

A black and white photograph of an elderly man, Henri Lefebvre, with white hair and a serious expression. He is wearing a dark sweater under a light-colored jacket. He is pointing his right index finger directly at the camera. The background is dark and out of focus.

Henri Lefebvre

A Critical Introduction

ANDY MERRIFIELD

Foreword by Herbert Muschamp

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6

SPACE

I hear the ruin of all space, shattered glass and toppling masonry.

—James Joyce, *Ulysses*

The Production of Space was Henri Lefebvre's fifty-seventh book, the crowning glory of research on cities and spatial questions, spanning the 1968–74 period, when, aside from lecturing and witnessing students go into revolt mode, he scribed nine books and a dozen articles and helped found the journal *Espace et société*.¹ To write *The Production of Space*, emeritus-to-be Henri was given a special stipend from Paris-Nanterre, his employer, and the densely argued, 485-page tome was worth every centime, reigning as it does as one of his greatest and most enduring works. The book, it's equally been noted, was personally important to Lefebvre, because it punctuated the end of his truncated yet

illustrious academic career.² If this spatial moment came in the twilight of Lefebvre's career, when it came it literally erupted. Just as the mature Karl Marx never chose political-economy as his vocation but rather political-economy chose him, space now seemed to choose Lefebvre as its critical conscience; it was the state of the world, as opposed to the state of his mind, that prompted his intellectual engagement, spurred his rejigging of the Marxist historical object, of a general theory of production that hitherto unfolded on the head of a pin.

* * *

Remi Hess has pointed out a curious Lefebvrian factoid. Despite being widely translated into scores of languages, there's a geography and temporality to the uptake of Lefebvre's books. His texts, in short, haven't all been translated in the same countries at the same time.³ The Japanese have translated a lot, Anglo-Americans have translated a handful, notably since 1991; German reeditions, and those released in Latin American countries, have their own politically conditioned logic; ditto South Korea, who today is a big Lefebvrian importer, where his texts sell like radical hotcakes. Moreover, works deemed important by aficionados, like *Nationalisme contre les nations* (1937) and *La Somme et le Reste* (rereleased in France in 1989), haven't sold well. Many Lefebvre texts are simply out of print or perhaps out of fashion, even if they're never out of sync. (Hess pointed out that since the fall of the Berlin Wall, Lefebvre's Marxist œuvre has dwindled and become antiquarian stuff.) By the early 1990s, there wasn't a single Lefebvre book in print in France; his renown there had apparently receded from the public realm. Furthermore, sales of *La production de l'espace*, whose fourth edition appeared in 2000, stretch somewhere between three and four thousand copies, whereas *The Production of Space* now tops almost twenty thousand copies.⁴

Given this minority homeland status, why, we might wonder, has Lefebvre become an almost cult figure in Anglo-American critical-theoretical circles? Did his work on space initially lead to bewilderment in France? Maybe this spatial moment sounded the death knell of Lefebvre's intellectual acclaim? *The Production of Space* was misunderstood and overlooked when it hit French bookshelves in 1974. The timing couldn't have been worse: by then Althusser's reputation was formidable and his structural Marxism was *de rigueur*; he was the flagship of French theory's arrival across the Channel and across an ocean. And if you didn't agree with Althusser and you were still a Marxist, you'd turn to Roger Garaudy's humanism, not Lefebvre's. There was seemingly little intellectual scope for Hegelian Marxism.⁵ And a book about space? That's what most socialist radicals seemed to need like a hole in the head! When things did assume an urban turn, in the early phases of *Espace et société*, Althusser still curiously snuck in ahead of Lefebvre. It was the former's Marxism, after all, that underwrote Manuel Castells's highly influential sociological research on urbanization: Castells's *La cuestión urbana*—replete with attacks on former mentor Lefebvre—made it to press two years before *La production de l'espace* and undercut his senior's humanist predilections and analytical pretensions.

