

# There is a Politics of Space because Space is Political

Henri Lefebvre and the Production of Space

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*Abstract: This lecture offers a reading of the work of the French Marxist Henri Lefebvre, particularly focusing on his writings on the question of space. It suggests that this is a simultaneously political and philosophical project and that it needs to be understood as such. Accordingly we need to examine and work with both terms in Lefebvre's book The Production of Space — thinking about the Marxist analysis of production and the question of space which goes beyond the resources Marxism can offer. The paper concludes by offering some reflections on Lefebvre scholarship through the relation of space and history.*

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The French Marxist philosopher Henri Lefebvre (1901-91) came to prominence in the 1930s with the first translation of Marx's 1844 *Manuscripts*. His first important works, such as *La conscience mystifiée* and *Le materialisme dialectique*, were published in the 1930s, and he continued working right up until his death, producing nearly seventy books. Compared to other Marxist writers who were his contemporaries, such as Jean-Paul Sartre and Louis Althusser, Lefebvre is still relatively little known. One of his most significant works is the 1974 study *La*



*production de l'espace*, recently republished in France.<sup>1</sup> Understandably, much of its reception has been in fields such as geography and urban studies, while the reception in the fields of political science and philosophy has been somewhat muted. However, Lefebvre's work can also provide the political theorist with a useful set of conceptual tools for mapping the spatiality of politics and history, rather than simply explaining the politics and history of space.

The limited length of this paper precludes a detailed situation of Lefebvre's work, but a few important points should be borne in mind. First, Lefebvre was always interested in the relationship between Hegel and Marx, and thus in idealism and materialism. Instead of matter being seen as the embodiment of mental constructs, or mind being seen as the reaction to matter, Lefebvre saw both material and mental together. It is the fusion of the idealist and materialist notions that enables an *idealist and materialist* approach to questions of life and lived experience.<sup>2</sup> Second, Lefebvre saw Marx's work as important, indeed essential, to an understanding of our times, but not something that could stand alone. To this purpose — as well as recognizing the importance of Hegel — he incorporated many of the insights of other thinkers, notably Heidegger and Nietzsche. This influence was apparent in the work on space, and in what Lefebvre called his most well-known concept, the critique of everyday life.<sup>3</sup> Lefebvre was one of the first to see Marx as a theorist of alienation and, *contra* Althusser, to emphasize the continuity between the early and late works. Within the concept of everyday life is a clear use of Marx's notion of alienation, but now applied beyond the economic and related to Heidegger's understanding of *Alltäglichkeit* [everydayness].<sup>4</sup>

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1. *La production de l'espace*, 4e édition (Paris: Anthropos, 2000 [1974]). All unattributed references in these notes are to works by Henri Lefebvre.

2. See *Le matérialisme dialectique* (Paris: PUF, 1947 [1939]).

3. "Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics: Remarks Occasioned by the Centenary of Marx's Death," in *Marxism and the Interpretation of Culture*, ed. Cary Nelson & Lawrence Grossberg (London: Macmillan, 1988), p. 78.

4. Lefebvre's important considerations of Marxism include *Le Marxisme* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1948) and *Sociologie de Marx* (Paris: Presses Universitaires de France, 1966). For an excellent biography of Lefebvre, see Rémi Hess, *Henri Lefebvre et*

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## I. The Rural, The Urban, and the Global

Lefebvre's notion of everyday life has been usefully situated between the two principal movements of post-war French theory.<sup>5</sup> Rather than the bracketing characteristic of phenomenology, or the denial of experience found in structuralism, Lefebvre wished to see how the structures, signs and codes of the everyday integrate with biographical life. Lefebvre utilized this notion in his numerous works in urban and rural sociology.<sup>6</sup> Lefebvre's understanding of space was further developed in his *La survie du capitalisme*, which suggested that the reshaping of the global spatial economy was an important historical development. In his initial sketches of the practical understanding of space Lefebvre rehearsed themes that would find theoretical backing in *Le production de l'espace*.

The relationship between the town and the countryside is, for Lefebvre, a historical relationship, with the mediating role being played by industrialization and the advance of technology. Industrial society has, Lefebvre argued, been supplanted by urban society. This was only just beginning in Marx's time, so it is therefore understandable that he failed to perceive that "the *production of the city* was the end, the objective and the meaning of *industrial production*."<sup>7</sup> Writing in 1968, Lefebvre suggested that "the great event of the last few years is that the effects of industrialisation on a superficially modified capitalist society of production and property have produced their results: a programmed *everyday life* in its appropriate *urban setting*. Such a process was favoured by the disintegration of the traditional town and the expansion of urbanism."<sup>8</sup> What this has produced, and therefore what must be examined, is an urban environment. Lefebvre suggested that this expression is better than 'technological environment', "since technology only produces an

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*l'aventure du siècle* (Paris: A.M. Métailié, 1988). On his relationship with Marxism and contemporary thought see, particularly, Michael Kelly, *Modern French Marxism* (Oxford: Basil Blackwell, 1982); Mark Poster, *Existential Marxism in Postwar France: From Sartre to Althusser* (Princeton: Princeton University Press, 1975). On everyday life, see Alice Kaplan & Kristin Ross, eds., *Everyday Life*, in *Yale French Studies* 73 (Fall 1987); A. Hirsch, *The French New Left* (Boston, MA: South End Press, 1981). Heidegger's discussion of *Alltäglichkeit* is found in *Sein und Zeit*, 11th ed. (Tübingen: Max Niemeyer, 1967).

