

TOWARDS A SPATIALIZED UTOPIA: ROMANTICISM AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE MARXISM OF HENRI LEFEBVRE

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Abstract

The presence of the spatial element in the reflections of Henri Lefebvre does not merely result from work involving the translation and adaptation of critical thinking developed up until his time. The realization that not even the highest expression of the critical tradition had sufficiently noticed this crucial dimension of life was one of the connecting points between theoretical advance, represented by the spatial orientation of critique, and the effort to renew the utopian horizon. A very distinct assimilation of the early work of Marx and the proximity to revolutionary romanticism, particularly of Nietzschean extraction, rendered a decisive impact on Lefebvrian conception. Practice, body, pleasure and instincts, recovering their place in the critical social imagination, went on to become the basis for the re-foundation of a theoretical-practical program that involved the formulation of the notion of the right to the city. The perspective of appropriation thus replaced the vague emancipatory statements of the subject's philosophies.

Keywords

Henri Lefebvre; The right to the city; Romanticism; Appropriation; Everyday life.

EM DIREÇÃO A UMA UTOPIA ESPACIALIZADA: ROMANTISMO E VIDA COTIDIANA NO MARXISMO DE HENRI LEFEBVRE

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Resumo

A presença do elemento espacial na reflexão de Henri Lefebvre não é mero resultado do trabalho de tradução e adaptação do pensamento crítico desenvolvido até o seu tempo. A compreensão de que nem mesmo a mais elevada expressão da tradição crítica havia notado suficientemente essa dimensão crucial da vida é um dos pontos de ligação entre o avanço teórico representado pela orientação espacial da crítica e o esforço de renovação do horizonte utópico. Uma assimilação muito particular do trabalho de juventude de Marx e a proximidade com o romantismo revolucionário, sobretudo de extração nietzschiana, tiveram impacto decisivo na concepção lefebvriana. A prática, o corpo, o gozo e os instintos, recobrando lugar na imaginação social crítica, se tornam a base da refundação de um programa teórico-prático que envolve a formulação da noção de direito à cidade. A perspectiva da apropriação substitui, assim, os vagos enunciados emancipatórios das filosofias do sujeito.

Palavras-chave

Henri Lefebvre; Direito à cidade; Romantismo; Apropriação; Cotidiano.

TOWARDS A SPATIALIZED UTOPIA: ROMANTICISM AND EVERYDAY LIFE IN THE MARXISM OF HENRI LEFEBVRE¹

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The forces of destruction can no longer be described; they no longer have, [...] name or face. They are System, the only one, that of negation and death, which under a positive appearance attacks in its innermost depth existence itself. Sometimes [...] one wants to cry out: 'Beware! Revolution or death. This does not mean, 'Let us die for the revolution', but rather 'If you do not want us to die, make the revolution, swiftly, totally'

Henri Lefebvre, [1972] 2008, *Espaço e política*²

The profound impact that the thoughts of Henri Lefebvre had on the human sciences and, more expressly, on the forms with which disciplines such as geography, architecture and urbanism came to be understood, was marked by the importance of his reflections on the spatial dimension in order to explain contemporary reality. This mark has also become very emblematic, bearing an aptitude for defining the current moment of capitalism and for guiding academic debate. Thus, post-mortem, Lefebvre has become considered as one of the icons of the so-called "spatial turn" (CARLOS, 2015; LÖW, 2013; SOJA, [1990] 1993). However, the destabilization capacity that the foundations of this turn represented for the utopian horizon of modernity is one particular aspect that has seldom been explored in this universe of accommodations. Viewed at the origin of Lefebvrian thought, this paradigm shift not only contains the potential for redesigning the utopian project, as conceded by liberals and critics of economic liberalism, but also demands that it should be redefined, being based, simultaneously, within it.

In the work of Henri Lefebvre, the relationship between the theoretical formulation and the redefinition of the utopian horizon is partly explained by the arrangements of the methodological conception, which brings the virtual element

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2. N.B. For these direct citations, the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *Writings on Cities*. Oxford, Blackwell Publishers Ltd. 2000. English translation, Introduction and Editorial Arrangement by Eleonore Kofman and Elizabeth Lebas, 2000.

into the analysis (LEFEBVRE, [1949] 2000; [1953] 2000; [1961] 2000; [1968] 1991; [1970] 1999), and by the very universe of references mobilized on the basis of a Lefebvrian understanding of the world. In an approximation with Romanticism, Marx and Nietzsche, a critique of the continuous, unreflective assimilation of the definitions of Enlightenment encounters the elements with which the utopian program became redesigned in the hands of Lefebvre. The insurgence of practice and of the corporeal dimension makes part of the movement that discovered appropriation as a factor for overcoming the limited emancipatory horizon of the subject's philosophies. Thus, the concrete dimension of the renewed utopia is not only in accordance with the foundations of the thinking that triggered the so-called "spatial turn", but is also inseparable from them. Therefore, the appropriation of space constitutes the necessary horizon of a theoretical-practical programming that takes place in and through everyday life, surpassing the expectations formulated around history as the immense object of abstract thought: a complex articulation that underlies the utopia of the right to the city.

1. Lefebvre and romanticism

Lefebvre's link with the tradition of romanticism is not an element that should be left exclusively in the hands of an ill-informed critic, for whom these links would be mere allegorical devices. There is an element of radical truth in the image that pronounces the author's link with a critique of romantic extraction, even though it has generally been diffused with derogatory intentions. This link, besides being genuine, is an important component in understanding the foundations of the Lefebvrian critique and utopian project. According to Michael Löwy (2011, p. 11),³ "one of the main sources of originality – and even uniqueness – of Henri Lefebvre's thought in the historical panorama of French Marxism [...] is precisely its relationship with revolutionary romanticism".⁴

3. This and all other non-English citations contained in this article, including some of the cited works of Lefebvre that are not yet available in English, have been translated by the author.

