

**Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture**, Łukasz Stanek, Christian Schmid, Ákos Moravánszky (eds.). 2014. Ashgate, 362 pages. £35.00 (paperback). ISBN: 978-1-4094-4293-6.

This edited volume is a result of a collaboration research project called 'Rethinking Theory, Space and Production: Henri Lefebvre Today' which implements Lefebvre's theory of production of space in urban research and architecture. The three editors, Łukasz Stanek, Christian Schmid and Ákos Moravánszky, are well-established scholars in the field of critical theory with a good knowledge of Lefebvre's oeuvre. In this volume they have successfully managed to bring together brilliant researchers and scholars that come from a variety of epistemological fields and discuss Lefebvre's critical theory on space.

*Urban Revolution Now: Henri Lefebvre in Social Research and Architecture* introduces us to Lefebvre's critique of the capitalist mode of production through numerous examples of urbanization processes. It is a welcome publication that revisits the French philosopher's key thoughts such as the production of space and its trialectic interpretation or the everyday life and the right to the city while it confronts them with empirical paradigms. The book offers transdisciplinary research coming from sociologists, geographers, architects and planners with case studies from around the globe, including Switzerland, Bangladesh, Hong-Kong, Canada, Mexico, France, Spain, United States, United Kingdom, Hungary, Bosnia and Herzegovina, Brazil, Poland, Germany, Serbia and Denmark.

Stanek, Schmid and Moravánszky motivate us to take Lefebvre's thought as a starting point, whether we want to understand or to produce the urban space. We could distinguish three main objectives that are pursued through the text. Firstly, there is an apparent intention not only to bring to the fore Lefebvre but also to rethink Marx's contribution to critical theory on space. Lefebvre's analysis constituted a break from the former a-spatial dialectic of historical materialism of orthodox Marxism. Lefebvre theorised space and suggested that the dialectic

can be “raised up” from a temporal to a spatial medium. In this sense, Lefebvre’s ‘return’ goes along with a fruitful revitalization of Marxian thought.

Moreover the book offers a postmodern look at Lefebvre’s reflections. By viewing his theory through several paradigms, the essays pay attention to the cultural, temporal and geographical differences while tracing urbanization processes in the contemporary urban terrains. In doing so, they open the debate of anti-eurocentrism, and bring Lefebvre in dialogue with anticolonial perspectives. In this context, the book discusses various methodologies in research while it unfolds Lefebvre’s main thesis of being in a ‘démarche’ (procedure) rather than apply a method when conducting urban research. But above all, the editors align with Lefebvre’s main intention: the aim not only to understand the city but also to encounter all those forces which are able to change it. This prepositional thesis, deriving straight from Marx’s 11<sup>th</sup> thesis on Feuerbach<sup>i</sup>, is one of the most intriguing goals of the book and mostly needed in the contemporary research. From this perspective, the editors underline the necessity to demystify the urban, to clarify any misinterpretations of the term ‘urban revolution,’ and to be critical of growth-oriented politics. As highlighted in the introductory part, a primary goal of the book is to promote future research on urban politics and inspire an alternative project on urban society; “to bring the impossible to the realm of possible” (p.2).

The volume is divided into four parts which are well structured and easy to follow. In the first part, *On complete urbanization*, case studies from Switzerland, Havana, Hong Kong, and Dhaka are presented. Christian Schmid’s contribution not only provides us with a very interesting review on Lefebvre’s genealogy of thought, but also offers insightful remarks on teaching experience. Wing-Shing Tang engages Lefebvre with the East, viewing the dialectics through the ying-yang schema, while Eliza Bertuzzo traces an anticolonial discourse in Lefebvre’s ratio focusing in Dhaka. A very intriguing contribution is the essay of

Kipfer and Goonewardena who offer us a post-modern lens in reading Lefebvre's oeuvre in regard to his writings on planetary urbanization.

The second part, *Contradictions of abstract space*, elaborates with Lefebvre's differentiated space and allows us to imagine alternative spaces while it introduces us to the violence of urbanization and the emerging urban struggles. The authors engage with projects like the 'Plan Puebla Panama', the 'Greater Paris', the 'Modelling22@Barcelona' and 'Reconstructing New Orleans.' Among them stands out the essay of Japhy Wilson that attempts the encounter of Lefebvre with the Zapatistas in Plan Realidad –Tijuana, justifying Lefebvre's observations on the abstraction of capitalism and the evolving emancipatory spaces.

Essays in part three, *Everyday architectures*, trace Lefebvre's critical thinking amongst the built environments of London's South Bank, four squares of Budapest, the post-socialist scapes of Sarajevo, and a cathedral square in Sao Paolo. Nick Beech in the South Bank case pinpoints the materiality of the state matrix and highlights the dialectic relations of the material-social-ideological degrees of production. Ákos Moravánszky sketches out, the Hungarian urban square and confronts it with the conceived, perceived and lived space. Mejrema Zatrić urges us to consider architecture as a political praxis. In the fourth and final section, *Urban society and its projects*, Łukasz Stanek brings into play the architect as the agent of representations, while juxtaposing the socialist and the rebel city in Nowa Huta's case. Ulrich Best tries an interesting time-xray of the (thoroughly examined) Berlin Tempelhof through the analytic lenses of affect, and Ljiljana Blagojević critically explores the transformation of Novi Beograd's scape under ecological urbanism. Finally, Jan Lilliendahl Larsen articulates vacant spaces in Copenhagen through Lefebvre's concept of diversion, and offers us a thought-provoking closing of the volume.

On the whole, the book offers a good articulation of theoretical and empirical research, though it is short on more recent paradigms. I would have liked to hear more on the

contemporary architectural design which evolves explosively. In this respect, paradigms on recent urban struggles, insurgencies and revolts could fill a gap. In addition to the above, a more intersectional approach could expand Lefebvre's view in other social relations like those of gender or sexuality. But these hints are mainly desires for more to come from this inspiring research project.

This volume is an essential guide for those who do not consider architecture simply as a design process but as one which produces social space. In this sense, it challenges architects to reconsider space theory, as it dares to reunite critical theory with architecture and design. It can serve as a valuable companion not only to students who are trying to demystify Lefebvre's thought, but also to teachers that attempt to communicate such approaches. Moreover, it is a useful guide to aspiring researchers who combine actively theory with practice. The book successfully activates Lefebvre's point of view and triggers us to look through his analytical lenses in order to understand not only the "dominant" contemporary urbanism but also the emerging antitheses, alternatives and differentiations.

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<sup>i</sup> "Philosophers have hitherto only interpreted the world in various ways; the point is to change it." Marx, K. (1963). *Oeuvres choisies*. Paris: Gallimard, p.164  
[Choix : Norbert Guterman & Henri Lefebvre]