5. Alice Kaplan & Kristin Ross, "Introduction" to *Everyday Life*, p. 3.

6. See, for example, *La vallée de Campan: Étude de sociologie rurale* (Paris: PUF, 1963); *Du rural à l'urbain* (Paris: Anthropos, 1970); *La révolution urbaine* (Paris: Gallimard, 1970); *Espace et politique* (Paris: Anthropos, 1973).

7. *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, trans. Sacha Rabnovitch (Harmondsworth: Allen Lane, 1971), p. 195, original emphasis throughout; see also *Writings on Cities*, ed. and trans. Eleonore Kofman & Elizabeth Lebas (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), pp. 65ff, 130; and *La pensée marxiste et la ville* (Paris: Casterman, 1972).

8. *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p. 65.



‘environment’ in the city and by the city; outside the city technology produces isolated objects: a rocket, a radar station.”<sup>9</sup> (We may nevertheless wish to question this last assumption, as it would seem to be self-evident that the advances of technology in, for example, farming, have sculpted the “rural” as much as parallel developments have the urban. It should also not be forgotten that the environment is, of course, directly affected by state planning, another development of relatively recent times.) As Lefebvre remarked, the state “is actively involved in housing construction, city planning, urbanisation. ‘Urbanism’ is part of both ideology and the would-be rational practice of the state.”<sup>10</sup>

This understanding of the shift from the rural to the urban — both in historical terms, and in his own work — enabled Lefebvre to escape accusations that suggest that there is a strong urban bias in much continental theory. Margaret Fitzsimmons castigates Marx and Weber for this, and sees the bias continue in the more recent work of Althusser, Michel Foucault, Jacques Derrida and Jacques Lacan. Only Lefebvre escapes her damning condemnation of “their obsession with *la vie urbaine*, *la vie parisienne*, as the only civilised manifestation of *la vie quotidienne*.”<sup>11</sup> Lefebvre’s understanding of the rural and urban together rather than in isolation was one of his key points: the over-emphasis on the urban was one of his criticisms of the Situationists,<sup>12</sup> while the neglect of the problems of urbanization was seen as a fault with Marcuse.<sup>13</sup>

Important readings of urban and rural landscapes are found throughout his work. For example, in the first volume of the *Critique de la vie quotidienne* there is a chapter entitled “Notes Written One Sunday in the French Countryside,” where Lefebvre took an ordinary village in France as an example. One of the clearest parts of Lefebvre’s discussion is of the village church, a reading which has distinct parallels with Nietzsche’s remarks on this subject.<sup>14</sup> Lefebvre clearly identified the

9. *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p. 50.

10. *The Explosion: Marxism and the French Upheaval*, trans. Alfred Ehrenfeld (New York: Modern Reader, 1969), p. 46; see also *La révolution urbaine*.

11. See Margaret Fitzsimmons, “The Matter of Nature,” in *Reading Human Geography: The Politics and Poetics of Inquiry*, ed. Trevor Barnes & Derek Gregory (London: Arnold, 1997), especially p. 188. Lefebvre’s fundamental text on this shift is *Du rural à l’urbain*.

12. *Introduction to Modernity: Twelve Preludes*, trans. John Moore (London: Verso, 1995 [1962]), pp. 345–6.

13. *The Explosion*, p. 33.

14. *Critique de la vie quotidienne I: Introduction*, 2nd édition (Paris: L’Arche, 1958 [1947]), pp. 228–37. See, for example, Friedrich Nietzsche, *Also Sprache Zarathustra*, Part II, §4; *Menschliches Allzumenschliches* §130. On power in space more generally, see *Götzendämmerung* Part 9, §11; all in *Samtliche Werke: Kritische Studienausgabe*, Fifteen Volumes, ed. Giorgio Colli & Mazzino Montinari (Berlin and München: W. de Gruyter and Deutscher Taschenbuch Verlag, 1980).



power of the symbols in the church — “for me this space can never be just like any other space” — and it is evident, even in this initial sketch, that he appropriated the Nietzschean notion of power in space: “Castles, palaces, cathedrals, fortresses, all speak in their various ways of the greatness and the strength of the people who built them and against whom they were built.”<sup>15</sup> The reading of space is similarly evident in a work written fifteen years later, in which he contrasted the village where he lived with a new town a few kilometres away. For Lefebvre, the town is very much a *planned*, rather than a natural, development.<sup>16</sup>

The *new town* was the typical significant phenomenon in which and on which this organisation could be *read* because it was there that it was *written*. What, apart from such features as the negation of traditional towns, segregation and intense police supervision, was inscribed in this social text to be deciphered by those who knew the code, what was projected on this screen? Everyday life — organised, neatly subdivided and programmed to fit a controlled, exact timetable.<sup>17</sup>

Lefebvre’s notion of everyday life suggests that capitalism, which has always organized the working life, has greatly expanded its control over the private life, over leisure. This is often through an organization of space.