In fact, Castells asked whether the “urban” was a legitimate object of inquiry at all. The “urban question” for him was above all a question of how an urbanizing *capitalist mode of production* functioned. In Castells's spatial universe, the city was indeed a *container* of social and class relationships. But it was these social relations that had primacy over any explicit “urban” or “spatial” category. Lefebvre, for Castells, had strayed too far, had *reified* space; Castells caught a whiff of spatial fetishism, attributing to the spatial causal determinacy over the societal. From trying to develop a “Marxist analysis of the urban phenomenon,” Lefebvre, Castells said, “comes closer and closer, through a rather curious

intellectual evolution, to an *urbanistic theorization of the Marxist problematic*.⁶ No compliment intended: this was a stinging rebuttal, probably helping ensure the relative neglect of Lefebvre's work during the 1970s.⁷

While Lefebvre's rejoinder maintained that Castells didn't understand space—"He sets aside space," Lefebvre scoffed. "His is still a simplistic Marxist schema"⁸—it was David Harvey who brought Lefebvre to the attention of Anglophone audiences. In *Social Justice and City*, we know, Lefebvre only cameoed. Yet his idea that a distinctively "urban revolution" was supplanting an "industrial revolution" and that this urban revolution was somehow a spatial revolution as well had a deep and lasting resonance in critical urban studies and geography—longer lasting, it seems, than Castells's own urban research, which was reaching its sell-by date as early as the mid-1980s. Steadily, from the mid-1970s onward, Lefebvre's urban and spatial ideas seeped into Anglophone urban and geographical scholarship, spawning, by the early 1980s, a Lefebvrian cottage industry of sociospatial Marxism. In this context, rather than Lefebvre influencing English-speaking geography and urbanism, it's perhaps been the other way around: maybe it has been Anglo-American spatial theorists who've resuscitated Lefebvre's flagging spatial career, prompted his more recent (post-humous) claim to fame. Michel Trebitsch, in his essay on Volume 3 of *Critique of Everyday Life*, forthcoming as a preface to Verso's English translation, even reckons this Anglophone Lefebvrian turn has reacted back into France, giving a "new look" to his œuvre there, "re-acclimating" it within "classic French theory."

One wonders how widespread Lefebvre's work would have been without the first-wave mediation of David Harvey (instrumental in pushing for an English translation of *La production de l'espace*), Ed Soja, Fredric Jameson, Mark Gottdiener, Derek Gregory, Kristin Ross, Elenore Kofman, and Elizabeth Lebas, as well as second-wave interpreters like Rob Shields, Erik Swyngedouw,

Stuart Elden, Stefan Kipfer, and Neil Brenner. One wonders, too, whether we'd have ever seen *The Production of Space* appear in English. God knows, seventeen years is a stretch anyway, a far cry from Althusser's *For Marx* (published in 1965 and making it into English a couple of years later). Debuting in 1991 and capably translated by one-time Brit Situ Donald Nicholson-Smith, *The Production of Space* has been the biggest catalyst in Lefebvre's rise to Anglophone stardom. Its appearance was *the* event within critical human geography during the 1990s, sparking a thorough reevaluation of social and spatial theory, just when apologists for a globalizing neoliberalism proclaimed "the end of geography." After a very long wait, English audiences not only have been given access to a classic text of Marxist geography, they've equally been living through the very productive process this book underscored.

* * *

The explorations in *The Production of Space* (POS in citations) are explorations of an extraordinary protean, seventy-three-year-old French Marxist. Of course, there's much more going on than plain old-fashioned Marxism: Hegel crops up often; Nietzsche's spirit is palpable; and Lefebvre's grasp of romantic poetry, modern art, and architecture is demonstrable. Meanwhile, he breezes through the history of Western philosophy as if it's kids' stuff, as if everybody understands his unreferenced allusions, his playful punning and pointed pillorying. Prominent here are the diverse "moments" within Lefebvre's own œuvre: his philosophical moment, his literary moment, his historical and political moments, plus a moment we can describe as a moment of *confrontation*. The book begins with a "Plan of the Present Work,"⁹ an opening gambit of masterful coherence, whose argument proceeds with considerable analytical consistency and lucidity. Immediately, we get a compressed account of the concept of space, listen to how it has been

denigrated in Western thought, within the Cartesian tradition, by Kant, by Bergson, and by structural linguistics, and hear how Lefebvre himself aims to tread through this mottled landscape. On the face of it, this all sounds like a tame philosophical dilemma, hardly one to change the world. But as we follow Lefebvre onward through *The Production of Space*, we soon see its radical import.

After a while, his pursuit for a “unitary theory of space” unfolds—critically and flamboyantly. The project he coins *spatiology* (POS, p. 404) and involves, among other things, a rapprochement between *physical space* (nature), *mental space* (formal abstractions about space), and *social space* (the space of human interaction). These different “fields” of space, Lefebvre says, have suffered at the hands of philosophers, scientists, and social scientists, not least because they’ve been apprehended as separate domains. *The Production of Space* seeks to “detonate” everything, to readdress the schisms and scions; Lefebvre considers fragmentation and conceptual dislocation as serving distinctly ideological ends. Separation ensures consent and perpetuates misunderstanding; or worse, it props up the status quo. By bringing these different “modalities” of space together, within a single theory, Lefebvre wants to *expose* and *decode* space, to update and expand Marx’s notion of *production*, to leave the noisy sphere where everything takes place on the surface, in full view of everyone, and enter into the hidden abode, on whose threshold hangs the following notice: “No admittance except on business!”

