 31–2; Schildt, *Grindelhochhäuser*, 193.

<sup>23</sup> Martin Conway, 'The Rise and Fall of Western Europe's Democratic Age 1945–73', *Contemporary European History*, 13 (2004), 67–88.

<sup>24</sup> Bonomo, 'Dwelling Space', 289, quoting *La Gazzetta di Casal Palocco*, July 1971 and an interview partner. See also Paolo Scrivano, 'Signs of Americanization in Italian Domestic Life: Italy's Postwar Conversion to Consumerism', *Journal of Contemporary History*, 40 (2005), 317–40.

and modern developments. A portrait of a successful female professional in her late thirties who, ‘unfulfilled as a woman’, regularly poured herself several drinks upon returning to her apartment building in central West Berlin attests to fears that gender relations might be destabilised.<sup>25</sup> Moreover, not everyone was convinced that the ‘American style’ was simply one cultural reference among others. Thus, the Milan daily *Corriere della Sera* commented critically on life in the new suburb Metanopoli. In this ‘modern artificial city’, a managerial middle class drove cars, lunched in self-service canteens and dedicated its spare time to sports or television. ‘The New City, in sum, reveals Americanising tendencies. It is isolated from the surrounding society, reminding me in certain ways of an American community on foreign soil, as part of an occupation regime.’ This questionable model was already inspiring developers elsewhere and might thus be ‘the anticipation of a future society’.<sup>26</sup> In a similar vein, a journalist for the – equally bourgeois – *Neue Zürcher Zeitung* expressed concern about the new weekend habit of driving around Greater Zurich to visit several shopping malls, to the detriment of extant city, village or neighbourhood centres. ‘We behave as if we lived in Texas without taking into account that conditions here are fundamentally different.’<sup>27</sup>

Another, no less crucial, concern was that modern developments were undermining rather than fostering the individuality of persons, couples and families. Spatial settings that appeared, at first glance, congenial to the principle of personal choice could also be seen as homogenising and coercive environments. The spectre of uniformity or ‘massification’ was by no means the preserve of ever-disgruntled intellectuals, as the frequently defensive or concerned tone of statements in favour of modern living shows. A ‘model flat’, *Goed wonen* explained, was not intended to be followed by everyone, but as a starting point for individual adaptation.<sup>28</sup> Mass production of buildings according to types was a necessity considering the pressing need for affordable accommodation, but it was pivotal not to base it on the wrong blueprints, which stifled rather than stimulated family life and the pursuit of hobbies.<sup>29</sup> High-rise buildings in particular came under attack. One of their advocates felt compelled to justify the uniformity that prevailed from the top floor all the way down to the mailboxes in the entrance hall by citing the democratic principle of equality. Another argued that high-rise buildings could blend harmoniously into their surroundings because they used a comparatively small amount of space and therefore

<sup>25</sup> Eberhard von Wiese, ‘Frauen – immer mit sich und ihrem Leben allein: Ein Bericht aus diesen Tagen’, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 1 Oct. 1961.

<sup>26</sup> Piero Ottone, ‘L’innesto di Metanopoli in un vecchio centro rurale: La fascia industriale Milanese’, *Corriere della Sera*, 3 May 1963.

<sup>27</sup> Walter Schreiber in 1972, quoted in König, ‘Weg in die Gegenwart’, 380. On the ambivalent reception of American (sub)urbanity in Western Europe, see Axel Schildt, ‘Amerikanische Einflüsse auf den Wiederaufbau westeuropäischer Städte nach dem Zweiten Weltkrieg’, *Informationen zur modernen Stadtgeschichte*, 2012 no. 1, 48–62.

<sup>28</sup> J.P. Kloos, ‘Een modelwoning van Goed Wonen is nooit een “model”-woning’, *Goed wonen*, 9 (1956), 19–21.

<sup>29</sup> Mart Stam, ‘Wel massawoningbouw – geen monotonic’, *Goed wonen*, 9 (1956), 220–1, 238.

allowed the preservation of adjacent old trees.<sup>30</sup> The planners of the Hansaviertel, the flagship development of Cold War modernism in West Berlin, were faced with a critique from the minister for family affairs in the early Federal Republic, Franz-Josef Wuermeling. In 1957, the Catholic conservative expressed his regret that the high-rise buildings were meant to accommodate families, too. To him, such ‘housing machines’ were reflective of a ‘collectivist view of life’; they curtailed children’s ‘freedom of movement’ and were bound to ‘massify even the last citizen who still feels himself to be a free man’. The secretary of the International Building Exhibition replied that high-rise buildings allowed for ample green spaces between them, as well as providing their youngest residents in particular with ‘literally a wider horizon’ and the skills required for ‘handling a lift independently’.<sup>31</sup>

One might see in such statements mere responses to the predictable critical noises accompanying any major innovation after its effects become visible. One might also point out that architects and planners were more willing to take on board residents’ views than has often been acknowledged – through specialised outlets such as *Goed wonen*, public exhibitions or, in Charles de Gaulle’s France, an unscientific poll that led to more flats being designed according to the preferences of middle-class families.<sup>32</sup> But to leave it at that would be to underestimate the political and intellectual power that the critique of modern living exerted in the 1950s and 1960s. It overlapped with the equally important critique that modernity remained incomplete and its benefits unevenly distributed. In France and Italy socially engaged Catholics and left-wing activists alike pointed to the persistence of urban poverty as well as to problematic aspects of capitalist development. Communist councillors led the charge against corrupt politicians and greedy construction magnates, as in the film *Hands Over the City* (*Le mani sulla città*, 1963), set in Naples, or politicised the popular resistance against the demolition of the old city centre, as in Toulouse.<sup>33</sup> Moreover, across Western Europe both left-wing and conservative voices kept alive the nagging doubt as to whether ‘modern’ apartment buildings and suburban homes were really an expression of legitimate, socially unharmed choices.