## II. The Production of Space

In recent years there has been a noticeable shift from questions of temporality to those of spatiality. As Frederic Jameson asks, “why should landscape be any less dramatic than the event?”<sup>18</sup> In his work, Lefebvre suggested that just as everyday life has been colonized by capitalism, so too has its location — social space.<sup>19</sup> There is therefore work to be done on understanding space and how it is socially constructed and used. This is especially necessary given the increased importance of space in the modern age. Lefebvre suggested that in the past there were shortages of bread,

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15. *Critique de la vie quotidienne I*, pp. 228, 247. For a later and more explicit formulation see *The Survival of Capitalism* (London: Allison & Busby, 1976), pp. 86–8: “Constructed space — a transparency of metal and glass — tells aloud of the will to power and all its trickery. It is hardly necessary to add that the ‘habitat’ too shares in this spatial distribution of domination.”

16. *Introduction to Modernity*, pp. 116ff.

17. *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p. 59.

18. Frederic Jameson, *Postmodernism, or, The Cultural Logic of Late Capitalism* (London: Verso, 1991), p. 364.

19. Kristin Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space: Rimbaud and the Paris Commune* (Houndmills: Macmillan, 1988), pp. 8–9, goes so far as to suggest that social space is a synonym of everyday life — that everyday life is primarily (though not entirely) a spatial concept.



and never a shortage of space, but now that corn is plentiful (at least in the developed world, although unevenly distributed), space is in short supply: “The overcrowding of highly industrialised countries is especially pronounced in the larger towns and cities.”<sup>20</sup> Social space is allocated according to class, and social planning reproduces the class structure. This is either on the basis of an abundance of space for the rich and too little for the poor, or because of uneven development in the quality of places, or indeed both. Like all economies, the political economy of space is based on the idea of scarcity.<sup>21</sup> “Today more than ever, the class struggle is inscribed in space.”<sup>22</sup>

There are also crucial issues around the idea of marginalization or regionalization. This was one of Lefebvre’s points in his call for the right to the city [*ville*]. Segregation and discrimination should not remove people from the urban.<sup>23</sup> Nor is space and the politics of space confined to the city. The relationship of center and periphery is similarly evidenced elsewhere: in under-developed countries, in the rural, in the marginal regions of capitalist countries — Sicily, Scotland, the Basque area — in the suburbs and the ghettos, and in the social and political peripheries — the areas of the mad, homosexuals, women, youth and drug takers. Several of these liminal groups have been analysed by Foucault, yet Lefebvre criticized his approach as “a lot of pin-prick operations which are separated from each other in time and space. It neglects the centres and centrality; it neglects the global.”<sup>24</sup> The local studies are essential, but we must see the whole picture. As Harvey has phrased it, “the whole history of territorial organisation, colonialism and imperialism, of uneven development, of urban and rural contradictions, as well as of geopolitical conflict testifies to the importance of such struggles within the history of capitalism.”<sup>25</sup> One of the reasons why capitalism has survived into the twentieth century is because of its flexibility in constructing and reconstructing the relations of space and the global space economy, in constituting the world market.<sup>26</sup> Lefebvre argued that space is

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20. *Everyday Life in the Modern World*, p. 52; *Espace et politique*, pp. 57–8.

21. On this, and other aspects of Lefebvre and space, see Mario Rui Martins, “The Theory of Social Space in the Work of Henri Lefebvre,” in *Urban Political Economy and Social Theory: Critical Essays in Urban Studies*, ed. Ray Forrest, Jeff Henderson & Peter Williams (Aldershot: Gower, 1982).

22. *La production de l’espace*, p. 68.

23. *Espace et politique*, pp. 22–3; *The Survival of Capitalism*, pp. 17ff.

24. *The Survival of Capitalism*, p. 116. This theme is prevalent throughout Foucault’s work, though see particularly *Histoire de la folie à l’âge classique* (Paris: Gallimard, 1976 [1961]), and *Surveiller et punir: Naissance de la prison* (Paris: Gallimard, 1975). For a discussion, see Stuart Elden, *Mapping the Present: Heidegger, Foucault and the Project of a Spatial History* (London/New York: Continuum, 2001), particularly Chapter Five.

