

Space, Class, and Revolutions

A Critical Reading of Henri Lefebvre's The Urban Revolution

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Figure 1. Manhattan, New York

Abstract: This essay connects to an ongoing discussion and debate on the usefulness and accuracy of the theories and the conceptual apparatus developed by the French theorist Henri Lefebvre. From an analytical reading of Lefebvre's book *The Urban Revolution*, I make an original interpretation of Lefebvre's arguments by tracing them back to Hegel's syllogism and Marx's two departments of social reproduction. Also, I claim that the dialectical understanding is able to explain the movement of history, and results in a concept of freedom that is constantly transcending into a higher phase. Thus, dialectics as a method and analysis, fundamentally opposes structuralist and essentialist approaches. The essay turns our attention towards space in general, urban and suburban issues in particular, and discusses the importance of an analysis of spatial domination. The usefulness and accuracy of Lefebvre's works is best demonstrated in the widened horizon it opens for a transcendence of the present social system into a higher phase.

Keywords: Lefebvre, Spatial Dialectics, Primary and Secondary Circuit of Capital, Humanism, Revolution, Marx, Hegel

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Introduction

When individuals and nations have once got in their heads the abstract concept of full-blown liberty, there is nothing like it in its uncontrollable strength, just because it is the very essence of mind, and that as its very actuality.¹

G. W. F. Hegel, *Philosophy of Mind*

Neoliberalism is dead. By referring to the US election this fall and Brexit as two definite manifestations, various sources from all over the political spectrum has claimed that the form of capitalism which has been dominating Western politics the last three or four decades is now on the way out. The question then posed is what alternative is going to replace it?

On the political arena in the US and in Europe there has been a rise of two oppositional political camps in recent years, which each assert to provide different alternatives to today's non-working neoliberalism. On the one side, we have the reactionary forces on the right-wing who demands deportations, walls, lower taxes, more police, etc. which are common demands to be found for example in the US Republicans, the National Front in France, AFD in Germany, and the Sweden Democrats in Sweden. On the other side, there is the rise of the so-called progressives, which might be most clearly visible in the rapid growth of support for Bernie Sanders in the US, SYRIZA in Greece, and Podemos in Spain. The demands that form an alternative coming from the left differs a bit more depending on national context but can be summarized in a call for better conditions for workers, immigrants, minorities, more redistribution etc.

While it is up to date with discussions on alternatives to neoliberalism, I found it interesting to take a closer look on what major theoreticians in my academic field might have thought and written about it. Being a student in sociology and human geography the options on which theoretician to choose for a closer

¹ Hegel, G. W. F. (1806). *Philosophy of Mind*, paragraph 482.

examination was not hard for several reasons. Henri Lefebvre (1901-1991) is presented on the introductory course as a major thinker, but not deeply analyzed. Lefebvre was a French Marxist, philosopher, geographer, and sociologist whose works contributed to a critical theory of the various dimensions of human existence under modern capitalism. Much of his work has quite recently been translated into English and made accessible to the English-speaking world. For example, his book *La révolution urbaine* from 1970 was translated into English (*The Urban Revolution*) for the first time as late as 2003, and has by many been considered as one of his key texts containing some explicit discussions on alternatives to capitalism and the possibilities for a revolution. David Harvey wrote in a review of the English translation of the book that;

The text has lost none of its freshness, its beguiling and tantalizing formulations. The questions it opens up are still with us and deserve a thorough airing. Perhaps the delay in translation /.../ will prove advantageous, coming, as it does, after the rise of poststructuralist, postmodernist, and post-Marxist mode of thought.²

Neil Smith writes in the foreword to the English translation of the book that Lefebvre was seeing things that many researchers are still discovering today. Also, Smith writes about Lefebvre's book that;

It was and remains *the* pathbreaking analytical work connecting urban research not just with Marxist theory but with social theory and philosophy, broadly conceived.³

The aim of this study will therefore be to take a closer look on Lefebvre's book called *The Urban Revolution*, discuss the arguments posed, evaluate them, and reflect upon if they provide us with any usefulness when trying to understand reality, and alternatives to capitalism, today.

BIOGRAPHICAL SKETCH

Lefebvre was born in a rural community in the south-west of France in 1901. He went to school on the French west coast and later moved to Paris. When Lefebvre came to Paris in the early 1920s he was devastated not only by the lack of food and heat, but on the widespread feeling of alienation among the French populace, originating from the new industrialized forms of work and bureaucratic institutions of civil society. His will to analyze and understand his fearful experiences led him into a study of social criticism in general, and Marx and Hegel in particular. As a young Marxist in a political tense France, Lefebvre, in 1928, decided to join the French communist Party.⁴

During the Second World War Lefebvre joined the resistance movement. His academic career was disrupted when the occupational regime, the Vichy regime, burnt his books and manuscripts between 1940-44. In the mid-1950s he got a work at the university in Strasbourg and moved there. In Strasbourg, he started working

² Harvey, D. (2004). *Possible Urban Worlds: A Review Essay*. in *City and Community*, vol. 3 March no. 7. pp. 83-4.

³ Smith, N. (2003). *Foreword*. in Lefebvre, H. (2003). *The Urban Revolution*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. p. x.

⁴ Shields, R. (2001). *Henri Lefebvre*. in ed. Elliott, A. & Turner, B. S. (2001). *Profiles in Contemporary Social Theory*. Sage Publications Ltd. London. pp. 226-37

on his doctoral thesis on changes in the rural France, and it was also there he met the avant-garde artistic collective of the Situationist Internationale, to whom he had a problematic relationship. Lefebvre had at this point developed his criticism against state capitalism and Stalinism, and he had embraced a humanistic approach into his body of work. The French communist Party had moved in a more rigid Stalinist direction and the collision with Lefebvre's works was inevitable. In the mid-1950s Lefebvre was therefore expelled from the communist party.⁵

In the 1960s Lefebvre moved back to Paris for a work at a university called Nanterre. It was in the late 1950s and early 1960s that he started to study the role of space and the urban, and its relation to capitalism. Through his life, Lefebvre witnessed the modernization of French everyday life, the industrialization of the rural economy, and suburbanization of the cities. He travelled around all continents and often worked for shorter periods as a visiting scholar on different universities. Lefebvre died in 1991 in his hometown in Navarrenx.

CONTEXT OF THE PUBLICATION OF THE BOOK

The Urban Revolution was published in France in 1970. At the time, Lefebvre was working as a professor at a new university, called Nanterre. Nanterre, established 1964, was located in the suburbs west of Paris. On the contrary to old European universities which often consists of small buildings integrated in the city, Nanterre was built out of inspiration from an American campus model, where all facilities are located on one big campus. Nanterre was therefore a primary example of the new tendencies of urban architecture and planning in the post-World War era. At this time, rebuilding of inner cities and expansion of suburbs took place all over Europe and the US. Many central neighborhoods in New York, for example, had been completely demolished by new highways and high rises, as envisioned by the town's major Robert Moses. Jane Jacobs wrote critically about the new urban space that emerged, and Lefebvre cited her works in an appreciative manner.

During the May '68 student rebellion uprisings in Paris, Nanterre became the center of activity. The campus was then nicknamed *Nanterre la rouge*, Red Nanterre. In an interview from 1983, Lefebvre talks about the atmosphere during the spring of '68 and makes the, not so modest, claim that the revolutionary spirit all started at a class of his own. Lefebvre says that the movement of young activists and striking workers, was not formed out of any particular group or a specific program. It all started at Nanterre as an informal gathering of all sorts of groups, Trotskyists, Maoists, Situationists etc. without a specific goal. On March 22 1968, Lefebvre had a lecture where the first actions took place, which led to the formation of the March 22 group, which then later developed to the May '68 movement and became a source of inspiration for the bigger, global, movements of uprisings by youth. And it all was set off by a tiny twist of the truth. Lefebvre says;

In fact, the movement began in a big crowded amphitheater where I was giving a course, and where students whom I knew well asked me if we could name some delegates to go to the administration to protest the blacklist. (The administration was insisting on establishing a list of the most disruptive students

⁵ Kurasawa, F. (2005). *Lefebvre, Henri*. in ed. Ritzer, G. (2005). *Encyclopedia of Social Theory*. Sage Publications, Inc. Thousand Oaks. pp. 439-40.

in order to sanction them.) “Of course,” I said. So it was on that podium that the election took place of delegates to protest the blacklist business. And all sorts of people participated in the election, Trotskyists as well as Situationists.