For instance, Alexander Mitscherlich contended that contemporary cities’ functional differentiation and spatial dispersal had caused an existential ‘inhospitality’. For the prominent German psychologist and social critic, capitalist development, civic irresponsibility and schematic planning made preserving old-style ‘urban humanity’ and ‘giving room to the individual’ in ways adequate to the ‘technological age’ equally impossible. The stylistically eclectic ‘pseudo privacy’

<sup>30</sup> ‘Nürnberger Bauten des Architekten Wilhelm Schleghtendal’, *Bauwelt*, 46 (1955), 648–9; B. von Busse and H.P. Buddeberg, ‘Ein Appartementhaus in München’, *Die Kunst und das schöne Heim: Monatsschrift für Malerei, Plastik, Graphik, Architektur und Wohnkultur*, 56 (1958), 460–3.

<sup>31</sup> Federal Minister of the Family Dr. Wuermeling to International Building Exhibition, 8 Apr. 1957; Secretary of the International Building Exhibition Dr. Mahler to Minister of the Family Dr. Wuermeling, 1 June 1957, both in Landesarchiv Berlin, B Rep. 167, no. 6.

<sup>32</sup> W. Brian Newsome, ‘The “Apartment Referendum” of 1959: Toward Participatory Architectural and Urban Planning in Postwar France’, *French Historical Studies*, 28 (2005), 329–58.

<sup>33</sup> Wakeman, *Modernizing*, 96–100.

prevalent in affluent suburbs was as problematic as the isolation that multi-unit buildings both reflected and imposed: 'An apartment building with some thirty studios. The tenants are professionals. If one of them falls ill, he is practically stranded, because no one knows their neighbour, and human beings are after all not made for the life of a hermit crab.'<sup>34</sup> The left-wing humanist thus questioned the very idea of elective affinities, since in his view contemporary urban spaces undermined human relations worthy of the name and fostered destructive egotism rather than the residents' true interests.

Mitscherlich's perspective had much in common with that of the French Neomaxist Henri Lefebvre, for whom industrialisation, top-down planning and the promise of homeownership had 'dulled' the 'consciousness of the city and of urban reality', and who proposed a critical urban theory as an intellectual alternative to narrow functionalism.<sup>35</sup> Without wishing to deny important differences in political conviction and conceptual ambition, Mitscherlich's and Lefebvre's views overlapped to a remarkable degree with Louis Chevalier's damning account of the 'assassination of Paris' as it had been built in the nineteenth century. For this, the conservative historian blamed a grand coalition of government technocrats, business interests and urbanites who took part in the 'general conversion to real estate', preferred supermarkets to corner shops and were convinced that they owned not only their cars but also streets, sidewalks and public squares. For Chevalier, consumerist individualism and uniformist planning were increasingly destroying the very individuality of Paris itself.<sup>36</sup>

As has been argued in this section, modern (sub)urban spaces held great attraction in the 1950s and 1960s because they were based on the principle of elective affinities. In a context of economic affluence and the growth of the welfare state and notwithstanding persistent social inequalities, millions of Western Europeans could now realistically hope to choose which furniture to pick and combine, how much distance to keep from neighbours or relatives, and how to commute between their residential area and centrally located sites of work and consumption. However, the critique of these spaces as isolating and ultimately coercive environments was part and parcel of this period's urban history. In addition to intellectuals and activists of different persuasions, it was shared by novelists such as Georges Perec, who dissected a young middle-class couple's modernist way of life in *The Things* (*Les Choses*, 1965), and film directors such as Jacques Tati, whose *Playtime* (1967) stars himself as a loveably clumsy provincial struggling to find his way around a Paris office building. In the French capital as well as in Munich or Amsterdam, bohemians converted the critique of functionalism and domesticity into happenings and other artistic provocations.<sup>37</sup>

<sup>34</sup> Alexander Mitscherlich, *Die Unwirtlichkeit unserer Städte: Anstiftung zum Unfrieden* (Frankfurt: Suhrkamp, 1965), quotations 12, 29, 20–1, 69–70.

<sup>35</sup> Henri Lefebvre, 'Right to the City' (1968), in Lefebvre, *Writings on Cities*, Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, select. and trans., (Malden, Mass.: Blackwell, 1996), 61–181, 80.

<sup>36</sup> Louis Chevalier, *L'assassinat de Paris* (Paris: Calmann-Lévy, 1977), quotation 52. For a similarly conservative view of the 'murdered city' West Berlin, see Wolf Jobst Siedler and Elisabeth Niggemeyer, *Die gemordete Stadt: Abgang auf Putte und Straße, Platz und Baum* (Berlin: Herbig, 1964).

