

UNDERSTANDING THE CITY

Henri Lefebvre and Urban Studies

Edited by

Gülçin Erdi-Lelandais



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CAMBRIDGE
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P U B L I S H I N G

Understanding the City: Henri Lefebvre and Urban Studies,
Edited by Gülçin Erdi-Lelandais

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PREFACE

HENRI LEFEBVRE: A PRAXIS OF WHAT IS POSSIBLE

REMI HESS*

Henri Lefebvre, who was born in 1901 and died in 1991, can be perceived in the world of social sciences as a “revolutionary romantic” (Lefebvre 2011). The “adventurous” side of his life course consisted of exploring what is possible. He produced a considerable body of work: he wrote close to seventy books during his life, as well as publishing hundreds of articles in reviews and journals between 1923 and 1991. So, for seventy years, as an intellectual H. Lefebvre participated in all the discussions about major issues of the 20th century (Hess 1988). It is difficult to associate him with a particular discipline. Even though he was a philosopher by training, he explored the realms of mathematics, linguistics, history and, above all, sociology. He translated the works of Hegel, Marx, Engels and Nietzsche, and, as Attilo Belli points out, his Nietzschean dimensions should not be overlooked since to define him simply as a Marxist—which he is not wholly—is not sufficient (Belli 2012).

Lefebvre chooses his objects of study in the areas of history, politics and sociology. Consequently, he tackles subjects pertaining to various disciplines. For example, his book *Language and Society* has been appreciated by linguists. His interest in aesthetics and art leads him to produce decisive texts on the creative process. He takes a keen interest in cybernetics but constantly comes back to philosophy and sociology.

His horizon is metaphilosophy: a critical discipline encompassing the contribution of human and social sciences, but surpassing their local limits (Hess and Deulceux 2013). Metaphilosophy is the art of conducting a search for totality through a *transductive* movement. Transduction—

* With the collaboration of Camille Rabineau.

Aufhebung with Hegel—means surpassing the dispersion of fragments in an effort to appropriate and to elevate.

In the domain of sociology, he invents a critical approach which should align him with the Frankfurt School tradition. However his critical posture leads him to add the intervention processes. Thus, he is also a critical practitioner. His critical thought tends toward action. This dimension is what interests both young researchers (Nicolas-Le Strat 2013) and students today (Rabineau 2013). The present book also privileges this critical approach to understand the new forms, systems and relationships which restructure cities in different parts of the world. The contributors propose their fieldwork findings in order to empirically discuss Henri Lefebvre's thought. This position is completely in harmony with Lefebvre's orientations when it comes to explaining urban space.

Lefebvre is not an armchair sociologist; he goes into the field and intervenes in real life. To get to know reality, he transforms it. He proceeds this way in the areas of rural and urban sociology by creating an institute that conducts surveys. He also takes part in politics. His militancy in the Communist Party between 1928 and 1957 does not exclude an effort to develop what Georges Lapassade calls an internal analysis of this apparatus. Lefebvre becomes interested in Institutional Analysis, which R. Lourau theorized under his direction. This analysis, which he considers to be "today's dialectic approach", makes it possible to examine the relationship between practice and the underlying "prophecy". The German philosopher G. Weigand pointed out the originality of the French intellectual trend of institutional analysis that is essential to Lefebvre's work and surpasses the critical posture in the praxis. For Lefebvre, producing a critique of life or urban development, for instance, means shedding light on what is possible, on the virtualities present in reality at a given time (Hess 2009). Thus, his role in the emergence of *Mai 1968* is decisive, not only from a theoretical point of view, but also in terms of his involvement in a pedagogical critique.

Lefebvre's work is a movement that attempts to produce concepts allowing intervention in the real world. Concepts have no universal legitimacy. They are meant to work in real life at a given moment. They can be transcended. This is what the authors of the present book try to do by situating Lefebvrian concepts within different national and cultural contexts and giving them new dimensions and interpretations.

From that point of view, Lefebvre uses an approach that constantly articulates sociology and history; he names it the regressive-progressive method. The point is to start from the here and now. A situation is described as minutely as possible, and the structure is brought out.

Contradictions appear. Where do they come from? The researcher then goes back to the past to identify the origin of today's problems. Enlightened by this regressive survey, he comes back to the present to find the germs of the future. Lefebvre does not study history for the sake of history, but to gain practical knowledge. The historical survey is inscribed in the analysis of circumstances in order to find out how they can possibly be transcended.