The group of March 22 was formed after these negotiations and arguments with the administration, and then the group occupied the administration building. The stimulus was this business about the blacklist, and I was the one who concocted the blacklist. What actually happened was that the administration phoned my office and asked for a list of the most politically disruptive students. I told them to get lost; I frequently had to say to the dean in those days, “Sir, I am not a cop.” So the blacklist never existed, in black and white. But they were trying to do it, and I told the students to defend themselves; I stirred things up a bit. One has one’s little perversities after all.⁶

Whatever the veracity might be in this anecdote, it is a fact that Lefebvre was lecturing literally in the center of where the activities took place, and his works on Marxism, dialectics and alienation was intensely studied by many of the students engaged in the movement.

The Urban Revolution, which discusses the possibilities and potentials of a revolution, is considered as sort of a testament of the (failed) revolution of ’68. The transcendence towards a higher phase, a more humane society, did not happen. But Lefebvre could not quite give up the ghost of the revolution. He recognized the hopes of those street-fighting years and understood that a sober reconceptualization of the situation was needed. Lefebvre then identifies the structural collapse of industrialism and state managerialism wherein the urban revolution symbolizes a move towards a new society which is no longer organized by planners but speculated on by entrepreneurs.⁷

THE STRUCTURE AND MAIN ARGUMENTS OF THE BOOK

Below I will try to give a very short summary of the main argument developed in the book, then discuss how I will go on to further dissect and explore the main arguments and themes in the book, and discuss their implications. But first, just to mention, *The Urban Revolution* is not an easy book to read. It is written in a French intellectual tradition where lots of arguments are posed on one place and picked up and developed upon fifty or hundred pages later. The references are not always clear and many of the themes are running beside each other simultaneously. Reading it feels therefore sometimes like listening to an improvisational speech by Lefebvre. That being said, the *Urban Revolution* starts off with this initial sentence;

⁶ Ross, K. & Lefebvre, H. (1997). *Lefebvre on the Situationists: An Interview*. October 79. The MIT Press, Cambridge. p. 82.

⁷ Especially this is impressive. The observant reader will recognize this argument from David Harvey’s classical text *From Managerialism to Entrepreneurialism* (1989 in *Geografiska Annaler. Series B, Human Geography* vol. 71 no. 1, pp. 3-17) in which Harvey is discussing that the Keynesian model now belongs to the past, and that instead we are approaching a new form of capitalism, a de-regulated, privatized neoliberalism. But Harvey only builds upon Lefebvre’s argument. While Lefebvre saw this coming already in 1970, Harvey’s text appeared not until 1989, almost twenty years later.

I'll begin with the following hypothesis: Society has become completely urbanized. This hypothesis implies a definition: An *urban society* is a society that results from a process of complete urbanization. This urbanization is virtual today, but will become real in the future.

This argument, that society has become completely urbanized, is the basic premise for the book. Today, in early 2017, it may not seem as a controversial statement at a first glance. But, then one must remember that this book was written in 1970 in Paris. Up until then, Western Europe had thought about itself as primarily an industrial society, not an urban (and still the West often conceives of itself as the industrialized part of the world). What the difference between industrial and urban society is, is part of what this essay is about. However, Lefebvre claims that western society should now be defined as an urban society. In recent surveys the rate of urbanization is increasing, more than half of the world's population now lives in urban environments, the majority in far out shanty towns, or favela-like suburbs. Lefebvre sees this coming and argues therefore that the industrial society has negated itself and is on the way of becoming a qualitatively new type of society.

Today, space as a whole enters into production as a product, through the buying, selling, and exchange of parts of space. Not too long ago, a localized, identifiable space, the soil, still belonged to a sacred entity: the earth. It belonged to that cursed, and therefore sacred, character, the owner (not of the means of production, but of the Home), a carryover from feudal times. Today, this ideology and the corresponding practice are collapsing. Something new is happening.⁸

In this new form of society, new forms of oppression, and new forms of alienation will engender. New class compositions, and most importantly, a new space will be created. Lefebvre notes that this new urban society will bring many new oppressive structures. He sees the needs to re-conceptualize our current situation in order to find ways to carry out resistance. With this new society, new forms of resistance will be needed as well. The title *The Urban Revolution* therefore connotes both that an urban revolution is happening, and that a revolution in the future against oppressive structures necessarily must be an urban one.

The themes I see in the book that I have chosen to develop upon and discuss further in this essay are;

1. Spatial Dialectics vs. Structuralism and Essentialism

Here I will explore Lefebvre's epistemological approach to his study of the city and modern capitalism. It involves a historical exposé of the birth of the city. In this part I do an original reading of Lefebvre by tracing his argument back to the German philosopher Hegel. I will also sort out some of the concepts Lefebvre uses, and discuss methodological aspects in his writings.

2. Ecology, and the Primary and Secondary Circuit of Capital

In this part I will do another original contribution to the literature which tries to understand Lefebvre by tracing back his concept of the secondary circuit of capital to Marx's discussion on

⁸ Lefebvre, H. (2003). *The Urban Revolution*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. p. 155.

department II of social reproduction. I will also touch upon Lefebvre's understanding of ecology and environmental destruction.

3. Humanism and Revolution

In this final part I will discuss concepts such as alienation in space, spatial fetishism, and class. This will lead up to an analysis of what Lefebvre calls the critical phase, and some of the suggestions he makes for a revolutionary movement to consider.

These three themes will form part one, two and three of this essay. Now, let's jump right into it.

Part 1 – Spatial Dialectics vs. Structuralism and Essentialism

FROM AGRICULTURAL, TO INDUSTRIAL, TO URBAN SOCIETY

After that initial sentence in the book, Lefebvre writes that the history of the urban can in no way be characterized as a non-violent history of an organic city that just evolved. Such as history serves the underlying ideologies of organicism, continuism and evolutionism. Instead, Lefebvre sees the history of the urban as one being full of contradicting interests and struggles, a history which has developed through the overcoming of negations.⁹ Lefebvre believes that we are approaching a complete urban society. To explain this process, he draws up an axis starting at zero percent, which symbolizes a moment where there is no domination of an urban center. The axis then continues up to hundred percent, which in turn symbolizes a moment where there is a complete domination of an urban center. As we will see, Lefebvre argues that a temporal axis can be put alongside this spatial axis.

Lefebvre means that close to the start of this axis we can point out the ancient political city. Priests, warriors, nobles, and administrators primarily populated this city. The agora, the forum, characterized, and dominated this city. However, a couple of centuries of existence, the ancient political city was challenged by the emerging mercantile class, and the political city fell. The mercantile class succeeded the political city. In Europe, the mercantile class represented the emerging class of the bourgeoisie, which had gained their wealth out of trade and exchange. When the mercantile class supplanted the political class, commercial exchange became an urban function, which was embodied in a form, and in turn gave urban space a new structure. Before, markets had been in smaller market towns and suburbs.¹⁰ After the mercantile class were supplanting the political city, an important moment in history occurs. The city takes dominance over the countryside. The Countryside is

⁹ Lefebvre (2003), pp. 1-2. The history Lefebvre is about to lay out can be understood as a critique of the established, liberal, and non-dialectical, way of writing about the history of the city, as for example expressed by Lewis Mumford, the Chicago School of sociology, or Max Weber's theorization about the city, probably most clearly stated in Weber's book *The City* from 1921.

¹⁰ Lefebvre (2003), p. 10-1.

created. The distinction between villagers and urban habitants suddenly appear. Nature becomes separated from the *city*.¹¹ The fact that these mercantile medieval cities often built walls around the cities, of course did not happen without reason. The city walls we can see today, as massive objects from a bygone era, is a marker of how vivid the tensions were between the city and the countryside around it, from which it had to protect itself.¹²

But what is it that drives this history forward? How is it that an idea of a city ever came into being? To explain the movement of history Lefebvre draws upon the German philosopher Hegel's dialectical understanding of the world. Lefebvre applies Hegel's dialectics into his understanding of space and develops a spatial dialectics which challenged the established dualistic understanding of space as simply either mental, or material spaces. For Lefebvre, space is social which implies both material and mental representations of space at the same time.

Although that Lefebvre on a couple of places in his book makes direct references to Hegel and his dialectics, I have not, up until this day, read any analysis written in the English language which tries to extensively clear out the connections between Lefebvre's spatial dialectics and Hegel's dialectics.¹³ However, I will argue that the only way to grasp the roots and the implications of Lefebvre's spatial dialectics must start with a review of Hegel. One of the originalities in this thesis will therefore be to try to map out the Hegelian roots of Lefebvre's spatial dialectical method and analysis.