<sup>37</sup> Aribert Reimann, *Dieter Kunzelmann: Avantgardist, Protestler, Radikaler* (Göttingen: Vandenhoeck & Ruprecht, 2009), 43–122; Nick Pas, 'Mediatization of the Provos: From a Local Movement to a

Thus, to the residents and observers of cities, the benefits of modernity appeared more intertwined with its downsides than is suggested in surveys of Western Europe's age of affluence.<sup>38</sup> It was this often tacit but ever-present ambivalence that made the predominant model of urbanity so vulnerable to the onslaught of left-wing radicalism, beginning in 1968.

## II

The commune sharing a large flat in West Berlin in the autumn of 1968 consisted of five adults and two children, with more people intending to join at some future point. According to its members, all money was collectivised to buy food or occasionally go out for a drink. At the same time, the domestic tasks were carried out through 'individual initiative' rather than planned in advance. The communards much preferred this life to the 'isolation' experienced in sublet flats or even the one-bedroom apartment in a new building that one of them was offered by her parents. Moreover, they saw it as a basis for various 'political actions' and as a building block for an alternative society in which a large number of communes would be on offer, so 'that you could change whenever you wanted', until you found the 'people who you can live with best'. Interestingly, the members of the commune demarcated themselves from the more collectivist mentality prevailing in the – then as now much more publicised – *Kommune 1*.

In the factory where K-1 is now living, they have just one big room, which they all live in together. That sounds terrible to me. How can you get any time to yourself? I think it's very important for everyone to have some privacy. It can't be set up so that everything individual gets lost. On the contrary, individual peculiarities should be encouraged.

Consequently, 'free' sexuality between various members did not play an important role in this particular commune, and 'divergent opinions', for instance regarding the recent Soviet intervention in Czechoslovakia, were considered inevitable. However, other questions were a little more difficult. To some extent, the communards recognised this themselves but tended to blame it on unfavourable circumstances, for instance when they explained that they simply could not let the children 'romp and make noise as we'd like to', since this would get 'too loud in such a small apartment'. Of potential contradictions in their vision they seemed unaware. For instance, it remained open whether the communal environment would, in the long term, really encourage everyone's 'individual peculiarities', and whether this issue could be addressed by a universal 'ability to start a new commune or to move

European Phenomenon', in Martin Klimke, Jakko Pekelder and Joachim Scharloth, eds., *Between Prague Spring and French May: Opposition and Revolt in Europe, 1960–1980* (New York: Berghahn, 2011), 157–76.

<sup>38</sup> See Mark Mazower, *Dark Continent: Europe's Twentieth Century* (London: Allen Lane, 1998), 290–331; Tony Judt, *Postwar: A History of Europe since 1945* (London: William Heinemann, 2005), 324–53; Dan Stone, *Goodbye to All That? The Story of Europe since 1945* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2014), 81–123.

into another one'. It was equally unclear whether the necessary domestic labour could be carried out merely through 'individual initiative', without some sense of organisation. The principle of equitable sharing, for one, was rather undermined by the acknowledgment that a vital task was left to a female communitarian: 'We all take care of the children. Someone has to get them ready in the morning; Heike usually does that.'<sup>39</sup>

This self-characterisation points to key issues in Western Europe's urban history from the late 1960s to the early 1980s. During that period, a sizeable number of young adults questioned the correlation between (sub)urban modernity and the principle of personal choice, which had already attracted a sizeable amount of criticism throughout the previous decade. What others saw as a path to a desirable familial privacy, they considered no less stifling and rigid than old-style conservatism. Rather than imposing 'collectivism', alternative living promised to free them from the conventional family and allow for personal growth in self-chosen and consequently malleable communal settings. This new type of elective affinities would be congenial to a broader understanding of the individual than that marking mainstream society. It also underpinned an activist political style whose importance transcended the respective flat, neighbourhood or city. However, the source also hints at potential pitfalls of this optimistic conception. Would different claims to self-realisation prove compatible in the longer term, or would they eventually clash, for instance when voiced more forcefully by women? Would they remain radical, or would they eventually constitute merely one lifestyle among others? On the one hand, West Berlin itself offers ample evidence for urban radicalism, for instance when New Left activists challenged municipal planners and capitalist developers by agitating against particularly brutalist landmark projects. On the other hand, the growth of an *Alternativszene* of self-governed cafés, bookstores and cultural centres entailed the possibility of becoming, in the longer term, a semi-accepted part of the cityscape, peacefully co-existing with the remains of the old middle and working classes and the presence of recent immigrants.<sup>40</sup>

In order to arrive at an answer to these questions, it is, in the first instance, crucial to take the New Left's urban radicalism seriously. Nowhere was such an approach to politics more in evidence than in Italy, where it simultaneously challenged a functionalist (but, in actual fact, often dysfunctional) modernity and a deeply ingrained conservatism, and succeeded to a remarkable extent in bridging divides between students, workers and the subproletarian poor. In an extensively researched

<sup>39</sup> 'Kommunarden über sich selbst', *konkret*, 7 Oct. 1968, available in the German original and in English translation at [germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub\\_document.cfm?document\\_id=896](http://germanhistorydocs.ghi-dc.org/sub_document.cfm?document_id=896) (last visited 17 Feb. 2014). For background, see Sven Reichardt, *Authentizität und Gemeinschaft: Linksalternatives Leben in den siebziger und frühen achtziger Jahren* (Berlin: Suhrkamp, 2014), esp. 351–459.