4. The reference adopted for the citations in this article on the positions of Michael Löwy concerning Lefebvrian revolutionary romanticism refer more to the preface written for the book *Maintenant Henri Lefebvre: renaissance de la pensée critique*, than to his much earlier, more major work, written in partnership with Robert Sayre (LÖWY; SAYRE, 1992). This option is justified by the fact that, when considering the formulations that focus more on the work of Henri Lefebvre, it may be noted that, between them, the differences in content and wording are minimal and that the most current version of the fragment of the book is devoted to the problem, which reappears in the form of a preface, and has included certain improvements. As the citations for Löwy's discussion in this article do not exceed those that may be gathered in this "reedited" fragment, it was decided to maintain the standard of references linked to the most recent work. However, reference to the original work, which brings elements to a much greater extent for the debate on revolutionary romanticism, remains in the bibliographical references.

This relationship does not appear as a neglected, obscure or unconscious dimension in Lefebvre's production. It had already been part of an explicit positioning in the title of two of his works: *Le romantisme révolutionnaire*, published in the *Nouvelle Revue Française* in 1957; and "Vers un nouveau romantisme", the last chapter of *Introduction à la modernité*, from 1962. However, the origin of this approximation dates back to earlier periods. Imbued with this spirit, after his studies on Schelling during the 1920s, Lefebvre approached the work of Nietzsche, who became one of the most important authors to compose the major framework of his more mature work.

To the same extent that Nietzsche brought to Lefebvrian critique the antagonistic dimension towards the great rationalization project of the world and claims for the rights of the irrational dimension of life (here understood as sex, passions, madness, inebriety, drives and instincts), the approximation to romanticism prepared the new setting that his critique would occupy. This thereby, brought dimensions to the scope of the Marxist debate that had hitherto been neglected both by many of its strands and by a significant part of the philosophical and scientific thought of modernity.

Since the first manifestations, "both *Sturm und Drang* and Romanticism demonstrated anti-classical tendencies, being opposed to their canons in general, and particularly to their equilibrium, proportion, order, harmony, objectivity, pondering, discipline and Apollonian vision" (ROSENFELD, 1969, p. 148). Since, for romanticism, "reason is not considered the supreme value, emphasizing the emotional forces and imponderable sensitivity of man, as being subjective and of irreducible variety, [...] the essential equality, verifiable only through analytic operations of abstraction, is denied" (ROSENFELD, 1969, p. 150). This critical dimension revealed by the romantic movement was decisive in Lefebvrian critique.

Romanticism, pregnant with the force of a cultural critique of modern civilization, struck the rationality of industry and economy. It was born from a "violent irrationalist impulse, from the struggle against illustration" (ROSENFELD, 1969, p. 146). This was one of the senses in which aspects were assimilated from the romantic movement in the elaboration of Lefebvrian critique. Revolutionary romanticism, both in origin and form, explicitly evoked by Lefebvre in the late 1950s carried with it the fundamental disagreement between critical theory and modern rationality. In terms of Grindon (2013, p. 218), therefore, "this romanticism is not a rational critique of everyday life, but by an accompanying attempt to inspire and enthuse".

It is true, however, that romantic criticism has often taken on conservative, backward, and frequently reactionary forms. These were the aspects that supplied

the rationale for Lukács's attack ([1954] 1959) on ideas coming from romanticism. Its conservative, retrograde face, as highlighted by the author in *The Destruction of Reason*, made up the foundations for the rejection that romantic inspiration came to face in the Marxist debate of the twentieth century, overall, in the elaboration of post-industrial utopian perspectives and within revolutionary thinking.

The lesser importance given to utopian and revolutionary dimensions in Georg Lukács' considerations of romanticism enabled Michael Löwy to attribute a "deeply one-sided" nature to his positions. For Lukács, according to Löwy's critique (2011, p. 12), "romanticism was only a reactionary ideology, totally unrelated to Marxism and destined, by its irrationalism, to favor the emergence of fascist doctrines". This was not the path that defined the manners with which Henri Lefebvre apprehended the critical, revolutionary potential of romanticism. This position was made explicit in the preliminary notes that Lefebvre addressed to Lukacsian aesthetics. In his words, there were "profound differences, even discord" (LEFEBVRE, 1955, p. 72), between his research and that of Lukács. The Marxist aesthetic envisioned by Lefebvre was "more imbued with romanticism than that of Lukács" (LEFEBVRE, 1955, p. 73).

2. Nostalgia or utopia?

Backward, retrograde solutions, arranged in the name of pre-modern values, if not rejected, did not predominate among the aspects that seem to have justified Lefebvre's approach to the Romantic legacy and movement. There were two reasons for this. First, because, according to Lefebvre, the radical nature of romantic critique was of interest for the purposes of a radical critique of modernity. Romanticism provided the critical elements and potential to go against the order of events and reason that governed the world. It bore the impetus that not only turned against the course and meaning of events, but also against history as a field of intelligibility and oppressive totality in the ordering of life – against, therefore, the very idea of – the inevitability of history. This was not a stance against a certain rationality or form of rational social organization, but against all reason and all forms of rationality, as defined in modernity.

In the search for the "total man", the premise of which was to surpass the theoretical man or the philosophical man, Lefebvre attempted to find the covert, repressed, castrated and exiled dimensions of that same man. It is in this sense that the critique of everyday life was configured in Lefebvre as a field of approximation, rather than incompatibility, between Romanticism and Marxism. Indeed, his program in the *Critique of Everyday Life* corresponds to "a kind of intuition, long before joining Marxism. This intuition is linked to the great postwar revolt [...]"

as a plebeian romanticism. Philosophically formulated, this intuition predicts or announces that the ‘inversion’ of philosophy, accomplished by Marx from the Hegelian system, will extend to all the so-called superior activities” (LEFEBVRE, [1959] 2009, p. 598).