Dialectics as an argumentative method of setting up contradictions against each other has ancient roots. What Hegel did in the 19th century with the dialectical method, was to use it to trace out a method for how the world has developed in a search for the idea of freedom. For Hegel, all of history is a series of historical stages in the development of freedom.¹⁴ Hegel reasoned like this, all consciousness is *individual* consciousness, therefore no thoughts exist in some ether external to the mind. But at the same time, everything that is human about us, our language, our culture, our work, is a collective social, historical creation. Our thoughts are therefore *universal* thoughts. This is one of the very peculiar things about the human condition, for Hegel. As *individuals*, we are only part of these *universals*, in fact we only become individuals after being socialized by the universals. This socialization process, when we get into contact with the universal ideas, takes place only in

¹¹ Lefebvre (2003), pp. 11-3.

¹² Anyone who has been walking around in the best preserved Hanseatic city in Sweden, Visby, has probably noted that the 3,6-kilometer-long city wall is much bigger towards the countryside than towards the naval port. This is because the huge wall was primarily a protection for the city from the surrounding landscape, not from naval attacks. The reason is that the wall was constructed on orders from the mercantile class in the city after long conflicts and wars with the semi-feudal lords on the countryside. Andrén, A. (2011). *Det medeltida Gotland - en arkeologisk guidebook*. Historiska media, Lund. pp. 117-24.

¹³ Stanek acknowledge Lefebvre's debt to Hegel, and touches upon the links between Hegel's dialectics and Lefebvre's conceptual apparatuses, but fails to sort out the relation between the syllogism and the tripartite spatial dialectic. Stanek, E. (2008). *Space as concrete abstraction: Hegel, Marx, and modern urbanism in Henri Lefebvre*. in ed. Goonewardena, K. et. al. (2008). *Space, Difference, Everyday Life – Reading Henri Lefebvre*. Routledge, New York.

¹⁴ Dunayevskaya, R. (1957). *Marxism and Freedom – From 1776 until Today*. Humanity Books, New York. pp. 33-43.

relations with other individuals. The universals are merely immaterial ideas, but they can take material form in human relations, in the institutions we create. Hegel calls our institutions for the *particulars*.

The *universal*, the *particular* and the *individual* together forms what is often referred to as Hegel's syllogism. The syllogism is the starting point of Hegel's dialectical analysis. It concludes that all thoughts are immaterial ideas that exists only as universals, but these universals can be materialized and concretized, in institutions, the *particulars*. As human beings, we exist as *individuals* who can only get into contact with the *universals* via the *particulars*.

The interesting thing with Hegel's syllogism is how it leads to the conclusion that our thoughts, the *universals*, develop, that our thoughts are products of a social and historical context. In fact, the universals therefore are social relations. Suddenly, Hegel relativizes our whole reality. He draws history into philosophy. Everything we know of are just products of a social and a historical context. The universals are not given from something outside man, the universals are just creations, social constructions if you like. Logically it then follows that our world can change.

This process of change and development of society occurs, according to Hegel, when a universal idea is facing another contradicting universal idea. These two negating, and contradicting ideas is then said to stand in a dialectical relationship towards each other. Contradicting relationships can also occur between individuals and particulars, and individuals and universals. For a time, there can be a quantitative change in the relationship, but at a certain moment a qualitative transformation is going to happen. The contradicting relationship is then abolished, *aufheben*, and something new has become born out of the contradicting relationship. A transcendence has happened, a revolution, a new higher phase which bears the historical roots inside it now exists. This is what Hegel calls a process of negation of the negation.¹⁵ This transcending, overcoming of contradictions, is thus what drives history forward. Thus, the dialectic of negativity is the moving and creative principle of our world.

Lefebvre wrote a book in 1939 called *Dialectical Materialism*, in which he engages with Hegel's dialectics. He writes about the process of transcending negations as;

The Becoming passes through the conflicting terms, confronts each of them, on its own level and in its own degree, with its 'other', which is in conflict with it, and finally transcends their opposition by creating something new.¹⁶

¹⁵ An illustrative example of how to understand this negation of negation, transcendence process works, would be to think of the way an ordinary Swedish pea soup is cooked. Dried peas and water does not make a unity when mixed at first. They cannot be mixed, the dried peas and the water can then be said to stand in a dialectical relationship. However, when time goes and the water becomes warm, when there is a quantitative change, there are a sudden moment when the peas and the water will blend together, transcend, negate the negation, and a qualitatively new higher phase has been reached, a pea soup.

¹⁶ Lefebvre, H. (2009). *Dialectical Materialism*. University of Minnesota Press, Minneapolis. p. 20.

Movement is thus transcending. Every reality and every thought must be surmounted in a higher determination which contains them as a content, as an aspect, antecedent or element, that is as a moment in the Hegelian or dialectical sense of that word.¹⁷

The influence Hegel's dialectics have had on philosophy cannot be underestimated. When Karl Marx was a student in Berlin in the 1840s he studied Hegel intensely. Marx ended up writing a long critique of Hegel's dialectics arguing that Hegel thought that the subject that drives this dialectical development, through the overcoming of contradictions, is an idea, or a spirit, that exists only inside the mind. Marx instead argued that there is a material base of the subject that pushes history forward by the overcoming of contradictions. The subject that pushes history forward are the oppressed classes, it is not just an idea or a spirit, Marx meant¹⁸. Thus, he concluded that all history is a history of class struggle. Marx therefore criticized Hegel for being too much of an idealist, and argued that we must turn Hegel's dialectics on its head, do a Feuerbachian flip of his philosophy, and ground his dialectical analysis on a material base.

When Hegel wrote about his dialectical analysis, he had just been witnessing the French revolution which ended in extreme violence and terror. He was not able to conceive the peasants as a subject. But, when Marx wrote, some fifty years later, the emerging industrial working class, the proletariat, had grown exponentially and started to form a potentially very powerful class. Lots of revolutionary attempts and strikes characterized the first decades of the 19th century in Europe, which influenced Marx in his writings.

When Marx analyzed capitalist society with a dialectical materialist approach, he saw *value production* (value in the sense Marx analyses value as an abstraction of socially necessary labor time) as the determinant idea of capitalist production. Value production, in Marx's analysis, therefore corresponds to Hegel's concept of the *universal*. For value production to exist there must be consumption. As *individuals*, we are therefore consumers. The institution, the medium, from which the universal is individualized, is the market of distribution and exchange. *Distribution and exchange* thus represent the Hegelian *particular*. In *Grundrisse*, from 1857-8, Marx himself describes it like this;

Production, distribution, exchange and consumption thus form a proper syllogism; production represents the general, distribution and exchange the particular, and consumption the individual case which sums up the whole. This is indeed a superficial one. Production (according to the political economists) is determined by general laws of nature, distribution by social chance, and it may therefore exert a more or less stimulating influence on production; exchange lies between the two as a formal social movement, and consumption, as the concluding act, which is regarded not only as the ultimate aim but as the ultimate purpose, falls properly outside the sphere of (political) economy, except in so far as it in turn reacts on the point of departure thus once again initiating the whole process.¹⁹

¹⁷ Lefebvre (2009). p. 24.

¹⁸ Dunayevskaya (1957). pp. 33-43.

¹⁹ Marx, K. (1857-8). *Outlines of the Critique of Political Economy*, p. 27 in *Marx and Engels Collected Works*, Vol. 28. International Publisher, New York.