<sup>40</sup> Tim Verlaan, 'Neues Kreuzberger Zentrum: from *Glitzerding* to *Profitwurm*. The Urban Renewal Process in Berlin-Kreuzberg and the Growing Tensions between Local Politicians, Private Developers and Citizens 1963–1974', MA thesis, University of Leicester, 2011; Belinda Davis, 'The City as Theater of Protest: West Berlin and West Germany, 1962–1983', in Gyan Prakash and Kevin M. Kruse, eds., *The Spaces of the Modern City: Imaginaries, Politics, and Everyday Life* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2008), 247–74.

PhD thesis, Mathias Heigl has shown how social movements in 1970s Rome acted according to the principle that major decisions had to be made by those whom they affected.<sup>41</sup> Self-empowerment, often transcending legal boundaries, prevailed over the logic of capitalist developers, established institutions or political parties (including the Communists). Since the largely non-industrial Italian capital offered few factories for agitation, a crucial focus was on changing life in the neighbourhoods. Activists, including many 'ordinary', mostly poor urbanites, reduced their rents or electricity payments and occupied residential buildings. They organised local festivals, adult education courses and cultural events for children. The *Collettivo femminista* opened a centre offering advice, self-help and personal interaction to women. The *Collettivo Policlinico* challenged the medical hierarchy and pushed for improved conditions in the city's foremost hospital. Together the two collectives even set up an abortion clinic, although it was eventually dissolved by the police. An approach to politics that took individuals, including their gender, body and emotions, as its starting point thus resulted in new appropriations of urban space. While the eventual accomplishments fell short of the wide-reaching transformative ambitions, the impact on Rome's political culture and social order was still considerable.<sup>42</sup>

By focusing on subjectivity in specific urban spaces, leftist activists, in Italian as well as the more affluent West German, Dutch or Swiss cities, tacitly distanced themselves from the global revolutionary visions and 'urban guerilla' phantasies that had been in full swing during and immediately after the revolt of 1968. But they were still radical in aiming at a very different idea of elective affinities than that prevalent in Western European cities during the 1950s and 1960s. Not only did they raise awareness that large numbers of residents stood little chance of enjoying access to new apartment buildings or single-family homes and were, for instance in Rome's poorer districts, even denied basic infrastructural facilities. They also charged that both the impersonal features of modern living and the rigid environment of the established family led 'not just to an impoverishment but to a division of individuals'.<sup>43</sup> The New Left rejected the model of urban consumers, who opted for a particular lifestyle, personalised it by combining different products and drove broader changes according to the logic of demand and supply. Instead, it foregrounded more substantial, 'thick' subjects, who together conquered 'autonomous' spaces and thus began to transform society slowly and from the bottom up. Defending old, often nineteenth-century neighbourhoods against municipal authorities and capitalist developers mattered because these offered affordable residential and recreational spaces alongside a richer, less functional and constrained environment than newly built areas. As one German squatter put it in 1981: 'We are sitting here and doing all these actions

<sup>41</sup> Mathias Heigl, 'Roma in Rivolta: Soziale Bewegungen im Rom der 1970er Jahre', PhD thesis, University of Munich, 2011.

<sup>42</sup> Much the same can be said about other Italian cities such as Milan or Turin, see Robert Lumley, *States of Emergency: Cultures of Revolt in Italy from 1968 to 1978* (London: Verso, 1990); Maud Anne Bracke, 'Building a "Counter-Community of Emotions": Feminist Encounters and Socio-Cultural Difference in 1970s Turin', *Modern Italy*, 17 (2012), 223–36.

<sup>43</sup> *I lavoratori studenti: Testimonianze raccolte a Torino* (Turin: Einaudi, 1969), 71.

because we're not prepared to resign ourselves to a world consisting of concrete and of cities increasingly devoid of life. We also don't feel like all pissing off surreptitiously and silently to the countryside.'<sup>44</sup>

Such alternative spaces were deemed crucial for allowing young people to develop an 'identity of their own' rather than become a mere 'product of adjustment reflexes and other-directed influences', to actually experience 'freedom, imagination, beauty and lust for living' instead of merely learning about them from films or books.<sup>45</sup> One article characterised the transient subjects who populated Zurich's *Autonomes Jugendzentrum*, the focus of a massive revolt in 1980/81, in almost lyrical terms. They had acquired their individuality neither by attending school or university nor by working in a factory or office but by roaming the streets, and were now finally able to realise it in the recently founded youth centre.<sup>46</sup> Twenty years later, one activist recalled how he began to join demonstrations: 'for the first time, I had the feeling that one could actually live in Switzerland'.<sup>47</sup> In a similar vein, squatters in Amsterdam stressed that their primary focus was on creating spaces allowing them to live as they wished, with like-minded others. One of them, Tycho, explained: 'I just want to make good use of my time, doing things I like . . . . What I want keeps clashing with the authorities.'<sup>48</sup>

The fluid communication within, and spontaneous 'actions' of, the squatter scene were congenial to Tycho's desires, including occasionally throwing stones at the police, thus avoiding 'the feeling of continuing to live without having resisted'.<sup>49</sup> A loosely structured movement allowed for a blend of political radicalism, subjective liberation and uninhibited interaction. The emphasis lay not on continuous and organised activity but on exceptional situations transcending ordinary causality. These comprised ecstatically self-empowering outbursts of violence alongside peaceful activities such as all-night parties, naked sunbathing or brunching on a public

<sup>44</sup> For pertinent analyses, see Daniel Schmidt, 'In Freiräumen leben: Hausbesetzungen und Hausbesetzer in der Bundesrepublik Deutschland (1970–1982)', in Duco Hellema, Friso Wielenga and Markus Wilp, eds., *Radikalismus und politische Reformen: Beiträge zur deutschen und niederländischen Geschichte in den 1970er Jahren* (Münster: Waxmann, 2012), 131–50, quotation 142; Sebastian Haumann and Susanne Schregel, 'Andere Räume, andere Städte und die Transformation der Gesellschaft: Hausbesetzungen und Atomwaffenfreie Zonen als alternative Raumpraktiken', in Hanno Balz and Jan-Henrik Friedrichs, eds., *"All We Ever Wanted . . ." Eine Kulturgeschichte europäischer Protestbewegungen der 1980er Jahre* (Berlin: Dietz, 2012), 53–72; Reichardt, *Authentizität*, 498–571.