The emphasis on production is, of course, very Marxist. To be radical, for Marx, meant “grasping things by the root.”¹⁰ And his obsession with production was designed to do just that: to get to the root of capitalist society, to get beyond the fetishisms of observable appearance, to trace out its inner dynamics and internal contradictions, holistically and historically. Lefebvre likewise demystifies capitalist social space by tracing out its inner dynamics and generative moments—in all their various physical and mental guises,

in all their material and political obfuscations. Here, *generative* means “active” and “creative,” and *creation*, he says, “is, in fact, a *process*” (POS, p. 34). Thus, getting at this generative aspect of space necessitates exploring how space gets *actively produced*. Again, like Marx in his theoretical quest for explanation, Lefebvre makes political purchase of process thinking, of conceiving reality in *fluid movement*, in its *momentary existence* and *transient nature*.

Now, space becomes reinterpreted not as a dead, inert thing or object but as organic and alive: space has a pulse, and it palpitates, flows, and collides with other spaces. Lefebvre’s favorite metaphors hail from hydrodynamics: spaces are described in terms of “great movements, vast rhythms, immense waves—these all collide and ‘interfere’ with one another; lesser movements, on the other hand, interpenetrate” (POS, p. 87). “All these spaces,” he adds, “are traversed by myriad currents. The hyper-complexity of space should now be apparent, embracing as it does individual entities and particularities, relatively fixed points, movements, and flows and waves—some interpenetrating, others in conflict” (POS, p. 88). And these interpenetrations—many with different temporalities—get superimposed on one another in a *present* space; different layers of time are inscribed in the built landscape, literally piled on top of each other, intersecting and buried, palpable and distorted within three-dimensional “objective” forms that speak a flattened, one-dimensional truth. Thus, “it’s never easy,” Lefebvre warns, “to get back from the object to the activity that produced and/or created it” (POS, p. 113). Indeed, once “the construction is completed, the scaffold is taken down; likewise, the fate of an author’s rough draft is to be torn up and tossed away” (POS, p. 113). Revisiting an abandoned construction site, delving into the wastebasket of history, retrieving a crumbled draft are henceforth tantamount to “reconstituting the process of its genesis and the development of its meaning.”

Here we have a vivid demonstration of Lefebvre's "regressive–progressive method," as well as a spatialized rendering of Marx's famous analysis on "the fetishism of commodities." From the present, from an actual predicament, Lefebvre's approach shifts backward, excavates the past, conceptually retraces it, burrows into grassed-over earth, then propels itself forward again, pushing onward into the frontiers of the virtual, into the yet-to-be. The production of space, he says, "having attained the conceptual and linguistic levels, acts retroactively upon the past, disclosing aspects and moments of it hitherto misapprehended. The past appears in a different light, and hence the process whereby that past becomes the present also takes on another aspect" (POS, p. 65). Ditto for Marx, who moved backward from a "thing-like" entity, the commodity-form, whose development was most pronounced in mid-nineteenth-century England, to reconstruct the totality of capitalism's past and possible future.

The commodity, Marx said, possesses a "mystical" and "mist-enveloped" quality he labels "fetishism." At the marketplace, at the level of exchange—in a department store, a car salesroom, at The Gap—it's impossible to apprehend the activities and exploitations occurring in a productive labor process. What are fundamentally intersubjective relations become, Marx says, perceived by people as objective, as "a definite social relation between men that assumes, in their eyes, the fantastic form of a relation between things."¹¹ Lefebvre's epistemological shift, from conceiving "things in space" to that of the actual "production of space" itself, is the same quantum leap Marx made in his colossal, all-incorporating analysis of the capitalist mode of production:

Instead of uncovering the social relationships (including class relationships) that are latent in spaces, instead of concentrating our attention on the production of space and the social relationships inherent to it—relationships which introduce specific contradictions into production, so echoing the contradiction

between private ownership of the means of production and the social character of the productive forces—we fall into the trap of treating space “in itself,” as space as such. We come to think in terms of spatiality, and so fetishize space in a way reminiscent of the old fetishism of commodities, where the trap lay in exchange, and the error was to consider “things” in isolation, as “things in themselves.” (POS, p. 90)