This way of analyzing the capitalist society helped Marx to conclude that it is possible to revolutionize, to transcend capitalism into a higher phase, to a phase he referred to as socialism or communism.²⁰

A very important part of the understanding of the dialectical analysis is that it is a process that constantly is in a movement. Thus, it is possible to read that freedom for Marx is motion, constant negation of negations that transcends. If the process of transcending stops, then there will not be any development. Socialism is not a specific stage, a specific model. It is a phase of constant motion. Therefore, Marx talked about *The Revolution of Permanence* as the guiding principle towards socialism. This emphasis on the dialectical motion is what separates a dogmatic, and perverted, reading as opposed to a dialectical reading of Marx. Lefebvre understood this, and it is also therefore he writes in *The Urban Revolution* that Marx did not discuss a *model* of socialism, instead he provided us with a *path* towards it.²¹

But, what is it that Lefebvre does with this dialectical method and analysis? Lefebvre applies the dialectical analysis into space so that *the Urban* is a universal idea, and a form which contains contradictions. The Urban is therefore an expression for a hierarchical ideology. Trying to define the essence of the Urban and pose it as a universal and an eternal truth would Lefebvre consider to be a positivistic pseudo-science²² that therefore only serves the interest of the already established social order. To this category, he counts technocrats and urban planners, for example, who are specialized in fragmented fields, and is suspicious of grand theories that might relativize and overturn existing knowledge.²³ The Hegelian particular, is for Lefebvre the institutions we have created that governs and control space. Today that refers to, for example, the state, the urban planners, bureaucratic society, and even the physical space we have built.²⁴ The individuals for Lefebvre, are we as inhabitants and our lived experience of the space. A simplified comparison between how Hegel's syllogism corresponds with Marx's and Lefebvre's application of his syllogism can therefore be drawn up like this;

Hegel's syllogism	Marx's analysis of industrial society	Lefebvre's analysis of urban society
The universal	Value production	Urbanism
The particular	Market and exchange	Physical space/urban planning
The individual	Consumption	Inhabiting

Figure 2. Three dialectical applications.

Coming back to Lefebvre's historical exposé about the development of the city we now start to understand how this history has been evolving. The history of the urban has evolved through the overcoming of

²⁰ Smith, T. (1988). *Hegel's Theory of the Syllogism and its Relevance to Marxists*. in *Radical Philosophy* vol. 48, Spring.

²¹ Lefebvre (2003), p. 110. Lefebvre did not conceive of the Soviet Union as an alternative to capitalism. Instead he referred to it as a system of state capitalism. He meant that after the promising revolution of 1917, the leadership had halted the dialectical process of development. Therefore, the development, in any sense, failed to appear.

²² Lefebvre (2003), p. 62.

²³ Lefebvre (2003), p. 157.

²⁴ Lefebvre (2003), p. 80.

contradictions. If we were to apply dialectics in history of the urban and exemplify it, we could for example imagine that the ancient political city had a universal idea of that free men have a right to own slaves and land, as a starting point of its society. This idea obviously contains a lot of material contradictions, i.e. the slaves which do not want to be slaves for a master, the merchants who cannot exercise trade because of ancient restrictions on trade etc. These contradictions can change quantitatively, i.e. one master accumulates more slaves, or restricts the possibilities for the merchants even more. But at a certain point there will be a qualitative change, the slaves will revolt against their masters and abolish the slave system, or the merchants will revolt against ancient and feudal restrictions. Suddenly society has transcended and has gotten qualitatively new properties, a society based on wage laborers and free markets instead of slavery and ancient and feudal restrictions.

Continuing the historical exposé at the beginning of the so-called industrial revolution, we know that the place of production was often located close to natural sources of energy, in a river valley, or to raw materials like wood, minerals etc. When the mode of transporting energy and goods developed, the demand for centrality and access to markets and labor-power increased and a new city, the industrial city, emerged. The class of capitalists supplanted, revolutionized against, the old mercantile class, and industry finally supplanted agriculture.

However, the peculiar thing with Lefebvre, is that he now sees a new complete urban society, emerging and challenging the industrial society. In this sense industrialization has negated itself, it was merely one phase of capitalism developing towards a society of complete urbanization.²⁵ History has thus been a history moving towards complete urbanization. But, this does not just happen as if it was a prefabricated destiny. Someone is steering the history towards complete urbanization because of an interest in it.

In terms of historical becoming, and given the inevitability of change, there is no definite, prefabricated goal, one that is therefore already achieved by God or in his name, by an Idea or absolute Spirit. There is no objective that can be posited as an object (already real). /.../ The urban (urban society) is not a prefabricated goal or the meaning of a history that is moving toward it, a history that is itself prefabricated

²⁵ Andy Merrifield notes that just one year after the publication of the French edition of *The Urban Revolution*, in 1971, the US president Richard Nixon devalued the dollar, and thereby led the move towards the abandonment of the Bretton Woods agreement two years later. For 29 years, the Bretton Woods system had regulated the international trade in currency by having world currencies fixed along the US dollar, and the US dollar locked to a gold standard. The representatives from the allies after the Second World War created this regulation to keep control over the world economy, and to prevent major catastrophes like the economic crisis in the 1930s, in the future.

While regulation was gone, capital could move more easily over national borders. The world economy became more unpredictable. The race to the bottom of finding competitive advantages increased. Markets in former closed colonial countries were at the same time opened up and exposed to the world economy, global speculation and investment strategies. Lefebvre sensed this coming, and he witnessed how increased speculation in real estate all over the world rearranged space, cities and the landscape. Merrifield, A. (2006). *Henri Lefebvre – A Critical Introduction*. Routledge, New York. pp. 82-3.

(by whom?) to realize this goal. Urban society provides a goal and meaning for industrialization only to the extent that it is engendered by it, encompasses it, and directs it toward some *other thing*.²⁶

Lefebvre historical exposé of the development of the city is a logical explanation, not an empirical one. The exposé however ends in a conclusion that soon we are to reach a total, complete urban society. A society where the urban dominates space, entirely. This is, for Lefebvre, a critical phase. His aim of the book is therefore to discuss how to react on a situation where the urban dominates completely.

WHAT IS THE URBAN, THE URBAN PHENOMENON, THE URBAN FABRIC?

To further understand what Lefebvre is talking about, and to make it a bit more complex, it is now time to sort out what he means with some of the recurrent concepts he uses. We start with *the Urban*. For Lefebvre, the Urban is not a physical object that has an arbitrarily chosen number of inhabitants. Instead, the Urban, for Lefebvre, is a form, in a Hegelian sense.

The Urban is, therefore, pure form: a place of encounter, assembly, simultaneity. This form has no specific content, but is a center of attraction and life. It is an abstraction, but unlike a metaphysical entity, the urban is a concrete abstraction, associated with practice. Living creatures, the products of industry, technology and wealth, works of culture, ways of living, situations, the modulations and ruptures of the everyday – the urban *accumulates* all content.²⁷

The essential aspect of the urban today is *centrality*. But this centrality is not neutral. It should be understood as an idea and an object that has evolved dialectically. The urban does not create anything, and at the same time it creates everything. It supplies a situation, where exchange, unions and relationships occur. The modern capitalism of today is unthinkable without the urban society, in fact it is an urban society. Lefebvre writes about this to explain that the Urban is no mere superstructure, as it otherwise had been conceived by Marxist intellectuals before him. Seen as a product of a dialectical process, the Urban is a universal idea, which is socially and historically constructed. It therefore contains social relations, in fact it is a social relation. The urban is therefore an ideology. This, the positivistic technocrats and urban planners, mentioned above, does not understand, Lefebvre means.

They are limited to cutting space into grids and squares. Technocrats, unaware of what goes on in their own mind and in their working concepts, profoundly misjudging what is going on (and what is not) in their blind field, end up minutely organizing a repressive space. For all that, they have a clear conscience. They are unaware that space harbors an ideology (more exactly, an ideo-logic). They are unaware, or pretend to be unaware, that urbanism, objective in appearance (because it is a function of the state and dependent on skill and knowledge), is a form of class urbanism and incorporates a class strategy (a particular logic).²⁸

²⁶ Lefebvre (2003), p. 67.

²⁷ Lefebvre (2003), p. 119.

²⁸ Lefebvre (2003), p. 157.

When Lefebvre discusses the urban as a concretized, and materialized, ideology he exemplifies with Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris in the beginning of the second half of the 19th century. After the turbulent start of the century, with lots of uprisings and revolutions that peaked in the year 1848, the French republic under Napoleon the third ordered Georges-Eugène Haussmann, to rebuild Paris. Haussmann's rebuilding of Paris involved not just the strict lines, the huge boulevards, the gigantic plazas etc., but also, following his plan, a deportation of the working class from the center towards the periphery of the city. The boulevards of scale had a twofold controlling purpose. They both facilitated for military interventions, and made it almost impossible to build barricades, which had been an often-used practice in uprisings by the working class before, especially in 1848.²⁹ It was during Haussmann that the first suburbs of Paris were created. And it was to those suburbs the working classes were displaced. This makes it possible for us today to conceive of Haussmann's rebuilding as one single, gigantic, state led gentrification process.³⁰

When the proletariat in France, a couple of decades later, starts revolting against the republic again, in the Paris Commune of 1871, they came from the outskirts in to the center, occupied it and took control of it. How is it then that the Paris Commune is not conceived as an urban revolution, but as a revolution of an industrial proletariat, which does not correspond to historical facts, Lefebvre asks himself.³¹ Because, the communards mostly consisted of artisans, women, and youth, who reacted against the republic, and not of an industrial proletariat reacting against owners of the means of production.