<sup>45</sup> Werner Fritschi, 'Vorzeichen der Eruption', in SP der Stadt Zürich, ed., *Eine Stadt in Bewegung: Materialien zu den Zürcher Unruhen* (Zurich, 1980), 11–3; Christian Rentsch, 'Plädoyer für die Unzufriedenheit', in *ibid.* 29–30.

<sup>46</sup> Shanne Marks and Helmut Reinicke, 'Autonomie der Gasse', in SP der Stadt Zürich, *Stadt in Bewegung*, 93–6.

<sup>47</sup> Achmed von Wartburg, 'Bewegter', in Heinz Nigg, ed., *Wir wollen alles, und zwar subito! Die Achtziger Jugendunruhen in der Schweiz und ihre Folgen* (Zurich: Limmat, 2001), 189–90; see also the contemporary statements cited *ibid.* 312.

<sup>48</sup> *Als je leven je lief is: Vraaggespreken met krakers en kraaksters* (Amsterdam, n.p., 1982), 18, 29 (quotation); 'De stad is vrij de stad is vrij isn't it?', *Kraakkrant*, 1980, no. 39, 3. For an analysis of the squatter movement within the broader history of leftist movements in Amsterdam, see Virginie Mamadouh, *De stad in eigen hand: Provo's, kabouters en krakers als stedelijke sociale beweging* (Amsterdam, Sua, 1992).

<sup>49</sup> *Als je leven je lief is*, 31.

sidewalk.<sup>50</sup> Moreover, there was no programmatic contradiction between Tycho's and others' avowedly self-centred perspective and the interest taken in ethnic and sexual minorities, drug addicts or psychiatric patients, who were very much present at the neighbourhood level but excluded from the official image of the city.<sup>51</sup> Indeed, many activists themselves were gay or lesbian, experimented with drugs or faced, due to their status as foreign citizens, the threat of expulsion. The New Left's elective affinities thus encompassed solidarity with other marginalised people and consequently a notion of urban space as a site of both empowered and fragile subjectivity.

This political emphasis on the tension between marginalisation and empowerment had important intellectual repercussions and inspired a new critical and interdisciplinary scholarship on Western European cities. For instance, the eclectic French thinker Michel de Certeau, an ordained Jesuit priest, registered his satisfaction that Paris's century-old built environment, the 'lost stories and opaque acts' at work in urban life, and the habit of appropriating the streets by walking them had survived the onslaught of 'functionalist totalitarianism'. For de Certeau, these symbolic layers, alternative narratives and everyday practices subverted the 'Concept city' and offered a 'readable identity', in stark contrast to New York, whose essence he saw encapsulated by the extreme vertical perspectives available to visitors of the World Trade Center.<sup>52</sup> A similar emphasis on small-scale acts of appropriation and subversion lay at the heart of a renewed historical engagement with the urban working class, which was no longer seen as a homogeneous entity but as a complex ensemble of men and women modifying social reality through their own choices and strategies. In the light of such a vision, the city of the past appeared as a 'site of possible resources' rather than a mere arena of exploitation and repression.<sup>53</sup>

However, individual preferences and collective solidarity, perspectives on the past and visions of the future did not blend into each other seamlessly. Doubts about the new kind of elective affinities permeated the discourse on alternative forms of urban living, especially once the initial enthusiasm had somewhat receded and tensions surfaced. Some activists deplored an excess of individualism in loosely structured settings. One Amsterdam squatter expressed disappointment that, after having taken considerable risks to defend others' occupied houses against the police, he did not receive a similar degree of support in return. And a critical voice vividly described

<sup>50</sup> For a sophisticated analysis, with relevance beyond West Berlin, see Joachim C. Häberlen, 'Sekunden der Freiheit: Zum Verhältnis von Gefühlen, Macht und Zeit in Ausnahmesituationen am Beispiel der Revolte 1980/81 in Berlin', in Dirk Schumann and Cornelia Rau, eds., *Ausnahmestände: Entgrenzungen und Regulierungen in Europa während des Kalten Krieges* (Göttingen: Wallstein, 2015), 195–213.

<sup>51</sup> See, for instance, various articles in *Kölner Volksblatt*, 1978, no. 5 en 8; ; 'Buurt en anarchie', *Kraakkrant*, 1979, no. 28, 19–21; *Als je leven je lief is*, 92.

<sup>52</sup> Michel de Certeau, *The Practice of Everyday Life* (Berkeley: University of California Press, 1984), 91–110, quotations 107, 106, 95.