Now, space is no more a passive surface, a *tabula rasa* that enables things to “take place” and action to ground itself somewhere; space, like other commodities, is *itself actively produced*: it isn’t merely the staging of the theater of life as a paid-up member of the cast. Indeed, it’s an “active moment” in social reality, something produced before it is reproduced, created according to definite laws, conditioned by “a definite stage of social development” (as Marx said in his *Grundrisse* introduction). Each mode of production has its own particular space, and “the shift from one mode to another must entail the production of a new space” (POS, p. 46); industrial capitalism dismantled feudal space, late capitalism has produced—goes on producing—its historically specific urban and industrial forms, continuing to colonize and commodify space, to buy and sell it, create and tear it down, use and abuse it, speculate on and war over it. The history of bourgeois geography is a historical geography of expropriation, both of property and of peoples, resounding with shattering glass and toppling masonry; it’s written in the annals of civilization in letters of blood and fire.

Capitalism seemed to exhaust a lot of productive capacity, a lot of profitable capability in the postwar era: where to turn, what to do, who to exploit, and what to rip off? The system found new inspiration in the conquest of space. Not stratospheric space but human space, our everyday universe, with new *grands projets* on terra firma, transforming city cores and suburban peripheries, frontiers between countries, communications infrastructure; implanting new transcontinental networks of exchange within an

emergent world market. To that degree, says Lefebvre, capitalism has bought time for itself out of the space it captures, out of the geographical niches it has created, the physical and social environment it absorbs. It has not resolved its inner contradictions as much as internalized them, displaced them elsewhere, broadened and deepened them. Contradictions of capitalism henceforth manifest themselves as contradictions *of* space. To know how and what space internalizes is to learn how to produce something better, is to learn how to produce another city, another space, a space for and of socialism. To change life is to change space; to change space is to change life. Neither can be avoided. This is Lefebvre's radiant dream, the virtual object of his concrete utopia. It's a dream that undergirds *The Production of Space*.

* * *

Critical knowledge has to capture in thought the actual process of production of space. This is the upshot of Lefebvre's message. Theory must render intelligible qualities of space that are both perceptible and imperceptible to the senses. It's a task that necessitates both empirical and theoretical research, and it's likely to be difficult. It will doubtless involve careful excavation and reconstruction; warrant induction and deduction; journey between the concrete and the abstract, between the local and the global, between self and society, between what's possible and what's impossible. Theory must trace out the actual dynamics and complex interplay of space itself—of buildings and monuments, of neighborhoods and cities, of nations and continents—exposing and decoding those multifarious invisible processes, as well as those visible practices of brute force and structural injustice. But how can this be done?

Lefebvre works through these dilemmas by constructing a complex heuristic: he calls it a "spatial triad," and it forms the

weight-bearing epistemological pillar of *The Production of Space*. Unfortunately—or perhaps fortunately—he sketches this out only in preliminary fashion, leaving us to add our own flesh, our own content, to rewrite it as part of our own chapter or research agenda. What’s more, while Lefebvre notes that the triad is something we’ll encounter “over and over again” in *The Production of Space*, its appearance beyond the opening chapter is more implicit than explicit, assumed rather than affirmed. Why? Because it’s no mechanical framework or typology he’s bequeathed but a dialectical simplification, fluid and alive, with three specific moments that blur into each other: representations of space, spaces of representation, and spatial practices.

Representations of space refer to conceptualized space, to the space constructed by assorted professionals and technocrats. The list might include planners and engineers, developers and architects, urbanists and geographers, and others of a scientific or bureaucratic bent. This space comprises the various arcane signs and jargon, objectified plans and paradigms used by these agents and institutions. Representation implies the world of abstraction, what’s in the head rather than in the body. Lefebvre says this is always a *conceived* space; usually ideology, power, and knowledge lurk within its representation. It’s the dominant space of any society, “intimately tied to relations of production and to the ‘order’ those relations impose, and hence to knowledge, to signs, to codes, to ‘frontal’ relations” (POS, p. 33). Because this is the space of capital, state, and bourgeoisie, representations of space play a “substantial role and specific influence in the production of space” (POS, p. 42), finding “objective expression” in monuments and towers, in factories and office blocks, in the “bureaucratic and political authoritarianism immanent to a repressive space” (POS, p. 49).