Thus, Marx’s project of “inverting the inverted world” was resumed by expanding its scope of action and range of area, thus reaching modern philosophy, the State, history, knowledge, laws, space, rationale: “[...] hence, it could well be the inversion of the whole culture and civilization founded on the hierarchies of people, values – and institutions [...]. This inversion would extend to the entire culture” (LEFEBVRE, [1959] 2009, p. 599). Distancing himself from Lukács’ conclusions, the revolutionary force of Marxist thought began to reveal new dimensions by adding to the subversive potential left by romanticism. This very special conjunction appears at the origin of the Lefebvrian extraction of revolutionary romanticism.

Romanticism also functioned as a kind of antidote against the abstraction that philosophical and functionalist thoughts attempted to impose onto critical reflection. The result of this was the emergence of body, infancy, femininity and everything that maintained an identity constituted by aversity and opposition, as negated negative dimensions of a world forged by male, Apollonian, formal rationality. A “new consciousness” was about to be born, which valorized the dimensions of everyday life, in which the concept of “total revolution” encountered all the material that enabled it to go beyond economic concepts. With everyday life coming to the fore, together with the exploited, the subaltern, the marginal and many other groups already classified by critical social thinking, the forgotten, erased and repressed dimensions gained prominence. In their name, Lefebvrian romanticism demanded “that the last shall be first. And not only the proletarians, and work and economics, but also the children and women, and bodies, and love, and the pleasure of innocence [...]. And everyday life. ‘Man will either be everyday or not at all’” (LEFEBVRE, [1959] 2009, p. 601).

There are two simultaneous movements here: (1) an attempt to re-found the theoretical-analytical parameters, which, by casting light onto the neglected dimensions of everyday life, re-elaborates the utopian horizon left by the strands derived from the Enlightenment, thereby restoring to it the concrete dimensions of life; and (2) the constitution of a critical understanding that preserves the potential to overcome the abstract man and the abstractions that prevent the enjoyment of a complete life, overcoming the concept of an abstract freedom founded on a subjectivity separated from the sensitive universe, the body and its passions. The program of the critique of everyday life, therefore, falls within the scope of elaborating a totally true revolutionary program.

The second reason why Lefebvre did not cling to the retrograde, reactionary positions of romanticism is linked to the expectation of extracting a renewed utopian, revolutionary program from the radical critique of modernity. The reference to the pre-industrial, pre-modern or pre-capitalist past “is an intrinsic aspect of any form of romanticism” (LÖWY, 2011, p. 14), therefore, it is not lacking in Lefebvre. Despite resorting to images of the past that seem to express or give the parameters of a lost life or unit, which often constitute the core or starting point for a critique of the present, Lefebvrian revolutionary romanticism remains directed toward the future. Indeed, the images and contents of the city as an artwork, the festival and the residue, which populate the universe of Lefebvrian-inspired works, in the broad spectrum of the author’s considerations, serve the purposes of elaborating a renewed utopian horizon and act as a parameter for constructing a united, total life, but that is ineffective in returning to the past. “Redirecting the nostalgia of ‘old romanticism’, revolutionary romanticism would be ‘firmly rooted in the present precisely because its heart belongs to the future’, and it would see its greatness (rather than its deficiency) in being ‘unpredictable, problematic, torn between the past and the future’” (BLECHMAN, 2000, p. 43).

The ties between critique and utopia – the core of the revolutionary romanticism brought to light by Lefebvre – defines the commitment to praxis and prevents the abstraction of the existing conditions, without reducing reality to the universe of the instantaneous. It is also through the disagreement between what is lived and the real that a projection of the “possible-impossible”, as a previously inscribed virtuality in the present, is drawn along the horizon as the content of utopia, and concurrently, the result of radical criticism. If the old romanticism implied a “man in thrall to the past”, the “man in thrall to the possible, such would be the first definition, the first affirmation of the attitude of revolutionary romanticism” (LEFEBVRE, [1957] 2012, p. 293). This is the attitude of a revolutionary romanticism that clings to the virtuality of the present and makes “radical critique of what exists” (LEFEBVRE, [1957] 2012, p. 293), “in the name of a possibility more real than the real” (LEFEBVRE, [1957] 2012, p.2960. “The inner drama of revolutionary romanticism is, in effect, what Lefebvre calls the awareness of the possible-impossible” (MARCOLINI, 2007, § 16). It is here, however, that “the revolutionary character of the new romanticism” resides (MARCOLINI, 2007, § 17).⁵

From what may be observed, on the one hand, the critical-radical element of romanticism interferes with the orientation of the utopian project, redefining

5. As the used version of the article by Marcolini (2007) has no pagination, it was decided to complete the reference by mentioning the cited paragraphs.

its terms and renewing its horizons; while on the other, the utopian-revolutionary conception extracts from conservatism what romanticism brought as a potential for critical social theory.

3. A reading of Marx through the lenses of revolutionary romanticism

In many of his works – for example, in *End of History, Hegel, Marx and Nietzsche* and *A Thought that Becomes a World* – Lefebvre’s approach in relation to the possibilities opened up by the revolutionary orientation of romanticism led him to emphasize dimensions that are generally not considered within the field of Marxist thought. If, on the one hand, this movement favored the recognition of a continuity between Hegel and Marx, not only from the viewpoint of what could be achieved in the name of building a critical, revolutionary theory, on the other, it never prevented Lefebvre from sustaining the radical position of Marx with regard to history and reason. Certainly, “Marx accused Hegel of *Realpolitik* and almost even positivism (something Hegel detested); but this was to wrest from him the dialectic, giving this back the cutting edge of an offensive weapon. The dialectical approach was turned back against Hegelianism and against philosophy, [...] as a requirement of a metaphilosophical superseding” (LEFEBVRE, [1975] 1976, p. 131).⁶

Thus, from Marx, “a path beyond the Hegelian achievement, that of philosophy, of thought, of history, of man in the state” is constituted (LEFEBVRE, [1975] 1976, p. 125).⁷ This is the point at which Marx, together with Nietzsche, is placed into the framework of the metaphilosophical critique declared by Lefebvre. This consideration indicates the undisputed importance that Marxist thought assumed in the work of Lefebvre, although, at the same time, it sketches the very particular way in which it was assimilated by Lefebvre’s critique.