25. David Harvey, *The Condition of Postmodernity* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1989), p. 237.

26. *The Survival of Capitalism*, pp. 21, 106.



the ultimate locus and medium of struggle, and is therefore a crucial political issue: “There is a politics of space because space is political.”<sup>27</sup>

As many commentators on Lefebvre have pointed out, Marxism is not particularly noted for attending to questions of space. Edward Soja attributes to Marx the view that history was important, and geography an “unnecessary complication,”<sup>28</sup> and Richard Peet suggests that “Marxism has little to say about relations with nature and sees events occurring on top of a pin rather than in space.”<sup>29</sup> The fairness of these claims is moot, though it is certainly true that analyses of space never claim center stage. It should also be noted that some Marxists who have signally failed to make such analyses have made extensive use of spatial metaphors. A classic instance is Althusser, who uses such terms as field, terrain, space, site, situation, position, but seems to rely on language alone.<sup>30</sup> While the use of spatial language for metaphor should not be knocked, an understanding of *why* this language is so useful should perhaps be appended. Much spatial language deals with contestation, struggle and productivity. This is precisely because it mirrors the actual uses and experiences of space. For example, where the space of town planners is seen as a scientific object, as pure and apolitical, Lefebvre argued that it has been shaped and molded by historical and natural elements, through a political process.<sup>31</sup> Space is a social and political product. This is clearly why Lefebvre’s main work on space is entitled *La production de l’espace*. There are two terms in this title, and both need to be critically examined.

Though Lefebvre has been accused of prioritizing the early Marx’s notion of alienation over the later idea of production, it is clear in his work on space (if not elsewhere) that the mode of production is essential to his analysis. The human effects, while considered forcefully, do not dominate. Lefebvre unequivocally states

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27. *Espace et politique*, p. 59.

28. Quoted (though without reference) by Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies* (London: Verso, 1989), p. 32. It seems likely that Soja picked it up from David Harvey, *The Urbanization of Capital: Studies in the History and Theory of Capitalist Urbanization II* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1985), p. xii. In a personal communication Harvey has told me that these are scare quotes rather than a direct quotation.

29. Richard Peet, *Global Capitalism: Theories of Societal Development* (London & New York: Routledge, 1991), pp. 17–89. Lefebvre’s view is that “although space is not analysed in *Capital*, certain concepts, such as exchange value and use value, today apply to space.” See “Space: Social Product and Use Value,” in *Critical Sociology: European Perspectives*, ed. J.W. Freiburg (New York: Irvington Publishers, 1979), p. 292.

30. See especially Louis Althusser, Jacques Rancière & Pierre Macherey, *Lire le Capital Tome I* (Paris: François Maspero, 1965), pp. 28–31. For a discussion of Althusser in this context, see Neil Smith & Cindy Katz, “Grounding Metaphor: Towards a Spatialised Politics,” in *Place and the Politics of Identity*, ed. Michael Keith & Steve Pile (London: Routledge, 1993).

31. *Espace et politique*, pp. 50–1.



that “(social) space is a (social) product.”<sup>32</sup> This means that “every society — and hence every mode of production with all its subvariants . . . produces a space, its own space.”<sup>33</sup> The crudities of the 1859 *Preface* regarding base and superstructure are not replicated, but he did recognize the causal efficacy of the forces and relations of production. He noted that there is not a strict correspondence, and that sometimes spaces are produced by the contradictions in the mode of production. The example he gave is of the medieval town, which was produced out of feudalism, but eventually emerged victorious.<sup>34</sup> Lefebvre was anxious to point out that “a social space is not a *socialised* space,”<sup>35</sup> it did not exist beforehand as a non-social space, as a natural space: it is produced by social forces.

An analysis of production in the modern world shows that “we have passed from the *production of things in space* to the *production of space itself*.”<sup>36</sup> One of the key factors is technology. Scott Kirsch has pointed out that this is sometimes neglected in an analysis of Lefebvre’s work: “In addition to its significance to production *in* space, technology also plays a mediating role in the production *of* space.” Kirsch also cautions against “resorting to the rather cartoonish shrinking world metaphor,” which risks losing sight of the complex relations between capital, *technology*, and space. Space is not “shrinking,” but must rather be perpetually recast.<sup>37</sup> We might wish to modify and rephrase this last sentence. Space is not shrinking, it is being perpetually recast, but we *perceive* it to be shrinking.

This highlights an important point. Lefebvre not only corrected the modernist imbalance of time over space, but also, *contra* Kant, emphasized the historicity of their experience. No longer the Kantian empty formal containers, no longer *conditions* of experience, time and space could be experienced *as such*, and their experience was directly related to the historical conditions they were experienced within.<sup>38</sup> For

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32. *La production de l'espace*, p. 35.

33. *La production de l'espace*, p. 40.

34. “An Interview with Henri Lefebvre,” trans. Eleonore Kofman, *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 5 (1987), p. 31.

35. *La production de l'espace*, p. 220.

36. “Space: Social Product and Use Value,” p. 285.

37. Scott Kirsch, “The Incredible Shrinking World? Technology and the Production of Space,” in *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995), pp. 533, 544. The critique of the shrinking world metaphor is expressly directed at David Harvey’s work. Kirsch suggests that the metaphorical space of the shrinking world takes material space out of geography, and is therefore akin to a fetishism of space. It is suggested that Lefebvre’s space, a concrete abstraction, cannot be divorced from its materiality.