<sup>53</sup> See, for instance, the introduction to Maurizio Gribaudi, *Itinéraires ouvriers: Espaces et groupes sociaux à Turin au début du XXe siècle* (Paris: Éditions de l'École des Hautes Études en Sciences Sociales, 1987), quotation 21.

how in the autonomous youth centre (*Autonomes Jugendzentrum*) certain persons and cliques dominated meetings and siphoned off much of the subsidy granted by the city of Zurich: 'At the end of the day this boils down to a situation in which he who has the sharpest elbows, yells most aggressively and is most cunning has his way – just like in bourgeois society!'<sup>54</sup> By contrast, other activists struggled with the lack of privacy in squatted houses, where the intense communication and emphasis on action made it difficult to retreat with a book.<sup>55</sup> Not coincidentally, female activists picked up on the excess of individualism and the lack of private space alike, associating them with the assertive masculinity that predominated in the alternative scene. One of them observed that women tended to be pushed to the margins in heated debates because they lacked the necessary 'healthy dose of confidence', while another explained how much she enjoyed living by herself again after having constantly been used by men wanting to offload their emotional baggage.<sup>56</sup>

Such perceptions fuelled a critique of urban radicalism, which was voiced by insiders and sympathetic observers alike. A councillor in Amsterdam noted acerbically that squatters were in the process of becoming one of several 'tolerated subcultures' that treated the left-wing parties as a sort of department store and did not shy away from asking the dreaded state for various subsidies and stipends.<sup>57</sup> Joschka Fischer, justifying his incipient transition from anarchist in Frankfurt's West End to career politician within the Green Party, pertinently described how erstwhile activists flocked back from India, the countryside or 'some cosmic depths and widths' to accommodate themselves to life in the city. Their radicalism was now 'a moral rather than a political alternative', a 'mere demand directed at the individual and devoid of practice, life or experience'.<sup>58</sup> The future German foreign minister thus drew the consequences from the increasing proximity between an initially radical culture and a changing urban mainstream. As early as the years around 1970, the activist defence of nineteenth-century buildings and neighbourhoods had enjoyed some sympathies among otherwise moderate middle-class residents, who shared the widespread doubts about the desirability of 'modern' planning and architecture.<sup>59</sup> A decade later, the back pages of 'alternative' magazines revealed the contours of a lifestyle driven by peculiar but not categorically different kinds of personal choice, be it for Greek restaurants, group therapy or contacts with potential partners.<sup>60</sup> Indeed, in the course of the 1980s and 1990s, many erstwhile features of radicalism blended or were co-opted into a new kind of urban society. Rental contracts for long-standing squatters; previously unknown street cafés and organic shops; the abolition of restrictions, for instance on

<sup>54</sup> *Als je leven je lief is*, 91; Markus Rüegg, 'Die autonomen Lemminge' (May 1981), reprinted in Nigg, *Wir wollen alles*, 286–91, quotation 290.

<sup>55</sup> *Als je leven je lief is*, 21, 37.

<sup>56</sup> *Als je leven je lief is*, 48 (quotation), 81–2.

<sup>57</sup> "'Geweld leidt alleen tot nederlagen": Frank Köhler, PSP-raadslid in Amsterdam, over de grenzen van de kraakbeweging', *De Groene Amsterdammer*, 107, 2 (1983) 107 (1983), no 2, 8–9.

<sup>58</sup> Joschka, 'Der Widerspenstigen Zähmung', *Pflasterstrand*, 93 (15–28 Nov. 1980), 11–12.

<sup>59</sup> For a case study, see Wolfgang Kraushaar, *Fischer in Frankfurt: Karriere eines Außenseiters* (Hamburg: Hamburger Edition, 2001), 38–79.

<sup>60</sup> See, for instance, *Plärrer*, 1980, no. 3, 40–5; Reichardt, *Authentizität*, 290–3, 659–74.

sunbathing on the lawns along Zurich's lakeshore; subsidised youth centres, music festivals and arthouse cinemas; municipal governments beginning to see ethnic and sexual diversity as an asset rather than a liability – all this points to the current (though no longer new) hype about the 'creative city' as well as an atmosphere that has undeniably become more tolerant than it was only a few decades ago.<sup>61</sup>

Depending on one's political leanings, one might thus write the story of either a sad decline or a welcome integration of urban radicalism. Yet, both versions would, by themselves, leave out an important dimension of urban societies since the 1970s, which arose from the counter-reactions to New Left activism. The orientation towards domesticity and consumption that had been such a crucial feature of the two previous decades not only persisted, it was vigorously defended. Already in 1968 many Parisians were angry at student radicals for destroying public property and burning their hard-earned cars, and glad to leave the city for the Whitsun weekend thanks to the petrol provided by the armed forces during the general strike. In Zurich in 1981 an elderly man yelled at demonstrators 'We are working from morning till evening, and you are smashing the things we built over decades! What the hell are you thinking?'<sup>62</sup> Urban radicalism visibly and tangibly challenged widely shared preferences, and it even claimed that a conventional existence was not worth living. This triggered resentment not least among working-class residents, whose range of personal choice had always remained limited, and who were, in a more volatile economy and amidst renewed social divisions, increasingly caught between aspirations for a higher living standard and worries about their future prospects. As West Berlin's trade union boss succinctly put it: 'The worker earning 1600 Marks wants nothing to do with university radicals. The Berlin worker is firmly attached to the rule of law.'<sup>63</sup>

During the 1970s and 1980s centre-right newspapers articulated a renewed urban conservatism. Reports on attacks on the government by subsidised artists, crimes committed by immigrants or drug addiction destroying families fuelled the widespread doubts about cultural subversion, alternative lifestyles and ethnic diversity.<sup>64</sup> The perspective assumed was that of the beleaguered 'little man'. In this vein, small business owners were plagued by junkies begging on West Berlin's Kurfürstendamm or the transient subjects attracted by Zurich's *Autonomes Jugendzentrum*, both of whom were scaring off potential customers.<sup>65</sup> Consumers

<sup>61</sup> For a good case study, see Christian Schmid, 'Wir wollen die ganze Stadt! – Die Achtziger Bewegung und die urbane Frage', in Nigg, *Wir wollen alles*, 352–68, esp. 359–60, 362–4.