Lefebvre departs from a scission in the forms of comprehending the work of Marx that relativizes the position of Marxian thought in view of both the problematic of history and the Lefebvrian schemes of the dialectical relationship established with the thoughts of Hegel and Nietzsche (SIMONI-SANTOS, 2019). For Lefebvre, Marx, during the period “in which we may discuss whether or not it is necessary to call it ‘Feurbachian’, [...] not only concedes an anthropology but an ontology” (LEFEBVRE, [1970] 1971, p. 86). Thus, the origin of a conception of nature, which both anticipates history itself and opposes it. “In one of the manuscripts from 1844 it is stated: human passions (desire and need) have an ontological importance.

6. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *Marx, Hegel, Marx, Nietzsche: or, The Realm of Shadows*. London. Verso Books. 2020 p. 99. Translated by David Fernbach. Kindle Edition.

7. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2020, p. 94).

They do not discover it, ‘they are it’” (LEFEBVRE, [1970] 1971, p. 86). The aspects and theoretical and analytical positions of Marx that bring him closer to Hegel and to historicity itself (of its logical and categorical developments) begin to predominate more clearly after this period.

After 1844, and the celebrated *Manuscripts*, or before, while they were being written (which confronts the Feuerbachian philosophy of Nature with the Hegelian philosophy of History), Nature loses its position. It is no longer the production ground of the ‘human being’ per se, production through which the privileged child emerges from Mother Nature. It is no longer the object of industrial production. The concept of production tends to be restricted when it becomes more precise, even though Marx never explained this reduction [...]. The historical character of production (which will help to recognize the primacy of political economy at a specific moment in history) prevails. (LEFEBVRE, [1970] 1971, p. 86-87)

According to Michael Löwy (2011), the influxes of romanticism, and even the endeavor to build the foundations of a new revolutionary romanticism, play a decisive role in Lefebvrian thought assimilating the entire work of Marx: “Adhering to the subversive potential of Romanticism plays a very important role in Lefebvre’s intellectual and philosophical evolution. His reading of Marx will itself be illuminated by this perspective” (LÖWY, 2011, p. 12). For Lefebvre, the writings of the young Marx “are the manifestation of a radical revolutionary romanticism” (LÖWY, 2011, p. 12), and this is not expressed exclusively by the presence of praxis, the corporeal, the sensitive and the natural: “It is necessary not to forget, not for a single moment, that for the young Marx the political revolution represented the end of philosophy and politics. Romanticism contained a part of illusion and utopia” (LEFEBVRE, [1959] 2009, p. 393).

In *La somme et le reste*, Lefebvre leaves another testimony to the importance of his considerations regarding the relationship he established between the young Marx and romanticism:

In the work produced by Marx in his youth – works assumed to be philosophical and that contain the most solid reasons to doubt philosophy as such – I irrefutably encounter and recognize the signs of romanticism and, at the same time, an effort to go beyond it. This ardent, spontaneous romanticism, occasionally somewhat naive, always optimistic, with unlimited confidence in the near future, was insufficiently stressed by the Marxists. Will Marxologists know how to reveal it?” (LEFEBVRE, [1959] 2009, p. 393)

For Lefebvre, one of the great problems of twentieth-century Marxism was scorning the utopian dimension of Marx's thought, in addition to being exclusively content with his more mature works.

In Marx's later work, political confrontation had dampened revolutionary enthusiasm and had taught him the limits of what was possible. The humanism of his earlier work is no less a romantic humanism [...]. The revolutionary romanticism of Marx already surpasses cosmological romanticism and anthropological romanticism [...]. This romanticism [...] has nothing eschatological or messianic. (LEFEBVRE, [1959] 2009, p. 394)

Based on this reading, Lefebvre observed many similarities between Marx and Nietzsche, especially in the field of philosophical critique and the valorization of praxis. According to Lefebvre, "it has not been sufficiently noted that Nietzsche's starting point coincides with that of Marx: the critique of Hegelianism and, more particularly, of left-wing Hegelianism. However, the theoretical situation has profoundly changed" (LEFEBVRE, [1970] 1971, p. 92-93). In another passage, he even states: "Nietzsche's meditation and work begin at the exact moment that Marx's thought, having reached its highest point with *Capital* (1867), declines" (LEFEBVRE, [1970] 1971, p. 92).

4. A critique of the fetishism of law and the primacy of conscience

Based on his critique of the fetishistic attachment to internal legality or the automatism of the categorial unraveling, extracted from a scientized reading of *Capital*, Lefebvre called for a more attentive reading on the method and practical dimension of Marx's work, countering its use by seeking to extract or formulate a general logic of social functioning. For Lefebvre, after having neglected it for years,

certain Marxists rushed to the notion of objective law. They saw absolutely nothing else. They *fetishized* it [...], realizing, as it were, a new metaphysics of law and a new form of vulgar Marxism. They forgot this profound thought of Lenin, retained and understood by Lukács: 'The phenomenon is richer than law', because it effectively not only contains law but also something else: the relationship with the universe, with the infinite richness of life, so that every law is incomplete, approximate and insufficient. (LEFEBVRE, 1955, p. 79)

In addition to the blockages to the revolutionary path posed by this kind of "Marxology", Lefebvre also had to face the mystifications nourished by a group of "experts of conscience", both strongly rooted inside French Marxist thought. Some of the work, considered to be among the most judicious approaches in this field

of debate, owe their wide recognition precisely to the rigor that was attributed to them in joining the logical treatment of the categories of critical social analysis to the conditioning factors of conscience. It is in this sense that Lefebvre directed his criticism towards the famous book *History and Class Consciousness* by the young Lukács: “Thus, concept [...] and science are reduced to an awareness, to a phenomenon of consciousness. A characteristic reduction of subjectivism, psychologism, phenomenology, existentialism, i.e., of all the ‘modern’ degradations of speculative philosophy since Hegel” (LEFEBVRE, 1955, p. 63). The problem of emancipation, thus posed, is often resolved through a universe of solutions given by conscience.