However, today, in the urban society which supplants the industrial society, space differs a lot from yesterday, according to Lefebvre.

Today, space as a whole enters into production as a product, through the buying, selling and exchange of parts of space. Not too long ago, a localized, identifiable space, the soil, still belonged to a sacred entity: the earth. It belonged to that cursed, and therefore sacred, character, the owner (not of the means of production, but of the Home), a carryover from feudal times. Today, this ideology and the corresponding practice are collapsing. Something new is happening.³²

The fact that space today (and therefore *the urban*) enters production in modern capitalism, creates a situation where the cities grows exponentially and becomes mega-cities with millions of inhabitants. This phenomenon, which could not have engendered out of another social system than that of industrial capitalism, is what Lefebvre refers to as *the urban phenomenon*.

In a similar way that Marx discussed the fetishistic character of the commodity in industrial capitalism, Lefebvre thinks of the urban phenomenon as having a fetishistic character from which he wants to, like Marx, drag away the veil which hinders us to see the unequal production relations hidden behind the idea of a commodity, or in Lefebvre's case, the urban phenomenon. *The Urban Phenomenon*, Lefebvre means, is therefore

²⁹ Sowerwine, C. (2009). *France since 1870: Culture, Society and the Making of the Republic*. Palgrave Macmillan, Hampshire. pp. 1-26.

³⁰ Lefebvre (2003), p. 109.

³¹ Lefebvre (2003), p. 111.

³² Lefebvre (2003), p. 155.

of the nature that it must be studied holistically. Fragmentary knowledge, specialized academic sub-disciplines, cannot comprehend knowledge about the Urban Phenomenon.³³ Trying to grasp reality without a dialectical approach may fall into a dogmatic, dangerous, and authoritarian science. Because, when objects in our daily life are not understood as products of socio-historical processes, i.e. struggles between contradictions, then the isolated object illuminates and hides the present contradictions. Lefebvre writes that it creates a blind field.³⁴ Social reality, seen from a dialectical perspective, is therefore just a reflection of social relations. Social objects are social relations. If we for example would assume that a city is a universal and neutral object, and we create a science out of that, we will produce an understanding of our realm which fetishizes the city and hides the unequal relations imbedded in it. This would be a positivistic pseudo-science, that would produce spaces that represents a specific ideology. Lefebvre writes;

The concept of a scientific object, although convenient and easy, is deliberately simplistic and may conceal another intention: a strategy of fragmentation designed to promote a unitary and synthetic, and therefore authoritarian, model. An object is isolating, even if conceived as a system of relations and even if those relations are connected to other systems. /.../ The sought-for system constitutes its object by constituting itself. The constituted object then legitimates the system. What is disturbing about this is that the system under consideration may purport to be a *practice*. /.../ An image or representation of the city can perpetuate itself, survive its conditions, inspire an ideology and urbanist projects. In other words, the “real” sociological “object” is an image and an ideology!³⁵

While this emphasis on the dialectical understanding in Lefebvre’s book I have talked about above is first aimed at challenging contemporary dogmatic communists and liberal essentialists in 1970 France, Lefebvre also discusses the dialectics in a critique of the major intellectual trend at that time, which is structuralism. While there are many different forms of structuralism developed, I will argue that Lefebvre’s critical discussion of structuralism is first directed towards the anti-humanist structural Marxism developed by Althusser. Structuralism has the problem of risking to fall into dogmatism, according to Lefebvre. The system the structuralist’s creates does not have an answer on how change occur, or how we entered the system, Lefebvre means.

If, within the urban space, there were only a single system of signs, associated with the objects or acts, it would become dominant; we would never be able to escape its power. But how would we have entered it? Whatever the limitations of semiology applied to urban reality may be, it is still remarkable that recent developments in science reveal new aspects of that reality.³⁶

³³ Lefebvre (2003), p. 56.

³⁴ Lefebvre is here obviously making a parallel with the illuminating power of Marx’s concept of the fetishism of commodities.

³⁵ Lefebvre (2003), p. 57.

³⁶ Lefebvre (2003), p. 50.

The problem Lefebvre sees with the structuralist approach is that if there already is an underlying structure which determines our mind, how did we get there? How do we explain change? How do we formulate a utopia? How do we emancipate ourselves? Lefebvre is highly critical of structuralism on these grounds. He also writes;

Can such a theory, developed by Saussure and Trubetzkoy and their disciples, stand, given that meanings are constituted from relations among already signifying units?³⁷

For several years now we have witnessed a growing enthusiasm for linguistic models, as if linguistic had acquired but a single definitive model, as if this model could be transplanted from its original environment to confer on their disciplines – psychology or sociology – a rigorous epistemological status. As is the science of words was the supreme science because everything is spoken and written with words!³⁸

Lefebvre acknowledge the growing enthusiasm for linguistic models and structuralism, but is critical of its capability to explain the urban phenomenon. He does not think that linguistics can acquire a single definitive model that can be transplanted from its original environment to confer on other disciplines.³⁹ In opposition to the anti-humanist structuralist Marxism that Althusser accounted for, which were highly critical of utopian ideas, Lefebvre instead claimed that a radical critique of modern capitalism, i.e. urbanism, must provide an orientation which opens pathways and reveals a horizon toward a higher phase, rather than constructing models we cannot escape.⁴⁰ Structuralism, Lefebvre means, de-hydrates the lived with its occupation with systems and systematizations.

The Urban fabric is another concept Lefebvre uses in his book. It corresponds to Hegel's concept of the particular. It is the institutions we create that aims to make the universal idea concrete, materialized. The urban fabric is a metaphor of how the urban center spreads its domination over space and creates a fabric which is woven with differently dense meshes. The urban fabric consists for example of highways, external shopping centers, etc. Some places are left out to a slow and painful decay. Others grow fast. The metaphor of a fabric that is woven and laid out over space, serves its illustrative purpose well. However, Lefebvre just borrows this metaphor. I have found a text by the American anthropologist, and cultural relativist, Margaret Mead from 1935, where she talks about gender relations and how ideas about gender are relative, and in the text Mead uses specifically the term *social fabric* when she tries to capture that culture and social relations are created in a specific context.

Now as each culture creates distinctively the social fabric in which the human spirit can wrap itself safely and intelligibly, sorting, reweaving, and discarding threads in the historical tradition that it shares with

³⁷ Lefebvre (2003), p. 52.

³⁸ Lefebvre (2003), p. 63.

³⁹ Lefebvre (2003), p. 63.

⁴⁰ Lefebvre (2003), p. 66.

many neighboring peoples, it may bend every individual born within it to one type of behavior, recognizing neither age, sex, nor special disposition as points for differential elaboration.⁴¹

My guess is that Lefebvre was well aware of Mead and the other cultural relativists at that time, and became inspired by their works, and also borrowed their metaphors.

Part 2 – Ecology, and the Primary and the Secondary Circuit of Capital

WHY IS THERE AN URBAN REVOLUTION OCCURRING?

At this point, we might stop and ask ourselves though, why is there an urban revolution? Why is there a tendency in history which seems to move towards a complete urban society? Lefebvre answer on this is quite simple, it is because it serves the interest of the ruling class. However, the logical argument for why a complete urban society serves the ruling class goes further than that. While part one of this essay primarily focused on Lefebvre's debt to Hegel and the dialectics, this part will focus more on Lefebvre's debt to Marx, and his criticism of Marxism.