Spaces of representation are directly lived spaces, the space of everyday experience. They are the nonspecialist world of argot

rather than jargon, symbols, and images of “inhabitants” and “users” and “overlay physical space, making symbolic use of its objects” (p. 39). Spaces of representation are the café on the corner, the block facing the park, the third street on the right after the Cedar Tavern, near the post office. Spaces of representation may equally be linked to underground and clandestine sides of life and don’t obey rules of consistency or cohesiveness, and they don’t involve too much head: they’re felt more than thought. A space of representation is *alive*: “it speaks. It has an affective kernel or center: Ego, bed, bedroom, dwelling, house; or, square, church, graveyard. It embraces the loci of passion, of action and of lived situations, and thus immediately implies time. Consequently, it may be qualified in various ways: it may be directional, situational or relational, because it is essentially qualitative, fluid and dynamic” (POS, p. 42).¹² Lived space is elusive, so elusive that thought and conception want to master it, need to appropriate and dominate it.

Spatial practices are practices that “secrete” society’s space; they propound and propose it, in a dialectical interaction. Spatial practices can be revealed by “deciphering” space and have close affinities with *perceived* space, to people’s perceptions of the world, of their world, particularly its everyday ordinariness. Thus spatial practices structure lived reality, include routes and networks, patterns and interactions that connect places and people, images with reality, work with leisure. Perceptual “imageability” of places—monuments, distinctive landmarks, paths, natural or artificial boundaries (like rivers or highways)—aid or deter a person’s sense of location and the manner in which a person acts. Spatial practices, says Lefebvre, embrace production and reproduction, conception and execution, the conceived as well as the lived; they somehow ensure societal cohesion, continuity, and what Lefebvre calls “spatial competence” (POS, p. 33).¹³ Yet cohesiveness doesn’t necessarily imply coherence, and Lefebvre is vague about how

spatial practices *mediate* between the conceived and the lived, about how spatial practices keep representations of space and spaces of representation together, yet apart. One thing he's sure of, though, is that there are "three elements" here not two. It's not a simple binary between lived and conceived but a "triple determination": each instance internalizes and takes on meaning through other instances.

Relations between conceived–perceived–lived spaces aren't ever stable, nor should they be grasped artificially or linearly. But Lefebvre has been around enough to know that lived experience invariably gets crushed and vanquished by the conceived, by a conceived *abstract space*, by an objectified abstraction. In this sense, abstract space is the product—the *materialization*—of what is conceived, a space of representation generalized. This idea of "abstract" again has Marxian overtones: *abstract space* bears an uncanny resemblance to Marx's notion of *abstract labor*, even though Lefebvre ventures much further than Marx, for whom "abstract" operated as an explicitly temporal category. Marx, remember, held that qualitatively different (concrete) labor activities got reduced to one quantitative (abstract) measure: money. Making a shirt is the concrete labor of a tailor whose use value is sanctioned by the market price for shirts; that is, by its exchange value. At such a point, what was concrete, useful, and particular becomes abstract, money driven, and universal. Money becomes the common denominator of all concrete things, of every labor activity that creates commodities; Marx coined this kind of labor *abstract labor*, labor in general, value-producing toil that's intimately tied to the "law of value," to socially necessary labor *time*.

In no way does "abstract" imply a mental abstraction: abstract labor has very real social existence, just as exchange value does, just as interest rates and share prices do. Similarly, abstract space has real ontological status and gains objective expression in specific buildings, places, activities, and modes of market intercourse

over and through space. Yet its underlying dynamic is conditioned by a logic that shows no *real* concern for qualitative difference. Its ultimate arbiter is value itself, whose universal measure (money) infuses abstract space. Here exigencies of banks and business centers, productive agglomerations and information highways, law and order all reign supreme—or try to. And while the bourgeoisie holds sway in its production and organization, abstract space tends to sweep everybody along, molding people and places in its image, incorporating peripheries as it peripheralizes centers, being at once deft and brutal, forging unity out of fragmentation. Lefebvre asks us to open our eyes, to visualize the world dialectically, to see how homogeneous abstract space manifests itself in a dislocated and dismembered landscape of capitalism, a global space pivoting around “uneven development” and pell-mell differentiation. “The space that homogenizes,” he declares, “thus has nothing homogeneous about it” (POS, p. 308).