<sup>62</sup> Michael Seidman *The Imaginary Revolution: Parisian Students and Workers in 1968* (New York: Berghahn, 2004), 216, 225–6, 257; documentary *Keine Zeit um auszuruhen* (1981), extracts on the DVD included in Nigg, *Wir wollen alles*, quotation at 23:07.

<sup>63</sup> Cited in Hans Habe, 'Rendezvous mit Berlin', *B.Z.*, 22 Apr. 1972.

<sup>64</sup> 'Dem Mäzen Staat wird ins Gesicht gespuckt: Keine Feier ohne Schreier', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 23 Mar. 1969; 'Gastarbeiter schoß vier Berliner nieder: Ein Todesopfer', *B.Z.*, 2 May 1972; 'Unser Leben ist die Hölle! Wie die Drogensucht eine Berliner Familie zerstörte', *ibid.*, 7 Sept. 1978.

<sup>65</sup> 'Pennerparadies Kudamm-Eck: Umsatzeinbußen bei Geschäftsleuten', *Berliner Morgenpost*, 18 Jan. 1981; 'Keine Bereicherung für das Quartier: Unmut über das AJZ', *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 11 Apr. 1981. In a similar vein, 'Punkers gooien ramen in de hoofdstad in', *De Telegraaf*, 1 May 1978.

indirectly payed for the windows of banks and department stores, which were regularly smashed by radicals enjoying a pleasant life ‘at the expense of the general public (read: the taxpayer)’.<sup>66</sup> Interestingly, the urban conservatism of the 1970s and 1980s shared some tenets commonly associated with leftist activism, namely the new emphasis on civic participation over bureaucratic decision-making and the doubts about modernist development.<sup>67</sup> But the solution it proposed lay in a turn to the past, in a renewed attention given to picturesque canals or side streets, ‘traditional’ festivals and expressions of old-style civic pride.<sup>68</sup> Consequently, one Catholic politician claimed that ‘the happiest moment of living in Milan’ had been in the 1950s, at a time of lower living standards but a ‘psychological climate’ less riddled by uncertainties.<sup>69</sup> Urban conservatism thus firmly defended the principle of consumer choice based on hard work, demarcating it from alternative subjectivities and embedding it within a framework of ‘traditional’ local identities. It was shared by many former social democratic voters, strengthened the democratic right in cities such as Frankfurt, West Berlin and Paris and, by the 1990s, fed into a new right-wing populism that has by no means been limited to rural or small-town constituencies.<sup>70</sup>

The New Left’s head-on challenge to the 1950s and 1960s relationship between urban societies and personal choice thus had deep repercussions. Radical activists across Western Europe fought for a richer notion of individual ‘life’, which they began to realise in conjunction with like-minded others and hoped to eventually employ to transform cities as a whole. However, this was from the outset a highly ambitious and tension-prone project, and conversely a starting point for a greater diversity of leisure sites and lifestyle choices. The ongoing debate about whether the 1968 revolt should be interpreted principally as an expression of left-wing radicalism within a longer pre- and afterhistory or as a harbinger of late twentieth-century consumer society appears rather misleading from the vantage point of cities, for both dimensions were inherent in the new type of elective affinities embraced by urban radicals.<sup>71</sup> Moreover, it is crucial to take the indirect effects of New Left activism into account, ranging from overlaps with a socially broad scepticism about modernist

<sup>66</sup> ‘Leserbriefe’, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 19 Jan. 1981.

<sup>67</sup> ‘Versteckspiel der Behörden’, *B.Z.*, 22 Apr. 1972; ‘Nun dürfen die Senioren wieder in ihre alten Wohnungen ziehen: Bei der Modernisierung ging dem Amt das Geld aus’, *Berliner Morgenpost*, 24 Feb. 1981.

<sup>68</sup> ‘Trecentomila sulle sponde dei due Navigli alla scoperta di una Milano più pittoresca’, *Corriere della Sera*, 2 June 1980; ‘Strassen und Gassen der Zürcher Altstadt: Trittligasse – “Wohnquartier für Eingeborene”’, *Neue Zürcher Zeitung*, 23 Apr. 1981; ‘Fahnen, Farben, Funken und Feuer: Fröhliches Sechseläuten unter wolkenschwerem Himmel’, *ibid.*, 29 Apr. 1981; Hans Habe, ‘Rendezvous mit Berlin’, *B.Z.*, 21 Apr. 1972.

<sup>69</sup> ‘Vivere meglio a Milano: Un dibattito con tre voci’, *Corriere della Sera*, 25 May 1980.