In several places in the book Lefebvre criticizes contemporary Marxist thinkers, the dogmatic Marxists he calls them, presumably talking about the members of the French Communist Party. His criticism of the dogmatic Marxist interpretation, as opposed to the dialectical dynamic, comes from Marx's early writings, which were much more focusing on the humanist aspect, alienation, and dialectics. Also, Lefebvre draws upon an, for that time, original interpretation of Lenin's notebooks on Hegel.⁴² Many of Marx's early writings became published in Germany not until the 1920s, and Lefebvre edited and translated some of those into French. Lefebvre's book *Dialectical Materialism*, mentioned above, is one of the first written analysis which engages with these early writings of Marx. Thus, Lefebvre represents a new interpretation of Marx, that in turn clashes with the established Marxism in the French Communist Party. Therefore, Merrifield, characterizes Lefebvre as a spatial humanistic Marxist.⁴³

When Lefebvre reads Marx, he uses Marx to explain the everyday life of his own (which is quite different from that of Marx), and the tendencies he sees coming, as well as to discuss the limitations of how much Marx was able to see and analyze of the dynamics of the system based on capitalist production. Lefebvre acknowledges that today, in 1970 France, the situation of the working classes is different from that of the working classes in London about hundred years earlier. Now, almost no one is starving, dying because of simple diseases, or risking their lives in dangerous factories, anymore. However, the working classes today are

⁴¹ Mead, M. (1935). *Introduction to Sex and Temperament in Three Primitive Societies*. in ed. McGee, R. J. & Warms, R. L. (2008). *Anthropological Theory – An Introductory History*. McGraw, New York. p. 220.

⁴² Anderson, K. B. (2007). *The Rediscovery and Persistence of the Dialectic in Philosophy and in World Politics*. in ed. Žižek, S. (2007). *Lenin Reloaded – Toward a Politics of Truth*. Duke University Press, Durham. pp. 137-43

⁴³ Merrifield (2006), p. 61.

having big troubles getting access to central housing, clean air, a healthy environment etc., which wasn't a major issue for the working class in Marx's time. This, Lefebvre means, requires a re-conceptualization of Marx's works to fit into the realm of today.

In Marx's *Grundrisse*, Lefebvre finds that Marx argues that the class of the bourgeoisie is constantly trying to revolutionize the process of production in the search of lowering the costs of production. One of the barriers the bourgeoisie tries to overcome is the time of transportation, and, when investing in land and housing, the time from when the investment was done to the time when the selling occurs. Capital, one must remember, is according to Marx analysis, *value set in motion*. The higher the velocity of the circulation of capital the higher is the possibility to make a bigger amount of profits. Decreasing the time of transporting, or the time between investing and selling, is therefore in the interest of the bourgeoisie. Marx writes;

While capital must on one side strive to tear down every spatial barrier to intercourse, i.e. to exchange, and conquer the whole world for its market, it strives on the other side to annihilate this space with time, i.e. to reduce to a minimum the time spent in motion from one place to another. The more developed the capital /.../ the more does it strive for an even greater extension of the market and for greater annihilation of space by time.⁴⁴

In volume 2 of *Capital* Marx distinguishes between two departments of social reproduction in capitalist society. Department I concern the reproduction of the means of production, i.e. machinery, wages to workers and profits to capitalists. Department II is the reproduction of means of consumption, which consists of the value of commodities that are consumed individually by the worker and the capitalist, the value of the labor-power that produces such consumption-goods, and the profits that the capitalists accumulates from it.

In the early phases of industrial capitalism, the reproduction process in department I dominates and determines the reproduction occurring in department II. This means that the big profits in the economy are realized in department I, which is the industrial sector in a broad sense. This was for example the case in England when Marx was writing in the 19th century. However, the industrial economies in the West in the 19th century developed in the way that to accumulate profits the exploitation of the workers were intensified up until a situation where the workers could no longer reproduce themselves. When the workers cannot reproduce themselves, the lack of effective demand, the market, disappears and a crisis in the economy will occur. This happened several times and in different scale in Europe, and is still part of the explanation of how a crisis occur. Basically, the exploitation of the workers is on a level so high that the workers is not able to buy back the goods they produce, and therefore the market disappears. In order to avoid a crisis, economists therefore started to create models of how to ensure that there are investments in department II of the economy, so that a lack of effective demand will not appear.

Although a crisis often manifests itself in a lack of effective demand, Marx objected to this theory of under-consumption as the central problem of capitalism. Because, it tends to locate the central contradiction of

⁴⁴ Marx, K. (1973). *Grundrisse*. Penguin Book, London. pp. 539-40. This book, or collection of manuscripts, by Marx, was published in German for the first time in 1939.

capitalism in the market rather than in the unequal production relations.⁴⁵ If the problem is that the workers cannot make up a proper market, then the solution would simply be to raise their wages just enough for them to keep the economy running. Marx's critique of capitalism is much more fundamental than that. I will come back to Marx's critique of capitalism, but will now continue Lefebvre's application of Marx's theory of the reproduction process of capital in the two different departments.

Lefebvre talks about a primary and a secondary circuit of capital. They correspond to Marx's first and second departments of reproduction. This is another original contribution this essay provides, in the attempt to understand Lefebvre's book. Neither on Lefebvre's theory of the primary and secondary circuit of capital have I seen anyone who explains it by tracing it back to Marx's concept of the two departments of reproduction. Lefebvre writes;

... I would like to highlight the role played by urbanism and more generally real estate (speculation, construction) in neocapitalist society. Real estate functions as a second sector, a circuit that runs parallel to that of industrial production, which serve the nondurable assets market, or at least those that are less durable than buildings. This second sector serves as a buffer. It is where capital flows in the event of a depression, although enormous profits soon slow to a trickle. In this sector, there are few "multipliers," few spin-offs. Capital is tied up in real estate. Although the overall economy (so-called domestic economy) soon begins to suffer, the role and function of this sector continue to grow. As the principal circuit – current industrial production and the movable property that results – begins to slow down, capital shifts to the second sector, real estate. It can even happen that real-estate speculation becomes the principal source for the formation of capital, that is, the realization of surplus value. As the percentage of overall surplus value formed and realized by industry begins to decline, the percentage created and realized by real-estate speculation and construction increases. The second circuit supplants the first, becomes essential.⁴⁶

What Lefebvre means, and this is one of the most important arguments in the book, is that department II, or the secondary circuit using his words, now supplants the first and becomes the dominant that determines the other. Or at least this process has started and will increase in speed in the near future.

So, now, almost fifty years after the publication of Lefebvre's book, we should be in a pretty good situation of being able to evaluate his argument. Did the secondary circuit of capital supplant the primary? Well, no one would deny that what we today use to call the service sector, finance and real estate sector has increased its significance in the economy in the West exponentially during the last decades. But, if it clearly dominates the industrial sector might be harder to say. In some cases, it obviously does, in others the answer is not so clear. But, in the same way as the industrial revolution did not happen over one night, the urban revolution is also going to take some time before becoming fully established, having changed society to a complete urban society. Maybe we can conclude that we are still right in the middle of a transformation from industrial to urban society. The urban revolution might be happening right in front of our eyes, in this very moment. The signs are numerous, for example did not the last big economic crisis of 2008-9 originate in the financial and

⁴⁵ Hudis, P. (2012). *Marx's Concept on the Alternative to Capitalism*. Haymarket, Chicago. p. 172.

⁴⁶ Lefebvre (2003), pp. 159-60.

real estate sector in the US? Is not processes of gentrification, and lack of affordable housing, starting to become one of the major issues for youth and working class in the West today? Is not even the new US president, Donald Trump, a product of the increasing dominance of the real estate sector (his fortune is engendered from it anyway). Lefebvre himself writes;

Can we claim that the phenomena associated with industrialization within a given global framework (institutional, ideological) have been completely supplanted by urban phenomena? That the former are now subordinated to the latter? Not in my opinion. We shouldn't confuse trends with realization. Today's society is undergoing a transition and can best be understood in this sense. The phenomena and implications of industry are only now beginning to wane.⁴⁷

ENVIRONMENTAL DESTRUCTION

Another theme in Lefebvre's book of which I have not touched upon yet is his understanding of nature and environmental destruction. While this aspect in Lefebvre's writings is much more analyzed by other researchers⁴⁸ (especially in the field of urban and political ecology), than the other themes I have discussed above, I will only briefly go over the most important conclusions Lefebvre makes.

Seen from today, his writings about nature in 1970 must be considered as exceptional. Lefebvre is discussing how capitalism as a system destroys nature, because it is a system that is dependent on infinite growth on a finite planet. He writes;

During the critical phase, nature appears as one of the key problems. Industrialization and urbanization, together or in competition, ravage nature. Water, earth, air, fire – the elements - are threatened with destruction. By the year 2000, whether or not there has been nuclear war, our water and air will be so polluted that life on earth will be difficult to maintain.⁴⁹

This he wrote before reports on increasing temperatures had come out. And even though the time of when the planet no longer will be able to live upon for humans was not exactly right, his argument is still accurate and controversial because it locates the problem with environmental destruction in the social system, capitalism, and not in "bad" technology. Therefore, the quote continues with a conclusion that in order to save nature, we have to transcend capitalism.