The approximation of a certain Marxism to the categorical determinisms of the Hegelian philosophy is not fortuitous. “Everything happens in the Hegelian system as if contradiction was born with and from alienation. The absolute Idea emerges from itself, alienates itself in nature, then finds itself, recognizes itself or re-produces itself in full consciousness and cognition by way of history and conceptual knowledge. Dis-alienation makes contradiction vanish, and hence dialectic” (LEFEBVRE, [1975] 1976, p. 80).⁸ Critical observation of this orientation places limits on establishing more direct relations between a theory of alienation (which often figured in the forms of consciousness of alienation and alienation of consciousness) and the emancipatory project. Moreover, it is thus that the alienation-emancipation duo began to be called into question when presented with the requirement of praxis.

The intention of scientificity that captivated even many Marxist thinkers brought harm to the dimension of practice in the sphere of theory, annihilating, according to Lefebvre, the revolutionary potential of Marx’s theory and method. It is in this sense that he, when reflecting on the commodity-form, stated that, “in order to know it and denounce it, a *science* is necessary”, however, “to destroy it, a political action is necessary, a profound transformation of social relations [...]. The conscience (be it that of the proletariat) is not enough”. Therefore, not even “the consciousness of the proletariat [...] spontaneously and readily possesses this singular philosophical privilege: to suppress philosophy” (LEFEBVRE, 1955, p. 30).

As Lefebvre inquired ([1959] 2009, p. 447), is there not here “a vast problem, an important aspect of the philosophical crisis and, even more, of the moral and cultural crisis? Wagering on conscience is dangerous. The conscience allows itself to be deceived; it deceives itself”. In the repertoire of possible solutions, the theoretical effort to “correct” consciousness or its forms, no longer fits as an exclusive

8. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2020, pp. 56,57).

alternative or solution. It is not about keeping it immaculate, pure, incorruptible. There is an offset in the field of wagering. It is no longer the conscience, the good conscience, that is corrupted. “In conscience and according to conscience, there is no criterion of authenticity” (LEFEBVRE, [1959] 2009, p. 448): this is the crucial finding in order to leap out.

5. The place of Nietzsche in a romantic-Marxist utopia

The solution that begins to be sketched out in the theoretical work of Henri Lefebvre simultaneously accommodates a project aimed at the future and a place for total social practice. One of the threads of renewed critical thinking woven into the scope of Lefebvrian thought thus refers to incorporating the virtual element into the methodological plan. This possibility was clearly systematized throughout his productions (LEFEBVRE, [1961] 2000; [1968] 1991; [1970] 1999; [1972] 2008; 1980). In Henri Lefebvre’s reflection, the utopian dimension is coupled with the theoretical-methodological dimension.

From the Lefebvrian perspective, in addition to valorizing the young Marx and his inclination towards revolutionary romanticism, it is the consideration of body, passions, dreams, instincts, sex and madness that serves as a counterpoint to the risks of importing a type of science of logic. In an effort to overcome modern rationalism, the demand for a place for the practice, which is either similar or superior to that dedicated to consciousness, is accompanied by claims for the corporeal, original and structural dimension, which is often neglected by the philosophical paradigm of subjectivity. Therefore, it is in revolutionary romanticism and, above all, in Nietzschean inspiration, that part of the specificity of the Lefebvrian project is revealed.

Unlike Germany, where “the breath of romanticism was directed in a reactionary sense, from Schlegel to Nietzsche” (LEFEBVRE, 1955, p. 28), in France and elsewhere in the world, it could still fulfill its role by calling for dimensions neglected by emancipatory philosophies in the constitution of a new project of society. For Lefebvre (1955, p. 69), “romanticism holds a subversive fascination, at least revolted, if not revolutionary”. As he indicated, in response to the position taken by Lukács:

Romanticism expresses the disagreement, the distortion, the contradiction between the individual and the social. It implies the disagreement between ideas and practice, consciousness and life, superstructures and base. It involves, at least virtually, revolt. For us, the French, romanticism holds an anti-bourgeois fascination. (LEFEBVRE, 1955, p. 72)

Nietzschean thought bears the vitality and criticism of the morality of reason to the core of Lefebvrian reflection. “Why abandon Nietzsche to the Hitlerites? It would also be the occasion to say that the political revolution, if it were to occur, would not solve all the problems of individual life, of love, of happiness” (LEFEBVRE, [1959] 2009, p. 460). The search for the “total man” would not come to an end with socialism. This teaching of Nietzsche became even more important from the second half of the twentieth century, since “industrial society [...] tends to lose contact with immediate life, with spontaneity, with the world” (LEFEBVRE, [1959] 2009, p. 465). Lukács’ option for classicism, by rejecting romanticism, committed him to the split between aesthetics and the transformative project. This is why, “on socialism, Lukács thinks and writes that it cannot fill the soul” (LEFEBVRE, 1955, p. 52).

6. A critique of history and Marx’s sublation: nature and body in the new utopia

In the field of critical analysis, Lefebvre observed the work of concealment found in modern Western reason, which erases body, pleasures, passions, instincts and dreams, as well as diminishing the role of nature, placing it in a subordinate position. In short, this was the same movement that cast a shadow over the Dionysian dimension of life. A powerful representation supported by this movement sustained a universe of extremely real constraints. Body, nature and passions, when they emerge on the horizon, appear as matter dominated, subjugated and subservient to the very projects of reason. It is only in this manner that history may be the cavalry of the great spirit of the world, which places all of nature at its service, including the blind impulses of imperfect men. Even “For Marx, *domination* over material nature was indissolubly linked with the *appropriation* of it” (LEFEBVRE, [1973] 1973, p. 14)⁹, and, at its foundations:

This appropriation transformed natural matter into human reality, according to the desires and needs of “man” (including nature in man: his body, as well as his needs and desires). It was an optimistic hypothesis, the expression of a nineteenth-century industrial rationalism which was to collapse in the second half of the twentieth (LEFEBVRE, [1973] 1973, p. 14).¹⁰

Given the renewed demands for engagement within the social debate, “revolutionary romanticism will also impose new terms onto the old romantic

9. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *The Survival of Capitalism: Reproduction of the Relations of Production*. New York, St. Martin’s Press. 1976, pp. 14-15. Translated by Frank Bryant.

10. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (1976, p.15).

question regarding the relationship between man and nature” (MARCOLINI, 2007, § 17). Reintroducing the dimension of body and of *physis* into critical analysis, without subordinating it to an abstract reason, discovered its element of support in Nietzsche. Based on Nietzschean reflection, Lefebvre revisited history, with the intention of understanding its more subtle mechanisms for rationalizing life, its Apollonian nature and the entire system of oppressions implemented throughout. In *End of History*, he situated history itself as a project that scorns the irrational dimensions of life, and that has a practical effect on repression of the senses, control over the body, the castration of impulses and the orientation of desire (LEFEBVRE, [1970] 1971). Thus, history is not just a form of recounting the facts, a selective narrative: it constitutes a form of social reproduction, organized under the utmost imperative of rationalizing the world.

Although Lefebvre ([1970] 1971; [1975] 1976) had placed Marx, in addition to Hegel, as a tributary of this social form, “Marx never considered the historical as a set of *faits accomplis*” (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 76).¹¹ Furthermore, “In his critique of Hegelianism, Marx turns [...] against philosophy, [...] against the state [...]. This is the philosophical meaning of Marx’s so-called philosophical writings [...]. These have been called philosophical, but wrongly so, since they state that the death of philosophy is a necessity [...]. In fact, Marx did not follow his thinking through to its conclusion” (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 187).¹²

In addition to the relationship with history and with the movement of a revolutionary overthrow anticipated in Marxist thought, Lefebvre questioned the very contents present in the real, which would be capable of starting a process to transform life and establish a new life.

In order to think of bourgeois society as a totality, Marx began by determining *what was possible* – socialism. He then turned back towards the real, seeing it in terms of the process of becoming, as a totality riven by inner contradictions and destined to be shattered by revolution in the near future. For us this process of thought is increasingly difficult to follow because, contrary to all expectations, capitalism has not been shattered under the pressure from the proletarian masses in the most capitalist countries, and equally because the very idea of socialism has become obscured by the way it has been put into practice. While we continue thinking along the lines of Marx’s plan (from the possible to the real and from the real

11. N.B. For direct citations, the English version was used of LEFEBVRE, H. *Critique of Everyday Life*. The One-Volume Edition. London, Verso Books. Translated by John Moore. 2014, p. 371. Online eBook Edition.

12. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, pp. 483-484).

to the possible) we are not confident that it will help us to clarify the real and the possible which surround us (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 189).¹³

It is at this point that Nietzschean thinking is brought into critical thinking, with a view to completing a project that is both theoretical and revolutionary. This is a project that also emancipates itself from history and appeases the nihilism left behind in its absence and in the failure of reason. This is also the reason why the Lefebvrian project required a different solution from those that had been imagined up until a certain point in revolutionary thought.

Faced with the advance of economic forces and the power over life and over the exiled aspects of everyday life, “the alienation of Hegel and Marx acquires a changed character and significance. The deterioration of life threatens its vital foundation, the body” (LEFEBVRE, [1975] 1976, p. 237).¹⁴ To the crisis of history and historicity, the demand for a renewed project is added: to exit and abandon history. For Lefebvre ([1975] 1976, p. 39),¹⁵ “European nihilism was not the product of critical thought, but of its ineffectiveness. It did not come from the rejection of history, nation, homeland, but from the defeats of history. [...]. Nietzsche wanted to supersede the real – transcend it – by poetry, appealing to carnal depths.” The revolutionary praxis, guided by a renewed utopia, is characterized, “firstly, by interrupting the linear and unidirectional time of the capitalist clock; secondly, because of its ability to open a breach that deviates the course of History and that pushes it – by means of a radical rejection– to pursue a diverse space-time plan” (BIAGI, 2019, p. 48). It is only by taking history, all of it, as an object, though partial, that enables the conception of a horizon that does not become confused with those projected within history and according to their own designs and ideologies.

7. Alienation and everyday life

The theory of alienation is the starting point for the Lefebvrian revolutionary project. However, it could not be assimilated in the exact manner with which it was formulated or sustained by much of Marxist thought. Its revolutionary outcome and practical results could also not be kept intact. “It is evident that world revolution has not exactly followed the path Marx predicted” (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 43)¹⁶. It was not the raising of consciousness, nor by taking over the means of production, that

13. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, pp. 484-485).

14. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2020, pp. 185-186).

15. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2020, pp. 24-25).

16. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 336).

followed the crisis of history: these ends no longer figured as a horizon of the permanent crisis that dragged on from the mid-twentieth century. This is why, in Lefebvre, there is “a critique of everyday life which uses the old ideas, above all the idea of alienation” (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 30).¹⁷

In Marx’s so-called philosophical thought, the alienation which Hegel presented speculatively becomes a historical fact. So does its disappearance. However (although we find many indications that his thought also moved in the opposite direction) Marx tended to push the many forms of alienation to one side so as to give it one specific definition in terms of the extreme case he chose to study: the transformation of man’s activities and relations into *things* by the action of economic *fetishes*, such as money, commodities and capital. Reduced to economic alienation within and by capitalism, alienation would disappear completely and in one blow, through a historical but unique act: the revolutionary action of the proletariat. In this historical and revolutionary perspective, there remained something of the philosophical absolute from which it derived [...] (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 209).¹⁸

The critique of everyday life presents itself, therefore, in its triple dimension: critical-analytic, strategic and utopian. “The human world is not defined simply by the historical, by culture, by totality or society as a whole, [...]. It is defined by this intermediate and mediating level: everyday life” (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 50).¹⁹

It encompasses the immediate and natural forms of necessity [...] as well as the seeds of the activity by which those forms are controlled [...]. Next it encompasses the region where objects and goods are continually appropriated, where desires are elaborated from needs, and where ‘goods’ and desires correspond. This is a zone of confrontation between the necessary and the random, the possible and the impossible, what has been appropriated and what has not, and empirical good luck and bad luck. In this zone, broadening what is possible is not an effortless task. [...] it is the realm of the dialectic between ‘alienation’ and ‘disalienation’” (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 66-67).²⁰

Despite the colonization that advances onto everyday life, everyday life may be “defined [...] initially as the region where man appropriates not so much external nature but his own nature – as a zone of demarcation and junction between the

17. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 323).

18. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, pp. 505-506).

19. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 344).

20. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 361).

uncontrolled sector and the controlled sector of life” (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 51).²¹ Thus, the role of the theory of alienation in the program of the critique of everyday life is also an orientation for renewing the utopian horizon, while being substantially modified in relation to what was at the origin of its radical formulation. The recognition of the practical-sensitive dimension is at the heart of both this new utopia and the reformulation of its theoretical foundations.

8. Everyday life: body and appropriation

The body, as a component of a renewed utopian project, rediscovers its place by rejecting the abstractions of the Enlightenment and the philosophies of the subject. The movement to reconsider the corporeal dimension, passions, dreams and desire blocks the alternative of maintaining an abstract idea of - freedom, as it appears in Hegel, and demands the expansion of the notion of emancipation, as it appears in Marx. The notion of appropriation completes the framework for the renewal of the utopian project, replacing, without discarding, the structuring element of the horizon of modernity’s expectations, namely, freedom itself.

This crucial shift takes place by reconsidering life and the very understanding of the constitution of the human. Restoring the dimensions that were neglected, repressed and exiled by the rationalization project illuminated other fronts of the alienation process. “Were we to define man by labour, we would be moving towards a fetishizing of productivity and the work ethic, or even regressing towards the archaic sanctification of craft and peasant labour. In short, we would be mutilating the human being by neglecting pleasure. [...] but pleasure alone makes this appropriation effective.” (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 194).²²

In the passage from the great historical narrative to everyday life, everyday life becomes an area of - constraints and possibilities, i.e., an arena of social disputes. The “colonization of the everyday”²³ drew attention to this universe of dimensions which, until then, was scorned upon by philosophy, created new struggles and did not leave the utopian orientation unscathed. The alienation of desire, of the body and of the dream was also the alienation of the ways of using time, of using space, of the relationship with the spaces of the city. Critique of the world of the commodity also takes on this meaning. This is why the project foresaw appropriation as the

21. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 345).

22. N.B. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 490).

23. “The second volume of the *Critique of Everyday Life* contains a thesis [...], not meaningless. [...] According to this theory, daily life replaces the colonies. Incapable of maintaining the old imperialism [...], capitalist leaders treat daily life as they once treated the colonized territories” (LEFEBVRE, 1981, p. 31). For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 705).

first instance of disalienation. If, on the one hand, reproduction strategies advance over the corporeal, the gestural and, by extension, everyday life, on the other hand, in so doing, they shed light onto the repressed, captive or erased instances. Thus, they become part of the general movement of a revolutionary overthrow.

Interest in ‘body language’ increases with a certain revival of the body and of interest in the body, with the pursuit of its reappropriation [...] at the expense of the image and the spectacle. The predominance of the visual [...] over the corporeal is declining without disappearing – something that will slowly but surely alter the relation between daily life and space. Space is no longer defined exclusively in optical, geometrical and quantitative fashion. It is becoming – or once again becoming – a flesh-and-blood space, occupied by the body (by bodies) (LEFEBVRE, 1981, p. 102).²⁴

The resummoning of the corporeal dimension forges one of the principles of the right to the city: effectively and concretely appropriating the social space as an instance of realizing life through reconsidering the body and the senses as crucial dimensions. It is part of a program that recognizes the range of action of the alienation processes, involves the objective critique of everyday life and undertakes the fulfillment of the redesigned utopia.

9. Space and utopia: between Marx and Nietzsche

In *The Right to the City, The Urban Revolution, Space and Politics, The Production of Space, and Critique of Everyday Life*, Lefebvre ([1968] 1991; [1970] 1999; [1972] 2008; [1974] 2000; 1981) recovers the importance of space at different times in history. Space, an extension of the corporeal dimension, equally concealed, diminished and despised by the philosophical thinking of modernity, was also mobilized in the name of economy and power, in the wake of advancements in the forms of production and the control of everyday life, from arrangements that dissimulate the crisis of historicity itself (ALVAREZ, 2019). In the loss of historical references, in the downfall of philosophy, in the vacillation of historicity, the crisis of accumulation and the strategies for the reproduction of power have resorted to the spatial dimension as an alternative for the reproduction of social relations of production. “The space of play, where the body rediscovers itself in rediscovering use, becomes an opportunity for profit, with the latter subjecting the potential for enjoyment to itself, and debasing it” (LEFEBVRE, 1981, p. 128).²⁵ “Here, too, le mort

24. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 777).

25. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 803).

saisit le vif! Like the humanity to which it offers shelter, the town is alienated” (LEFEBVRE, 1981, p. 132).²⁶

At the same time, Lefebvre also recognizes that this is the moment that space and spatiality emerge as a new field of intelligibility, which unleashes the crisis of history and historicity, as well as the crisis and new (critical) modalities of economic reproduction. If, on the one hand, at this critical moment, space is the object of action by the State and capital, on the other, it is the function of engaged thinking both to recognize the enemy’s strategies and to make an inventory of the damages caused by this offensive, and to project a solution. Thus, the transformation program of life does not only involve rejecting the repressions of historical times on the body, nor only revealing the dimensions concealed by history or defending against the alienation of social space. This involves, with the exit of history, the appropriation of space. “[...] this project of space [...] implies a superseding (Überwinden) on the scale of the world, casting the dead results of historical time into abolition. It contains a concrete test, bound up with practice and the totality of the possible, according to Marx’s most radical thought, bound up too with the entire restitution of the palpable and the body, according to Nietzsche’s poetry” (LEFEBVRE, [1975] 1976, p. 259).²⁷ “This moment no longer depends on the historicizing thought or a classical theory of crises [...]. The possibility of such a moment (a perspective that does not exactly coincide with the usual theory of revolution) defines a strategic hypothesis” (LEFEBVRE, [1972] 2008, p. 18).