38. For the view Lefebvre was arguing against, see Immanuel Kant, *Kritik der reinen Vernunft* (Hamburg: Felix Meiner, 1956), especially the Transcendental Aesthetic; or the *Prolegomena zu einer jeden künftigen Metaphysik*, in *Immanuel Kants Werke*, Vol IV, ed. Ernst Cassirer (Berlin: Bruno Cassirer, 1922).





Lefebvre, of course, these historical conditions are directly linked to the mode of production: hence the *production* of space. Lefebvre therefore wished to make two main moves in his work. First, to put space up with and alongside time in considerations of social theory, and in doing so correct the vacuity of the Kantian experiential containers. Spatiality is as important as, but must not obscure considerations of, temporality and history: “space and time appear and manifest themselves as different yet inseparable.”<sup>39</sup> Second, he wished to use this new critical understanding to examine the (modern) world in which he was writing. This is accomplished through an analysis of how space is produced, and how it is experienced. Space is produced in two ways: as a social formation (mode of production), and as a mental construction (conception).

What is meant by space? As Doreen Massey sensibly warns, “space” and “spatial” are regularly used as if their meaning was clear, but writers generally fail to realize that they have many different interpretations. She accepts that Lefebvre realized this, and that he was fairly explicit in his understanding of these problematic terms.<sup>40</sup> The situation is further complicated when we consider that the French word *espace* has a wider range of meanings than “space.” In English some of the other meanings might be translated as area, zone, locus or territory. Lefebvre began *La production de l'espace* by suggesting that up until recently one view of space dominated. This was the view of space based on the division Descartes established between *res cogitans* and *res extensa*.<sup>41</sup> Space was formulated on the basis of extension, thought of in terms of co-ordinates, lines and planes, as Euclidean geometry. Kant further complicated the picture by conceiving of space and time as forms of sensibility, structuring all experience. We have already seen how Lefebvre’s emphasis on the production of space historicized this experience; the critique of Cartesian formulations still remains to be shown.

As early as 1939, Lefebvre had described geometric space as abstractive, and had likened it to clock time in its abstraction of the concrete.<sup>42</sup> This is clearly drawing on the critique of geometric space in Heidegger’s *Sein und Zeit* and later works. Just as we experience the hammer as a hammer only when there is a problem with it, we encounter space geometrically only when we pause to think about it, when we conceptualize it.<sup>43</sup> Our mode of reaction to space is not geometric, only our

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39. *La production de l'espace*, p. 204.

40. Doreen Massey, “Politics and Space/Time,” *New Left Review* 192 (Nov/Dec 1992): p. 66. See *La production de l'espace*, pp. 9–10.

41. René Descartes, *Meditationes de Prima Philosophia* in *Œuvres Philosophiques: Tome II (1638–1642)* (Paris: Garnier Frères, 1967).

42. *Le matérialisme dialectique*, pp. 118, 130.

43. Heidegger, *Sein und Zeit*, pp. 109, 361–2; see also his *Die Grundprobleme der Phänomenologie, Gesamtausgabe Band 24* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann,



mode of abstraction is. There is an opposition established between our *conception* of space — abstract, mental and geometric — and our *perception* of space — concrete, material and physical. The latter takes as its initial point of departure the body, which Lefebvre saw as the site of resistance within the discourse of Power in space.<sup>44</sup> Abstract, decorporalized space is, he suggested, still another aspect of alienation.

In order to make progress in understanding space, we need to grasp the concrete and the abstract together. As was argued in *Le matérialisme dialectique*, if only one is grasped and turned into an absolute, a partial truth becomes an error: “By rejecting a part of the content it gives sanction to and aggravates the dispersion of the elements of the real.”<sup>45</sup> Just as Lefebvre described the state as a “realised abstraction,”<sup>46</sup> space too is a realized (in both senses of the word) abstraction. Here there is an obvious use of idealism and materialism together. Space is a mental *and* material construct. This provides us with a third term between the poles of conception and perception, the notion of the lived. Lefebvre argued that human space and human time lie half in nature, and half in abstraction. His example of time is instructive: “It is obvious . . . that the human rhythms (biological, psychological and social time-scales — the time-scale of our own organism and that of the clock) determine the way in which we perceive and conceive of the world and even the laws we discover in it.”<sup>47</sup> Socially lived space and time, socially produced, depend on physical and mental constructs.

This gives us a conceptual triad: spatial practice; representations of space; and spaces of representation.<sup>48</sup> Space is viewed in three ways, as perceived, conceived and lived: *l’espace perçu, conçu, vécu*. This Lefebvrian schema sees a unity between physical, mental and social space:

spatial practice	<i>l’espace perçu</i>	perceived	physical	materialism
representations of space	<i>l’espace conçu</i>	conceived	mental	idealism
spaces of representation	<i>l’espace vécu</i>	lived	social	materialism & idealism

The first of these takes space as physical form, *real* space, space that is generated and used. The second is the space of *savoir* (knowledge) and logic, of maps, mathematics,

1975), pp. 231ff.

44. *The Survival of Capitalism*, p. 89.

45. *Le matérialisme dialectique*, p. 165; see Norbert Guterman & Henri Lefebvre, *La conscience mystifiée* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 1999 [1936]), p. 210.