It is now possible to conceive of a form of "socialism" that differs considerably from what is commonly understood by the word or from what Marx defined. Goods that were once scarce are now abundant, such as bread and food in general (which are still scarce in a large, poorly developed, part of the world but

⁴⁷ Lefebvre (2003), p. 138.

⁴⁸ See for example ed. Kipfer, S. (1996). *Cities, Nature and Socialism: Towards an Urban Agenda for Action and Research*, in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* vol. 7 #2; and, Castree, N. (1998). *Remaking Reality: Nature and the Millennium*, Routledge, London; and, Swyngedouw, E. (1996). *The City as Hybrid: On Nature, Society and Cyborg Urbanization*, in *Capitalism, Nature, Socialism* vol. 7 #2.

⁴⁹ Lefebvre (2003), p. 26.

superabundant in the developed part). In contrast, goods that were once abundant have become scarce: space, time, desire, water, earth, light. Unless we intend to produce or re-produce everything that was “nature,” we will have to collectively manage new types of scarcity.⁵⁰

A socialism that is commonly understood by the word or from what Marx defined, is of course a reference to Soviet Union or the other so-called socialistic countries at that time. Lefebvre knew that those countries did not provide an alternative to capitalism. What Lefebvre thought about alternatives to capitalism will be discussed in the final part of this essay.

Part 3 – Humanism and Revolution

ALIENATION IN SPACE, SPATIAL FETISHISM, AND CLASS

So, we can now conclude that Lefebvre conceives of space as a product. Space is something that is produced. Different social systems create different spaces. This production of space, he writes, is not something new. Man always, necessarily, creates and modifies spaces. But, what is new is that space enter the reproduction process, and that there becomes a global, and total production of social spaces.⁵¹

Capitalist space, as a product, results from the relations of production. The spaces it produces therefore embodies class divisions. What Lefebvre does when he tries to talk about a production of space that comes from a hierarchical ideology, is to drag away the veil which hinders us to see the unequal production relations behind the production of space (using Marx’s words). While Marx talked about the fetishism of commodities, Lefebvre talks in the same way about a fetishism of space (this I talked about in part one of this essay when developing on Lefebvre’s concept of *The Urban Phenomenon*, pp. 14-5).

Lefebvre argues that in the same sense as the capitalist mode of production engenders a feeling of alienation by a; it cuts the worker into two by quantifying his or her *concrete labor* into *abstract labor*, and b; lets the constant capital i.e. machinery, dominate the worker, and c; creates competition between the workers, in the same sense, capitalist spaces can also create a form of alienation. Regarding alienation that originates in space he writes that the urban contains and perpetuates all forms of alienation.

Urban alienation contains and perpetuates all other forms of alienation. In it, through it, segregation becomes commonplace: by class, by neighborhood, by profession, by age, by ethnicity, by sex. Crowds and loneliness. Space becomes increasingly rare – it is expensive, a luxury and privilege maintained and kept up through a practice (the “center”) and various strategies. The city does indeed grow richer. It attracts wealth and monopolizes culture just as it concentrates power. But it collapses under the weight of its wealth. The more it concentrates the necessities of life, the more unlivable it becomes. The notion that happiness is possible in the city, that life there is more intense, pleasure is enhanced, and leisure time more

⁵⁰ Lefebvre (2003), pp. 26-7.

⁵¹ Lefebvre (2003), p. 155.

abundant is mystification and myth. If there is a connection between social relationships and space, between places and human groups, we must, if we are to establish cohesion radically modify the structures of space.⁵²

Lefebvre therefore acknowledges that there are different forms of alienation, not just one that originates from the factory. It is possible then to interpret that he opens for a conclusion that the feeling of alienation can originate in any form of oppressive structure, such as racism and sexism as well, and that all of these forms of alienation has to be abolished. This was, for example, not the standpoint of the French Communist Party of that time.

In a developed urban society, the inhabitant of spaces becomes reduced to simply one whose function is to being a buyer of space, one who realizes surplus value.⁵³ Former spaces are being destroyed, and former life are planned to increase efficiency. Spaces are then separated and planned to function for a specific purpose. Space becomes controlled, dominated, and restructured. But, Lefebvre means that space could be so much more. It is the place for human development, and if it would be under a social control it could be a beautiful creation, not merely a product. To talk about alienation, Lefebvre must have a conception about a human. What would there otherwise be alienation from? However, what that humanism is, is not easily interpreted in his book. He does not clearly state it anywhere. Although, what he does say about it, is that it has to be created by the proletariat it selves.

Hence, what we can conclude of his writing about alienation in space is that it affects everyone. Even the rich, the owners of the means of production, will be affected, alienated, by “bad” spaces. If we then for a moment connects back to Hegel, there is a similarity between Lefebvre’s conclusion that bad spaces limit even the bourgeoisie’s development, with Hegel’s conclusions about the destructive dialectical relationship between the master and the slave, in the famous passage about Lordship and Bondage in his *Phenomenology of Spirit*⁵⁴ from 1807. In it Hegel writes about that in a struggle for recognition, the master dominates the slave and demands recognition by the slave. But the recognition the master gets from the slave is a coerced recognition. The master, even though he dominates the slave, will in the end not feel recognized, and therefore not be able to develop his self-consciousness, absolute knowledge, and spirit, and all the rest of it that Hegel talks about. For Lefebvre, the capitalist who dominates the workers by producing an oppressive space, will neither retain a full development of his humanity. He is also stuck in an alienating space which also hinders his development. Hence, as Hegel concludes in his passage about the master and the slave, the slave will in the end be the one who will gain a fuller consciousness. This is because he has both the experience of being dominated by the master, and the possibility to imagine the master’s life, because of all that he does is to serve the master. In the end the slave will therefore be the one who has the possibility to create a notion of freedom, that can develop into a reason to revolt, and to start a dialectical process of negation towards a transcendence.

⁵² Lefebvre (2003), p. 92.

⁵³ Lefebvre (2003), p. 156.

⁵⁴ Hegel, G. W. F. (1967). *Phenomenology of the Spirit*. Harper & Row, Idaho. Part B – Self-Consciousness.

Thus, nothing could therefore be more wrong, than to conclude that Lefebvre abolishes class divisions in his conceptual apparatus. Alienated spaces affect everyone, true. But, that does not mean that classes suddenly disappear to exist. Class divisions are the very reason to why alienating spaces exist. But class divisions are more complex in a society dominated by the reproduction in the secondary circuit of capital than one in which reproduction is still concentrated in the primary circuit of capital. This is why Lefebvre in one passage in the book writes that Che Guevara was too late when he went to Bolivia in the late 1960s and tried to create centers of peasant guerillas, and start the revolution from the countryside.⁵⁵ Lefebvre means that the boundary line does not divide city and country but cuts across the urban phenomenon, between a dominated periphery and a dominating center.⁵⁶ Therefore, he means that, in a complete urbanized society the revolutionary proletariat will be the suburbanites. He mentions that Blacks in the United States, who are locked in urban ghettos by a form of social segregation somewhat forms a potential for this revolutionary class⁵⁷. This leads us into the next section on theories of revolution.

THE CRITICAL PHASE

Throughout his book, Lefebvre refers to a critical phase in the future. What is this critical phase? In the first chapter, he writes that his book *The Urban Revolution* is an attempt to answer what occurs during the critical phase.⁵⁸ I will suggest that one way to interpret the critical phase is as a phase of total domination by the dominating classes over the masses. Remember the axis discussed in part one of this essay where Lefebvre describes the history as a history of spatial domination. The axis ends where the domination is total. This phase will then be characterized as a society which is completely urbanized. The inhabitants will have no power to control the space they inhabit. The space they live in will be an alienating space, arranged to preserve the present hierarchy.

Important to note here is that Lefebvre is not against centrality as such. Centrality is not bad per se, he thinks. The thing Lefebvre wants us to focus on is, who controls the urban, and for what purpose?

... there can be no sites for leisure, festivals, knowledge, oral or scriptural transmission, invention, or creation without centrality. But as long as certain relationships of production and ownership remain unchanged, centrality will be subjected to those who use these relationships and benefit from them. At best it will be "elitist," at worst controlled by military or police.⁵⁹

Logically it then follows that an alternative to such a space would be one that is controlled by the inhabitants themselves. Lefebvre talks about a demand for a total self-management, *autogestion*, over space as something

⁵⁵ Lefebvre (2003), p. 146.