* * *

There’s nothing obvious or transparent about abstract space; it cannot be reduced to a single strategy. Although its nature *is* a conspiracy of sorts, it isn’t *just* a conspiracy. Within abstract space are subtle ideological and political machinations, which maintain a perpetual dialogue between its space and users, prompting compliance and “nonaggression” pacts. The quasi-legal authority of abstract space imposes “reciprocity” and “commonality” of use, just as “in the street,” Lefebvre jokes, analogously, “each individual is supposed not to attack those he meets; anyone who transgresses this law is deemed guilty of a criminal act” (POS, p. 56). You instinctively know your place, instinctively know where things belong; this intricate microfunction pervades abstract space’s macrodetermination. Abstract space impregnates people, socializes everybody as spatial bodies and class subjects; its inbuilt consensus

principle allows it to function within lived space and to flourish as all there is to be perceived. Just as abstract labor denies true concrete labor, renders labor without a market superfluous, abstract space ultimately denies concrete qualitative space: it denies the generalization of what Lefebvre calls *differential space*, the space of what socialism *ought* to be, a space that doesn't look superficially different but that is different, different to its very core. It's different because it celebrates bodily and experiential particularity, as well as the nonnegotiable "right to difference."

There are interesting glimpses in Lefebvre's spatial ideals about the body and corporeal sensuality of the Mexican poet, essayist, and Nobel Laureate Octavio Paz (1914–98). In *The Production of Space*, Lefebvre repeatedly draws on Paz's surrealist dialectical interpretations of the body and "signs of the body" (by means of mirrors) (cf. POS, p. 184; pp. 201–202; pp. 259–60). Lefebvre, too, uses an enigmatic Paz poem as the epigraph to *The Production of Space*. Meanwhile, he concurs with Paz's thesis of the "disjunction" of the body in Western Cartesian thought and its "conjunction" in the Eastern, non-Christian tradition. Imprisoned by the four walls of abstract space, our bodies are not ours, both Lefebvre and Paz remark; our sexuality gets refracted and mediated by mirrors of nonknowledge, by how we are *meant* to see ourselves in society. "Apart from the lack of fantasy and voluptuousness," Paz wrote, "there is also the debasement of the body in industrial society. Science has reduced it to a series of molecular and chemical combinations, capitalism to a utilitarian object—like any other that its industries produce. Bourgeois society has divided eroticism into three areas: a dangerous one, governed by a penal code; another for the department of health and social welfare; and a third for the entertainment industry."¹⁴

The right to difference cried out as loud as the right to the city. For Lefebvre, the two are commensurably united, tautologically woven into the fabric of any liberated space, any differential

space, expressing a geography of “different rights,” moving beyond simple “rights in general”—as Lefebvre put it in *Le manifeste différentialiste* (1970). The right to difference, he warned, “has difficulty acquiring a formal or judicial existence.”¹⁵ Indeed, rather than stipulating another “abstract” right among many, “it is the source of them.”¹⁶ If this program encroaches on the domain nowadays seen as “postmodern,” Lefebvre preempts it as a humanist ideal, citing the German mystic Angelus Silesius (1624–77) for clarification: a flower doesn’t reduce itself to one particular feature of nature; nature herself bestows particularity to a flower. A flower has its own specific form, its own smell, color, and vitality, yet it comprises the totality of nature, its cosmic universality, its *essential* powers.¹⁷ “A rose is without a why,” said Silesius, famously. “It flowers because it flowers.” Thus, its very universality ensures its particularity, supports its discrete identity, just as, claims Lefebvre, Marx argued in *The Jewish Question* (1844) that human emancipation guaranteed political emancipation, rather than the other way around. Implementing the right to difference necessitates the “titanic combat between *homogenizing powers* and *differential capacities*. These homogenizing powers possess enormous means: models, apparatus, centralities, ideologies (productivism, unlimited growth). Such powers, destroying both particularity and differential possibility, enforce themselves through technicity and scienticity, and via certain forms of rationality.”¹⁸

Differential capacities, on the other hand, often go on the defensive and usually can’t express themselves offensively, as polycentric powers, united in heterogeneity against an abstract, homogeneous force—which spreads itself differently and unevenly across global space. The “titanic struggle” isn’t straightforward; threats, Lefebvre recognizes, wait covertly in ambush, especially within the Marxist tradition, where the specter of Leninism, with its monolithic mentality, its doctrine of party and working-class universality, haunts the dialectic, shadows any “differentialist

manifesto.” Within space, this dilemma becomes at once simpler and more complicated. “The more carefully one examines space,” Lefebvre explains, “considering it not only with the eyes, not only with the intellect, but also with all the senses, with the total body, the more clearly one becomes aware of the conflicts at work within it, conflicts which foster the explosion of abstract space and the production of a space that is *other*” (POS, p. 391). So, within abstract space, militancy fomented within its lived interstices, within its lifeblood and organic cells:

Thanks to the potential energies of a variety of groups capable of subverting homogeneous space for their own purposes, a theatricalized or dramatized space is liable to arise. Space is liable to be erotized and restored to ambiguity, to the common birthplace of needs and desires, by means of music, by means of differential systems and valorizations that overwhelm the strict localization of needs and desires in spaces specialized either physiologically (sexually) or socially. An unequal struggle, sometimes furious, sometimes more low-key, takes place between the Logos and the Anti-Logos, these terms being taken in their broadest possible sense—the sense in which Nietzsche used them. The Logos makes inventories, classifies, arranges: it cultivates knowledge and presses it into the service of power. Nietzsche’s Grand Desire, by contrast, seeks to overcome divisions—divisions between work and product, between repetitive and differential, or needs and desires. (POS, pp. 391–92)

The Production of Space thereby underscores Nietzsche’s contribution to the right to difference, to the prioritization of the lived over the conceived. Or, better, with Nietzsche (and Marx), Lefebvre seeks to transcend a factitious separation under modern capitalism, a compartmentalization between thinking and acting, between theory and practice, life and thought—dissociation and sundering that spelled alienation and *indifference*.¹⁹ Lefebvre’s attraction to Nietzsche here was highly personal and deeply political. The

latter's insistence on overcoming the past and reaching out for the future, as well as the finger he gave to Christianity—expressed so vividly with the quip “God is dead”—had obvious appeal to somebody who'd seen his beloved sun crucified.²⁰ “They’ve crucified the sun! They’ve crucified the sun!” wailed young Lefebvre years earlier, resting under a giant crucifix during a long country walk in the Pyrenees. It was he who'd been crucified, he recounts in *La Somme et le Reste (Tome I, pp. 251–52)*. Nietzsche showed Lefebvre how he could rescue the sun from the cross and, a little scarred, return the bright yellow ball to the sky where it belonged. At the same time, Nietzsche's critique of rationality, of universal truths and idols, of prime movers and systematized thinking spoke volumes to Lefebvre, who, like the other Marx, Groucho, struggled with any club that had him as a member.

In *The Birth of Tragedy* (1872), Nietzsche evoked the battle between Dionysian and Apollonian art forms. And though Lefebvre says this analysis is “inadequate,” he nonetheless realizes that it's “certainly meaningful” with respect to “the dual aspect of the living being and its relationship to space” (POS, p. 178). Borrowing from Greek deities, Nietzsche said Dionysus and Apollo are two different cultural impulses, metaphors for our civilization and for our own personalities: the former favors irrational, unfettered creativity and self-destructive “paroxysms of intoxication”; the latter expresses rationality, harmony, and restraint, “the calm of the sculptor god.” Lefebvre opts for Nietzsche's figure of Dionysus, walking a knife-edge path between coherent, ordered, dialectical logic (Logos) and irrational Dionysian spontaneity and creativity (Anti-Logos).

“Under the charm of the Dionysian,” Nietzsche wrote, “not only is the union between man and man reaffirmed, but nature which has become alienated, hostile, or subjugated, celebrates once more her reconciliation with her lost son, man.”²¹ On the side of Logos, of Apollo, “is rationality, constantly asserting itself in the shape of organizational forms, structural aspects of industry,

systems and efforts to systematize everything ... business and the state, institutions, the family, the ‘establishment.’ ” On the side of Anti-Logos, of Dionysus, are forces seeking to reappropriate abstract space: “various forms of self-management or workers’ control of territorial and industrial entities, communities and communes, elite groups striving to change life and to transcend political institutions and parties” (POS, p. 392).

With differential space, Lefebvre plays his Nietzschean–Marxist trump card at a decisive moment, as an innovative geographer whose ideals seem more akin to Orpheus than Prometheus. Marx’s cult-hero was Prometheus, who suffered because he stole fire from the gods. It was he who appeared in the noble guise of the proletariat chained to capital. The Promethean principle is one of daring, inventiveness, and productivity, yet Lefebvre’s Orphean spirit neither toiled nor commanded. It intervened unproductively, sang, partied, listened to music (to Schumann—his favorite), and reveled in a Dionysian space of drink and feast, of mockery and irony. Differential space isn’t systematic, and so the form and content of *The Production of Space* unfolds *eruptively* and *disruptively*, unsystematically through a Nietzschean process of “self-abnegation.” “I mistrust all systematizers,” Nietzsche said; “I don’t build a system,” Lefebvre concurred, on the page and in politics. Nothing here even remotely resembles a system, the latter pointed out, neither in form nor in content. “It’s all a question of living,” he explained in closing lines of *Le manifeste différentialiste*. “Not just of thinking differently, but of *being* different,” of uniting ourselves with our protean vital powers and constructing a spatial form worthy of those powers: a “true space,” he labels it in *The Production of Space* (p. 397), “the truth about space.”