46. *Critique de la vie quotidienne I*, p. 223.

47. *Le matérialisme dialectique*, p. 139.

48. *La production de l’espace*, pp. 42–3.



of space as the instrumental space of social engineers and urban planners, that is, space as a mental construct, *imagined* space. The third sees space as produced and modified over time and through its use, spaces invested with symbolism and meaning, the space of *connaissance* (less formal or more local forms of knowledge), space as *real-and-imagined*.

This notion of lived space is one of Lefebvre's central contributions, though it predates his use. Heidegger's influence can be seen in many places in *La production de l'espace*, and in other works of the same period. What Lefebvre seems to have done is to bring together much of Heidegger's work with the work of Marx. Through his work on Nietzsche and Hölderlin, Heidegger incorporated an understanding of the poetic into his work, crucially in the spatial notion of poetic dwelling, a notion of *lived experience of everyday life*.<sup>49</sup> Lefebvre's use of *habiter* is a direct translation of Heidegger's *wohnen*.<sup>50</sup> Indeed, in a number of places, Lefebvre cites Hölderlin's poem "poetically man dwells," and mentions Heidegger's discussion positively.<sup>51</sup> Lefebvre's suggestion that inhabiting [*habiter*] has been reduced to the notion of habitat [*habitat*] parallels Heidegger's notion of a crisis in dwelling.<sup>52</sup> As Lefebvre noted, explicitly following Heidegger, this crisis "springs from a strange kind of excess: a rage for measurement and calculation."<sup>53</sup> As Harvey has noted, in this view of lived space, Cartesian-Kantian notions of space are not necessarily wrong — they can be perfectly reasonable approximations — but they are approximations.<sup>54</sup> To repeat, they are approximations that begin at the level of abstraction, crucially one level away from the initial level of lived reaction.

The construction, or production, of spaces therefore owes as much to conceptual realms as to material activities. An example of a space that incorporates both mental and material constructs is a cloister, where "a gestural space has succeeded in mooring a mental space — a space of contemplation and theological abstraction — to the earth, thus allowing it to express itself symbolically and to become part of a practice."<sup>55</sup> Another example shows how constructs are experienced in a modern

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49. See Martin Heidegger, *Nietzsche* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, Zwei bande, 1961); *Hölderlins Hymne 'Der Ister'*, *Gesamtausgabe Band 53* (Frankfurt am Main: Vittorio Klostermann, 1984); *Vorträge und Aufsätze* (Pfullingen: Günther Neske, 1978). For a commentary, see Stuart Elden, "Heidegger's Hölderlin and the Importance of Place," *Journal of the British Society for Phenomenology* 30, no. 3 (October 1999), pp. 258–74.

50. *La révolution urbaine*, p. 240; *La production de l'espace*, pp. 143–4.

51. *Du rural à l'urbain*, p. 160; *La révolution urbaine*, p. 111; *La production de l'espace*, p. 362.

52. *Writings on Cities*, p. 79; *La production de l'espace*, p. 362.

53. *Du rural à l'urbain*, p. 161.

54. David Harvey, *Justice, Nature and the Geography of Difference* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), p. 267.

55. *La production de l'espace*, p. 250.



city. A park is *conceived*, designed and produced through labor, technology and institutions, but the meaning of the space, and the space itself, is adapted and transformed as it is *perceived* and *lived* by social actors and groups.<sup>56</sup> But this notion of space as lived is on its own not sufficient. Lefebvre's criticism of Heidegger is that he failed to understand the notion of production in sufficient detail. Heidegger's conception of production is seen as "restrained and restrictive," as he envisaged it as a "making-appear, an arising [*un surgissement*] which brings forth a thing, as a thing present among things already-present."<sup>57</sup> What is involved, therefore, is a *social* and *political* production of space.

How then should an analysis of space proceed? Just as the social is historically shaped, so too is it spatially shaped. Equally the spatial is historically and socially configured. The three elements of the social, spatial and temporal shape and are shaped by each other. "Social relations, which are concrete abstractions, have no real existence save in and through space. *Their support is spatial*,"<sup>58</sup> and, we should add, historical. And yet space is not merely "the passive locus [*lieu*] of social relations."<sup>59</sup> Searching for a name for this new approach, Lefebvre toyed with spatio-analysis or spatiology, but accepted there is a problem with these, as we need an analysis of the *production of space*.<sup>60</sup> Being a Marxist, Lefebvre incorporated this within a reworked historical materialism. In his *Critique de la raison dialectique*, Sartre praised Lefebvre for integrating sociology and history within historical materialism,<sup>61</sup> but given the way his work progressed, we may feel tempted to add "spatiology" to the mix as well. Indeed, in 1989 Lefebvre suggested to his interviewers that courses in history and sociology which leave aside urban (spatial) questions seem ludicrous, in that they lack their very substance.<sup>62</sup>

### III. Critical Reception: Towards a History of Space or a Spatial History?

I have argued that Lefebvre made two main moves in his work: an assertion of the importance of space in tandem with that of time; and an analysis of the spaces of the modern age. While in Lefebvre's subtle and nuanced work this distinction is clear

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56. Kirsch, "The Incredible Shrinking World?," p. 548.