Here, then, we observe a project for society (theoretical and practical) that is supported by an exit from history, which therefore, neither awaits its realization nor its collapse. Hence, a solution that rejects obstructions to the body and to the passions and revokes Dionysian exile: a solution through space.

Marx replaced the study of things with the critical analysis of the activity producing things. Taking up the initiative of the great economists (Smith, Ricardo) and adding to it the critical analysis of the (capitalist) mode of production, he raised knowledge to a higher level. An analogous démarche is currently imposed with regard to space. (LEFEBVRE, [1972] 2008, p. 33)

However, following Marx’s guidance, for Lefebvre, what is revealed behind the appearance of things is not only a hidden truth, but also the world of what is possible – virtuality, already present in reality and in the orientation of a way out.

26. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 807).

27. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2020 p. 195).

This theoretical, methodological position enabled Lefebvrian thought to avoid the “pitfalls of criticism” and the “utopian vacuum”, thereby releasing it from confinement in the denunciation. Thus, seeking a way out of this universe of constraints in the practical-sensitive dimensions, more than in conscience or in the ways of understanding, enabled the revolutionary project to become recomposed.

This is why emancipation, as a product of the de-alienation of consciousness, is no longer at the heart of the utopian program. Alienation itself has to be observed, in spite of its links with the forms of understanding, in relation to practical life, referring to the material world as in Marx, but now linked to urban life, production and the use of space, seen beyond of the moment of economic, subsistence and manufacturing production. Here the corporeal dimension takes on meaning, which cannot be reduced to a pack of mere organic functions. This is how, given the demands forged by everyday life, by the body, by instincts and by desire, the utopian horizon is re-elaborated, exceeding and replacing, without discarding, freedom by appropriation.

Redefining the central linking element of the utopian project in Henri Lefebvre constitutes the premise of the right to the city and the inversion that prioritizes use over exchange.²⁸ “Changing life”? Yes, of course, but this can only be glimpsed by considering the space of the entire planet, without excluding the creation, here and there, of appropriate spaces, whose appropriation, evading ownership, could serve as an example” (LEFEBVRE, [1972] 2008, p. 162). “The historical [...] experience of recent times makes it necessary for us to continue to develop Marxist theory beyond the point Marx himself left it” (LEFEBVRE, 1961, p. 324).²⁹ The restitution of alienated concrete dimensions is at the heart of a project that prioritizes appropriation, as a subversive strategy and purpose, in an active process of dis-alienation. *This appropriation is not only the appropriation of the alienated product, but also the appropriation of time, body, desires, dreams and space; the latter being the most prominent among these items, and that which makes them viable.*

28. Therefore, “Lefebvrian urban studies are traversed by a new vision of the meaning of «utopia»” and the political status of the «right to city» is incomprehensible without the reflection upon the utopia.” (BIAGI, 2019, p. 45). A reflection of density in this regard may be found in: CARLOS, A.F. *A privação do urbano e o 'direito à cidade' em Henri Lefebvre*. [The deprivation of the urban and the 'right to the city' in Henri Lefebvre.] In: CARLOS, A. F. ALVES, G.; PADUA, R. (Org.) *Justiça espacial e o direito à cidade* [Spatial justice and the right to the city]. São Paulo: Contexto, 2017 p. 33-62; CARLOS, A.F. *Em nome da cidade (e da propriedade)*. [On behalf of the city (and property)]. Geocrítica: XIV Coloquio Internacional de Geocrítica: Las utopías y la construcción de la sociedad del futuro. Barcelona, May 2-7, 2016. Available at: http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/xiv_anafani.pdf; and CARLOS, A.F. *Henri Lefebvre: o espaço, a cidade e o “direito à cidade”*. [Henri Lefebvre: space, the city and the “right to the city”]. Available at: http://www.ub.edu/geocrit/xiv_anafani.pdf; and CARLOS, A.F. *Rev. Direito Práx.*, Rio de Janeiro, v.11, n. 1, 2020, p.349-369.

29. For this direct citation, the English version was used of Lefebvre (2014, p. 623).

Thus, the analytical plan and the utopian orientation appear reunited within the Lefebvrian theoretical-practical project and place the spatial dimension at the center of considerations. They recognize, on the one hand, that space has become the new dimension of the reproduction of economic, political and social processes, as well as highlighting that it is exactly in this dimension that the violence, abstractions and reductions that underpinned the subject's philosophies are transmitted to life. On the other hand, they demand that the spatial dimension is considered as a necessary complement within this universe of economic needs and desire.

Final considerations

On reading Marx, rejecting logical reductionism, typical of approaches more aspiring to rigor than to a commitment to reality, and recovering aspects in Nietzsche neglected by emancipation philosophies, Lefebvre reintroduced praxis and instinctive, sensitive and affective contents, as attributes of the corporeal dimension, not only in terms of critical reflection on the present, but also in the renewal of the utopian horizon. By explicitly mobilizing the revolutionary potential of romanticism, he re-inaugurated a program of radical transformation that underlies the project of the right to the city, rejecting the abstract rationality that supported the hegemonizing projects of statist bureaucracy, the formalism present in urban and territorial planning, the world of commodity and the abstraction of work.

Recognizing that the abstraction of the corporeal dimension had made it possible for the principle of emancipation to be captured by history, which failed to fulfill its promises, and by the social reproduction of the social relations of production made Lefebvrian thought commit itself to the renewal of critical social imagination. The appropriation of space thus appears as a component of a renewed utopian project, inseparable from the theoretical understanding of the world. For this reason, "the practice of appropriation, by the human being, of time and space" emerges as "the highest modality of freedom" (LEFEBVRE, [1970] 1999, p. 131). In this theoretical-revolutionary context, the notion of the Right to the City is elaborated.

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