⁵⁶ Lefebvre (2003), p. 113.

⁵⁷ Lefebvre (2003), p. 145.

⁵⁸ Lefebvre (2003), p. 16.

⁵⁹ Lefebvre (2003), p. 97.

that could challenge the existing hierarchical social relations. This total self-management is built into the concept of the *Right to the City* which Lefebvre mentions in his book, but does not develop much upon.

The Right to the City is a slogan that Lefebvre coined and discussed in another book, called *Le Droit à La Ville*⁶⁰ published 1968, just two years before *The Urban Revolution*. It has become a wide-spread slogan used unfortunately quite often divorced from the content Lefebvre filled it with. For Lefebvre, *The Right to the City*, is a cry for housing, centrality, participation, appropriation, as well as self-management, abolition of the state, classes, and alienation. *The Right to the City* is a cry for a de-alienating space. Thus, it is a vision of what freedom could be like. As a political demand, *The Right to the City*, has been accused for being too utopian. But, the ones who dismisses it for being too utopian have not understood that the purpose of the concept is to be utopian. Utopian ideas of freedom, a new society, is absolutely necessary to set the dialectical process in motion. All revolutions always starts with a conclusion that the current situation can improve, and a vision of something new. Because, without a vision of freedom there is no reason for a revolution. When Margarethe Thatcher in the early 1980s said that *there is no alternative*, arguing that neoliberal capitalism is the only way we can organize a society, she therefore stabbed the left-wing right in its heart. She took away the very reason for struggles. Without a notion of what freedom could be, the left is nothing. Without a notion, there is nothing that can develop to a reason, and without a reason there is nothing that can unite the dominated against the oppressive social system.

Lefebvre's alternative to capitalism is therefore not a model, it is a notion and a path towards it. Like Marx posed the idea of a revolution of permanence, so do Lefebvre talks about the right to the city as a process towards a higher phase. Freedom is, for both Lefebvre and Marx, a constant motion of overcoming of negations. Lefebvre writes that an abstract notion of freedom is necessary, but there of course must be attempts to concretize this too. So, although Lefebvre does pose a few concrete, down-to-earth, suggestions for what to do in a political strategy, these suggestions has to be understood as small steps, with the purpose of launching a bigger dialectical process of overcoming negations.

It is obviously that for strategy to succeed it must combine the "negative" forces of revolt against a repressive society with social forces that are capable of "positively" resolving the problems of the megalopolis. This is no simple matter.⁶¹

Lefebvre suggestions for a political strategy concerns to 1; start talking and analyzing the urban problems to unmask the social relations hidden within the physical structure, and 2; develop a program that begins with a form of generalized self-management, i.e. a right to the city, and 3; start trying to implement it.⁶²

⁶⁰ This book was translated into English in 1996 and published by Blackwell under the title *Writings on Cities*.

⁶¹ Lefebvre (2003), p. 146.

⁶² Lefebvre (2003), p. 150.

Conclusion

TIME AND SPACE

In this reading of Lefebvre I have suggested an interpretation of Lefebvre's book which traces back the Hegelian roots of his dialectical method, the Marxist roots to the theory of the primary and secondary circuit of capital, and stresses the importance of a vision of freedom, and the possibilities of a revolution. From this perspective, Lefebvre comes out as an original humanistic Marxist, who developed Marxism and stretched it into new areas. In this light, his intellectual project can to some extent be compared with other French intellectuals who also found usefulness in Hegel and/or Marx, and applied their understanding to their own everyday lives. Here I am thinking of, for example, Frantz Fanon who drew much upon Hegel's Master and Slave dialectic when understanding colonial and racial relations, and Simone de Beauvoir who took Hegel and Marx into gender relations. Lefebvre himself writes in *The Urban Revolution* about his project like this;

I have added a few elements to the theory of the upside-down world that strengthen the mission to reverse this world and complete the Marxist ideal of a revolution in the system of industrial organization with the addition of a planned urban revolution.⁶³

Lefebvre argues that an urban revolution now supplants the industrial revolution. Does this mean that we in the future are going to teach our kids about "the urban revolution" just as we today teach our kids about "the industrial revolution"? Can we imagine a completely mechanized industrial sector, that reduces its importance in the economy to a minimum? Today, that seems far ahead, but is it not likely? Think for example on the agricultural sector, imagine if we would travel back in time, say, two hundred and fifty years, would anyone then believe us if we said that the agricultural sector is going to be reduced to a minimum of the economy? Probably not. Agriculture has of course not completely played out its role, but in the West, there is less than one percent today who works directly in the agricultural sector. So, in the same way as the industrial sector supplanted the agricultural sector, is it not likely that the industrial sector also may face a similar destiny as the agricultural, become something that is heavily mechanized, something almost forgotten, that belonged to the past, and only employs less than one percent of the workforce? Technical inventions like 3D-printers seem to point in a direction of a massive reduced need for people working in traditional industries, at least.

However, now, 47 years after the publication of Lefebvre's book, what is going to happen when the complete urban society is established? If we accept that the secondary circuit of capital, or department II (the urban), dominates and supplants industry, and that this domination of space will continue to the point that the surplus value withdrawn from this sector is so big that the consumers/inhabitants can no longer constitute an effective demand, then we will have a crisis. This is what Lefebvre calls the critical phase. While the economic crisis of 2008-9 obviously originated from the sector of finance and real estate, the economy has today somewhat stabilized. But, even the liberal economists admit that another crisis, similar to the one we just had, will likely

⁶³ Lefebvre (2003), p. 101.

occur in the near future.⁶⁴ This crisis will manifest itself as a lack of effective demand, but is of course rooted in the unequal production relations (that the liberal economists does not admit). This means that just raising wages to workers will not abolish the capitalist system.⁶⁵

But is it not thinkable, at least hypothetically, of a third circuit/department of capital? Another sector in which the owners of the means of production can dominate the masses? Or, is the spatial domination the total domination from which it is not possible to exploit more? Lefebvre seems however to mean that the spatial domination is the total domination.

We can then conclude that while industrial capitalism was foremost concerned with a temporal domination, a domination of time, the urban capitalism adds another sphere of domination, that of space. Early industrialists struggled to get the workers to work as much as possible. For Marx, the struggle for the shortening of the working day, was therefore extremely important. Lefebvre writes hundred years after Marx and acknowledge a new form of domination of spaces in the urban society, and therefore stresses the importance of a Right to the City, as the first negation that can unify the masses and start a dialectical process of overcoming. For Lefebvre, capitalism is a hierarchical social system which dominates the masses in both temporal, and spatial dimensions.

VISION OF ALTERNATIVES

The critique of Lefebvre for being utopian is in one sense understandable. It is hard to conceive of other social system than the current. The people who was living in the medieval era for example, did of course not conceive of themselves as medieval. For them, the divine order of lordship and serfdom, was given. If we could, again, travel back in time and tell a lord in the 14th century in Europe that in the future the serfs are going to be free wage laborers, he would then probably not have taken it serious. The society for him, could not be organized in another way. And this is exactly what the defenders of the current social system say today, as well. They mean that a collective management would not be possible, humans are too greedy and so on, and we must stay with value production. But what is it exactly that is so special with capitalism that makes it an eternal, universal truth that humans cannot go beyond?

Lefebvre wants to open our horizon for something new, loosen our chains and take us on a walk out of the Platonian cave, and start a discussion of an alternative that can unite the masses in a revolution against the oppressive structure. This is the most valuable and useful conclusions a progressive movement of today, can find in Lefebvre's work. The emphasis on the dialectic understanding as opposed the dogmatic and structuralist approach, cannot be less underestimated today. Hence, nowhere else have I found anyone in the field of urban sociology or human geography who, with such sharpness, analyses contemporary capitalism, its future, and negations, as well as Lefebvre does in *The Urban Revolution*. Consider again the quote by Hegel on page 3, he

⁶⁴ Reinhart, C. & Rogoff, K. (2009). *This Time is Different – Eight Centuries of Financial Folly*. Princeton University Press, New Jersey.

⁶⁵ Hudis (2012), p. 172. This argument was further developed on p. 18.

meant that there is nothing like the strength of the subject who has gotten into its head the concept of full-blown liberty, i.e. freedom. Trying to discuss what a full-blown and freedom is, is what Lefebvre is about. If the ideas will spread and contribute to social revolution, is still up to the future to unveil.

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