57. *La production de l'espace*, p. 144.

58. *La production de l'espace*, p. 465.

59. *La production de l'espace*, p. 18.

60. *La production de l'espace*, p. 465.

61. Jean-Paul Sartre, *Critique de la raison dialectique précédé de questions de méthode, Tome I: Théorie des ensembles pratiques* (Paris: Gallimard, 1960), p. 50; see David Caute, *Communism and the French Intellectuals 1914-1960* (London: Andre Deutsch, 1964), p. 298.

62. *Writings on Cities*, p. 215.



and useful, in the hands of less adroit writers it all too often descends into a heavy-handed examination of the postmodernization of, for example (though it is with depressing regularity the only example), the Los Angeles cityscape.<sup>63</sup> In this brief appreciation of the critical appropriation of Lefebvre, only the first of these two moves — the methodological one — will be examined.

One of the first glimpses of Lefebvre's work in the English-speaking world was through the work of Manuel Castells. Castells was influenced by the anti-Hegelian/Althusserian strand of Marxism, and was therefore critical of Lefebvre, especially on the question of space. It has been pointed out that he mainly formulated his view before Lefebvre became explicit on this subject, and that he neglected Lefebvre's work on everyday life, where the ideas were already apparent.<sup>64</sup> Lefebvre's work was initially read by Castells as a kind of spatial fetishism. It was felt that the prioritizing of space was injurious to historical materialism, which of course marginalized space, and privileged time and history. It has been convincingly argued that this is a misreading of what Lefebvre is doing.<sup>65</sup> Lefebvre may have inhabited a liminal position within Western Marxism and historical materialism, but was still trying to further an explicitly Marxist analysis. Given the imbalance previously found within historical materialism, some over-prioritization of space — in order to redress the imbalance — was perhaps to be expected. Had space not been thrust to the fore it would probably have been ignored.

This is one of the claims of Edward Soja, who champions Lefebvre as the "original and foremost historical and geographical materialist."<sup>66</sup> Soja deserves due credit for promoting Lefebvre's work in the English-speaking world, and his *Postmodern Geographies* has been rightly hailed as one of the most challenging and stimulating books ever written on the social use of space. The major problem with Soja's work is that he is so intent on focusing on the postmodern and on Los Angeles that he develops a program from the work of Lefebvre and others for precisely this

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63. I have in mind particularly Edward Soja's *Thirdspace: Journeys to Los Angeles and Other Real-and-Imagined Places* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1996), which I have critically reviewed in "What about Huddersfield?" *Radical Philosophy* 84 (July/August 1997), and further discussed in "Politics, Philosophy, Geography: Henri Lefebvre in Anglo-American Scholarship," *Antipode: A Radical Journal of Geography* 33, no. 5 (November 2001), pp. 809–25.

64. See Manuel Castells, *La question urbaine* (Paris: Maspéro, 1972). For a critical discussion of Castells' work see Peter Newman, "Urban Political Economy and Planning Theory," in *Urban Political Economy and Social Theory*, ed. Forrest, Henderson & Williams; and Peter Saunders, *Social Theory and the Urban Question*, 2nd Edition (London: Hutchinson, 1986). It should be noted that Castells changed his mind about and softened his attitude towards Lefebvre in later works. Also important is David Harvey's work *Social Justice and the City* (Oxford: Blackwell, 1973).

65. Ross, *The Emergence of Social Space*, p. 9; Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, pp. 69–70, 76ff.

66. Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 42.



intent, rather than sketching a framework approach that could be applied to other times and places. While Soja claims that criticisms such as “what about Huddersfield?” miss the point, in that his conceptual tools can be used in other areas, in his own work he continually focuses on the one place, with only a cursory nod toward its history.<sup>67</sup> This blunts the critical edge of his aim: the reassertion of space in critical social theory.

The reassertion of space in critical social theory — and in critical political praxis — will depend upon a continued deconstruction of a still occlusive historicism and many additional voyages of exploration into the heterotopias of contemporary postmodern geographies.<sup>68</sup>

Through this reassertion Soja hopes to spatialize history, and put time “in its place,” but he seems largely unaware that Lefebvre’s work is a historicism of sorts.<sup>69</sup> This is a key issue: does Lefebvre’s work spatialize history, historicize space, or simply spatialize sociology? While I believe that Lefebvre, working with three continually relating terms, was attempting to do all these and more, it can appear that he was writing a *history of space*, and not a *spatial history*.<sup>70</sup> Many of his commentators seem to have followed these leads in historicizing space without due attendance to the converse. The crucial point seems to be a radicalizing of the notion of history so that it becomes spatialized. With little of Lefebvre’s work on history and time available in English this problem will not easily go away. There is a danger of crowning space at the expense of an impoverished historical understanding; similarly I do not believe that simply adding a second adjective to the phrase “historical materialism” is adequate. In tandem with Lefebvre, we may wish to draw on the work of Foucault, who, utilizing Nietzsche and Heidegger, developed an alternative approach to questions of time and space that, crucially, is temporally and spatially aware *right from the beginning*. Though Soja does look at Foucault’s work, he fails to address many of his more important insights. What Foucault did so successfully was to spatialize historical

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67. Soja discussed these criticisms in a paper entitled “Postmodern Spaces,” given at the July 1995 Signs of the Times conference “Postmodern Times,” at City University, London.