Lefebvre relies on this method to study historical moments in literature or philosophy through figures. He studies Rabelais, Pascal, Descartes, Diderot, and Musset. These characters interest him because they show how the particular social situation with which they were confronted produced theoretical issues. For Lefebvre, an author's genius lies in the fact that he manages to overcome the contradictions of his time. According to him, Rabelais' invention, for example, was to produce a work in French, thus challenging the power of Rome and of the Vatican, which imposed the use of Latin.

Some of Lefebvre's readers can be called "contingent". They are interested in a book or a series of books. For instance, some geographers are fascinated by his research on urban reality. As far as we are concerned, we do not allow ourselves to decide on a hierarchy of Lefebvre's works, here or elsewhere. We assume that his theoretical involvement is a global movement that uses all opportunities to intervene in reality. From this point of view, any "moment" in his work is a fragment of a totality into which we attempt to instil dialectics as well as historical and sociological dynamics.

We are constantly trying to maintain the posture of the "necessary" reader who places each work into the general movement. Since, for Lefebvre, "man's work is himself", it seems that his life experience, his relation to the world and to the social praxis have to be taken into account as well as his written work (Deulceux and Hess 2012).

Our ambition is to publish Lefebvre's complete work one day. However, today this project is impossible. First, we must realize what is possible now. For the time being, amongst his books translated into English, the most widely read are those on space, on the city, and his critique of daily life. However, Verso will soon publish in English his *La fin de l'histoire*, a Nietzschean book, and *Métaphilosophie*. These books will help English-speaking readers to perceive the complementarity of his works. Perhaps one day *La somme et le reste*, a magnificent book, will also be available in English.

With Lefebvre, there is a will to constantly articulate real life experience, the perceived and the conceived. His texts are therefore always

the product of a context and of an aim within that context. Circumstances arise from circumstances. At the end of his career, he conducted seminars on Clausewitz and wrote a book called *De la guerre*. Lefebvre thinks about strategy. He does not do anything that is not inscribed in a strategic perspective. He is not afraid of going against the flow. That is why he frequently opens new channels! In the ten years following the publication of his *Manifeste différentialiste*, there was not a single philosopher who did not write a book on difference, unfortunately too often without mentioning Lefebvre. For several decades, this code of silence enabled philosophers and sociologists to pick up their themes from his ideas. Conversely, architects, town planners and his friends, the institutionalists, have always been loyal to him. The present book also contributes to this recognition and brings Lefebvre back to the core of discussions on urban studies. From this point of view, it is more than welcome in order to understand the dynamics of cities today.

Nowadays, Lefebvre is being massively rediscovered. In the last ten years about fifty books have been published on him in English, German, Spanish, Portuguese and even Korean. In France, the prospect of a new edition appears to be on the agenda. Quite a few newly reprinted books by Lefebvre are currently available. We have just republished *La somme et le reste* and *Le droit à la ville*, *Marx, une métaphilosophie de la liberté*, and *Descartes*. We are working toward a new publication of several out-of-print books: *Pascal, au-delà du structuralisme*, etc.

The book you are about to read is important. It makes new contributions to the field of urban reality and also refers to rhythmanalysis, an essential dimension of this thought and of its complexity. It is not an ordinary collection of disparate papers loosely organized around a topic, nor mildly polished conference proceedings, but rather carefully written contributions to a complex and important single theme: the meanings and the use of Henri Lefebvre's sociological theory in urban studies from an empirical perspective.

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—Gülçin Erdi-Lelandais

LIST OF ABBREVIATIONS

AGM	Antalya Greater Municipality
AGOFF	Antalya Golden Orange Film Festival
AKMED	Akdeniz Medeniyetleri Enstitüsü <i>Research Institute on Mediterranean Civilization</i>
AKP	Adalet ve Kalkınma Partisi <i>Justice and Development Party</i>
AKTOB	Akdeniz Turizm ve Otelciler Birliği <i>Mediterranean Tourism and Hoteliers Association</i>
ANSİAD	Antalya Sanayiciler ve İşadamları Derneği <i>Association of Industrialists and Businessmen of Antalya</i>
ATAV	Antalya Tanıtım Vakfı <i>Antalya Promotion Foundation</i>
ATSO	Antalya Sanayi ve Ticaret Odası <i>Antalya Chamber of Commerce and Industry</i>
AU	Akdeniz University
CHP	People's Republican Party
CQA	Conseil de Qualité Architecturale <i>Council for Architectural Quality</i>
GaWC	Globalization and World Cities Research Network
GIAT	Groupement Industriel des Armements Terrestres <i>Land Weapons Manufacturing Group</i>
GÜLDAM	Gülensu Gülsuyu Dayanışma Merkezi <i>Gülensu Gülsuyu Life and Solidarity Centre</i>
HLM	Habitation à Loyer Modéré <i>Social Housing</i>