<sup>70</sup> There are thus far few studies that place right-wing populism in its local contexts, but see, on suburban Zurich, Lukas Zollinger, *Der Mittelstand am Rande: Christoph Blocher, das Volk und die Vorstädte* (Bern: Berner Beiträge zur Soziologie, 2004).

<sup>71</sup> Cf., from a rich and growing literature, Gerd-Rainer Horn, *The Spirit of ’68: Rebellion in Western Europe and North America, 1956–1976* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2007) with Stephan Malinowski and Alexander Sedlmaier, ‘“1968” – A Catalyst of Consumer Society’, *Cultural and Social History*, 8 (2011), 255–74.

cityscapes to counter-reactions feeding into a new – and hitherto underrated – conservatism. By the 1980s, the relationship between urban societies and personal choice had become far more complex than could have been anticipated two decades earlier.

### III

The present article has focused on elective affinities in order to synthesise some of the recent historiography on Western European cities between the mid-1950s and the early 1980s. Along the way, it has cited a broad array of voices, ranging from family-oriented suburbanites to the authors who denied them a meaningful existence, from radical activists to their decidedly ‘ordinary’ opponents. This has not been intended merely to add colour to an otherwise dry account of social and spatial change, but to make a broader point about discourse and agency in urban society. For without the quietly expressed demand for privacy on the one hand and, on the other, the much more vocal quest for a fuller ‘life’, without the ideas of modernist architects and the critical intellectuals who contradicted them, Western European cities would have a very different spatial and social outlook today. All of these voices grappled with, but also gave shape to, the interplay between individualisation, depersonalisation and repersonalisation or between dis-embedding and re-embedding that has been highlighted in Georg Simmel’s and Anthony Giddens’s prominent sociologies of modernity. The resulting complexity had much to do with broader cultural trends during the period under discussion, and indeed with the ambivalence of the very notion of individuality in twentieth-century Europe.<sup>72</sup> This ambivalence needs to be accounted for conceptually, unlike, for instance, in David Harvey’s unequivocally negative picture of a mere ‘aura of freedom of choice’ in contemporary cities, of ‘intense possessive individualism’ complemented by ‘individualistic isolation, anxiety and neurosis’.<sup>73</sup>

While personal choice and elective affinities have thus been identified as an overarching theme in the urban history of Western Europe since the Second World War, they were closely linked to the particularities of two discrete yet intertwined periods. Crucially, the new spatial order emerging in the 1950s and 1960s was seen in ambivalent terms. Although (or because) the spread of ‘modern’ apartment buildings, suburban homes and road networks reflected the preferences of millions of urbanites, it triggered nostalgia, resentment and resistance. For the critics, it threatened to undermine social cohesion, the specificity of a given city and even the individuality it purported to foster. It is only against the backdrop of this critique that the radical left after 1968 could assume such significance especially on an urban level. The communards and squatters of the 1970s and early 1980s did not succeed in

<sup>72</sup> See Andreas Wirsching, ‘From Work to Consumption: Transatlantic Visions of Individuality in Modern Mass Society’, *Contemporary European History*, 20 (2011), 1–26; Föllmer, *Individuality and Modernity*.

<sup>73</sup> Harvey, *Rebel Cities*, 14.

revolutionising Western European cities, but they challenged their social and spatial order and ushered in a number of crucial if sometimes unintended changes. An urban history that does not confine itself to case studies and is methodologically attentive to expectations, practices and effects can thus offer important insights to contemporary European historians.

What, in the end, was 'Western European' about all this? In the cities of the Eastern Bloc, domestic privacy and alternative lifestyles were by no means absent, but they played a more tacit role within a structure determined by communist dictatorship.<sup>74</sup> Conversely, although doubts about modernist planning and suburban life were certainly articulated by American intellectuals, they did not have anywhere near the same impact on mainstream culture and the spatial order. England's 'Western Europeanness' is questionable with regard to its contemporary urban history, since its middle class and its democratically elected politicians abandoned city centres to a far greater extent than on the continent.<sup>75</sup> Finally, southern European cities were much more marked by rural in-migration and consequently a quest for a level of housing and infrastructure that could be taken for granted in West Germany or the Netherlands; comparatively prosperous Italy arguably constituted a mixed case.<sup>76</sup> Thus, in Western Europe with its recent affluence and its tradition of cultural critique personal choice and elective affinities were more consequential than elsewhere, while also being especially complex and disputed. As a result, they were inextricably linked to the transformation as well as the continuity of urban spaces and societies.

<sup>74</sup> See, among others, David Crowley and Susan Reid, eds., *Socialist Spaces: Sites of Everyday Life in the Eastern Bloc* (Oxford: Berg, 2002); Paul Betts, *Within Walls: Private Life in the German Democratic Republic* (Oxford: Oxford University Press, 2010); Alexei Yurchak, *Everything Was Forever, Until It Was No More: The Last Soviet Generation* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 2005).

<sup>75</sup> See Peter Mandler, 'New Towns for Old: The Fate of the Town Centre', in Becky Conekin, Frank Mort and Chris Waters, eds., *Moments of Modernity: Reconstructing Britain, 1945–1964* (New York: Rivers Oram, 1999), 208–27.

<sup>76</sup> See, among others, Pedro Ramos Pinto, *Lisbon Rising: Urban Social Movements in the Portuguese Revolution, 1974–1975* (Manchester: Manchester University Press, 2013); John Foot, *Milan since the Miracle: City, Culture and Identity* (Oxford: Berg, 2001).