68. Edward Soja, *Postmodern Geographies*, p. 248.

69. Lynn Stewart, “Bodies, Visions and Spatial Politics: a Review Essay of Henri Lefebvre’s *The Production of Space*,” *Environment and Planning D: Society and Space* 13 (1995), p. 617.

70. *La production de l’espace*, pp. 57, 130–1, 144. Important exceptions include *The Explosion*, a short text in which he looks at the events of May 1968, according special status to “urban phenomena,” and his analysis of Paris 1871 in *La proclamation de la commune* (Paris: Gallimard, 1965). It should be noted that Lefebvre’s criticism of structuralism with regard to space is that it does not accord due status to the historical. See *The Survival of Capitalism*, pp. 65–6; also, Elden, *Mapping the Present*.



studies in such a way as to show how space is important in a number of ages, though naturally in different ways.<sup>71</sup>

Equally a solely spatial approach would risk missing the importance of an analysis of rhythms, a “rhythmanalysis” which would “complete the exposition of the production of space.”<sup>72</sup> An analysis of the *production* of space, given that this is clearly informed by Lefebvre’s reworking of dialectics and historical materialism, would be a useful step in taking Lefebvre’s work forward. Lefebvre did not see the analysis of space as a replacement of other analyses, and recognized that we also need to look at the production of population and class structure. Despite the way he has sometimes been appropriated, the analysis must also be historical — it is not something static,<sup>73</sup> it must take into account rhythm, through the human body.<sup>74</sup> Space and time are interrelated and dependent on each other.<sup>75</sup>

It would be harsh, but perhaps not unfair, to suggest that Lefebvre’s work may have suffered as a *result* of being read by certain types of scholars. Just as the theoretical underpinnings of Foucault have been neglected by cultural critics eager to get their hands on his toolkit, so too has Lefebvre been poorly served by geographers and urbanists who only look to Marx for Lefebvre’s philosophical background. Lefebvre only makes sense if the arguments of Nietzsche and Heidegger are understood along with those of Marx. His Marxism was open to many possibilities, as he saw Marx’s thinking as “a nucleus, an effervescent seed, the ferment of a conception of the world that develops without being able to avoid confrontation with entirely different works.”<sup>76</sup> Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche and Heidegger can be used to help us understand the modern world. The understanding works by retaining some of Marx’s concepts, but also by adding new ones: “the everyday, the urban, social time and space.”<sup>77</sup> A residual Hegelian idealism, Heidegger’s understanding of the everyday and experiencing space, Nietzsche’s comments on the will to power and buildings,

71. It is telling that Soja and others have made so much use of Foucault’s 1967 lecture “Des Espaces Autres,” in *Dits et écrits*, volume IV (Paris: Gallimard, 1994), which is Foucault’s most explicit demonstration of the history of space, rather than giving due attendance to the spatial histories throughout his work. See Elden, *Mapping the Present*, chs. 4 and 5.

72. *La production de l’espace*, p. 465.

73. *Le temps des méprises* (Paris: Stock, 1975), p. 238.

74. *La production de l’espace*, p. 465, see also pp. 236–8; *Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche ou le royaume des ombres* (Paris: Casterman, 1975), pp. 191–2, 195–6; *Éléments de rythmanalyse: Introduction à la connaissance de rythmes* (Paris: Éditions Syllepse, 1992).

75. *Le temps des méprises*, p. 240.

76. “Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics,” p. 76. On this, and also as a useful summary of some of his ideas, see the discussion between Lefebvre and Leszek Kolakowski, “Evolution or Revolution,” in *Reflexive Water: The Basic Concerns of Mankind*, ed. Fons Elders (London: Souvenir Press, 1974).

77. “Toward a Leftist Cultural Politics,” p. 77.



and “the emphasis on the body, sexuality, violence and the tragic, and the production of differential space and plural times”<sup>78</sup> are all found in Lefebvre’s work. Marxist scholars have struggled to map Lefebvre’s intellectual heritage for precisely these reasons, while spatialists often fail to grasp his reworking of Marxism.

In his own words, Lefebvre’s work provides us with an “orientation” to questions of space:

I speak of an orientation advisedly. We are concerned with nothing more and nothing less than that. We are concerned with what might be called a ‘sense’: an organ that perceives, a direction that may be conceived, and a directly lived movement progressing towards the horizon. And we are concerned with nothing that even remotely resembles a system.<sup>79</sup>

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78. Eleonore Kofman & Elizabeth Lebas, “Lost in Transposition—Time, Space and the City,” in *Writings on Cities*, p. 5.

79. *La production de l’espace*, p. 485.



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