In a 1985 preface to his earlier original, octogenarian Lefebvre filled in some gaps of an eleven-year-old thesis. Margaret Thatcher and Ronald Reagan had since stormed onto the scene, castigating an evil Empire and waging war in the South Atlantic. Meanwhile, the Berlin Wall tottered. Then it would topple, imploding from within while battered from without; an erstwhile absolute space, outside the realm of capitalist social relations, would shortly be colonized, rendered another abstract market niche. The production of space began edging itself outward onto the global plane, deepening preexisting productive capacity in traditional centers of power while pulverizing spaces elsewhere in the world, disintegrating and reintegrating them into a post-postwar spatial orbit. All hitherto accepted notions of national and local politics, replete with closed absolute frontiers, thus began to melt into air; a new fragmented, hierarchical, and homogeneous landscape—a “fractal” neocapitalist landscape—congealed.²²

On a few occasions, Lefebvre brandishes the term *globality*, hinting at the continued planetary reach of this process, anticipating our own debates around globalization. Moreover, nobody could ignore, he said, the replacement of state-planning and demand-led economics by a “badly-reconstituted neo-liberalism,” signaling not an end of planning per se but its reemphasis, a new machination of the liberal-bourgeois state, now unashamedly in cahoots with capital, notably with finance capital. This new state orthodoxy parallels the new production and control of global space, a “new world order,” at once more rational and irrational in its everyday penetration and supranational subjugation.

During this same eleven-year period, a neoliberal right wing triumphed with its “metanarrative” of the market. Within the space of seventeen years, between *The Production of Space* and Lefebvre’s death, in all walks of life—in politics and business, in business schools and universities, in peoples’ imagination—a new plausibility about reality became common wisdom, dictating the terms of

what is (and isn't) possible. Soon, all *oughts* were sealed off—like the Geneva headquarters of the World Trade Organization—behind a barbed wire fence of *is*. A global ruling class had set off on its long march, dispatching market missionaries here, spreading TINA (There Is No Alternative) doctrines there, cajoling and imposing its will of a constantly expanding world market, brooking no debate or dissent.

The state and economy steadily merged into an undistinguishable unity, managed by spin doctors, spin-doctored by managers. Abstract space started to paper over the whole world, turning scholars and intellectuals into *abstract labor* and turning university work environments into another *abstract space*. Suddenly, free expression and concrete mental labor—the creation and dissemination of critical ideas—increasingly came under assault from the same commodification Lefebvre was trying to demystify. Suddenly, and somehow, intellectual space—academic and ideational space in universities and on the page—had become yet another neocolony of capitalism, and scholars are at once the perpetrators and victims, colonizers and colonized, warders and inmates.

More and more, academic labor power is up for sale and there for hire. And their products—those endless articles and books—are evermore alienated, increasingly judged by performance principles, by publisher sales projections—or by their ability to *justify* the status quo. Thus, when writers and scholars enter the Lefebvrian fray, when they write about daily life and global space, they should think very carefully about whose daily life they're talking about, whose (and what) space they mean. When they write about radical intellectuals like Lefebvre, they should think about their own role as radical intellectuals, turning Lefebvrian criticism onto themselves, analyzing their own daily life and space at the same time as they analyze global capitalism. Better to bite the hand that feeds than remain a toothless intellectual hack, another cog within the general social division of labor.

Guts, as well as Lefebvre, are needed to resist the growing professionalization of ideas and university life, where, before all else, abstractions and cybernanthropes, evaluations and economic budgets sanction knowledge claims. Hence, a universal capitulation to the conceived over the lived hasn't just taken place in the world: it has taken place in those who should know better, in those who read Lefebvre's work, in those who edit and contribute to radical journals. When scholars write about emancipation, about reclaiming space for others, we might start by emancipating ourselves and reclaiming our own work space, giving a nod to disruption rather than cooptation, to real difference rather than cowering conformity. Yet before imagination can seize power, some imagination is needed: imagination to free our minds and our bodies, to liberate our ideas, and to reclaim our society as a lived project. That, it seems to me, is what the production of differential space is really all about. It's a project that can begin *this afternoon*.